

**NEW JERSEYANS= OPINIONS
ON SCHOOL REVENUE
PROPOSALS**

Conducted for:

New Jersey School Boards Association

Conducted by:

The Eagleton Institute of Politics
Center for Public Interest Polling
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Data Collection:

August 1999

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NEW JERSEYANS= OPINIONS ON SCHOOL REVENUE PROPOSALS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A. Project Background and Objectives

In order to assess New Jerseyans= opinions on different proposals to raise revenues for public schools, the New Jersey School Boards Association commissioned the Eagleton Institute=s Center for Public Interest Polling at Rutgers University to conduct a statewide survey of New Jersey residents.

The specific issues addressed by this study include:

- ! Awareness and attitudes towards local property taxes, and
- ! Opinions on specific proposals to balance state and local revenue sources for New Jersey schools.

B. Summary of Research Methodology

The questionnaire for this study was developed by Eagleton in consultation with the New Jersey School Boards Association. The draft questionnaire was pretested and modifications were made to the survey instrument. The final version of the questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

The survey involved telephone interviews conducted between August 17 and 26, 1999 with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years old and older.

Percentages for the total sample of 803 have a sampling error of $\sqrt{3.5}$ percent at a 95 percent confidence level with 50/50 proportions. Sampling error is the probability difference in results between interviewing everyone in a population versus interviewing a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account any other possible sources of error

inherent in any study of public opinion. A more comprehensive description of the research methodology is included in Appendix B.

C. Organization of the Report

This descriptive report is designed to provide an overview of the key findings from the research and a road map to the data produced from the survey. Following this introductory chapter is a summary of the survey findings. The descriptive text is followed by statistical tables. In most cases the percentages on the tables read from left to right with the total equal to a 100 percent. In instances where there is statistical rounding, the total may be more or less than 100 percent. The table will also report the A(n)@ for each group referenced on the table. The A(n)@ is the actual number of people in the group the percentages are based on. Readers should be aware of the A(n)@ when referencing the percentages on a table. Smaller sub-groups will have a higher margin of sampling error. Therefore, in some cases what may appear to be a large difference between groups is a result of the larger sampling error and may not be statistically significant. The descriptive text will discuss only those findings which are statistically significant.

The title of the table summarizes the actual question that was asked. After the title is a A(Q)@ designation that identifies the specific question number on the questionnaire to which the percentages refer. Readers are encouraged to use the questionnaire in Appendix A if they want to review the exact question wording.

Following the descriptive text and tables, there are four appendices. Appendix A has the text of the questions used in the survey as well as the demographic and other questions used in the analysis of the data. Appendix B provides additional information about the survey methodology

so interested readers may have a better understanding of the process used to obtain the data. A demographic profile of survey participants is in Appendix C. Finally, Appendix D has a complete set of data tabulations.

D. Acknowledgments

At Eagleton, the study was conducted by Patrick Murray, Senior Research Analyst. The report and the interpretation of the survey findings are the sole responsibility of the Center for Public Interest Polling, the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey.

CHAPTER 2: OVERVIEW OF SURVEY FINDINGS

A. Introduction

The survey findings reported in this chapter are organized around the main questions included in the questionnaire: attitudes toward taxes in New Jersey, awareness of the main use for property taxes, and opinions on increasing the state's share in funding public schools.

In each of the sections to follow, the overall findings for all New Jerseyans are generally presented first. These findings are followed by a discussion of the results for selected groups within the population. A complete set of statistical tables showing a range of other subgroup responses to the questions addressed in this report is included in Appendix D.

B. Awareness and Opinion of Property Taxes

Of the main state and local taxes levied on New Jerseyans, a clear majority of state residents feel that the local property tax is the most burdensome. Overall, 54 percent of New Jerseyans say the property tax is least fair, compared to 22 percent who feel the state income tax is least fair and 14 percent who name the state sales tax as least fair (Table 1). Another 10 percent of residents have no opinion on which of these three New Jersey taxes is worst. Homeowners (63%) and households that earn between \$50,000 and \$70,000 a year (62%) are most likely to feel that the local property tax is the least fair tax in New Jersey.

When asked what services most property tax revenues go to, half of state residents (52%) are aware that the bulk of their property taxes pays for local public schools (Table 2). The

remainder believe that most of their property taxes go to pay for either county (16%) or municipal (16%) services or are not sure where their property tax dollars go (16%).

