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BARACK OBAMA AND RACE RELATIONS

*New Jersey optimistic about incoming president;
but more work needs to be done on race relations*

On Monday, New Jersey and America commemorate the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. On Tuesday, we will watch Barack Obama take office as the nation's first African-American president. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* finds that Garden State residents have high hopes for the Obama presidency, both in the overall direction he will take the country as well as how his leadership will affect race relations. Despite this promising start, many New Jerseyans still feel that we have a way to go before racial and ethnic discrimination disappear completely.

An overwhelming 75% of New Jersey residents approve of the way Barack Obama has handled his presidential transition. A similar 71% say they are optimistic about the policies he will pursue over the next year. Just 5% disapprove of his transition and only 16% are pessimistic about his policies. These New Jersey results are basically identical to the findings of recent national polls.

One the subject of race specifically, about 2-in-3 (65%) New Jerseyans believe that an Obama presidency will help race relations in this country. Only 4% say his leadership will hurt race relations. New Jersey appears to have slightly higher expectations than Americans in general. A recent ABC News Poll found that 58% nationally – 7 points lower than in New Jersey – think Obama's presidency will help race relations.

In New Jersey, one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states in the country, the Obama candidacy has appeared to have also had some impact on residents' views of integration as a societal goal. Fully 62% of New Jerseyans say that it is important for people of different races and ethnic groups to live, go to school and work closely together. This is up from 54%

who felt this way in June 2007. Another 33% – mainly white, non-Hispanic residents – feel that a fully integrated society is not that important as long as everyone is treated fairly and has the same opportunities.

Currently, 38% of New Jerseyans believe that blacks and whites are generally treated equally in our society and another 29% think they will see equal treatment in their lifetimes. On the other hand, 25% believe that they will never see equal treatment of the races. However, this negative finding is down significantly from the 41% who felt the same in a 2004 poll.

Examining these results further reveals a disparity of opinion between the races. While the expectation of seeing full racial equality has increased among residents of all races, white residents (74%) are still much more likely than black residents (44%) to believe racial equality is obtainable.

“It appears that Obama’s election may have caused many white New Jerseyans to feel that race relations have taken a giant step forward. Black residents, though, are more likely to take a wait-and-see attitude as his presidency unfolds,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. “Still, many state residents, black and white alike, believe there is more work to be done to eliminate discrimination in New Jersey.”

Overall, 57% of New Jerseyans say that racial and ethnic discrimination remains a problem in New Jersey, including 21% who characterize it as a “big problem.” This is similar to the 55% of state residents in a 2007 poll who said that discrimination is a problem. However, this also marks a decline from earlier polls taken in 2001 (65%) and 1996 (67%) – during a time when racial profiling by police was in the news – when two-thirds of New Jersey residents said that discrimination was a problem.

The current poll also found little change over the past two years in the view that families of different races or ethnicities would be welcomed into Garden State neighborhoods. About half (49%) of New Jerseyans believe that their neighbors would openly welcome families of different backgrounds, 41% say that they would pay no attention to them, and just 3% believe such families would be actively discouraged from moving into their neighborhoods. These numbers are basically unchanged from polls conducted in 2007 and 1996.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 500 New Jersey adults from January 12-14, 2009. This sample has a margin of error of ± 4.4 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.)

1. In general, do you feel that blacks and whites are treated equally in our society, or not?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Yes	38%	31%	41%	44%	42%	33%	14%
No	53%	60%	53%	44%	49%	60%	74%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	5%	13%	9%	7%	12%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

TREND:	January 2009	January 2004*
Yes	38%	30%
No	53%	65%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	5%
Unwtd N	500	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

2. Do you think you will see equal treatment for blacks and whites in your lifetime, or not?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Already equal (from Q1)	38%	31%	41%	44%	42%	33%	14%
Yes	29%	35%	26%	25%	32%	26%	30%
No	25%	24%	28%	23%	19%	34%	47%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	10%	5%	8%	7%	8%	9%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

