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NEW JERSEY SENATE: MENENDEZ vs. WHO?

Garden State voters divided on another Obama term

President Barack Obama's job rating from New Jersey residents has ticked up a bit in the latest ***Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll***, but voters are lukewarm on giving him a second term. Senator Bob Menendez, who is also up for re-election, has stable but not stellar ratings. Few are convinced right now that he deserves another term, but most voters also know nothing about his potential opponents.

As Senator Bob Menendez prepares to ask voters for a second full term, his job approval rating stands at 41% approve to 26% disapprove. Another 33% of New Jersey voters still have no opinion of him after six years on the job. This rating is basically unchanged from October.

With only nine months to go before Election Day, only 21% of New Jersey voters definitely say that Bob Menendez should be re-elected. On the other hand, just 32% say he should be thrown out of office. Nearly half (46%) of the Garden State's electorate express no opinion on whether he deserves another term. Among independent voters, though, 40% say it is time to have someone else in his Senate seat compared to just 16% who are ready to endorse the incumbent.

There is a silver lining in the poll results for Senator Menendez. Very few voters even know his potential Republican challengers, let alone have an opinion of them. State legislator Joe Kyrillos, who launched his campaign last week, is recognized by just 20% of voters statewide, with just 4% having a favorable opinion of him and 2% unfavorable. Another potential GOP candidate, former mayor and Tea Party favorite, Anna Little, fares even worse in name recognition – just 13% say they know who she is, with 3% having a favorable opinion and 1% unfavorable.

“Senator Menendez has middling job ratings and the probable GOP challenger has nearly non-existent name recognition. Presidential coattails will be the key to victory. This is one reason why state Republican leaders don't want Newt Gingrich at the top of the ticket and New Jersey Democrats hope that he is,” said Murray.

The poll found that if Mitt Romney is able to lock up the GOP nomination, only 32% of voters would be more likely to vote Republican this year, compared to 42% who would be less likely. Another 26% say it would make no difference to them or have no opinion.

Republicans would fare even worse if Newt Gingrich became the GOP standard bearer. Just 23% of voters would be more likely to vote Republican this year if Gingrich was the nominee compared to 53% who would be less likely. Another 24% say it would make no difference to them or have no opinion.

The gap is similar among independent voters – 55% would be less likely to vote Republican with Gingrich at the top of the ticket and 40% would be less likely if it were Romney. Even Republicans say they are more likely to defect from the party line or stay home if Gingrich was their nominee (29%) rather than Romney (15%).

President Obama's job rating among New Jersey voters now stands at 51% approve to 42% disapprove. This marks an improvement from the 47% to 46% rating he received back in October. The current results are near his summer ratings, as he was coming off his career high mark of 60% after the capture and killing of Osama bin Laden in May. The president's New Jersey rating continues to be higher than the national poll average of 49% approve to 47% disapprove reported by RealClearPolitics.com.

Despite the improved job rating, New Jersey is not overly enthusiastic about a second Obama term. Just 47% of registered voters are ready to say that he deserves to be re-elected while 45% say it may be time to have someone else in office. These numbers are little changed from October. More than 4-in-5 Democrats (82%) say he should be re-elected and practically the same number of Republicans (84%) say he should not. A majority (51%) of Garden State independents prefer someone new compared to 37% who say the president has earned a second term. Obama won New Jersey by just over 15 points in 2008.

“New Jersey is certainly not enthusiastic about President Obama, but he can probably count on its 14 electoral votes come November. His saving grace is that the eventual Republican nominee is unlikely to win over lukewarm independent voters,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute in West Long Branch, New Jersey.

The poll also asked about the state's senior US Senator. Frank Lautenberg gets positive job ratings from 39% of New Jersey voters and negative ratings from 33%. His job approval number is a few ticks down from the 43% positive rating he received in October. Another 28% have no opinion. Lautenberg was first elected to the Senate in 1982 and has served nearly continuously since, so perhaps the lack of voter opinion about Bob Menendez is not so bad in comparison.

The *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* was conducted by telephone with 709 New Jersey registered voters from January 31 to February 4, 2012. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.7

percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the NJ Press Media 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. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Barack Obama is doing as president?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+
Approve	51%	81%	46%	17%	41%	76%	65%	47%	47%
Disapprove	42%	12%	49%	78%	53%	18%	30%	48%	44%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%	5%	6%	6%	7%	5%	5%	9%

TREND: Registered voters only	February 2012	October 2011	August 2011	May 2011	September 2010	July 2010	April 2010	February 2010	October 2009	July 2009
Approve	51%	47%	52%	60%	47%	51%	54%	53%	54%	59%
Disapprove	42%	46%	39%	36%	44%	42%	41%	38%	33%	29%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%	9%	4%	9%	6%	5%	9%	14%	12%
Unwtd N	709	693	730	725	726	747	719	716	785	792

[QUESTIONS 2 AND 3 WERE ROTATED]

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Frank Lautenberg is doing as United States Senator?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+
Approve	39%	55%	34%	27%	38%	41%	41%	33%	45%
Disapprove	33%	17%	39%	47%	36%	24%	21%	38%	34%
(VOL) Don't know	28%	28%	27%	26%	26%	35%	38%	30%	20%

