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NEW JERSEYANS ON POLICE AND GANGS

Public sees little benefit to countywide police force

Public safety issues have been in the headlines recently, with high-profile police layoffs, the talk of police force consolidation, and a statewide report on gang activity. The latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* found the Garden State giving high marks to local police services, seeing little benefit to merging police departments, and being unaware of gang activity in their own backyards.

At least two New Jersey counties – Camden and Somerset – are actively discussing the merger of local police departments into a countywide police force. These plans have received even more attention because of the large number of police lay-offs in the City of Camden. The poll found that most New Jersey residents oppose the idea of having their town served by a countywide police force, with 52% giving it a thumbs down compared to 38% who support the idea. Opponents outnumber supporters in every region of the state.

Fear of potentially escalating crime is not a major factor in this opinion. Most residents (58%) – both urban and suburban – think having a countywide police force would have no impact on the amount of crime in their town. Among the remainder, 23% feel going to a countywide force would lead to more crime while 13% feel it would actually lead to less crime.

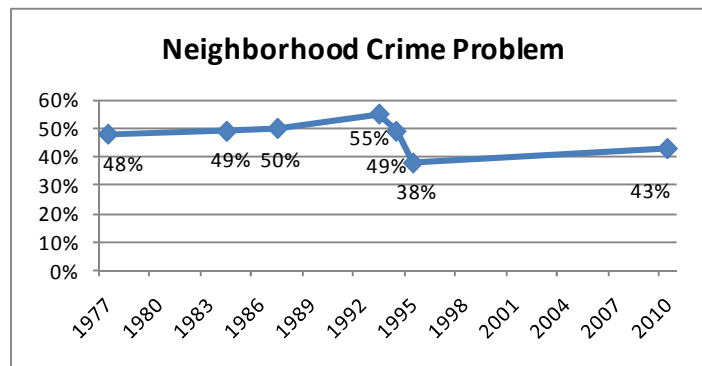
“While home rule is always a consideration when merging any local service, support for the concept of police consolidation may be low because residents see no significant benefit in it,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

Although most residents (52%) say that countywide police consolidation would lead to some taxpayer savings, few (18%) say that such savings would be significant.

The poll found that most New Jerseyans feel recent cuts to municipal budgets have not harmed public safety. More than 2-in-3 (69%) say there has been no impact on overall safety in their town, while 20% say budget cuts have made their town less safe and 6% counter that they are actually more safe after these cuts. Urban residents (32%) are somewhat more likely than those in older suburban towns (18%) or newer suburbs (15%) to feel less safe because of these cuts.

Overall, more than 3-in-4 residents have a generally positive view of the job their local police department is doing, including 33% who rate their police force as excellent and 45% who rate it as good. Another 17% rate their police service as only fair and 5% give it a poor rating. Past poll readings found about 1-in-4 residents giving the top rating of “excellent” to their local police force (27% in 1993 and 25% in 1984). Suburban residents (38%) are twice as likely as urban residents (19%) to give the top rating of excellent. Furthermore, nearly 4-in-10 urban residents give a negative rating of only fair (33%) or poor (5%).

Currently, just over 4-in-10 New Jersey residents say that crime in their neighborhoods is a problem, including 11% who say it is a very serious problem and 32% who say it is somewhat serious. The 43% who say crime is a problem is similar to the 38% measured in the last poll reading on this question back in 1995. However, the current number is lower than prior readings in the 1980s and early 1990s. Residents of New Jersey’s urban communities are more likely than suburbanites to say crime is a problem. Specifically, 1-in-4 (26%) urban residents say neighborhood crime is a very serious problem where they live compared to just 1-in-20 suburban residents (6% in older towns and 3% in newer suburbs).



Gang Activity

Fresh on the heels of the New Jersey State Police’s triennial gang report, the *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* asked state residents about the perceptions of gangs in their towns. Overall, 3-in-10 say that gangs are currently active in their towns, including 12% who say there is a lot of gang activity and 19% who say there is just a little. Another 52% say there is no gang activity in their town and 16% are unsure. These results are similar to a poll taken in 2007.

