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Blue State Pans President: Seven in ten say country is on “wrong track”

According to the most recent statewide poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, fewer than one in five New Jersey voters (18%) say the country is headed in the right direction; 71% say the country is “off on the wrong track.”

“That is a steep dive from the 34% who said the country was going in the right direction in May,” Peter Woolley, a political scientist and director of the poll. “You have to go back to the last days of the Bush administration to find such pessimism.” In October 2008 just 13% said the country was headed in the right direction and 78% said it was on the wrong track.

But President Obama doesn't get all the blame. Voters essentially split on the president, 44% approving and 47% disapproving. That is down dramatically from 55%-36% approvals in May after Navy Seals killed Osama Bin Laden. And it is the first time since he took office, through 18 PublicMind polls, that his disapprovals have exceeded his approvals in this state which leans distinctly Democratic. “The killing of Osama Bin Laden gave the president a very temporary boost. But people put that behind them quickly, and are thinking about economic problems,” said Woolley.

More voters are concerned that government debt is dragging down the economy than are concerned that the government is not doing enough spending to stimulate growth. One-third (32%) say the federal government needs to spend more money to get the economy going—not cut the budget. But a majority (54%) say the government needs to cut its debt to fix its finances—not spend more money.

Bob Menendez who must stand for reelection in the same cycle as the president, and is closely linked to Obama, continues to have a low profile: 30% have a favorable view of the Democratic senator and 23% an unfavorable view, while 47% don't know him at all or have no opinion of him, including 49% of Democrats.

“The senator's weak numbers don't necessarily mean he is easily beatable,” said Woolley. “The Republicans will have to find a strong challenger.” However, 92% have never heard of or have no opinion of State Senator Joe Kyrillos, a friend of Gov. Chris Christie and one possible challenger to Menendez. Likewise, 92% have not heard of or have no opinion of State Senator Michael Doherty, a Tea Party favorite and possible challenger to Menendez.

In hypothetical matchups, Menendez outpolls both state senators: 49%-28% over Kyrillos and 49%-30% over Doherty.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 800 registered voters statewide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from Sept. 19 through Sept. 25, 2011, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points.

*Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: <http://publicmind.fdu.edu>
Radio actualities at 201.692.2846 For more information, please call 201.692.7032*

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Sept. 19, 2011, through Sept. 25, 2011, using a randomly selected sample of 800 registered voters statewide. The margin of error for a sample of 800 randomly selected respondents is +/- 3.5 percentage points. The margin of error for subgroups is larger and varies by the size of that subgroup. Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers. PublicMind interviews are conducted by Opinion America of Cedar Knolls, NJ, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a land-line phone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected. Landline households are supplemented with a separate, randomly selected sample of cell-phone-only-households, interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Question: In your opinion, do you believe that the country is moving in the right direction or do you believe it has gotten off on the wrong track?

	All	Men	Women	Dem	Ind	Rep.
Right direction	18%	18	19	29	10	7
Wrong track	71%	73	68	55	79	90
Unsure/mixed	11%	10	13	16	11	3

Right/wrong direction trend

	2011				2010						
	May	Apr	Feb	Jan	Nov	Oct	Aug	My	Mar 30	Mar 3	Jan
Right direction	34%	32%	39	35	31	30	33	34	42	38	35
Wrong track	51%	57%	49	52	58	60	54	52	51	52	53
Unsure/mixed	15%	11%	12	13	11	10	13	13	8	10	12

	2009							2008
	Oct 30	Oct 9	Sep	July	Apr	Mar	Jan	Oct
Right direction	41	41	44	49	51	51	34	13
Wrong track	50	49	46	41	37	37	52	78
Unsure/mixed	8	9	10	11	11	12	13	9

US2: In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

	All	Men	Women	Dem	Ind	Rep.
Approve	44%	40	47	70	38	10
Disapprove	47%	53	42	20	49	86
Unsure	9%	7	11	10	12	4

Obama approval, previous measures

	2011				2010						2009						
	May	Apr	Feb	Jan	Nov	Oct	Aug	May	Mar	Jan	Oct	Oct	Sep	Jun	Apr	Mar	Jan*
Approve	55%	47	54	47	51	47	49	49	53	48	52	52	56	61	66	66	72
Disapprove	36%	42	36	41	40	43	40	40	38	41	37	35	36	29	22	21	10
Unsure	9%	11	10	12	9	10	11	11	9	11	10	12	8	10	12	13	18

*January 2009 question asked how Obama was handling his transition to the presidency.

When it comes to the US economy some people say... Others say... Which comes closer to your view? ROTATE:

...the federal government needs to spend more money to get the economy going, not cut the budget.

