

Contact:

**PATRICK MURRAY**

732-263-5858 (office)

732-979-6769 (cell)

*pdmurray@monmouth.edu*

Released:

**Friday, January 16, 2009**

*Please attribute this information to:  
Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll*

*For more information:  
Monmouth University Polling Institute  
West Long Branch, NJ 07764  
[www.monmouth.edu/polling](http://www.monmouth.edu/polling)*

## **GUBERNATORIAL GRUDGE MATCH AHEAD**

*Corzine-Christie a tight race in the early days  
Economy & property taxes top voters' priorities*

Let the games begin! Governor Corzine gave his re-election year State of the State address on Tuesday. It came a week after the GOP establishment's favored candidate, former U.S. Attorney Chris Christie, threw his hat in the ring. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* provides both good news and bad news for the two, as well as for the other potential contenders.

Governor Corzine starts 2009 with a 43% approve to 40% disapprove job rating among Garden State voters. While these numbers are not stellar, it marks the first time his job ratings have been in net positive territory in more than a year. His job numbers went south – 42% to 46% – after last January's State of the State speech when he unveiled his highly unpopular toll hike plan. They bottomed out at 34% approve to 55% disapprove in March 2008, and held steadily negative through the summer and fall.

This year, the governor's State of the State laid out more modest plans, with the emphasis on the economy as his top priority for the coming year. The voters agree with Corzine – about half name either the economic downturn (35%) or jobs (19%) as the issue they most want to hear the gubernatorial candidates address this year. However, New Jersey voters are also likely to say that they want the candidates to explain what they are going to do about property taxes (38%).

“Property tax reform remains the sleeping giant in New Jersey, and it is inextricably tied to the economy. When you ask the typical homeowner how state government can help ease their economic pain, the first response is to lower property taxes,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Education (18%) and health care (14%) are among other issues mentioned by Garden State voters as important in this year's election.

Looking ahead to potential November match-ups, Chris Christie starts the year as the strongest likely challenger to the incumbent. Currently, Jon Corzine holds a negligible 38% to 36% lead over Christie among the state's registered voters. The two-point gap between Corzine and Christie in early voter preferences is little different than how the incumbent fares against a generic challenger. In a match-up between Corzine and "another Republican candidate," Corzine is preferred by 36% to 32%.

"Compared to other potential GOP nominees, Chris Christie enters the race with comparatively high name recognition and generally favorable voter opinion, but he still has a way to go to break beyond the support a typical Republican would get in the state," said Murray.

The poll found that the other announced and potential Republican candidates fare slightly worse than Christie in hypothetical match-ups with the incumbent governor. Currently, voters prefer Jon Corzine over former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonigan by 45% to 29%; over Assemblyman Rick Merkt by 41% to 27%; and over Franklin Township Mayor Brian Levine by 44% to 27%.

While the GOP nomination for governor is by no means a foregone conclusion, Chris Christie starts the race for the June primary as the strongest candidate among Republican voters in the state. The former U.S. Attorney has name recognition among more than 8-in-10 Republican voters, and nearly all of those voters have a favorable opinion of him – 69% compared to only 3% who are unfavorable. By comparison, Lonigan, who garnered 8% of the primary vote when he ran for governor in 2005 – is known to 43% of Republican voters, including 18% who have a favorable opinion and 9% with an unfavorable opinion of him. Only 1-in-4 GOP voters say they recognize the name of Merkt (23%) or Levine (28%).

– *Corzine vs. Christie on the Issues* –

Although Chris Christie's announcement-via-email last week was a bit anti-climactic, his entry into the field was certainly one of the most highly anticipated events for New Jersey's political class. However, aside from his tenure as a corruption-busting U.S. Attorney, his record and stance on other important issues has yet to be articulated. The poll asked some benchmark questions to see how Christie matches up against Jon Corzine on a number of key issues prior to the official unveiling of his platform.

Not surprisingly, Christie has the clear advantage over the incumbent when it comes reducing corruption – 43% of voters say Christie would do a better job of this compared to 25% who pick Corzine on this issue.

