Hey, Numb Nuts: Not All Names Are Equal

Most New Jersey voters say that politicians should avoid name-calling and be respectful of their opponents. According to the most recent poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind™, 87% say politicians should lay off the name-calling. Just 10% say it's OK for pols to make a strong point by calling their opponent a name.

But given a choice of 14 names, not all names are equal: 23% of Garden State voters say calling an opponent "dishonest" is never acceptable. And 24% say "corrupt" is never acceptable. And only 25% say "radical" is never acceptable. But half (50%) say "unpatriotic" is never allowed. Two-thirds (67%) say "fascist" is never acceptable.

Topping the "never acceptable" list are "ignoramus" (78%), "jerk" (83%) and, the winner, "numb-nuts" (84%).

"People really do want civility in political discourse," said Peter Woolley, a political scientist and director of the poll. But he added, "The problem is that civility doesn't sell any advertising, and it doesn't necessarily energize voters. People want a spark."

In general, Republicans are more lenient about name-calling than Democrats. For example, while a majority of Democrats (57%) say it's not acceptable to call an opponent "unpatriotic," only 38% of Republicans agree. A third of Democrats (34%) say "hypocrite" is off-limits, but only two of five Republicans (22%) agree.
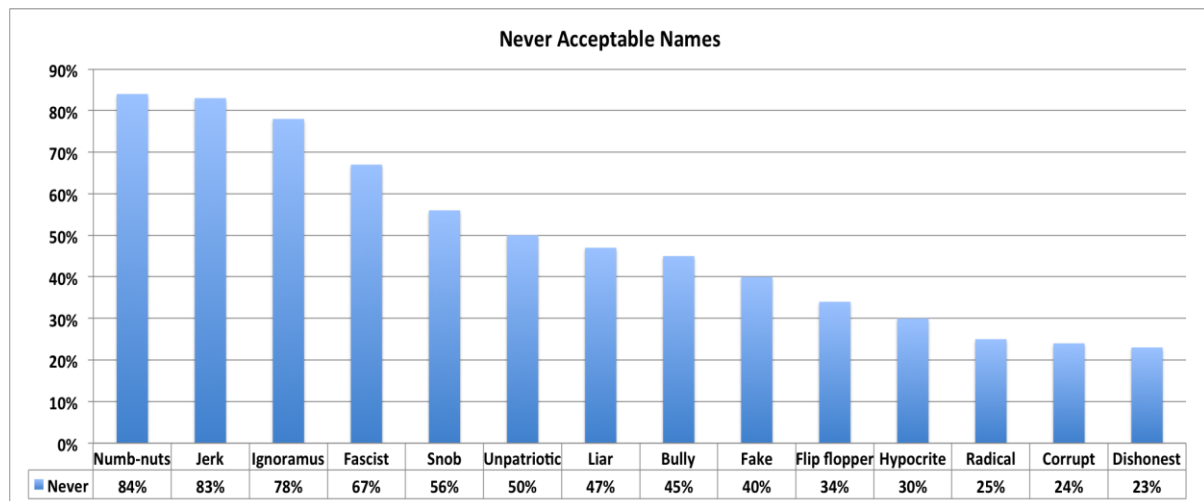
Voters who approve of their governor are generally more accepting of names than those who don't approve of the governor, but with notable exceptions. "Snob" can be acceptable to 43% of those who approve of the governor's handling of his job, and 46% of those who disapprove. "Dishonest" is OK at least sometimes for three-quarters of approvers (75%) and a similar proportion of disapprovers (77%). And most important, "bully" can be acceptable to 58% of those who approve of the governor and 52% of those who disapprove of him.

"The governor's critics who call him 'bully' are just as much name-calling as anyone else," said Woolley. "It's just a matter of which names you will allow as appropriate. Apparently, many voters don't like this name either."

In general, women are more likely than men to declare any of the 14 names tested as "never acceptable." For example, a third of men (32%) say "liar" is never alright, but twice as many women (62%) say "liar" is never OK. A quarter of men (27%) say "flip flopper" is not acceptable ever, while 42% of women say "flip flopper" is never acceptable. Some exceptions are "jerk" where three-quarters of men (76%) agree with nine of ten women (89%) that's it is never acceptable, and "numb-nuts," where four of five men (79%) agree with nine of ten women (89%).

"Any job where you can call someone numb-nuts or write about someone calling someone numb-nuts is a good job," said Woolley. "I'm thankful to the voters of the state of New Jersey and to my university, who made all this possible. I hadn't heard that gem since I was a student at Wildwood High School."

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 800 registered voters statewide was conducted by telephone using both landlines and cell phones from Mar. 5 through Mar. 11, 2012, and has a margin of error of +/-3.5 percentage points.

Never Acceptable Names

	Numb-nuts	Jerk	Ignoramus	Fascist	Snob	Unpatriotic	Liar	Bully	Fake	Flip flopper	Hypocrite	Radical	Corrupt	Dishonest
Never	84%	83%	78%	67%	56%	50%	47%	45%	40%	34%	30%	25%	24%	23%

Methodology, Questions, and Tables

The survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from Mar. 5, 2012, through Mar. 11, 2012, 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. Each respondent was asked his or her opinion of seven names. Only "numb nuts" was asked of all respondents. Another six names were selected at random by a computer program. The total number of respondents (N) for each of the other names ranges from 359 to 379 and the MoE for these 359 is +/- 5 points. 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.