More homeowners (61%) than renters (34%) are able to identify public school districts as the recipients of most of their property taxes. Also, older residents age 50 to 64 (64%) and 65 or older (60%) and New Jerseyans whose household income tops \$70,000 a year (60%) are also more likely to be aware of where most of their property taxes go.

C. Support for Proposal to Balance State and Local Revenue Sources for New Jersey Schools

In New Jersey, on average, most of the funds for school districts come from local property taxes. In many other states, the state government pays for most of the costs for public schools. Survey participants were asked whether they favor or oppose increasing the state government's share of education costs to at least half of the total school costs statewide. An overwhelming 71 percent of state residents support this proposal to increase state funding of public schools compared with only 15 percent who oppose it (Table 3). Another 14 percent have no opinion on this proposal. Support for this proposal is high in all areas of the state.

New Jerseyans were also asked if they would support a proposal to increase the state's share of education costs if it meant an increase in the state income tax which would be offset by an equal decrease in local property taxes. A clear majority of state residents also support this component of the education funding proposal, although by a 2 to 1 margin. Overall, 57 percent of New Jerseyans support a state income tax increase offset by a local property tax decrease in order to fund a larger state government share in public school costs (Table 4). Another 27 percent oppose this proposal and 16 percent have no opinion on it.

Support for the income tax/property tax shift is highest among those who feel the property tax is the least fair tax in New Jersey (66%). Support is also slightly higher among homeowners (61%) than renters (55%).

D. Conclusions

- Y A majority of New Jerseyans (54%) feel that the local property tax is the least fair among the three main taxes in the state.
- Y Half (52%) are aware that their property taxes are used mainly to pay for local public school services.
- Y A large majority of residents (71%) support a proposal to increase the state government's share of local public education costs to at least half of the statewide total.
- Y A majority (57%) also favor an increase in the state income tax to fund this proposal if it were offset by an equal decrease in local property taxes.

TABLE 1
LEAST FAIR TAX IN NEW JERSEY [S1]

	<u>Local</u> <u>Property Tax</u>	<u>NJ State</u> <u>Income Tax</u>	<u>NJ State</u> <u>Sales Tax</u>	<u>Don=t</u> <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
TOTAL	54%	22%	14%	10%	100%	(803)
<u>Registered Voter</u>						
-- Yes	54	23	14	9	100	(650)
-- No	54	18	16	12	100	(153)
<u>Age</u>						
-- 18 to 29	48	24	19	8	99	(177)
-- 30 to 49	54	24	12	10	100	(341)
-- 50 to 64	58	22	15	5	100	(160)
-- 65 and older	57	13	13	18	101	(112)
<u>Household Income</u>						
-- Under \$30,000	42	23	18	18	101	(115)
-- \$30,000-50,000	58	22	12	9	101	(154)
-- \$50,001-70,000	62	20	14	4	100	(144)
-- Over \$70,000	56	25	15	4	100	(275)
<u>Home Ownership</u>						
-- Own	63	20	11	7	101	(536)
-- Rent	39	27	18	15	99	(208)
<u>Region</u>						
-- North	51	22	16	11	100	(388)
-- Central	57	21	14	9	101	(208)
-- South	58	23	12	8	101	(207)

TABLE 2
WHERE DO MOST PROPERTY TAX REVENUES GO [S2]

	<u>Local Public Schools</u>	<u>County Services</u>	<u>Municipal Services</u>	<u>Don=t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
TOTAL	52%	16%	16%	16%	100%	(803)
<u>Registered Voter</u>						
-- Yes	55	15	16	14	100	(650)
-- No	40	18	17	25	100	(153)
<u>Age</u>						
-- 18 to 29	33	31	20	16	100	(177)
-- 30 to 49	54	14	17	16	101	(341)
-- 50 to 64	64	14	11	10	99	(160)
-- 65 and older	60	3	15	23	101	(112)
<u>Household Income</u>						
-- Under \$30,000	37	15	21	26	99	(115)
-- \$30,000-50,000	46	20	19	15	100	(154)
-- \$50,001-70,000	57	14	18	11	100	(144)
-- Over \$70,000	60	18	15	7	100	(275)
<u>Home Ownership</u>						
-- Own	61	12	15	11	99	(536)
-- Rent	34	21	18	27	100	(208)
<u>Region</u>						
-- North	46	17	18	19	100	(388)
-- Central	58	13	15	14	100	(208)
-- South	58	16	13	13	100	(207)