On the other hand, the incumbent has a clear 39% to 29% advantage on the issue of education. Corzine also has a smaller 38% to 33% advantage over Christie on the top voter concern – the economy. However this issue advantage shrinks to a negligible 30% to 29% among independent voters.

The two are basically tied on handling the state budget – 37% prefer Corzine on this issue to 34% who say Christie would do a better job.

The New Jersey electorate is also split on who is better able to handle the property tax issue – 36% say it's Christie to 32% who prefer Corzine. However, among the state's independent voter group, Christie starts the campaign with a sizeable 37% to 23% edge over Corzine on this other top issue.

“It's very interesting that while Chris Christie has yet to articulate a property tax plan, many voters are already inclined to believe that whatever he has in mind has got to be better than the current administration,” said Murray.

*– Emails, the Death Penalty, and W –*

No Garden State election campaign is complete without its share of negative attacks on wedge issues. The poll tested a number of possible messages that could be used against this year's main contenders.

On Monday, a state appeals court ruled that Governor Corzine does not have to release his email correspondence with Carla Katz, his former girlfriend and state union local president. Two-thirds (67%) of New Jersey voters are aware of this issue – up from the 55% who heard about it when the story first broke in summer 2007. While the court declared that the emails are protected by the governor's executive privilege, fully 6-in-10 voters (61%) say Corzine should release the emails “in order to clear the air.” Only 29% say he should keep them private to preserve executive privilege. Those who say the emails should be released include majorities of Democrats (53%), independents (60%), and Republicans (73%) alike.

There is some potential for this to become a campaign issue. At the current time, 31% of voters say they would be less likely to vote for Corzine if he chooses not to release these emails.

Considering the probable focus on crime and safety in this year’s race if Christie is the GOP nominee, the governor’s support and signing of the state’s death penalty ban in December 2007 could also become a wedge issue. About one-third of voters (34%) say this issue would make them less likely to vote for Corzine compared to 15% who say it makes them more likely to re-elect the incumbent.

On the other hand, Chris Christie may be hampered by his association with an unpopular, albeit soon to be out of office, president. George W. Bush appointed Chris Christie to the U.S. Attorney position early in his first term. Christie was also a fundraiser for the 2000 Bush-Cheney campaign. One-third of voters (35%) say knowing this information makes them less likely to vote for Christie, compared to 14% who say it makes them more likely.

“A number of potential wedge issues in the gubernatorial race are already in play. The question is whether any of them will be relevant eight or nine months from now,” said Murray.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 413 New Jersey registered voters from January 12-14, 2009. This sample has a margin of error of  $\pm 4.8$  percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the Gannett New Jersey newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, and Home News Tribune).

### DATA TABLES

*The questions referred to in this release are as follows:*

(\* Some columns may not add to 100% due to rounding.)

- As you may know, there will be an election for governor of New Jersey this November. If the election for governor was held today between Jon Corzine the Democrat and Chris Christie the Republican, for whom would you vote? [NAMES WERE ROTATED]

	Registered	PARTY ID			REGION		
	Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine	<b>38%</b>	62%	32%	10%	42%	28%	38%
Christie	<b>36%</b>	14%	32%	78%	34%	40%	35%
(VOL) Other candidate	<b>2%</b>	3%	1%	0%	3%	0%	1%
(VOL) Neither, won't vote	<b>4%</b>	3%	7%	1%	2%	8%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>21%</b>	18%	28%	12%	20%	23%	22%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

- And if the election was between Jon Corzine the Democrat and another Republican candidate, would you vote for Corzine or the Republican?

