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DESPITE MEDIA FOCUS, MAJORITY OF NEW JERSEY VOTERS NOT CONSIDERING CANDIDATES' PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE SENATE AND GOVERNOR'S RACES

The most recent statewide poll from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind finds that an overwhelming majority of registered voters are unaffected by questions of weight, gender, and sexual identity in the upcoming gubernatorial and senate elections. Most believe such characteristics are irrelevant as they relate to effective governance.

The Senate Race

As PublicMind reported last Tuesday, Republican Steve Lonegan continues to trail Democrat Cory Booker by double digits (29 to 45%, respectively). Among the personal issues that have been raised in the race are questions concerning sexual identity, particularly that of Booker. Registered voters were asked two questions about the issue of sexual identity and the Senate race: First, does a candidate's sexual identity matter for one's ability to be an effective leader and, second, are voters aware of the sexual identity of either candidate. Public opinion is decisive on both questions. An overwhelming majority is uncertain as to the sexual identity of either Booker (78%) or Lonegan (79%), with around one-in-five identifying both candidates as heterosexual. And, although public discourse reflects an interest in the connection between sexual identity and political candidates, New Jersey voters treat the issue with a collective yawn. Eighty-five percent say the sexual identity of a candidate does not matter, a sentiment that prevails across all relevant demographic categories.

"There's clearly a disconnect between what the media has highlighted in recent months and how voters approach the issue of sexual identity," said Dan Cassino, professor of political science and an analyst with PublicMind. "Taken as a whole, these numbers suggest the public neither knows nor cares about who, if anyone, a candidate forms a close and loving relationship with."

The Governor's Race

Gender and weight are two additional personal traits that have received focus in the press, both of which pertain to candidates in the gubernatorial election. Barbara Buono, while not the first woman to seek the state's highest office, presents a unique opportunity to voters. The state is generally not known for being at the forefront of choosing women to positions of elective office. When asked if gender is operative in voter's minds as a defining characteristic in judging one's ability to be an effective leader, the vast majority of registered voters (92%) say it makes no difference. As with sexual identity, no differences are apparent across relevant demographic categories, including gender.

And finally, weight has also been an issue in this race. Governor Christie has talked openly about his struggles with weight, and was referenced obliquely in the gubernatorial debate on October 8th when the candidates were asked if they would make available all of their health records for public scrutiny. As with sexual identity and gender, weight does not appear to make a difference to voters. Nine-in-ten say a candidate's weight makes no difference to one's ability to be an effective leader, and this is true regardless if one is young or old, white or non-white, male or female. Even when we compare a respondent's answer with their own weight, differences are negligible.

“Taken as a whole, these numbers suggest New Jersey voters are a tolerant bunch who are concerned more about where a candidate stands and believes, rather than who they love, whether they are male or female, and how much they weigh,” said Cassino. “Despite media focus on these issues, the public seems to think it's all much ado about nothing.”

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 702 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from September 30 through October 5, 2013, and has a margin of error of +/-3.7 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 30 through October 5, 2013 using a randomly selected sample of 702 registered voters who reside in New Jersey. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.7 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 landline 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.

Tables

<i>In your opinion, does a candidate's sexual orientation matter or not matter for how you evaluate his or her ability to be an effective leader? [Randomize matter/not matter]</i>														
		PID			Gender		Race		Senate pref.		Age			
	All	Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Booker	Lonegan	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Matters	10%	5	18	10	12	9	10	11	7	17	5	11	11	11
Doesn't matter	85%	90	78	86	83	86	85	83	88	78	91	85	86	82
DK/Ref (vol)	6%	5	5	4	5	6	4	6	5	5	4	4	4	7

Do you happen to know if Cory Booker/Steve Lonegan is gay, straight, bisexual, or do you not know? [Randomize names & gay/straight/bisexual]

		PID				Gender		Race		Senate pref.	
	All	Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Booker	Lonegan	
Booker	Gay	4%	2	5	6	2	6	3	5	2	6
	Straight	18%	22	14	16	22	14	18	17	26	10
	Bisexual	1%	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
	DK/Ref	78%	74	80	76	75	80	77	76	71	82
Lonegan	Gay	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
	Straight	20%	17	28	15	26	15	23	14	19	32
	Bisexual	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	1	1
	DK	79%	83	73	82	73	84	76	85	80	67

In your opinion, does the fact that Barbara Buono is a woman make it harder, easier, or does it make no difference in her ability to be an effective leader? [Randomize harder/easier]

		PID			Gender		Race		Governor pref.		Age			
	All	Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Christie	Buono	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Harder	5%	7	3	7	4	6	4	8	4	6	8	8	1	6
Easier	2%	2	2	1	2	2	2	3	1	3	3	2	1	2
Both (vol)	0	0	0	0	0	0			0	0				
No diff. (vol)	92%	91	95	91	92	92	92	88	94	90	87	89	97	91
DK/Ref (vol)	1%	1	1	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1		1

In your opinion, does Chris Christie's weight make it harder, easier, or does it make no difference in his ability to be an effective leader? [Randomize harder/easier]

	All	PID			Gender		Race		Governor pref.		Age			
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Christie	Buono	18-29	30-44	45-59	60+
Harder	7%	10	4	6	5	9	8	5	4	14	2	6	8	9
Easier	1%	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	3	0	1
No diff. (vol)	90%	88	93	92	92	88	90	91	94	84	93	90	91	88
Both (vol)	1%	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
DK/Ref (vol)	1%	1	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	0	4	0	1	2

	Respondent's weight		
	Overweight	Within a few pounds of normal	Underweight
Harder	5	8	13
Easier	1	1	0
No difference (vol)	94	89	87
Both (vol)	0	1	0
DK/Refused (vol)	0	1	0

<i>Considering your height and build, would a doctor consider you overweight or underweight, or would a doctor consider you to be within a few pounds of your ideal weight?</i>	
	All
Overweight	27%
Underweight	4%
Within a few pounds of ideal	64%
DK/Refused (vol)	2%
DK/Refused (vol)	2%

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1 and US2 released October 11, 2013

NJ1 through NJ3 released October 11, 2013

NJ4 through NJ5 released October 8, 2013

NJ6 In your opinion, does a candidate's sexual orientation matter or not matter for how you evaluate his or her ability to be an effective leader? [Randomize matter/not matter]

- 1 Matters
- 2 Does not matter
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

NJ7 In your opinion, does Chris Christie's weight make it harder, easier, or does it make no difference in his ability to be an effective leader? [Randomize harder/easier]

- 1 Harder
- 2 Easier
- 3 Both (vol)
- 4 No difference
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

NJ8 In your opinion, does the fact that Barbara Buono is a woman make it harder, easier, or does it make no difference in her ability to be an effective leader?

- 1 Harder
- 2 Easier
- 3 Both (vol)
- 4 No difference
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

NJ9 through NJ12 released October 8, 2013

NJ13 Do you happen to know if Cory Booker/Steve Lonegan is gay, straight, bisexual, or do you not know? [Randomize NJ13A and B; Randomize gay/straight/bisexual]

NJ13A Cory Booker

NJ13B Steve Lonegan

- 1 Gay
- 2 Straight
- 3 Bisexual
- 8 DK/Refused [DON'T READ]

Sample characteristics – Registered voters

Gender

Male	49
Female	51

Age

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

Race/Ethnicity

White	68
Black/African-American	12
Latino or Hispanic	10
Asian	5
Other/refused	5

Public employee household

Yes	23
No	75
Unsure/refused	2

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	46
Independent/DK/refused	19
Republican/Lean Republican	35