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WHAT NEW JERSEY BELIEVES

What do New Jerseyans choose to believe? The *Monmouth University/Asbury Park Press Poll* took a look at what drives the Garden State's belief system on a variety of issues.

Overall, 64% of New Jerseyans believe in life after death, 51% believe in the theory of evolution, 49% believe in life on other planets, and 38% believe in astrology. Compared to a similar series of questions posed by the *Eagleton-Rutgers Poll* 12 years ago, belief in life after death is down by 4 points, evolution by 2 points, life on other planets by 7 points, and astrology by 1 point.

Education is a significant factor behind the belief in astrology and evolution, although it has less impact on belief in life after or beyond our earthly existence. Fewer than 3-in-10 New Jerseyans with a college degree believe in astrology compared to more than 4-in-10 of those without a degree. In terms of evolution, more than 2-in-3 (69%) college graduates believe in it, compared to 52% with some college education and 37% of New Jerseyans who never went to college.

New Jerseyans with a Darwinian bent may despair at the 42% of their fellow Garden State residents who cannot countenance the idea that humans may have evolved from lower life forms. However, they may take solace from the fact that recent polls in other places put that number significantly higher. For instance, large majorities of Republican primary voters in Southern states do not believe in evolution – 60% in Alabama and 66% in Mississippi, according to a March 2012 PPP Poll. However, that number was a much lower 43% among Illinois Republicans. Here in New Jersey, 49% of Republicans do not believe in evolution, compared to 41% of independents and 39% of Democrats.

The poll also asked how New Jerseyans view the Bible. Nearly half (49%) see it as the inspired word of God, but not everything in it should be taken literally. At the opposite ends of the spectrum, 24% say that it is indeed the literal word of God while a similar 20% say it is only a book of fables, history, and moral precepts. The *Gallup Poll* asked this question of a national sample last year and found an

identical number (49%) of Americans who believe the Bible is the inspired word of God. However, compared to the New Jersey results, they found slightly more Americans who say it is literal (30%) and slightly, although not significantly, fewer (17%) who see it as a book of fables.

For a final Garden State twist, the poll also asked about the Jersey Devil and found that 60% of New Jerseyans have heard about the home-grown legend, but only 9% believe it actually exists. Residents of South (80%) and Central (65%) Jersey are more likely than those in North Jersey (48%) to be aware of the legend, but no more likely to believe in it – 11% South/Central to 7% North.

“Once again, New Jersey shows itself to be a microcosm of the nation. We’re a little less fundamentally religious, but only just a little. There are pockets of every type of belief throughout the Garden State,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

The *Monmouth University/Asbury Park Press Poll* also took a more “wonky” look at the anchors of our political beliefs. Pres. Barack Obama understood the power of anchoring when, in an October 2011 speech, he tried to sway Republican-leaning independents – and some Republicans as well – by using the words of Ronald Reagan to support a re-evaluation of the income tax system. He specifically cited a June 1985 speech in which Pres. Reagan said the country needed to close tax loopholes that allow some of the wealthiest Americans to avoid paying their fair share.

The *Monmouth University/Asbury Park Press Poll* asked New Jerseyans if they agreed with that statement. But half the sample heard it as a statement sourced to Reagan and half heard it as a statement made by Obama. About 3-in-4 residents agree with the need to close tax loopholes, regardless of who said it – 79% as attributed to Reagan and 73% as attributed to Obama. The number who “strongly” agree is even closer – 57% for Reagan and 58% for Obama.

A closer look underneath those similar total results reveals a notable partisan effect that divides New Jersey. Republicans are much more likely to agree with the Reagan statement (73% overall and 52% strongly) than the identical Obama statement (52% overall and 28% strongly). Democrats, though, are only slightly more likely to agree with the statement about tax loopholes if spoken by Obama (88%) rather than Reagan (82%), although they are significantly more likely to “strongly” agree with that statement if made by the Democratic incumbent (75%) rather than the Republican icon (57%). Interestingly, opinion among independents is not at all affected whether the presidential anchor is Reagan (78% overall and 59% strongly) or Obama (71% overall and 58% strongly).

