



New Jersey: Presidential Politics & the Race for U.S. Senate

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This Marist Poll reports:

Presidential Race in New Jersey

- **Democratic Presidential Candidate Barack Obama Leads Republican Opponent John McCain by 7 Percentage Points in New Jersey:** With 15 electoral votes up for grabs in New Jersey, 47% of registered voters in the state say they support Senator Barack Obama for president while 40% say they back Senator John McCain. That's the same margin in New Jersey with which former Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry beat President George W. Bush in the 2004 presidential election. However, Obama's lead shrinks when looking at likely voters, including those who are leaning toward a specific candidate. 48% of likely voters support Obama while 45% are behind McCain. So, how does support break down along party lines among likely voters? 83% of likely Democratic voters say they support their party's candidate, Barack Obama, while 87% of likely Republican voters back John McCain. And, among New Jersey's all-important likely Independent voters, including those leaning toward a candidate, 51% support Barack Obama compared with 41% for McCain.

Question Wording: If November's presidential election were held today, whom would you support if the candidates are:

	John McCain/ Sarah Palin the Republicans	Barack Obama/ Joe Biden the Democrats	Other	Undecided
Registered voters	40%	47%	1%	12%

	John McCain/ Sarah Palin the Republicans	Barack Obama/ Joe Biden the Democrats	Other	Undecided
Likely voters w/ leaners	45%	48%	<1%	7%
Democrats	10%	83%	<1%	7%
Republicans	87%	9%	<1%	4%
Independents	41%	51%	1%	7%

- Intensity of Support:** Just how committed are New Jersey's registered voters to their choice for president? Most say they strongly support their candidate. 80% of John McCain's supporters are firmly behind him, and 80% of Barack Obama's supporters say they are strongly committed to him. Only a small percentage of both McCain's and Obama's respective supporters say they might vote differently – 5% for McCain and 6% for Obama.

Question Wording: Would you say that you strongly support [ticket], somewhat support them, or do you think you might vote differently on Election Day?

Registered voters	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Might Vote Differently	Unsure
September 2008	80%	14%	5%	1%
McCain supporters	80%	15%	5%	<1%
Obama supporters	80%	13%	6%	1%

- Impression of the Candidates:** Regardless of whom they plan to support, a majority of registered voters in New Jersey say they have a favorable impression of both presidential candidates. 62% report having a positive view of Barack Obama closely matched by 61% for John McCain.

Question Wording: Overall, do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of [candidate]?

Registered voters	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
John McCain	61%	32%	7%
Barack Obama	62%	32%	6%

- Voters' Positive Perception of V.P. Picks:** What about Biden and Palin? When it comes to the number two spot on the parties' tickets, the newly selected vice presidential nominees also have comparable favorability ratings. 58% think well of Senator Joe Biden while Governor Sarah Palin presents a positive picture to 55% of New Jersey voters. While impressions of Palin differ along party lines, she enjoys similar favorability between the sexes.

Question Wording: Overall, do you have a favorable or an unfavorable impression of [candidate]?

Registered voters	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
Joe Biden	58%	27%	15%
Democrats	76%	13%	11%
Republicans	39%	48%	13%
Independents	57%	25%	18%
Men	54%	33%	13%
Women	61%	23%	16%
Sarah Palin	55%	29%	16%
Democrats	38%	45%	17%
Republicans	85%	6%	9%
Independents	48%	36%	16%
Men	55%	31%	14%
Women	55%	27%	18%

- What Voters Want:** While the campaigns are both talking about change, more than one-fifth of registered voters – 22% – say the number one *quality* they want in a candidate is someone who is closer to them on the issues. 19% want a president who will bring about change while only 7% say it's most important for a candidate to have experience. How do the priorities of McCain's supporters stack up against those of Obama's supporters? 25% of voters who favor McCain say they want a strong leader while 32% of Obama's backers say they want to elect a candidate who will bring about change. 14% of McCain's supporters say experience is most important compared with just 2% of those voters who favor Obama.

Question Wording: When deciding your vote for president, which one of following qualities is most important to you? A presidential candidate who:

	Sept. 2008	McCain/ Palin Supporters	Obama/ Biden Supporters
Registered voters			
Is closer to you on the issues	22%	20%	25%
Will bring about change	19%	5%	32%
Is honest and trustworthy	18%	17%	17%
Is a strong leader	16%	25%	7%
Shares your values	15%	16%	15%
Has experience	7%	14%	2%
Unsure	3%	3%	2%

- **Framework for Change:** Half of registered voters in New Jersey think Barack Obama has a better *plan* for bringing about change in the United States while only 39% feel John McCain would be the better architect. 78% of both Democrats and Republicans say their party’s candidate has the better vision for bringing about change. Among New Jersey Independents, 60% see Barack Obama as the candidate with the better plan.

Question Wording: Which presidential candidate do you think has a better *plan* to bring about change for the country?

Registered voters	McCain	Obama	Unsure
September 2008	39%	50%	11%
Democrats	12%	78%	10%
Republicans	78%	12%	10%
Independents	29%	60%	11%

- **Record of Change:** When asked which candidate has a better *record* for bringing about change, a majority – 51% – says the answer is John McCain. That’s compared with 37% for Barack Obama.

