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NEW JERSEY SEES CORRUPTION FLOURISHING

Public takes dimmer view despite four years of reforms

In the past four years, the state has passed pay-to-play reforms, banned dual office-holding, and pilot-tested public financing of legislative elections. In addition, the U.S. Attorney has arrested or indicted over 100 public officials for corruption. So has the ethics situation in New Jersey improved? Not at all, say Garden State residents. In fact, on most questions tracked by the latest *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll*, public perceptions of corruption in the state have worsened since 2003.

Some key questions from the poll include:

- How do New Jerseyans rate the quality of their government? Only 29% give it a positive rating of excellent or good. This is down from 39% who said the same in a statewide poll taken nearly four years ago.
- Today, 60% of New Jerseyans say that there is “a lot” of corruption in the state. Nearly four years ago, only 34% characterized the amount of corruption as being “a lot”.
- Which interest do state legislators have at heart – the general good or their own pocketbooks? Fully 71% of New Jersey voters believe that legislators look out for their own financial interests first and foremost. This is a jump from 47% four years ago.
- And what is the public’s best guess at the percentage of state legislators who are willing to sell out to lobbyists? They say it’s about 60%, up from an average estimate of 52% nearly four years ago.

The poll was conducted as part of Gannett New Jersey’s “Profiting From Public Service” series looking back at four years of ethics reform efforts in the state. For comparison purposes, poll questions were taken from a September 2003 survey of state voters conducted by Gannett New Jersey and a January 2004 survey of state residents taken by the Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.

Changing Views of Corruption in New Jersey			
	<u>4 years ago</u>	<u>Today</u>	<u>Change</u>
Approve of state legislature	40%	33%	-7
Disapprove of state legislature	30%	41%	+11
Dissatisfied with state government	50%	48%	-2
NJ government quality is good	39%	29%	-10
New Jersey has “a lot” of political corruption	34%	60%	+26
Legislators more concerned about own financial interests	47%	71%	+24
Percentage of legislators willing to sell out to lobbyists	52%	60%	+8
Legislators should not be permitted other public jobs	60%	78%	+18

In the current survey, just 1% of state residents say the quality of government in New Jersey is excellent and 28% say it is good. Another 44% rate the quality of government as only fair and 25% say it is poor. In January 2004, 2% of residents said excellent, 37% good, 47% fair, and 12% poor.

Residents are split on the job state government has done in the past two years, not just on corruption but in all areas. The poll found 46% of New Jersey adults are basically satisfied while an identical 46% are dissatisfied. Among registered voters, the scale tips to dissatisfied (48%) over satisfied (43%). These results are similar to the September 2003 voter poll (50% dissatisfied to 38% satisfied).

When focusing specifically on the state legislature, New Jerseyans are in a pessimistic mood. Just 33% approve of the job the legislature is doing to 41% who disapprove. Another 26% have no opinion. Four years ago, these numbers were reversed – 40% approved to 30% disapproved.

Turning to the issue of corruption, 6-in-10 New Jerseyans classify political corruption as a major problem in the state. Overall, 60% say there is a lot of corruption in the state, 30% say

there is some, 6% a little, and 1% none. Nearly four years ago, those numbers stood at 34% a lot, 45% some, 11% a little, and 3% none.

New Jerseyans see the state's elected legislators as generally self-serving, much more so than four years ago. More than 2-in-3 residents feel that legislators generally have their own financial interests (69%) rather than the interests of the general public (20%) at heart. Among registered voters, this disparity stands at 71% to 19%. In the voter poll from September 2003, fewer than half of voters (47%) said that legislators considered their own pocketbooks before the interests of the public (32%).

When asked for their best guess at how many legislators are willing to sell out to lobbyists for meals, trips and campaign contributions, 7% of New Jerseyans say all of them, 41% say more than half, 25% say between a quarter and half, and 14% say a quarter or fewer. When all the responses are tallied, this translates to an average estimate of 60% of state legislators who the public feel are willing to sell out. Four years ago, the average estimate stood at 52%.

The current poll asked residents to think back to four years ago and compare changes in the amount of corruption over that time. While most (58%) say that the amount of corruption has not changed, 1-in-4 (24%) feel that there is even more corruption today than there was four years ago compared to only 8% who say there is less.

“One of the consequences of both the criminal crackdown and the reform efforts is that more light has been shed on public corruption in the state than there was four years ago,” commented Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. “Clearly, the public has become much more aware of the problem and the poll also indicates that they may be becoming less tolerant of it.”