	Registered	PARTY ID			REGION		
	Voters	Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine	<b>36%</b>	63%	29%	4%	41%	27%	34%
Republican	<b>32%</b>	12%	24%	74%	29%	32%	35%
(VOL) Neither, won't vote	<b>2%</b>	2%	4%	0%	1%	6%	1%
(VOL) DEPENDS on who the Republican candidate is	<b>12%</b>	9%	19%	9%	13%	18%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>18%</b>	13%	24%	14%	16%	18%	24%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

3. I'm going to read you the names of some potential candidates for governor. Please tell me if your general impression of each is favorable or unfavorable, or if you don't really have an opinion. If you don't recognize a name, just let me know. [NAMES WERE ROTATED]

Jon Corzine

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Favorable	<b>49%</b>	70%	51%	19%	51%	47%	48%
Unfavorable	<b>38%</b>	21%	35%	69%	33%	43%	44%
No opinion	<b>12%</b>	9%	15%	13%	15%	10%	9%
Do not recognize name	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

TREND:	January 2009	July 2008	September 2006
Favorable	49%	43%	46%
Unfavorable	38%	44%	30%
No opinion	12%	10%	24%
Do not recognize	0%	2%	n/a
Unwtd N	413	889	630

Chris Christie

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Favorable	<b>42%</b>	18%	51%	69%	42%	49%	36%
Unfavorable	<b>12%</b>	21%	8%	3%	12%	12%	12%
No opinion	<b>25%</b>	30%	25%	17%	27%	25%	24%
Do not recognize name	<b>21%</b>	30%	17%	11%	19%	14%	29%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

TREND:	January 2009	July 2008
Favorable	42%	30%
Unfavorable	12%	9%
No opinion	25%	25%
Do not recognize	21%	37%
Unwtd N	413	889

Steve Lonegan

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Favorable	<b>12%</b>	7%	14%	18%	9%	18%	9%
Unfavorable	<b>11%</b>	11%	14%	9%	14%	8%	8%
No opinion	<b>20%</b>	21%	19%	16%	22%	12%	20%
Do not recognize name	<b>58%</b>	62%	53%	58%	54%	62%	63%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

Rick Merkt

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Favorable	<b>5%</b>	4%	5%	7%	5%	5%	4%
Unfavorable	<b>6%</b>	10%	5%	2%	5%	5%	8%
No opinion	<b>13%</b>	10%	15%	14%	13%	9%	17%
Do not recognize name	<b>76%</b>	76%	75%	76%	78%	81%	71%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

Brian Levine

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Favorable	<b>7%</b>	8%	5%	7%	8%	5%	6%
Unfavorable	<b>8%</b>	9%	8%	8%	7%	11%	6%
No opinion	<b>16%</b>	19%	18%	13%	17%	10%	22%
Do not recognize name	<b>68%</b>	64%	68%	73%	68%	74%	66%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

4. If the election for governor was between Jon Corzine the Democrat and Steve Lonegan the Republican, for whom would you vote? **[NAMES WERE ROTATED]**

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine	<b>45%</b>	72%	41%	8%	51%	39%	41%
Lonegan	<b>29%</b>	11%	22%	67%	24%	34%	34%
(VOL) Other candidate	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
(VOL) Neither, won't vote	<b>5%</b>	4%	7%	4%	4%	11%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>20%</b>	12%	30%	20%	22%	16%	21%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

[Question 5 was asked of a random half-sample: moe= ± 7.0%]

5. If the election was between Jon Corzine the Democrat and Rick Merkt the Republican, for whom would you vote? **[NAMES WERE ROTATED]**

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine	<b>41%</b>	66%	32%	8%	51%	27%	38%
Merkt	<b>27%</b>	11%	25%	69%	24%	33%	29%
(VOL) Other candidate	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
(VOL) Neither, won't vote	<b>6%</b>	5%	11%	2%	4%	12%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>25%</b>	19%	31%	21%	22%	28%	27%
Unwtd N	<b>219</b>	95	76	39	103	56	60

[Question 6 was asked of a random half-sample: moe= ± 7.0%]

6. If the election was between Jon Corzine the Democrat and Brian Levine the Republican, for whom would you vote? **[NAMES WERE ROTATED]**

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine	<b>44%</b>	78%	38%	11%	46%	48%	32%
Levine	<b>27%</b>	7%	16%	62%	22%	22%	39%
(VOL) Other candidate	<b>0%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
(VOL) Neither, won't vote	<b>4%</b>	0%	7%	7%	3%	12%	0%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>25%</b>	15%	39%	21%	29%	19%	29%
Unwtd N	<b>194</b>	76	61	50	94	43	49

7. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Jon Corzine is doing as governor?

