

BRIDGEGATE NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL, SAY VOTERS VOTERS STILL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT STATE

At the heart of the George Washington Bridge lane closure scandal are charges of corruption by public officials accused of using unsuspecting motorists as political pawns. A new survey of New Jersey registered voters from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind finds that two-thirds (67%) believe this type of behavior is beyond the pale. Only a quarter (23%) believe "Bridgegate," as it's been dubbed by the media, is behavior that's par for the course in politics these days.

"Even the casual observer of New Jersey politics would note the rough and tumble nature of the state's political process," said Krista Jenkins, director of PublicMind and professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "The fact that the lanes were closed for reasons other than safety heightens the behavior's seriousness in the eyes of voters."

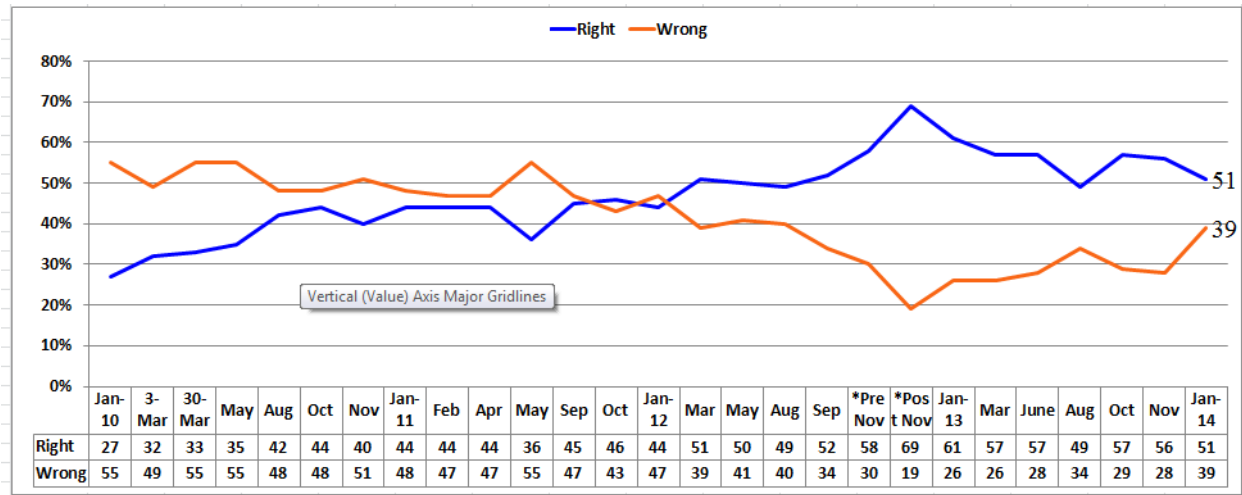
Partisans understand the issue differently, however. Republicans are considerably more likely to count the lane closures for political reasons as a fact of life in New Jersey (30%), whereas Democrats are far less sanguine when it comes to this type of behavior (18%). Democrats (73%) and independents (68%) consider "Bridgegate" as a more serious affair than do Republicans (59%).

Despite voters' belief that the GWB lane closures aren't simply part and parcel of the New Jersey political way, most also believe Port Authority decision makers often put politics ahead of what's in the best interests of motorists. Two-thirds (67%) believe a great deal or some decision making by Port Authority officials is influenced by politics rather than motorists' safety, compared with a quarter (24%) who say politics rarely or never enters into Port Authority policy.

"Taken together, these numbers suggest that despite the expectation that politics and the Port Authority are often intertwined, closing the lanes for partisan purposes is bad news," said Jenkins. "Traffic is enough of a headache for motorists these days. Knowing that someone is pulling strings and you're the unwitting victim is no doubt adding to the lower approval for the governor that PublicMind reported on Tuesday."

Unflattering views of the governor and Bridgegate are not, however, taking much of a toll on how voters evaluate the health of the state. Half (51%) of registered voters say the state is headed in the right direction, with 39 percent who believe it's on the wrong track. These numbers are down slightly from the last time the same question was asked, in November 2013. At that time, 56 percent said the state was headed in the right direction.

