



For immediate release... **Friday, September 14, 2012** 7 pp.

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Big Lead for Obama After the Convention; Unemployment an Insignificant Factor

With the convention in their rearview mirrors, President Obama enters the homestretch with a sizable lead over Mitt Romney among likely voters in New Jersey, according to the most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind. The poll, conducted after the Democratic convention concluded, found that 52% of likely voters say they intend to vote for President Obama, with around four-in-ten (38%) who align themselves with his opponent. The remainder say they're supporting someone else (1%) or are unsure (9%).

"Obviously this is good news for the president," said Krista Jenkins, director of the poll and professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "Even though he remains saddled with the perception among almost half of all likely New Jersey voters that the country is on the wrong track, he remains favored by double digits in the state."

While support for the two major party candidates is split across party lines, Obama's lead is greater than the edge that self-identified Democrats have over Republicans among likely voters (47 vs. 37%).

Underscoring Obama's appeal is the percentage of respondents who say they are "very certain" about their expected choice in November. Nine-in-ten (90%) report being unlikely to change their mind, a number that is identical to that found among Romney supporters.

The survey also provides insight into the effect, or lack thereof, that future economic trends will have on the presidential race. In an experiment, respondents were told that economists predicted either a slight increase or decrease in the unemployment rate before the election. Half were selected at random to be asked a question about unemployment *increasing*, while half received the question that noted the possibility of unemployment *decreasing*. Following this question, respondents were asked about their candidate preference.

As it turns out, the trajectory of expected unemployment makes little difference for whom someone says they support. When it's suggested that unemployment will increase before Election Day, about half (49%) support the president. This figure increases insignificantly to 53% when told unemployment will drop before the election. A similar, but reverse effect, can be seen among Mr. Romney supporters. His support is 39% when the question indicates an increase in unemployment, and it decreases slightly to 36% in the question that references a decrease in unemployment.

"These numbers suggest that Garden State voters accept the inevitability of tough economic times, at least for the foreseeable future, and are largely unswayed by short term economic trends," said Jenkins.

The experiment also provides insight on who voters identify as largely responsible for the high unemployment numbers. Regardless of whether unemployment was referenced as likely increasing or decreasing before Election Day, voters identify a number of usual suspects. About three-in-ten (29%) believe President Obama and/or Democrats are to blame, and slightly fewer than a quarter (23%) identify the Bush administration and/or Republicans. The rest are convinced Congress (7%), banks and financial institutions (8%), and other political players (19%) are responsible, with the remainder simply unsure who's to blame (14%).

Other notable findings include the persistence of the gender gap. Women remain significantly more likely than men to endorse President Obama in the election (56 versus 48%), and approve of the job he's doing as president (56 vs. 47%). And young people are also significantly more likely to support President Obama as compared to those from older age cohorts (67 vs. 45, 52, and 52% respectfully).

"Regardless of where you look today, youth support is key," said Jenkins. "The President will likely need the younger vote on Election Day, just as he did in 2008. At least in New Jersey, it looks like he's doing well with Millennials."

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 706 likely voters statewide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from September 6 through September 12, 2012, and has a margin of error of +/-3.8 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

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from September 6 through September 12, 2012 using a randomly selected sample of 901 residents statewide. Within this sample 706 respondents were identified as "likely voters" by scoring responses to questions that are relevant to assessing one's likelihood of voting.

One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of plus or minus 3.8 percentage points among likely voters. 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 respondents interviewed in the same time frame. The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, race and gender.

Presidential Election

In the upcoming elections for President of the United States, which candidate are you most likely to vote for?

	Likely Voters (with leaners)	Party			Gender		Age			
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Obama	52%	92	39	6	48	56	67	45	52	52
Romney	38%	3	32	88	43	34	25	43	39	42
Other	1%	0	3	0	0	1	1	2	0	0
Unsure/ref	9%	5	26	6	8	10	9	10	9	6

	Race		Education		
	White	Non-white	HS or less	Some College	College Grad
Obama	43	81	50	54	52
Romney	47	12	41	35	39
Other	1	0	0	1	1
Unsure/ref	9	6	9	11	8

	Union Workers		Employment			
	Union	Non-union	Unemployed	Part-time	Full-time	Retired
Obama	60	49	52	56	52	51
Romney	34	41	34	37	38	42
Other	0	1	0	2	1	0
Unsure/ref	6	10	14	5	10	7

Cont.

How certain are you, or might you change your mind before Election Day?

	Likely Voters	Candidate		Party		
		Obama	Romney	Dem	Ind	Rep
Very certain	90%	90	90	94	78	89
Somewhat certain	6%	6	6	5	14	5
Might change	3%	3	4	1	6	6
Unsure	0%	1	0	0	3	0

Unemployment

The current official unemployment rate is 8.1 percent, and many economists believe that; (A) *The unemployment rate will increase to 8.3 percent* or (B) *The current unemployment rate will decrease to 7.9 percent before the election*. Who do you think is mostly to blame for the current unemployment rate?