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Approve	<b>43%</b>	58%	44%	19%	48%	34%	41%
Disapprove	<b>40%</b>	23%	37%	72%	33%	47%	48%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>17%</b>	20%	18%	9%	19%	20%	11%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

TREND:	January 2009	October 2008	Sept 2008	July 2008	April 2008	March 2008	January 2008	October 2007	July 2007	April 2007	February 2007	Sept 2006	July 2006	April 2006
Approve	<b>43%</b>	38%	40%	39%	36%	34%	42%	47%	46%	52%	44%	44%	40%	33%
Disapprove	<b>40%</b>	45%	49%	47%	53%	55%	46%	34%	36%	30%	36%	41%	41%	38%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>17%</b>	18%	11%	14%	11%	11%	12%	19%	17%	17%	20%	16%	19%	29%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	900	709	889	720	719	698	688	678	668	681	663	670	652

8. In your opinion, what are the most important one or two issues that the candidates for governor should talk about? [Note: Results add to more than 100% because multiple responses were accepted]

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Property taxes	38%	33%	37%	52%	40%	33%	41%
Income tax	6%	5%	4%	9%	7%	6%	4%
Sales tax	4%	5%	1%	6%	3%	5%	4%
Other tax	2%	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%	3%
Jobs	19%	25%	13%	19%	19%	22%	16%
Cost of living/affordability	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	5%	2%
The economy/downturn in general	35%	30%	45%	31%	31%	41%	33%
Development/building boom	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
Roads/traffic/congestion	2%	3%	2%	3%	4%	1%	2%
Health care/prescription drug costs	14%	17%	9%	13%	15%	9%	15%
Environment	2%	4%	1%	1%	1%	3%	3%
Same-sex/Gay marriage	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%
Immigration	3%	4%	2%	1%	2%	1%	3%
Corruption/government ethics	6%	5%	6%	6%	3%	12%	6%
Education/schools	18%	23%	20%	8%	24%	11%	13%
State Budget	6%	4%	8%	7%	5%	7%	7%
Crime	2%	1%	4%	0%	3%	3%	0%
Abortion	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Other	5%	5%	6%	7%	5%	3%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	7%	5%
Unwtd N	413	171	137	89	197	99	109

9. Focusing now on just Jon Corzine and Chris Christie. Regardless of who you may support for governor... Who would do a better job on [READ ITEMS] – Jon Corzine or Chris Christie? [ITEMS WERE ROTATED]

The economy

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine better	38%	60%	30%	12%	46%	30%	30%
Christie better	33%	16%	29%	67%	29%	40%	34%
(VOL) Both equally	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%
(VOL) Neither	4%	4%	7%	1%	5%	4%	2%
(VOL) Don't know	23%	19%	31%	19%	19%	23%	32%
Unwtd N	413	171	137	89	197	99	109

Property taxes

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine better	32%	54%	23%	11%	38%	28%	24%
Christie better	36%	15%	37%	67%	32%	45%	34%
(VOL) Both equally	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%	0%
(VOL) Neither	4%	3%	7%	3%	4%	4%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	27%	27%	33%	19%	26%	21%	37%
Unwtd N	413	171	137	89	197	99	109

The state budget

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine better	37%	57%	32%	14%	42%	32%	32%
Christie better	34%	18%	31%	64%	30%	39%	36%
(VOL) Both equally	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%	1%
(VOL) Neither	4%	3%	5%	3%	5%	3%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	24%	21%	31%	19%	22%	24%	27%
Unwtd N	413	171	137	89	197	99	109