The poll found that only 16% of residents say it is appropriate for state legislators to take another public job, elected or appointed. Fully 76% of residents – and 78% of voters – feel that legislators should be banned from all other public offices. This is an increase from the 60% voter majority who felt that way four years ago.

The public also wants to take a tough line with public officials who are convicted of crimes involving the misuse of their office. Focusing on pension eligibility, 66% of New Jerseyans say that a corrupt official should not just lose the pension for the job in which the crime was committed. They should also lose pension eligibility for every public job they have ever held, even if they had been a police officer or teacher. Only 25% feel a corrupt official should be able to receive a state pension from prior public jobs.

“While the results show a definite increase in public concern over corruption, our polling indicates that this peak may have occurred about two years ago during the 2005 gubernatorial race and has held steady ever since,” said Murray.

The poll found that 60% of residents view corruption as a major problem in the state, nearly identical to the 62% who said the same in a September 2005 *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll*. Likewise, two years ago 62% of residents said they would revoke all state pensions for corrupt public officials, similar to the 66% who feel that way in the current poll.

The current poll also found little movement in Governor Corzine’s job rating. It now stands at 46% approve to 32% disapprove, almost identical to the 46%-36% he received in July. The governor’s approval had peaked at 51% in April this year after successful negotiation of the state workers’ union contract.

“Corzine does not appear to have gotten any bounce from signing the ban on dual-office holding and other ethics reform measures last month,” said Murray.

The poll also identified partisan differences in a few of the public’s attitudes on corruption and the performance of government in general. Democrats are more likely than Republicans and independents to give the quality of state government a positive rating (41%-D, 22%-R, 21%-I), express satisfaction with state government (61%-D, 32%-R, 39%-I), and approve of the state legislature’s job performance (47%-D, 22%-R, 28%-I). The governor, of course, also garners more approval from his fellow Democrats (59%) than from Republicans (38%) or independents (39%).

On the corruption front, Democrats (45%) are less likely than Republicans (69%) or independents (70%) to characterize this issue as a major problem for the state. However, it’s important to note that the other corruption-related questions in the poll did not show significant partisan differences.

The *Monmouth University/Gannett New Jersey Poll* was conducted by telephone with 801 New Jersey adults from September 27 to 30, 2007. 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 Gannett New Jersey newspaper group (Asbury Park Press, Courier-Post, Courier News, Daily Journal, Daily Record, Home News Tribune, and Ocean County Observer).

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 Jon Corzine is doing as governor?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		REGION OF STATE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	North	Central	South
Approve	46%	47%	43%	59%	39%	38%	42%	51%	47%	51%	42%
Disapprove	32%	34%	25%	23%	34%	49%	37%	28%	30%	34%	35%
(VOL) Don't know	22%	19%	32%	18%	27%	13%	21%	22%	23%	15%	23%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182	383	418	356	189	230

TREND:	September 2007	July 2007	April 2007	February 2007	September 2006	July 2006	April 2006
Approve	46%	46%	51%	44%	42%	37%	34%
Disapprove	32%	36%	29%	34%	38%	43%	37%
(VOL) Don't know	22%	18%	20%	22%	20%	20%	29%
Unwtd N	801	800	804	801	800	802	803

2. Do you approve or disapprove of the job the state legislature is doing?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID			GENDER		REGION OF STATE		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	North	Central	South
Approve	33%	32%	37%	47%	28%	22%	34%	33%	37%	32%	28%
Disapprove	41%	43%	32%	31%	44%	56%	45%	37%	37%	42%	47%
(VOL) Don't know	26%	25%	31%	22%	28%	22%	21%	30%	26%	26%	25%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182	383	418	356	189	230

TREND:	September 2007	February 2007	January 2004*
Approve	33%	35%	40%
Disapprove	41%	40%	30%
(VOL) Don't know	26%	25%	30%
Unwtd N	801	801	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

3. 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	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%
Good	28%	26%	33%	39%	20%	21%
Only fair	44%	45%	40%	45%	48%	40%
Poor	25%	27%	17%	14%	30%	37%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	1%	8%	1%	1%	1%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND:	September 2007	January 2004*
Excellent	1%	2%
Good	28%	37%
Only fair	44%	47%
Poor	25%	12%
(VOL) Don't know	2%	2%
Unwtd N	801	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

4. Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the job that the New Jersey state government has done in the past two years?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Satisfied	46%	43%	55%	61%	39%	32%
Dissatisfied	46%	48%	38%	34%	50%	60%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	9%	8%	5%	10%	8%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND (among voters):	September 2007	September 2003*
Satisfied	43%	38%
Dissatisfied	48%	50%
(VOL) Don't know	9%	12%
Unwtd N	688	542

* Source: Gannett New Jersey Poll of likely voters

5. Which statement is closer to your opinion: Most state legislators have the interest 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	20%	19%	24%	25%	16%	19%
Own financial interest	69%	71%	64%	62%	75%	73%
(VOL) Both equally	6%	6%	5%	7%	6%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	5%	4%	7%	5%	3%	5%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND (among voters):	September 2007	September 2003*
Public interest	19%	32%
Own financial interest	71%	47%
(VOL) Both equally	6%	14%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	8%
Unwtd N	688	542

* Source: Gannett New Jersey Poll of likely voters

6. Do you think legislators should or should not be permitted to take other public jobs?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Should	16%	15%	18%	17%	13%	17%
Should not	76%	78%	69%	73%	80%	78%
(VOL) Depends	4%	4%	5%	7%	3%	2%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	8%	4%	4%	4%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND (among voters):	September 2007	September 2003*
Should	15%	27%
Should not	78%	60%
(VOL) Depends	4%	9%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%
Unwtd N	688	542

* Source: Gannett New Jersey Poll of likely voters

[NOTE: The following two questions were asked of half the sample:]

7A. 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	60%	61%	56%	59%	61%	66%
Some	30%	31%	25%	34%	29%	20%
Only a little	6%	4%	11%	3%	7%	10%
None at all	1%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	3%	6%	3%	2%	4%
Unwtd N	390	334	56	140	151	88

TREND:	September 2007	January 2004*
A lot	60%	34%
Some	30%	45%
Only a little	6%	11%
None at all	1%	3%
(VOL) Don't know	4%	7%
Unwtd N	390	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

7B. Is political corruption a major problem in New Jersey, a minor problem, or not really a problem?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Major problem	60%	66%	41%	45%	70%	69%
Minor problem	27%	26%	31%	34%	23%	24%
Not really a problem	6%	5%	10%	14%	2%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	4%	17%	7%	6%	3%
Unwtd N	411	354	57	138	159	94

TREND:	September 2007	September 2005
Major problem	60%	62%
Minor problem	27%	26%
Not really a problem	6%	5%
(VOL) Don't know	6%	7%
Unwtd N	411	800

8. Compared to four years ago, is there now more corruption in the state, less, or is it about the same?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
More now	24%	24%	22%	24%	23%	26%
Less now	8%	8%	11%	12%	6%	7%
About the same	58%	59%	55%	53%	63%	58%
(VOL) Don't know	10%	10%	12%	11%	7%	8%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

9. If you had to guess, what percentage of state legislators are willing to sell out to lobbyists in return for free meals, free trips, or campaign contributions?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
25% or less	14%	13%	17%	23%	9%	8%
26% to 50%	25%	26%	20%	23%	27%	24%
More than half	41%	41%	39%	37%	41%	50%
All / 100%	7%	7%	7%	3%	12%	8%
(VOL) Don't know	13%	12%	17%	15%	11%	9%
AVERAGE	60%	60%	59%	51%	64%	65%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND:	September 2007	January 2004*
25% or less	14%	20%
26% to 50%	25%	29%
More than half	41%	29%
All / 100%	7%	6%
(VOL) Don't know	13%	16%
AVERAGE	60%	52%
Unwtd N	801	904

* Source: Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

10. Say a public official commits a crime involving the misuse of their office AND this person had another job such as police officer or teacher prior to holding public office. Should they still be able to receive the state pension for their prior job or should all state pensions be revoked if they misuse their public office?

	TOTAL	REGISTERED VOTER		PARTY ID		
		Yes	No	Dem	Ind	Rep
Receive pension	25%	27%	18%	26%	25%	25%
Revoke pension	66%	64%	72%	67%	65%	68%
(VOL) Depends	5%	6%	4%	5%	5%	4%
(VOL) Don't know	3%	3%	6%	2%	4%	3%
Unwtd N	801	688	113	278	310	182

TREND:	September 2007	September 2005
Receive pension	25%	26%
Revoke pension	66%	62%
(VOL) Depends/ Don't know	8%	12%
Unwtd N	801	404

The Monmouth University/Gannett NJ Poll was designed and analyzed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute research staff. The telephone interviews conducted by Braun Research on September 27-30, 2007 with a statewide random sample of 801 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 3.5 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.

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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