TREND: Registered voters only	February 2012	October 2011	August 2011	May 2011	July 2010	October 2008	July 2008	April 2008	January 2008
Approve	39%	43%	41%	48%	47%	48%	45%	48%	43%
Disapprove	33%	31%	32%	30%	33%	28%	33%	31%	28%
(VOL) Don't know	28%	27%	26%	21%	21%	24%	22%	21%	30%
Unwtd N	709	693	730	725	747	900	874	720	698

3. Do you approve or disapprove of the job Bob Menendez is doing as United States Senator?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+
Approve	41%	60%	32%	27%	35%	56%	47%	34%	46%
Disapprove	26%	9%	34%	42%	30%	13%	17%	33%	25%
(VOL) Don't know	33%	30%	35%	31%	34%	31%	36%	33%	30%

TREND: Registered voters only	February 2012	October 2011	August 2011	May 2011	July 2010	October 2008	April 2008	January 2008
Approve	41%	43%	38%	46%	38%	34%	41%	37%
Disapprove	26%	29%	33%	28%	33%	25%	31%	25%
(VOL) Don't know	33%	28%	29%	26%	29%	41%	28%	37%
Unwtd N	709	693	730	725	747	900	720	698

4. Looking ahead to November's election for president, do you think that Barack Obama should be re-elected, or do you think that it is time to have someone else in office?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+	
Should be re-elected	47%	82%	37%	11%	34%	80%	56%	44%	44%	
Time to have someone else in office	45%	13%	51%	84%	57%	15%	36%	49%	47%	
(VOL) Don't know	8%	5%	12%	4%	9%	5%	8%	7%	8%	

TREND: <i>Registered voters only</i>	February 2012	October 2011
Should be re-elected	47%	46%
Time to have someone else in office	45%	47%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	7%
<i>Unwt'd N</i>	709	693

[QUESTIONS 5 AND 6 WERE ROTATED]

5. Would you be more likely or less likely to vote Republican this year if Newt Gingrich is the Republican nominee for president?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+	
More likely	23%	7%	23%	47%	26%	12%	24%	23%	23%	
Less likely	53%	70%	55%	29%	50%	65%	52%	55%	52%	
(VOL) Neither, will not affect	15%	18%	12%	17%	14%	17%	14%	13%	18%	
(VOL) Don't know	9%	5%	11%	7%	10%	5%	10%	10%	7%	

6. Would you be more likely or less likely to vote Republican this year if Mitt Romney is the Republican nominee for president?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+	
More likely	32%	12%	33%	63%	38%	15%	32%	30%	34%	
Less likely	42%	62%	40%	15%	35%	64%	48%	41%	39%	
(VOL) Neither, will not affect	16%	21%	14%	11%	15%	17%	12%	16%	19%	
(VOL) Don't know	10%	5%	12%	11%	12%	4%	7%	13%	9%	

7. Senator Menendez is up for re-election this year. Do you think that he should be re-elected, do you think that it is time to have someone else in office, or do you have no opinion on this?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+	
Should be re-elected	21%	36%	16%	6%	19%	24%	16%	17%	27%	
Time to have someone else in office	32%	13%	40%	51%	35%	23%	27%	36%	31%	
No opinion/Don't know	46%	50%	43%	43%	45%	52%	57%	45%	41%	
(VOL) Refused	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	

8. Do you happen to know of State Senator Joe Kyrillos, or haven't you heard of him before? [If YES: Is your general impression of him favorable or unfavorable, or don't you really have an opinion?]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+	
Favorable	4%	3%	4%	7%	6%	0%	3%	5%	4%	
Unfavorable	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	3%	
Heard of but no opinion	14%	12%	15%	14%	12%	19%	11%	12%	17%	
Does not recognize name	80%	82%	80%	77%	79%	79%	85%	81%	77%	

9. Do you happen to know of former mayor Anna Little, or haven't you heard of her before?
 [If YES: Is your general impression of her favorable or unfavorable, or don't you really have an opinion?]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+
Favorable	3%	3%	2%	6%	4%	2%	2%	4%	4%
Unfavorable	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%	1%	0%	3%	1%
Heard of but no opinion	9%	6%	8%	9%	8%	9%	6%	6%	10%
Does not recognize name	87%	89%	88%	84%	86%	88%	91%	87%	84%

The *Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll* was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on January 31 to February 4, 2012 with a statewide random sample of 709 registered voters, including 575 contacted on a landline telephone and 134 on a cell phone. Sampling and interviewing services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 3.7 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 (weighted)			
Registered Voter Sample			
36% Dem	49% Male	24% 18-34	69% White
23% Rep	51% Female	40% 35-54	12% Black
41% Ind		35% 55+	12% Hispanic
			7% Asian/Other

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			RACE		AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Black & Hisp	18-34	35-54	55+
Unweighted N	709	234	249	190	552	111	107	255	335
moe	3.7%	6.4%	6.2%	7.1%	4.2%	9.3%	9.5%	6.1%	5.4%

It is the Monmouth University Polling Institute's policy to conduct surveys of all adult New Jersey residents, including voters and non-voters, on issues that affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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