Direction of the State – Overtime trend



Garden Staters are significantly less optimistic about where the country is headed. Only a third (35%) think the country is on the right footing, with over half (54%) who say they’re worried about the direction it is headed. However, when it comes to leadership, President Obama is evaluated positively by about as many as Governor Christie is these days. As PublicMind reported on Tuesday, 48 percent approve of the job that Governor Christie is doing. When it comes to President Obama, a similar number (44%) give him high marks for his job performance.

“Governor Christie’s transcendent appeal often distinguished him from the more polarizing President Obama. Today, that’s no longer the case, with support for both leaders breaking along the usual party lines,” said Jenkins.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 734 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from January 20 through January 26 and has a margin of error of +/-3.6 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 January 20 through January 26 using a randomly selected sample of 734 registered voters who reside in New Jersey. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of +/- 3.6 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>Which of the following statements best describes how you feel, even if neither is perfect: Closing the lanes on the George Washington Bridge for political purposes is behavior that's par for the course in politics these days OR Closing the lanes on the GWB for political purposes is behavior that goes beyond what the public has grown accustomed. [Rotate]</i>								
		PID			Gender		Race	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite
Par for the course	23%	18	21	30	24	22	26	13
NOT par for the course	67%	73	68	59	68	65	66	70
DK/Ref (vol)	11%	8	11	11	8	13	8	16

<i>In your opinion, how much decision making by port authority officials is influenced by politics, rather than what's in the best interests of motorists?</i>								
		PID			Gender		Race	
	All	Dem	Ind	Repub	Male	Female	White	Nonwhite
A great deal	34%	35	33	34	39	30	34	36
Some	33%	34	36	33	31	35	33	35
A little	12%	12	10	14	11	13	13	11
None at all	12%	12	14	11	12	13	12	13
DK/Ref (vol)	8%	7	8	8	7	8	9	5

<i>In your opinion, do you believe things in New Jersey are moving in the right direction or are they on the wrong track? [Randomize right direction/wrong track]</i>								
		PID			Gender		Race	
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	White	Non-white
Right direction	51%	36	49	70	50	51	55	37
Wrong track	39%	53	37	21	38	39	35	49
Neither (vol)	10%	10	13	9	11	10	9	14
DK/Ref. (vol)	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0

<i>In general, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President? [Randomize approve/disapprove]</i>								
		PID			Gender		Race	
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	White	Non-white
Approve	44%	71	36	11	40	47	33	70
Disapprove	42%	15	41	81	44	40	54	14
Neither (vol)	13%	13	21	8	15	11	12	16
DK/Ref. (vol)	1%	1	3	0	0	1	1	0

<i>In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track? [Randomize right direction/wrong track]</i>								
		PID			Gender		Race	
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Men	Women	White	Non-white
Right direction	35%	60	22	9	35	35	28	51
Wrong track	54%	27	64	85	57	51	63	34
Neither (vol)	10%	13	11	7	7	13	8	15
DK/Ref. (vol)	1%	0	3	0	0	1	1	1

Exact Question Wording and Order

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/ mixed (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

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 (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

NJ1 released January 28, 2014

NJ2. In your opinion, do you think things in New Jersey are moving in the right direction or are they on the wrong track?

- 1 Right direction
- 2 Wrong track
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

NJ3 through NJ5 released January 28, 2014

NJ6 Which of the following statements best describes how you feel, even if neither is perfect: Closing the lanes on the George Washington Bridge for political purposes is behavior that's par for the course in politics these days OR Closing the lanes on the GWB for political purposes is behavior that goes beyond what the public has grown accustomed to.

- 1 Par for the course
- 2 Beyond what's expected
- 8 DK/Ref

NJ7 In your opinion, how much decision making by port authority officials is influenced by politics rather than what's in the best interests of motorists?

- 1 A great deal
- 2 Some
- 3 A little
- 4 None at all
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

Sample characteristics – Registered voters

Gender

Male	49
Female	51

Age

18-29	12
30-44	26
45-59	32
60+	28
Refused	2

Race/Ethnicity

White	69
Black/African-American	13
Latino or Hispanic	9
Asian	5
Other/refused	4

Public employee household

Yes	25
No	73
Unsure/refused	2

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	44
Independent/DK/refused	23
Republican/Lean Republican	33