The poll performed a similar experiment with the New Jersey issue of sentencing reform for non-violent drug offenders. A policy to send such offenders to treatment facilities rather than prison has been pushed by some Democrats in the past. This year, Republican Gov. Chris Christie made it a major policy initiative of his own. When this proposal is attributed to the governor, 68% of New Jerseyans agree with

it, including 41% who do so “strongly.” When it is sourced to state Democratic leaders, a nearly identical 67% agree with it, including 39% who do so “strongly.”

As with the national example, this overall similarity masks significant partisan differences. In this instance, opinion among Republicans is more stable, while opinion among Democrats and independents is swayed more by the anchoring effects. Specifically, 64% of Democrats agree with this policy as proposed by Gov. Christie, but it jumps to 80% if proposed by New Jersey Democratic leaders. Among independents, the effect is in the reverse. More independents like the policy if proposed by Gov. Christie (76%) than by state Democratic leaders (64%).

Among Garden State Republicans, there is no difference in the overall level of support for drug sentencing reform – 62% agree if proposed by Christie and 60% agree if proposed by Democrats. But Republicans are more likely to “strongly” agree with the policy if the GOP governor proposed it – 36%, compared to 25% if proposed by Democratic leaders.

“I’m not sure which finding is more remarkable? The extent to which different segments of the population change their opinion on policies based on the politician who proposes it. Or the fact that all this partisan churning cancels out when we average opinion for the state as a whole,” said Murray.

The *Monmouth University/Asbury Park Press Poll* was conducted by telephone with 804 New Jersey adults from April 11 to 15, 2012. 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 Asbury Park Press and its sister publications (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.)

[Questions 1 and 2 were asked of randomized split-samples: moe= $\pm 4.9\%$]

[READ NAME] once said we need to close tax loopholes that allow some of the wealthiest Americans to avoid paying their fair share. Do you agree or disagree that this needs to be done? [*PROBE:* Do you agree/disagree strongly or somewhat?]

1. ... President Ronald Reagan ...

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Strongly Agree	57%	57%	59%	52%	63%	51%	52%	56%	63%	46%	61%	62%
Somewhat Agree	22%	25%	19%	21%	19%	24%	22%	27%	17%	34%	18%	15%
Somewhat Disagree	6%	7%	7%	6%	3%	9%	8%	5%	5%	7%	6%	5%
Strongly Disagree	11%	6%	11%	18%	11%	11%	12%	11%	11%	11%	12%	11%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	5%	6%	1%	4%	2%	4%	7%

2. ... President Barack Obama ...

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Strongly Agree	58%	75%	58%	28%	53%	62%	45%	68%	65%	46%	64%	61%
Somewhat Agree	15%	13%	13%	24%	15%	14%	18%	8%	18%	18%	13%	16%
Somewhat Disagree	10%	1%	13%	21%	10%	10%	15%	10%	5%	18%	8%	5%
Strongly Disagree	13%	6%	14%	26%	16%	10%	16%	12%	10%	13%	12%	15%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	5%	2%	2%	6%	3%	7%	2%	3%	7%	3%	3%

[Questions 3 and 4 were asked of randomized split-samples: moe= ± 4.9%]

[READ NAME] proposed sentencing non-violent drug offenders to treatment facilities rather than prison. Do you agree or disagree with this proposal? [*PROBE*: Do you agree/disagree strongly or somewhat?]

3. ... Governor Chris Christie has ...

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Strongly Agree	41%	48%	39%	36%	42%	41%	35%	43%	48%	38%	43%	43%
Somewhat Agree	27%	16%	37%	26%	25%	28%	24%	26%	29%	22%	27%	29%
Somewhat Disagree	7%	6%	5%	10%	5%	8%	5%	9%	7%	6%	7%	7%
Strongly Disagree	17%	21%	16%	16%	17%	18%	24%	16%	10%	23%	18%	11%
(VOL) Don't know	8%	8%	4%	11%	11%	5%	12%	6%	5%	10%	5%	10%

4. ... New Jersey Democratic leaders have ...