TABLE 3
OPINION ON PROPOSAL TO INCREASE STATE GOVERNMENT SHARE
TO HALF OF TOTAL SCHOOL COSTS IN NEW JERSEY [S3]

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don=t</u> <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
TOTAL	71%	15%	14%	100%	(803)
<u>Registered Voter</u>					
-- Yes	72	13	14	99	(650)
-- No	67	19	14	100	(153)
<u>Age</u>					
-- 18 to 29	73	16	10	99	(177)
-- 30 to 49	75	13	12	100	(341)
-- 50 to 64	71	12	16	99	(160)
-- 65 and older	62	19	20	101	(112)
<u>Household Income</u>					
-- Under \$30,000	60	18	23	101	(115)
-- \$30,000-50,000	77	11	12	100	(154)
-- \$50,001-70,000	78	13	9	100	(144)
-- Over \$70,000	75	15	9	99	(275)
<u>Home Ownership</u>					
-- Own	74	13	13	100	(536)
-- Rent	71	15	15	101	(208)
<u>Region</u>					
-- North	70	15	14	99	(388)
-- Central	73	14	13	100	(208)
-- South	71	14	14	99	(207)
<u>Least Fair Tax in New Jersey</u>					
-- Property	79	10	10	99	(454)
-- Income/Sales	66	22	12	100	(283)
<u>Use of Most Property Taxes</u>					
-- Schools	73	15	11	99	(434)
-- County/Municipal	75	16	9	100	(260)
-- Don=t Know	55	10	34	99	(109)

TABLE 4
OPINION ON SCHOOL REVENUE PROPOSAL TO INCREASE
STATE INCOME TAX IF OFFSET BY PROPERTY TAX DECREASE [S4]

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Oppose</u>	<u>Don=t</u> <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
TOTAL	57%	27%	16%	100%	(803)
<u>Registered Voter</u>					
-- Yes	58	26	16	100	(650)
-- No	54	29	17	100	(153)
<u>Age</u>					
-- 18 to 29	60	28	13	101	(177)
-- 30 to 49	58	29	14	101	(341)
-- 50 to 64	62	22	16	100	(160)
-- 65 and older	49	22	29	100	(112)
<u>Household Income</u>					
-- Under \$30,000	46	26	27	99	(115)
-- \$30,000-50,000	63	24	13	100	(154)
-- \$50,001-70,000	67	20	12	99	(144)
-- Over \$70,000	62	29	9	100	(275)
<u>Home Ownership</u>					
-- Own	61	25	14	100	(536)
-- Rent	55	28	17	100	(208)
<u>Region</u>					
-- North	58	27	15	100	(388)
-- Central	55	28	17	100	(208)
-- South	59	24	17	100	(207)
<u>Least Fair Tax in New Jersey</u>					
-- Property	66	20	14	100	(454)
-- Income/Sales	49	39	13	101	(283)
<u>Use of Most Property Taxes</u>					
-- Schools	58	28	15	101	(434)
-- County/Municipal	64	26	9	99	(260)
-- Don=t Know	39	23	37	99	(109)

APPENDIX A:
SURVEY INSTRUMENT

(n=803)

S-1. On another subject: Thinking about the different taxes that people pay, which tax do you think is the worst -- that is, the least fair -- the state income tax, state sales tax, or local property tax? **[PROBE FOR SINGLE RESPONSE]**

22%	STATE INCOME TAX
14	STATE SALES TAX
54	LOCAL PROPERTY TAX
10	DON'T KNOW

S-2. And do you think MOST of your property taxes are used to pay for services provided by your county government, by your municipal government, or by your local school district?

16%	COUNTY
16	MUNICIPAL
52	SCHOOLS
16	DON=T KNOW

S-3. In New Jersey, on average, most of the funds for local school districts come from local property taxes. In many other states, the state government pays most of the costs for local schools. A proposal has been put forth in New Jersey to increase the state government's share of education costs to at least half of the total school costs statewide. Do you favor or oppose this proposal? **[PROBE:]** Do you (favor/oppose) this strongly or mildly?

44%	STRONGLY FAVOR
27	MILDLY FAVOR
6	MILDLY OPPOSE
9	STRONGLY OPPOSE
14	DEPENDS/DON'T KNOW

S-4. It may be necessary to increase state income taxes in order to fund this proposal. However, the proposal would also require an equal decrease in local property taxes. Would you favor or oppose an increase in the state income tax if it were accompanied by an equal decrease in the local property tax? **[PROBE:]** Would you (favor/oppose) this strongly or mildly?