	All Likely Voters	Increase	Decrease
President Obama/Democrats	29%	28	29
President Bush/Republicans	23%	24	23
Congress	7%	7	6
Banks/Financial Institutions	8%	8	7
Don't know	14%	11	16
Other	19%	21	17
Refused	1%	0	1
	Candidate Preference	Increase	Decrease
	Obama	49	53
	Romney	39	36

Right direction/Wrong track Obama Administration

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

	Likely voters	Candidate		Party			Gender		Race	
		Obama	Romney	Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	White	Non-white
Right Direction	48%	83	4	82	37	8	44	52	39	76
Wrong Track	46%	9	91	12	48	89	50	42	55	18
Unsure/mixed	6%	9	4	6	14	3	6	6	6	6

	Education			Age			
	HS or less	Some College	College Grad	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Right Direction	44	48	49	62	45	45	47
Wrong Track	48	45	45	32	52	48	45
Unsure/mixed	8	7	5	6	4	6	7

	Union Workers		Employment			
	Union	Non-union	Unemployed	Part-time	Full-time	Retired
Right Direction	54	45	43	56	48	47
Wrong Track	41	48	51	41	45	46
Unsure/mixed	5	6	6	3	6	7

Right/wrong direction trend

	2012				2011					
	July	May	Mar	Jan	Oct	Sep	May	Apr	Feb	Jan
Right direction	33	33	37	28	22	18	34	32	39	35
Wrong track	54	56	53	61	67	71	51	57	49	52
Unsure/mixed	14	10	9	10	10	11	15	11	12	13

	2010						
	Nov	Oct	Aug	May	Mar 30	Mar 3	Jan
Right direction	31	30	33	34	42	38	35
Wrong track	58	60	54	52	51	52	53
Unsure/mixed	11	10	13	13	8	10	12

	2009							2008
	Oct 30	Oct 9	Sep	Jul	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

Approve/Disapprove Obama as President

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

	Likely voters	Party			Gender		Age			
		Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	18-34	35-49	50-64	65+
Approve	51%	85	44	9	47	56	61	48	53	47
Disapprove	41%	6	46	86	45	37	28	48	40	44
Unsure	7%	8	9	4	7	8	11	4	7	9
Refused	0%	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

	Race		Education		
	White	Non-white	HS or less	Some College	College Grad
Approve	42	78	46	56	51
Disapprove	50	16	42	39	42
Unsure/ref	8	6	13	5	7

	Union Workers		Employment			
	Union	Non-union	Unemployed	Part-time	Full-time	Retired
Approve	59	49	49	57	52	49
Disapprove	33	45	41	38	41	44
Unsure/ref	9	7	10	5	7	7

Obama approval, previous measures

	2012				2011						2010					
	July	May	Mar	Jan	Oct	Sep	May	Apr	Feb	Jan	Nov	Oct	Aug	May	Mar	Jan
Approve	49	50	51	46	44	44	55	47	54	47	51	47	49	49	53	48
Disapprove	41	42	42	45	47	47	36	42	36	41	40	43	40	40	38	41
Unsure/ref	10	7	7	9	9	9	9	11	10	12	9	10	11	11	9	11

2009					
Oct	Se	Jun	Ap	Mar	Jan*
52	56	61	66	66	72
37	36	29	22	21	10
10	8	10	12	13	18

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

Exact Question Wording and Order

PRES1 A The current official unemployment rate is 8.1 percent, and many economists believe the unemployment rate will decrease to 7.9 percent before the election. Who do you think is mostly to blame for the current unemployment rate?

[Open-ended: do not read options aloud]

- 1 President Obama/Obama/Democrats
- 2 President Bush/Republicans
- 3 Congress (other than Republicans in Congress)
- 4 Banks/Financial institutions/Wall Street
- 5 Don't Know
- 6 Other [no need to specify]
- 7 7 Refused

PRES1B The current official unemployment rate is 8.1 percent, and many economists believe the unemployment rate will increase to 8.3 percent before the election. Who do you think is mostly to blame for the current unemployment rate?

[Open-ended: do not read options aloud]

- 1 President Obama/Obama/Democrats
- 2 President Bush/Republicans
- 3 Congress (other than Republicans in Congress)
- 4 Banks/Financial institutions/Wall Street
- 5 Don't Know
- 6 Other [no need to specify]
- 7 7 Refused

PRES2 In the upcoming elections for President of the United States, which candidate are you most likely to vote for? Barack Obama or Mitt Romney [rotate]

- 1 Barack Obama, the Democrat [Go to PRES2a]
- 2 Mitt Romney, the Republican [Skip to PRE2a]
- 3 Someone else [vol] (Specify) [Skip to PRES2a]
- 4 Unsure [vol; ask PRES2b]
- 8 Not registered [vol; skip to US1]
- 9 Refused [vol; skip to US1]

PRES2a How certain are you, or might you change your mind before Election Day?

- 1 Very certain
- 2 Somewhat certain
- 3 Might change my mind
- 9 Don't know (vol)

PRES2b Which way do you lean? ROTATE NAMES

- 1 Barack Obama, the Democrat
- 2 Mitt Romney, the Republican
- 3 Someone else (VOL) (Specify)
- 8 DK

US1. In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 DK/Unsure/mixed [DON'T READ]

9 Refused [DON'T READ]

US2. *In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track?*

- 1 Right direction
- 2 Wrong track
- 8 DK/Unsure [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused. [DON'T READ]

Sample characteristics – Likely voters

Gender

Male	50
Female	50

Age

18-34	12
35-49	27
50-64	35
65+	25
Refused	1

Race/Ethnicity

White	74
Black/African-American	11
Latino or Hispanic	8
Asian	4
Other/refused	4

Public employee household

Yes	25
No	74
Unsure/refused	1

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	47
Independent/DK/refused	14
Republican/Lean Republican	37

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