The poll reveals that many state residents are unaware of gangs in their own backyards. In towns the State Police identifies as having gang activity, only 43% of those residents say they are aware of that activity. Another 41% inaccurately believe that there is no gang activity in their town and 16% are unsure.

There is a stark urban-suburban divide in awareness among residents who live in towns identified by the State Police as having gangs. Those living in urban cities with gang activity (57%) are the most likely to be aware of these gangs. Those living in older towns and suburbs (42%) are somewhat less likely, and those living in newer suburbs and rural areas with active gangs (23%) are the least likely to be aware of those gangs.

Despite the greater lack of awareness in the suburbs, 7-in-10 New Jerseyans disagree with the premise that gang violence is mainly an urban problem that does not affect the suburbs.

About 1-in-3 residents (37%) are worried that a member of their family will become the victim of gang violence. This is down from 46% who held that fear in 2007. This concern ranges from 50% of urban residents to 36% of older town residents and 29% of newer suburb residents.

Just 20% think that media coverage of gang activity is accurate. The remainder are split, with 30% saying that media coverage tends to exaggerate the problem and 33% saying it underplays the extent of gang activity. In 2007, more New Jerseyans (41%) felt that media coverage was overblown, while fewer (26%) felt that the media were under-emphasizing the issue compared to current public opinion.

The poll also found that 62% of the public disagrees with the idea that certain people will always be drawn to gangs and not a lot can be done to solve the problem.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll* was conducted by telephone with 801 New Jersey adults from February 2 to 7, 2011. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.5 percent. The poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute and originally published by the New Jersey 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.)

- How serious a problem is crime in your neighborhood – very serious, somewhat serious, or not at all serious?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Very serious	11%	15%	10%	8%	26%	6%	3%	17%	2%
Somewhat serious	32%	31%	33%	30%	36%	30%	30%	35%	28%
Not at all serious	57%	54%	56%	61%	37%	63%	66%	47%	69%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	May 1995*	June 1994*	February 1993*	October 1987*	April 1984*	May 1977*
Very serious	11%	8%	11%	11%	12%	10%	18%
Somewhat serious	32%	30%	38%	44%	38%	39%	30%
Not at all serious	57%	61%	49%	43%	50%	50%	51%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	1%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	802	801	801	499	805	1005

* Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

- How would you rate the job your local police are doing – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Excellent	33%	27%	34%	36%	19%	37%	39%	29%	37%
Good	45%	46%	45%	43%	43%	43%	48%	43%	47%
Only fair	17%	23%	14%	15%	33%	14%	8%	21%	12%
Poor	5%	4%	6%	3%	5%	6%	3%	6%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	2%	0%	1%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	February 1993*	October 1984*
Excellent	33%	27%	25%
Good	45%	46%	53%
Only fair	17%	21%	14%
Poor	5%	5%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	2%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	801	500

* Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

Question wording in 1984 was "Police protection in your area."

- Have recent cuts in local government budgets made your town more safe, less safe, or had no impact on overall safety in your town?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
More safe	6%	13%	5%	3%	11%	4%	5%	8%	5%
Less safe	20%	25%	21%	16%	32%	18%	15%	25%	15%
No impact	69%	60%	71%	75%	53%	74%	76%	63%	77%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	2%	3%	6%	5%	3%	4%	4%	3%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

4. Some people have proposed creating countywide police forces to serve the whole county. Would you favor or oppose having your town served by a countywide police force?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Favor	38%	40%	35%	40%	33%	43%	36%	36%	40%
Oppose	52%	53%	54%	49%	56%	48%	55%	52%	53%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	7%	10%	11%	11%	9%	9%	12%	7%
Unwtd N	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

5. Would having a countywide police force lead to significant savings for taxpayers, small savings, or no savings at all?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Significant savings	18%	16%	17%	23%	10%	22%	20%	18%	19%
Small savings	34%	43%	34%	27%	34%	32%	35%	32%	37%
No savings at all	36%	35%	35%	38%	46%	32%	32%	39%	33%
(VOL) Don't know	12%	7%	15%	12%	9%	13%	12%	12%	11%
Unwtd N	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