29%	STRONGLY FAVOR
28	MILDLY FAVOR
10	MILDLY OPPOSE
17	STRONGLY OPPOSE
16	DEPENDS/DON'T KNOW

Just a few more questions so we can classify your answers.

D1. In politics today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?

1. DEMOCRAT -----> **SKIP TO Q.XD2**
2. REPUBLICAN ----->**SKIP TO Q.XD2**
3. INDEPENDENT
4. SOMETHING ELSE/OTHER
9. DON'T KNOW/NO OPINION

(IF #3,4, OR 9 TO Q. D1, ASK)

D2. Do you lean more toward the Democratic Party or more toward the Republican Party?

1. DEMOCRATIC PARTY
2. REPUBLICAN PARTY
3. OTHER PARTY
4. NEITHER
9. DON'T KNOW/NO OPINION

XD2. Are you currently registered to vote here in New Jersey?

1. Yes
2. No
9. Don=t know

D3. Regardless of the political party you might favor, do you consider yourself to be liberal, conservative, or somewhere in between?

1. LIBERAL -----> **SLIP TO Q.D5**
2. CONSERVATIVE -----> **SKIP TO Q.D5**
3. SOMEWHERE IN BETWEEN
9. DON'T KNOW/NO OPINION

(IF #3 OR 9 TO Q. D3, ASK)

D4. Do you lean more toward the liberal side or more toward the conservative side?

1. LIBERAL
2. CONSERVATIVE
3. OTHER/NEITHER
5. DON'T KNOW/NO OPINION

D5. Did you receive a high school diploma?

1. YES
2. NO -----> **GO TO Q. D7**
9. DON'T KNOW -----> **GO TO Q. D7**

(IF "YES" TO Q. D5, ASK:)

D6. Did you ever attend college? (IF YES, ASK: Did you graduate?)

1. YES, GRADUATED (not specific) ---> **ASK D.6A**
2. YES, DID NOT GRADUATE
3. JUNIOR COLLEGE--GRADUATE
4. VOCATIONAL/TECHNICAL SCHOOL
5. NO
9. DON'T KNOW

D6A. Was this from a 4-year college, a two-year or junior college, or a vocational-technical school?

1. FOUR YEAR
2. TWO YEAR/JR
3. VO-TECH
4. OTHER
9. DON'T KNOW

D7. Are you currently employed, temporarily laid off, retired or not employed?

1. EMPLOYED
2. TEMPORARILY LAID OFF
3. RETIRED
4. NOT EMPLOYED
9. OTHER/REFUSED

D9. Are you the chief wage earner in your household?

1. YES
2. NO
9. DON=T KNOW

D12. Do you own or rent your apartment or house?

1. OWN
2. RENT
3. LIVE RENT FREE WITH PARENTS/RELATIVES
4. BOTH OWN AND RENT
9. NOT DETERMINED

D13. Are you married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?

1. MARRIED
2. WIDOWED
3. DIVORCED
4. SEPARATED
5. NEVER MARRIED
9. DON'T KNOW

D14A. And, are you Latino or of Hispanic origin?

1. Yes
2. No/Don=t know

D14B. Are you white, black or of Asian origin?

1. White
2. Black
3. Asian
4. Hispanic (VOL)
5. Other (specify: _____)
9. not determined

D16. What was your age on your last birthday?

/ / / (CODE # OF YEARS, 99 = REFUSED)

D17. [IF REFUSED IN D.16, ASK:] Is it between...

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. 18 - 20 | 6. FIFTIES (50 - 59) |
| 2. 21 - 24 | 7. 60 - 64 |
| 3. 25 - 29 | 8. 65 OR OVER |
| 4. THIRTIES (30 - 39) | 9. NO ANSWER/REFUSED |
| 5. FORTIES (40 - 49) | |

D18. Where do you live--in what township or municipality? In what county is that?

/ / / / / _____
County Town

D19. So that we can group all answers, is your total annual family income before taxes: Under \$35,000; between \$35,000 to just under \$70,000; \$70,000 to just under \$100,000; or \$100,000 or more?