TREND:	January 2009	January 2004*
Already equal (from Q1)	38%	30%
Yes	29%	26%
No	25%	41%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	4%
Unwtd N	500	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

3. Do you think that racial and ethnic discrimination in New Jersey is a problem, or not? [IF YES, ASK: Is it a big problem, somewhat of a problem, or a small problem?]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Big problem	21%	26%	17%	16%	14%	32%	42%
Somewhat of a problem	27%	29%	24%	27%	25%	30%	38%
Small problem	9%	9%	13%	6%	10%	7%	2%
Not a problem	37%	32%	38%	46%	42%	28%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	4%	7%	5%	8%	2%	5%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

TREND:	January 2009	June 2007**	April 2001*	August 1996**
Big problem	21%	14%	27%	21%
Somewhat of a problem	27%	30%	31%	40%
Small problem	9%	11%	7%	6%
Not a problem	37%	39%	29%	28%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	6%	6%	5%
Unwtd N	500	1279	802	1203

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

** Source: American Conference on Diversity NJ Poll

4. Which statement comes closer to the way you feel: It's important that people of different races and ethnic groups live, go to school and work closely with each other – OR – It's NOT important that people of different races and ethnic groups live, go to school and work closely with each other as long as everyone is treated fairly and has the same opportunities.

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
It IS important	62%	71%	60%	47%	58%	70%	90%
It IS NOT important	33%	26%	36%	44%	38%	24%	9%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	3%	4%	9%	4%	6%	1%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

TREND:	January 2009	June 2007**	March 2004*	June 1999*	August 1996**
It IS important	62%	54%	50%	51%	43%
It IS NOT important	33%	43%	46%	48%	54%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	3%	4%	1%	3%
Unwtd N	500	1279	819	802	1203

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

** Source: American Conference on Diversity NJ Poll

5. Let's say that a family of a different race or ethnicity wanted to move into your neighborhood. Do you think people in your neighborhood would welcome the family, discourage them from moving in, or not pay any attention to them?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Welcome them	49%	52%	42%	50%	49%	48%	48%
Discourage them	3%	4%	4%	1%	4%	1%	2%
Not pay attention	41%	37%	49%	40%	39%	46%	41%
(VOL) Depends on which race/ethnicity	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	5%	5%	7%	6%	4%	6%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

TREND:	January 2009	June 2007**	August 1996**
Welcome them	49%	53%	49%
Discourage them	3%	5%	5%
Not pay attention	41%	37%	40%
(VOL) Depends on which race/ethnicity	2%	n/a	n/a
(VOL) Don't know	6%	5%	6%
Unwtd N	500	1279	1203

** Source: American Conference on Diversity NJ Poll

6. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his presidential transition?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Approve	75%	91%	70%	58%	72%	80%	87%
Disapprove	5%	2%	6%	13%	7%	3%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	20%	8%	24%	29%	21%	17%	11%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

7. Thinking about the next 12 months, would you say you feel optimistic or pessimistic about the policies Obama will pursue?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Optimistic	71%	83%	74%	48%	71%	72%	73%
Pessimistic	16%	11%	14%	33%	17%	14%	17%
(VOL) Don't know	13%	6%	13%	18%	12%	13%	10%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

8. Do you think Obama's presidency will do more to help or more to hurt race relations in this country, or won't it make much of a difference? [*RESPONSE OPTIONS WERE ROTATED*]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White Non-Hispanic	Black, Hispanic, Other	Black Only
Help	65%	76%	65%	49%	62%	72%	81%
Hurt	4%	1%	5%	8%	4%	2%	0%
No difference	25%	16%	29%	37%	29%	19%	13%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%	1%	7%	6%	6%	6%
Unwtd N	500	201	165	103	363	121	67

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 500 New Jersey adults. 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 4.4 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			
Total Sample (weighted)			
42% Dem	48% Male	30% 18-34	65% White
34% Ind	52% Female	41% 35-54	12% Black
24% Rep		29% 55+	14% Hispanic
			9% Asian/Other

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