6. Would having a countywide police force lead to more crime in your town, less crime in your town, or would crime in your town remain about the same?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
More crime	23%	19%	27%	21%	17%	25%	25%	23%	24%
Less crime	13%	21%	11%	8%	20%	12%	8%	15%	10%
About the same	58%	58%	54%	63%	59%	56%	61%	56%	61%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	2%	8%	8%	4%	7%	6%	6%	5%
Unwtd N	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

7. Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about gangs. Currently, are any gangs active in your town? [If YES: Is there a lot of gang activity or just a little?]

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Yes, a lot	12%	16%	13%	9%	31%	7%	5%	20%	5%
Yes, a little	19%	20%	21%	15%	22%	20%	15%	23%	14%
No gang activity	52%	54%	49%	55%	34%	57%	61%	41%	65%
(VOL) Don't know	16%	10%	17%	21%	13%	16%	19%	16%	16%
Unwtd N	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	July 2007
Yes, a lot	12%	14%
Yes, a little	19%	18%
No gang activity	52%	53%
(VOL) Don't know	16%	16%
Unwtd N	801	801

8. How concerned are you that you or a member of your family will be the victim of gang violence – very, somewhat, or not worried?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Very worried	11%	13%	12%	8%	22%	9%	5%	15%	7%
Somewhat worried	26%	22%	28%	27%	28%	27%	24%	26%	25%
Not worried	62%	64%	59%	64%	50%	62%	70%	57%	67%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	2%	1%	1%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	July 2007
Very worried	11%	16%
Somewhat worried	26%	30%
Not worried	62%	54%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	801

9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Gang violence is mainly an urban problem; it rarely happens in the suburbs?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Agree	27%	33%	22%	30%	26%	30%	25%	26%	29%
Disagree	70%	65%	76%	67%	70%	67%	74%	71%	69%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	2%	2%	3%	4%	3%	1%	3%	2%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	July 2007
Agree	27%	28%
Disagree	70%	70%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	2%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	801

10. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: There's not a lot that can be done to solve the gang problem; certain people will always be drawn to this lifestyle.

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Agree	34%	37%	29%	39%	38%	33%	33%	38%	31%
Disagree	62%	63%	67%	54%	60%	63%	62%	58%	65%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	0%	4%	7%	2%	5%	5%	4%	4%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	July 2007
Agree	34%	35%
Disagree	62%	63%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	2%
<i>Unwtd N</i>	801	801

11. Overall, does the news media's coverage of youth violence and gang activity accurately portray the extent of the problem or does it make people think the problem is bigger or smaller than it actually is?

	TOTAL	AGE			COMMUNITY TYPE			STATE POLICE REPORT GANG ACTIVITY	
		18-34	35-54	55+	Urban	Stable town	Expanding suburb	Yes	No
Accurately portrays	20%	21%	21%	19%	17%	20%	23%	21%	21%
Make people think problem is bigger	30%	32%	26%	33%	36%	27%	28%	33%	26%
Make people think problem is smaller	33%	32%	36%	31%	34%	35%	31%	31%	35%
(VOL) Don't know	17%	15%	17%	18%	14%	17%	18%	15%	18%
Unwtd N	801	125	351	310	152	314	316	365	400

TREND:	February 2011	July 2007
Accurately portrays	20%	21%
Make people think problem is bigger	30%	41%
Make people think problem is smaller	33%	26%
(VOL) Don't know	17%	12%
Unwtd N	801	801

The Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Press Media Poll was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on February 2-7, 2011 with a statewide random sample of 801 adult residents. Sampling and live telephone 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 3.5 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)			
35% Dem	49% Male	28% 18-34	65% White
22% Rep	51% Female	40% 35-54	12% Black
43% Ind		32% 55+	15% Hispanic
			8% Asian/Other

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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