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Strongly Agree	39%	53%	36%	25%	41%	37%	35%	43%	40%	39%	41%	35%
Somewhat Agree	28%	27%	28%	35%	25%	32%	27%	33%	27%	34%	27%	25%
Somewhat Disagree	11%	6%	11%	20%	10%	12%	13%	9%	11%	16%	9%	10%
Strongly Disagree	16%	8%	21%	14%	18%	15%	19%	14%	14%	7%	19%	20%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%	5%	6%	6%	5%	6%	2%	8%	3%	4%	9%

5. Have you heard of the legend of the Jersey Devil, or not? [*If YES*: Do you believe the Jersey Devil actually exists or not?]

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Exists	9%	9%	10%	7%	11%	7%	10%	7%	9%	7%	9%	11%
Does NOT exist	48%	42%	49%	60%	52%	45%	39%	54%	56%	45%	51%	48%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%	1%	2%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%	1%	3%	4%
Have not heard of	40%	46%	40%	30%	35%	45%	48%	36%	33%	47%	37%	37%

6. I'm going to read a list of items. Please tell me whether or not you personally believe in each one. Just a quick yes or no.

[*QUESTIONS WERE ROTATED*]:

The theory of evolution – that humans evolved from lower life forms

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes, believe	51%	55%	53%	45%	55%	47%	37%	52%	69%	51%	54%	48%
No, does not believe	42%	39%	41%	49%	37%	47%	52%	43%	28%	43%	38%	45%
(VOL) Don't know	7%	7%	6%	5%	8%	6%	11%	5%	3%	6%	8%	7%

Life on other planets

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes, believe	49%	51%	49%	51%	59%	40%	41%	52%	57%	48%	53%	45%
No, does not believe	45%	43%	45%	45%	34%	54%	52%	44%	36%	46%	42%	47%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%	6%	4%	7%	6%	7%	4%	7%	6%	5%	8%

Life after death

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes, believe	64%	63%	65%	66%	60%	67%	65%	65%	61%	65%	66%	61%
No, does not believe	31%	31%	31%	30%	34%	28%	31%	28%	33%	33%	29%	31%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	6%	4%	4%	6%	5%	4%	6%	6%	3%	5%	8%

Astrology

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Yes, believe	38%	41%	41%	30%	32%	44%	41%	48%	28%	45%	40%	32%
No, does not believe	58%	57%	54%	69%	64%	52%	53%	51%	69%	53%	57%	64%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	2%	5%	1%	4%	4%	6%	1%	2%	2%	3%	5%

7. Which of the following statements comes closest to describing your views about the Bible: The Bible is the actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word; The Bible is the inspired word of God but not everything in it should be taken literally; OR The Bible is an ancient book of fables, legends, history, and moral precepts recorded by man?

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Actual word of God taken literally	24%	28%	18%	25%	21%	27%	34%	23%	12%	21%	21%	30%
Inspired word of God, but not all literal	49%	48%	50%	55%	45%	52%	45%	51%	52%	57%	47%	45%
Book of fables, legends, moral precepts	20%	20%	24%	15%	26%	14%	12%	21%	29%	17%	24%	18%
(VOL) Don't know	7%	4%	8%	5%	8%	7%	8%	4%	7%	5%	8%	7%

The *Monmouth University/Asbury Park Press Poll* was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute on April 11 to 15, 2012 with a statewide random sample of 804 adult residents, including 644 contacted on a landline telephone and 160 on a cell phone. Live interviewing services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. and the telephone sample was obtained from Survey Sampling International. Monmouth is responsible for all aspects of the survey questionnaire design, data weighting and analysis. 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)			
36% Dem	49% Male	29% 18-34	64% White
22% Rep	51% Female	39% 35-54	12% Black
42% Ind		32% 55+	15% Hispanic
			9% Asian/Other

	TOTAL	PARTY ID			MARGIN OF ERROR GENDER		EDUCATION			AGE		
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	HS or less	Some college	College grad	18-34	35-54	55+
Unweighted N	804	284	327	160	382	422	204	188	400	160	326	299
moe	3.5%	5.8%	5.4%	7.8%	5.0%	4.8%	6.9%	7.2%	4.9%	7.8%	5.4%	5.7%

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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