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CORRUPTION GROWS IN GARDEN STATE

New Jerseyans paint both political parties with same brush

The arrests of dozens of public officials last month has once again put the national spotlight on New Jersey's reputation for political corruption. So, have Garden State residents finally reached the point where they will take out their anger at the ballot box? Probably not, according to the latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll*. Despite the large number of Democrats arrested for corruption in the past few years and the fact that Democrats control most of the state's political apparatus, New Jerseyans just don't believe that Republicans would be any more honest if they were in power.

The poll also tracked New Jerseyans' views of corruption and found that the events of July 23rd have done nothing to lift their opinion of Garden State politics. The poll results include:

- New Jerseyans hold a dim view of the quality of their government. Only 27% give it a positive rating of excellent or good, similar to the 29% who did so in 2007. However, this is down somewhat from 39% in 2004, and marks a significant decline from the majorities of 54% in 2001 and 61% in 1984 who held a positive view of their government's quality.
- Currently, 65% of New Jerseyans say that there is "a lot" of corruption in the state. That marks a small uptick from 60% in 2007. As recently as 2004, though, only 34% of residents characterized the amount of corruption in New Jersey as being "a lot."
- A majority of 55% say there is more corruption in New Jersey than in other states. Just four years ago, only 41% felt that way.
- Fully 63% of New Jerseyans believe that most of their state legislators look out for their own financial interests rather than the public good. This is down slightly from the 69% who said so two years ago, but still marks an increase from 47% of voters who felt that way six years ago. The state's mayors fare slightly better than its legislators, but still register a majority (51%) who feel most New Jersey mayors place their own financial interests first and foremost.

Most of the public officials arrested and convicted to date have been Democrats, the party which controls most state and local governmental bodies in New Jersey. However, only 17% of Garden State residents believe that Democrats are inherently more corrupt than Republicans. In fact, the vast majority (72%) say that Republicans would probably be just as corrupt if they were able to get into power. This sentiment is held by 89% of Democrats, 73% of independents, and even 50% of Republican residents.

“Neither political party has an advantage on dealing with corruption, and that is one of the major reasons why the issue is rarely part of New Jersey voters’ decision-making process,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. “This doesn’t mean that voters are happy about corruption or even that they believe nothing can be done to stop it. It’s just that their primary concerns are pocket-book issues and they don’t necessarily see reducing corruption as the primary way to address their economic woes.”

While corruption seems to have become part and parcel of New Jersey’s political fabric, most state residents say it does not have to be that way. More than 3-in-4 (78%) believe that the amount of corruption can be reduced, compared to only 20% who feel that there is probably little that can be done about it.

Also, more residents believe that getting involved in politics and government is an honorable thing to do (50%) rather than seeing it as “a dirty business” (40%). While positive views of public service outweigh negative ones, it’s still worth noting that the number of New Jerseyans who see politics as a dirty business has increased by 8 points since last year. Currently, Republicans (46%) and independents (46%) are more likely than Democrats (30%) to view politics as a disreputable pursuit.

“The bottom line for residents is that it doesn’t have to be this way. But it is,” said Murray.

The vast majority of New Jerseyans have followed last month’s federal sting, including 64% who have heard a lot about it and 24% who have heard a little. Only 12% are completely unaware of this news story.

Some observers claim that this and other recent instances of corruption are due in part to the large number of local governing bodies in New Jersey with the ability to hand out contracts. Others counter that more local control actually leads to more oversight. When asked about the potential impact on corruption if some towns and school districts were merged, the public is split. Just 27% feel such mergers would lead to less corruption compared to 19% who think it

would lead to more corruption. A plurality (46%) of residents, though, feel that a merger solution would have no real impact on reducing corruption in the state.

Changing Views of Corruption in New Jersey				
	<u>2009</u>	<u>2007-08</u>	<u>2003-05</u>	<u>2001-02</u>
NJ has good quality government	27%	29%	39%	54%
NJ has a lot of political corruption	65%	60%	34%	33%
NJ has more corruption than other states	55%	<i>n/a</i>	41%	<i>n/a</i>
Politics is a dirty business	40%	32%	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>
Legislators more concerned with own financial interests	63%	69%	47%*	<i>n/a</i>

* (likely voters)

In the current survey, just 2% of state residents say the quality of government in New Jersey is excellent and 25% say it is good. Another 41% rate the quality of government as only fair and 30% say it is poor.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of New Jerseyans say there is a lot of corruption in the state, 26% say there is some, 5% a little, and 2% none. A majority also believe that New Jersey has more corruption than other states, including 41% who say it has a lot more and 14% who say it has a little more. Only 5% feel that New Jersey has less corruption than other states and 37% say it has about the same amount.

New Jerseyans tend to see most of their elected officials as generally self-serving. Nearly 2-in-3 residents (63%) feel that most state legislators generally have their own financial interests at heart rather than the interests of the general public (28%). Local mayors fare a little better. Just over half of state residents (51%) feel that most New Jersey mayors generally look out for their own financial interests rather than the interests of the general public (42%).

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 900 New Jersey adults from July 29 to August 2, 2009. This sample has a margin of error of ± 3.3 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.)