Now thinking about the behavior of politicians…Which of the following comes closest to your view…ROTATE?
…politicians should avoid name calling and be respectful of their opponents.

…it can be OK for politicians to make a strong point by calling their opponent a name.

	All	Party ID			Gender		Governor Approval	
		Dem	*Ind*	*Rep.*	*Men*	*Women*	*Approve*	*Disapprove*
No name calling	**87%**	91	89	81	81	93	84	90
Name calling	**10%**	6	11	16	16	5	13	8
Unsure/mixed	**3%**	3	1	3	3	3	3	2

			Party			Gender		Governor Approval		
		All	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Men	Women	Approve	Disapprove	N=
Liar	Always	14%	10	15	20	20	8	17	13	
	Sometimes	38%	38	32	41	46	29	41	33	377
	Never	47%	52	52	39	33	62	41	53	
	Unsure	1%	-	1	1	1	1	2	1	
Fake	Always	18%	15	23	20	27	9	18	19	
	Sometimes	40%	41	29	44	44	36	44	33	372
	Never	40%	43	48	33	29	52	36	45	
	Unsure	2%	2	-	3	1	3	1	3	
Numb-nuts	Always	4%	2	11	4	6	3	5	3	
	Sometimes	9%	8	8	12	13	6	12	6	800
	Never	84%	87	78	81	79	89	80	89	
	Unsure	3%	3	3	2	2	3	2	2	
Bully	Always	12%	12	11	14	17	9	12	15	
	Sometimes	42%	40	47	45	51	34	46	37	375
	Never	45%	48	41	40	31	57	41	47	
	Unsure	1%	-	1	1	1	-	1	1	
Snob	Always	11%	11	7	13	17	6	12	10	
	Sometimes	30%	29	34	31	34	27	31	36	359
	Never	56%	58	57	52	46	65	54	52	
	Unsure	3%	2	1	4	3	2	3	1	
Un-patriotic	Always	14%	9	13	22	22	7	19	11	
	Sometimes	33%	33	29	35	28	38	32	32	368
	Never	50%	57	57	38	47	53	46	57	
	Unsure	2%	1	1	5	3	2	4	-	
Hypocrite	Always	20%	17	28	20	27	13	21	19	
	Sometimes	49%	47	43	55	50	47	48	52	374
	Never	30%	34	28	22	23	37	29	28	
	Unsure	2%	2	-	3	1	2	2	1	
Dishonest	Always	27%	25	31	25	35	20	30	29	
	Sometimes	48%	49	46	52	46	51	45	48	379
	Never	23%	25	24	20	17	28	22	23	
	Unsure	2%	1	-	2	2	1	2	1	
Jerk	Always	4%	1	10	5	4	3	4	2	
	Sometimes	13%	9	14	18	20	7	16	10	360
	Never	83%	89	76	75	76	89	78	88	
	Unsure	1%	-	-	2	-	1	1	-	
Ignoramus	Always	7%	3	12	9	11	3	8	4	
	Sometimes	15%	14	14	16	22	9	17	14	369
	Never	78%	82	73	74	67	88	74	82	
	Unsure	1%	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	
Corrupt	Always	25%	24	29	24	30	20	23	33	
	Sometimes	48%	50	39	54	53	44	51	44	364
	Never	24%	25	29	21	14	33	23	23	
	Unsure	2%	1	2	2	3	2	3	1	
Flip Flopper	Always	20%	20	25	19	22	18	23	17	
	Sometimes	43%	39	37	55	48	37	47	38	372
	Never	34%	39	31	27	27	42	28	42	
	Unsure	2%	2	7	-	2	2	2	2	
Radical	Always	23%	16	34	28	31	15	29	19	
	Sometimes	50%	51	40	52	46	53	49	51	364
	Never	25%	29	25	17	22	28	20	28	
	Unsure	2%	3	-	2	1	4	2	2	
Fascist	Always	6%	3	12	5	8	4	5	9	
	Sometimes	23%	21	17	25	27	19	22	26	367
	Never	67%	70	63	68	61	74	69	63	
	Unsure	4%	5	8	2	5	4	4	3	

Exact Question Wording and Order

NC1. Now thinking about the behavior of politicians….

Which of the following comes closest to your view…?

ROTATE

…politicians should avoid name calling and be respectful of their opponents.

…it can be OK for politicians to make a strong point by calling their opponent a name.

DK (vol)

NC2. Let me read you some names. Tell me whether these are names can always, sometimes, or never be acceptable to you when a politician is talking about an opponent…

ROTATE, ASK ANY SIX + ALWAYS "numb-nuts"

  A. Liar
  B. Fake
  C. Numb-nuts
  D. Bully
  E. snob
  F. unpatriotic
  G. hypocrite
  H. dishonest
  I. jerk
  J. ignoramus
  K. Corrupt
  L. Flip flopper
  M. Radical
  N. fascist

PROMPT AS NECESSARY

Always
sometimes
Never

DK (vol)

Sample Characteristics (%)

Gender	
Male	49
Female	51

Age	
18-29	12
30-44	26
45-59	32
60+	27
Ref.	4

In addition to being American, would you say you are…?	
White	68
Black	13
Hispanic or Latino	9
Asian	4
Other/ref.	6

Party ID	
Dem. + lean Dem.	49
ind. + unsure + ref.	18
Rep. + lean Rep.	33

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