1. UNDER \$35,000
2. \$35,000 TO \$69,999
3. \$70,000 TO \$100,000
4. \$100,000 OR MORE
9. DON=T KNOW

APPENDIX B:
SURVEY METHODOLOGY

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

I. INTRODUCTION

The New Jerseyans' Opinion on School Revenue Proposals study was developed by The Eagleton Institute's Center for Public Interest Polling in consultation with representatives from the New Jersey School Boards Association. The main objective of the survey is to provide information on New Jerseyans' knowledge and attitudes toward increasing the state's of public school funding.

II. QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

Representatives of the New Jersey School Boards Association proposed an initial set of issues to be addressed in the study. The questionnaire was then drafted and refined by the Eagleton research staff. The draft questionnaire was pretested with a random group of New Jersey residents and modifications were made to the survey instrument in order to increase the understandability and accuracy of the questions asked.

Besides the substantive series of questions, some basic demographic information was obtained from all study participants in order to provide more detailed analysis of the data.

The final version of the questionnaire was programmed into a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) system. The CATI system enables the interviewer to accurately skip over certain questions which may be irrelevant to a particular study participant, while retaining the flow and integrity of the interview process.

III. SAMPLE DESIGN

A random proportional probability sample was used to select the 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older who were contacted to participate in this study. The sample was designed to make sure that each of the state's 21 counties was proportionately represented and that an equal number of men and women were interviewed. The three digit exchange was used to match telephone numbers and geographic areas. The remaining four digits were randomly selected. This procedure insures that those with unlisted or new telephone numbers are included in the sample. Each working phone number was called a minimum of three times, at different times of the week, in an effort to reach people who were infrequently at home.

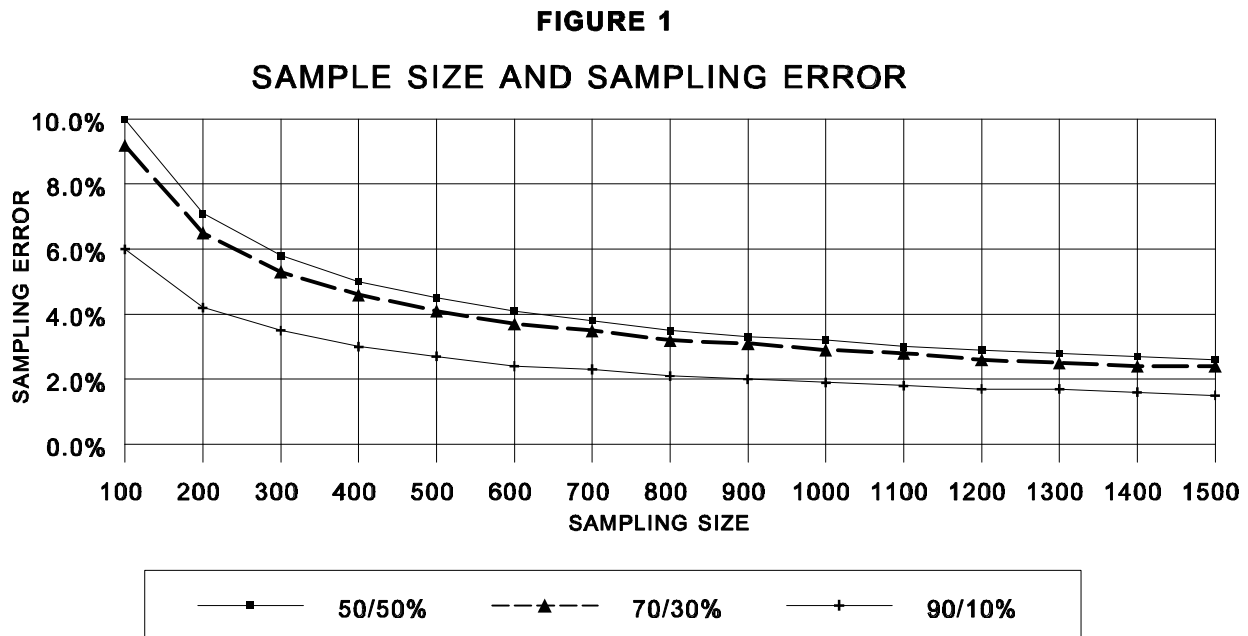
IV. WEIGHTING

While those interviewed in a survey ideally will have the same characteristics as the population they represent, samples frequently may under-represent groups that are more difficult to interview, such as the elderly or those with less than a high school education. To correct this imbalance, a statistical technique known as "weighting" is used. The weighting procedure compares New Jersey population figures for age and education based on census data with those of the sample. When there is significant difference between these two figures, the sample is weighted so it more accurately reflects the population of the state. For example, if census figures show 39 percent of New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, to have a high school education, and the sample consists of 32 percent with a high school education, each respondent in this category would be counted as 1.21 persons to adjust for this difference.