Education

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine better	<b>39%</b>	56%	39%	13%	44%	34%	32%
Christie better	<b>29%</b>	15%	24%	56%	26%	30%	31%
(VOL) Both equally	<b>1%</b>	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%
(VOL) Neither	<b>3%</b>	2%	3%	7%	3%	6%	2%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>28%</b>	25%	35%	21%	25%	28%	34%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

Reducing corruption

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Corzine better	25%	44%	15%	10%	31%	18%	19%
Christie better	43%	21%	51%	69%	38%	50%	43%
(VOL) Both equally	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%
(VOL) Neither	5%	6%	5%	4%	4%	6%	7%
(VOL) Don't know	26%	28%	29%	15%	25%	25%	30%
Unwtd N	413	171	137	89	197	99	109

[QUESTIONS 10 AND 11 WERE ROTATED]

10. Chris Christie is a former U.S. Attorney who was appointed by President George W. Bush. Christie was also an active fundraiser for the Bush-Cheney campaign in 2000. Does knowing this information make you more likely or less likely to vote for Christie for governor, or does it make no difference in your vote?

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
More likely to vote for Christie	<b>14%</b>	6%	13%	29%	16%	8%	13%
Less likely to vote for Christie	<b>35%</b>	58%	31%	4%	37%	24%	41%
No difference	<b>47%</b>	31%	53%	65%	42%	61%	44%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>4%</b>	5%	3%	2%	5%	6%	1%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

11. Just over a year ago, Governor Corzine signed a law banning the death penalty in New Jersey. He actively supported this effort, which eliminated the death penalty for even the most serious murders. Does knowing this information make you more likely or less likely to vote for Corzine for governor, or does it make no difference in your vote?

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
More likely to vote for Corzine	<b>15%</b>	24%	14%	2%	18%	13%	8%
Less likely to vote for Corzine	<b>34%</b>	14%	36%	64%	29%	36%	41%
No difference	<b>48%</b>	56%	49%	33%	47%	49%	51%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>3%</b>	5%	1%	1%	5%	3%	0%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

12. Have you read or heard about the court case surrounding emails Governor Corzine exchanged with Carla Katz, a former girlfriend and head of a state worker's union, or not?

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Yes, have heard about	<b>67%</b>	58%	74%	76%	61%	77%	72%
No, have not heard about	<b>30%</b>	36%	24%	24%	34%	22%	28%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>3%</b>	6%	1%	0%	5%	2%	0%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109



13. This week, a state appeals court said the governor does NOT have to release these emails to the public because they are protected by executive privilege. Some people still have questions about whether those emails include improper discussions about union contract negotiations. Do you think the governor should release the emails in order to clear the air --OR-- Do you think the governor should keep the emails private to preserve executive privilege? [RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE ROTATED]

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
Release the emails	<b>61%</b>	53%	60%	73%	58%	61%	68%
Keep the emails private	<b>29%</b>	35%	28%	24%	29%	32%	26%
(VOL) Don't care/No opinion	<b>6%</b>	9%	7%	2%	9%	4%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>3%</b>	2%	5%	2%	4%	3%	3%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

14. If the governor does NOT release these emails, would it make you more likely or less likely to vote to re-elect Corzine in November, or would it make no difference in your vote?

	Registered Voters	PARTY ID			REGION		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	North	Central	South
More likely to vote for Corzine	<b>5%</b>	9%	4%	1%	4%	8%	1%
Less likely to vote for Corzine	<b>31%</b>	23%	33%	45%	29%	30%	38%
No difference	<b>58%</b>	63%	56%	52%	63%	52%	55%
(VOL) Don't know	<b>5%</b>	5%	7%	2%	4%	9%	5%
Unwtd N	<b>413</b>	171	137	89	197	99	109

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll was conducted and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews were collected by Braun Research on January 12-14, 2009 with a statewide random sample of 413 registered voters. For results based on this sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 4.8 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

POLL DEMOGRAPHICS			
Registered Voter Sample (weighted)			
42% Dem	49% Male	24% 18-34	71% White
33% Ind	51% Female	43% 35-54	12% Black
25% Rep		33% 55+	12% Hispanic
			5% Asian/Other

###