...the federal government needs to cut its debt to fix its finances, not spend more money

	All	Dem.	ind.	Rep.
Spend more	32%	49	31	11
Cut debt	54%	33	56	82
Neither (vol)	4%	6	3	2
Both (vol)	3%	5	3	1
Don't know (vol)	6%	7	8	3

	Haven't heard of	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Unsure/ no opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Frank Lautenberg	15%	13%	23%	24%	10%	14%
<i>Republicans only</i>	6	4	18	27	17	28
<i>Independents only</i>	10	10	30	24	12	12
<i>Democrats only</i>	23	20	26	21	5	4
<i>Previous measures</i>						
<i>May 2011</i>	16%	12%	25%	23%	10%	14%
<i>April 2011</i>	15%	10%	25%	22%	13%	15%
<i>Feb. 2011</i>	14%	13%	26%	19%	13%	14%
<i>Nov 2010</i>	6%	15%	27%	21%	14%	17%
<i>March 2010</i>	9%	14%	28%	20%	14%	15%
<i>Jan 2010</i>	8%	12%	23%	19%	20%	15%
<i>Jan 2009</i>	8%	13%	30%	19%	14%	16%

	Haven't heard of	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Unsure/ no opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Bob Menendez	20%	11%	19%	27%	11%	12%
<i>Republicans only</i>	15	1	15	25	18	26
<i>Independents only</i>	12	6	14	43	16	9
<i>Democrats only</i>	25	19	24	24	6	2
<i>Previous measures</i>						
<i>May 2011</i>	22%	10%	20%	28%	8%	12%
<i>April 2011</i>	21%	8%	20%	31%	9%	10%
<i>Feb. 2011</i>	21%	10%	19%	28%	11%	10%
<i>Nov 2010</i>	15%	11%	20%	29%	12%	13%
<i>March 2010</i>	17%	8%	21%	28%	13%	12%
<i>Jan 2010</i>	17%	7%	21%	27%	15%	13%
<i>Jan 2009</i>	17%	9%	20%	30%	13%	11%

	Haven't heard of	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Unsure/ no opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Joe Kyrillos	82%	1%	3%	10%	3%	1%
<i>Previous measures</i>						
<i>Sept. 2008</i>	85%	1%	2%	8%	2%	1%

	Haven't heard of	Very favorable	Somewhat favorable	Unsure/ no opinion	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very unfavorable
Michael Doherty	82%	1%	4%	10%	3%	--
<i>Previous measures</i>						
<i>March 2010</i>	79%	1%	5%	13%	1%	1%

In one year from now, Robert Menendez will be coming up for re-election to the United States Senate... If the election were now, would you vote for... or ... [If "don't know" ASK "Which way do you lean?"]					
	All	Dem*	ind	Rep#	Jan. 2011
Robert Menendez, the Democrat	49%	80	39	11	41%
Joe Kyrillos, the Republican	28%	5	12	67	29%
unsure/neither/other	22%	15	49	21	30%
Robert Menendez, the Democrat	49%	81	34	11	40%
Michael Doherty, the Republican	30%	5	16	69	30%
unsure/neither/other (vol.)	22%	14	50	20	30%

*Including "lean Democrat"
#Including "lean Republican"

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1. In your opinion, do you believe that the country is moving in the right direction or has it gotten off on the wrong track?

US2. In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

US3. When it comes to the US economy some people say... Others say... Which comes closer to your view?

ROTATE

...the federal government needs to spend more money to get the economy going, not cut the budget.

...the federal government needs to cut its debt to fix its finances, not spend more money

Neither [do not read]

Both [do not read]

Unsure [do not read]

US4. Now I'm going ask about some people. If you haven't heard of one of them, just say so. Have you heard of ... [ROTATE LIST]? Do you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of... [MATCH ROTATION]? Would that be very or somewhat? [ROTATE NAMES]

- Chris Christie [released 9.27.11]
- Robert Menendez
- Frank Lautenberg
- Joe Kyrillos
- Mike Doherty

US5 a-b. In one year from now, Robert Menendez will be coming up for re-election to the United States Senate... If the election were now, would you vote for... or ... [If "don't know" ASK "Which way do you lean?"] [ROTATE NAMES; ORDER]

Robert Menendez, the Democrat

- Joe Kyrillos, the Republican
- Michael Doherty, the Republican

NJ1-5 released 09.27.11

NJ6A-8B, NJCC 1-6 held for later release

D1. Regardless of who you might vote for, do you consider yourself a...ROTATE... Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent?

Democrat [ASK D1A]

- Republican [ASK D1B]
- Independent [ASK: which way do you lean?"][ASK BOTH D1A and D1B]
- Other [DON'T READ]
- Don't Know/Ref [DON'T READ]

D1b. [ASK Republicans and independents] If you could pick a Republican to run against Bob Menendez for US Senate next year, who would you prefer...or ...? ROTATE LIST

- Mike Dougherty
- Joe Kyrillos
- Don't know/unsure [DO NOT READ]
- Someone else [DO NOT READ...SPECIFY]

Sample Characteristics (%)

Gender

Male	50
Female	50

Age

18-29	12
30-44	26
45-59	32
60+	27
Ref.	3

In addition to being American, would you say you are...?

White	70
Black	14
Hispanic or Latino	9
Asian	3
Other/ref.	4

Public Employee Household?

yes	25
No	73
not sure/ref.	2

Party ID

Dem. + lean Dem.	49
ind. + unsure + ref.	15
Rep. + lean Rep.	36