V. SAMPLING ERROR

The percentages obtained in a sample survey are estimates of what the distribution of responses would be if the entire population had been surveyed. "Sampling error" is a statistical term which describes the probable difference between interviewing everyone in a given population and a sample drawn from that population. For example, the sampling error associated with a sample of 803 persons is $\sqrt{3.5}$ percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus, if 47 percent of those in a sample of 803 are found to agree with a particular statement, the percentage of agreement within the population from which the sample was drawn would be between 43.5 and 50.5 percent ($47 \pm 3.5\%$) 95 times out of 100.

Sampling error increases as the sample size is reduced. For, example, if statements are made based on a sub-group of 400 persons, the sampling error is $\sqrt{5}$ percent. This fact must be kept in mind when comparing the responses of different groups within a sample (e.g. men compared with women). Figure 1 in this appendix shows the relationship between sample (or



group) size and sampling error.

Readers should note that sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion.

VI. DATA COLLECTION

The study involved CATI interviews with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older. The CATI interviews were conducted by telephone between August 17 and August 26, 1999 by experienced professional interviewers who were trained and monitored by the Eagleton research staff.

VII. DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

The CATI system generates a computer readable data file which reduces the amount of error inherent in the coding and entry of data recorded on paper questionnaires. An SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) computer file was developed to process the CATI information. The SPSS system enabled the Eagleton research staff to integrate the survey data so that it could be presented in aggregate form.

VIII. REGIONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

Region is classified according to county boundaries:

North -- Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex, Union, and Warren

Central -- Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset

South -- Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean, and Salem

**APPENDIX C:
PROFILE OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

(n=803)

Gender

--Male	46%
--Female	54

Age

--18 to 29	22
--30 to 49	43
--50 to 64	19
--65 and older	16

Race

--White	74
--Non-white	26

Home Ownership

--Yes	64
--No	28
--Other	8

Education

--High school or less	51
--Some college	23
--College graduate	26

Income

--Less than \$30,000	22
--\$30,000-50,000	22
--\$50,000-70,000	21
--Greater than \$70,000	35

Region of State

--North	49
--Central	24
--South	28

Type of Community

--Major urban center	12
--Urban & surrounds	19
--Older town & suburb	20
--Newer suburb	32
--Rural	16

APPENDIX D:
STATISTICAL TABULATIONS

HOW TO READ THE STATISTICAL TABULATIONS

The following statistical profile consists of responses to the survey questions broken down by several groupings, such as party identification, ideology, and demographic characteristics such as race, income, gender and education . The purpose of the profile is to allow for an analysis among subgroups of the population..

In the following tables, percentages presented for the total sample of 803 have a sampling error interval of about ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence level. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in a population and interviewing a scientific sample drawn from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. Percentages based on smaller subsets of the sample have somewhat greater sampling error. For a chart of sampling error distribution across various n-sizes, see Figure 1 in Appendix B of the narrative report. Sampling error is always based on the actual number of people interviewed (shown as AUNWEIGHTED N@ in the statistical output).

Each table refers to a question from the survey instrument, e.g. ASTUB=Q1.@ In the box under this grouping number is the grouping label. Since the profile tables abbreviate question wording, readers are advised to refer to the questionnaire in Appendix A of the narrative report for the exact wording of all questions. Below the stub grouping label are listed the value labels assigned to the numeric codes. ADK@ refers to the Adon't know@ response.

The set of percentages in the first column (under the label ATotal@) refer to the total sample of 803 state residents asked this question. Percentages are read down the column for the total and each sub-group.

The "UNWEIGHTED N" row at the bottom of the table refers to the number of New Jerseyans who answered this question, in this case 803. The "WEIGHTED N" is the number in the sample after it has been statistically weighted according to the population age and education distribution. The weighting procedure used for this project is outlined in Appendix B of the report. It is important to keep the n-sizes in mind, especially in making subgroup comparisons, when n-sizes can get very small. Because of the increased likelihood of sampling error, even large differences in percentages should be interpreted with extreme caution when based on a small n-size.