- Overall, how would you rate the quality of government in New Jersey – is it excellent, good, only fair, or poor?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Excellent	2%	2%	2%	4%	2%	0%
Good	25%	27%	20%	40%	15%	20%
Only fair	41%	40%	43%	38%	42%	43%
Poor	30%	29%	34%	18%	39%	36%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

TREND:	August 2009	September 2007	January 2004*	April 2001*	October 1984*	January 1981*
Excellent	2%	1%	2%	5%	8%	4%
Good	25%	28%	37%	49%	53%	36%
Only fair	41%	44%	47%	37%	31%	48%
Poor	30%	25%	12%	6%	5%	10%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	2%	2%	3%	2%	2%
Unwtd N	900	801	904	802	500	1003

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

- Which of the following two statements do you agree with more: Getting involved in politics and government is a dirty business – or – Getting involved in politics and government is an honorable thing to do? [Note: statements were rotated]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Dirty business	40%	37%	48%	30%	46%	46%
Honorable thing to do	50%	54%	37%	60%	42%	45%
(VOL) Depends/Both/Neither	8%	6%	12%	6%	10%	5%
(VOL) Don't Know	3%	3%	3%	4%	2%	3%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

TREND:	August 2009	October 2008
Dirty business	40%	32%
Honorable thing to do	50%	55%
(VOL) Depends/Both/Neither	8%	8%
(VOL) Don't Know	3%	6%
Unwtd N	900	808

[Question 3 was asked of a random half-sample: moe= ±4.8%]

- Which statement is closer to your opinion: Most state legislators have the interests of the general public at heart – or – Most state legislators have their own financial interests at heart? [Note: statements were rotated]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Public interest	28%	31%	18%	46%	19%	22%
Own financial interest	63%	61%	70%	46%	73%	68%
(VOL) Both equally	5%	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	5%	3%	3%	4%
Unwtd N	419	331	88	124	178	107

TREND:	August 2009	September 2007	September 2003*
Public interest	28%	20%	32%
Own financial interest	63%	69%	47%
(VOL) Both equally	5%	6%	14%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	5%	8%
Unwtd N	419	801	542

* Source: Gannett New Jersey Poll of likely voters

[Question 4 was asked of a random half-sample: moe= ±4.5%]

4. Which statement is closer to your opinion: Most New Jersey mayors have the interests of the general public at heart – or – Most New Jersey mayors have their own financial interests at heart? [Note: statements were rotated]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Public interest	42%	45%	33%	44%	35%	47%
Own financial interest	51%	49%	58%	51%	59%	43%
(VOL) Both equally	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	4%	7%	4%	6%	4%
Unwtd N	481	392	89	159	185	118

5. How much political corruption would you say there is in New Jersey – a lot, some, only a little, or none at all?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
A lot	65%	68%	56%	60%	70%	72%
Some	26%	25%	29%	29%	23%	21%
Only a little	5%	5%	6%	9%	3%	5%
None at all	2%	1%	6%	1%	1%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	2%	0%	3%	2%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

TREND:	August 2009	September 2007	January 2004*	June 2002*
A lot	65%	60%	34%	33%
Some	26%	30%	45%	51%
Only a little	5%	6%	11%	8%
None at all	2%	1%	3%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	4%	7%	7%
Unwtd N	900	390	904	801

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

6. Compared to other states, do you think New Jersey has more corruption, less corruption, or about the same amount? [If "More": Is that a lot more or just a little more?]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
LOT MORE corruption	41%	43%	34%	29%	50%	42%
LITTLE MORE corruption	14%	15%	11%	17%	11%	15%
LESS corruption	5%	4%	8%	5%	3%	4%
About the SAME	37%	34%	45%	46%	32%	35%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	4%	2%	4%	4%	3%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

TREND:	August 2009	September 2005
More corruption	55%	41%
Less corruption	5%	7%
About the same	37%	42%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	10%
Unwtd N	900	404

7. Do you think corruption in New Jersey can be reduced or is there probably not much that can be done about it?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Can be reduced	78%	80%	71%	77%	77%	83%
Not much can be done	20%	18%	25%	20%	20%	16%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	2%	5%	3%	3%	1%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

8. Have you heard anything about the recent arrests of more than 40 New Jersey public figures, including mayors, legislators, and other local officials? [If “Yes”: Have you heard a lot or a little?]

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Yes, heard a lot	64%	68%	49%	64%	63%	67%
Yes, heard a little	24%	23%	28%	25%	25%	25%
No, not heard anything	12%	9%	21%	10%	12%	8%
(VOL) Don't know	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

9. Some people say that the amount of corruption in New Jersey is due to our large number of local governments and school districts, which makes it difficult to monitor the contract process and can lead to corruption. On the other hand, others say that more local control actually leads to better oversight of the process. Do you think that merging some towns and school districts would lead to less corruption, more corruption, or wouldn't it have an impact either way?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Less corruption	27%	28%	26%	27%	29%	24%
More corruption	19%	18%	22%	20%	19%	20%
No impact	46%	46%	45%	49%	45%	47%
(VOL) Mixed, both less and more	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%
(VOL) Don't know	7%	7%	7%	4%	6%	8%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

10. Most of the public officials arrested have been Democrats. Do you think this is because New Jersey Democrats tend to be more corrupt than Republicans – OR – because Democrats happen to be in power and if Republicans were in power they would probably be just as corrupt?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Dems more corrupt	17%	17%	17%	3%	17%	40%
Reps in power would be same	72%	73%	68%	89%	73%	50%
(VOL) Don't know	11%	10%	15%	9%	9%	10%
Unwtd N	900	723	177	283	363	225

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 July 29 to August 2 2009 with a statewide random sample of 900 adult residents. 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 3.3 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.

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 which affect the state. Specific voter surveys are conducted when appropriate during election cycles.

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