Question Wording: Which presidential candidate do you think has a better *record* for bringing about change?

Registered voters	McCain	Obama	Unsure
September 2008	51%	37%	12%

Registered voters	McCain	Obama	Unsure
Democrats	26%	61%	13%
Republicans	82%	8%	10%
Independents	47%	41%	12%

- It's the Economy, Again:** More than four out of ten registered voters in New Jersey say the economy is foremost in their minds. 42% rate the economy as the most important issue when it comes to picking the next president; security against terrorism falls a distant second with 13% while the war in Iraq stands as the top priority for 10% of voters. For supporters of both John McCain and Barack Obama, the economy is the top issue with 34% and 49%, respectively. Security against terrorism ranks high in the minds of McCain's supporters. 27% think the issue is important when choosing the next president compared with only 3% of Obama's supporters.

Question Wording: When deciding your vote for president, which one of following issues is most important to you:

Registered voters	Sept. 2008	McCain/ Palin Supporters	Obama/ Biden Supporters
Economy	42%	34%	49%
Security against terrorism	13%	27%	3%
War in Iraq	10%	5%	14%
Education	9%	5%	15%
Health care	8%	4%	10%
Taxes	7%	11%	2%
Social issues like abortion or same sex marriage	4%	7%	3%
Environment	3%	1%	3%
Illegal immigration	2%	4%	<1%
Unsure	2%	2%	1%

- On the Attack?** 51% of New Jersey voters, regardless of whom they support, think the presidential candidates are spending most of their time attacking each other. Only 41% believe they are mostly talking about the issues.

Question Wording: Do you think the candidates for president have spent more time talking about the issues or attacking each other?

Registered voters	Talking Issues	Attacking Each Other	Unsure
September 2008	41%	51%	8%

- **High-Level of Excitement:** A majority of registered voters in New Jersey are enthusiastic about the choices they have for president. 59% say they are excited while 38% are not. Obama’s supporters, however, are more energized about their candidate compared with McCain’s supporters by a margin of almost 20 percentage points.

Question Wording: Are you excited or not excited about the choices you have for president?

Registered voters	Excited	Not Excited	Unsure
September 2008	59%	38%	3%
McCain supporters	55%	44%	1%
Obama supporters	74%	24%	2%

- **President Bush’s Approval Rating at 22%:** A majority of New Jersey voters disapprove of the job that President George W. Bush is doing in office. 52% say Bush is doing a poor job while only 4% rate Bush’s performance as excellent. Even a majority of Republicans do not have a positive image of the president’s job performance. Only 48% of Republicans think he is doing either an excellent or good job compared with 52% who rate his performance as either fair or poor.

Question Wording: Would you rate the job President George Bush is doing in office as excellent, good, fair, or poor?

Registered Voters	Excellent/ Good	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Unsure
September 2008	22%	4%	18%	25%	52%	1%
Democrats	6%	1%	5%	17%	77%	<1%
Republicans	48%	10%	38%	34%	18%	<1%
Independents	18%	1%	17%	23%	59%	<1%

Race for U.S. Senate in New Jersey:

- Democratic Incumbent Leads But Fails to Receive Majority Support Among Registered Voters in Bid for U.S. Senate in New Jersey:** Democratic candidate Frank Lautenberg leads Republican Dick Zimmer by 11 percentage points among registered voters in New Jersey. 47% say they support the Democratic incumbent while 36% are behind his opponent, Zimmer. When factoring in likely voters, including those leaning toward a candidate, Lautenberg leads Zimmer by the same 11 percentage point margin. He receives 51% to Zimmer’s 40%. 8% of likely voters say they are still undecided.

Question Wording: If the election for U.S. senate in New Jersey were held today, whom would you support if the candidates are:

	Dick Zimmer the Republican	Frank Lautenberg the Democrat	Other	Undecided
Registered voters	36%	47%	1%	16%
Likely voters w/ leaners	40%	51%	1%	8%
Democrats	9%	84%	1%	6%
Republicans	80%	11%	<1%	9%
Independents	33%	60%	<1%	7%

- Strength of Support:** Both candidates for U.S. Senate in New Jersey share nearly the same intensity of support among their backers. Overall, 45% of the state’s registered voters say they strongly support their choice for U.S. Senate; 37% somewhat support their candidate while 17% say they might vote differently. Looking at voters who say they support Lautenberg, 81% either strongly support or somewhat support the Democrat. A comparable number of Zimmer’s supporters – 84% – say they won’t change their minds inside the voting booth.

Question Wording: Would you say that you strongly support (candidate), somewhat support him, or do you think you might vote differently on Election Day?

	Strongly Support	Somewhat Support	Might Vote Differently	Unsure
Registered voters				
September 2008	45%	37%	17%	1%
Zimmer supporters	45%	39%	15%	1%
Lautenberg supporters	45%	36%	18%	1%

Nature of the Sample: 805 New Jersey Voters

This survey of 805 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted from September 5th through September 8th, 2008. Registered voters were interviewed by telephone in proportion to the voter registration in each county in New Jersey and adjusted for turnout in statewide elections. Results are statistically significant at $\pm 3.5\%$. There are 584 likely voters. The results for this sub-sample are statistically significant at $\pm 4\%$. The error margin increases for cross-tabulations.