



Voters split on doggy seat belts in New Jersey

By a narrow margin, New Jersey voters support a proposed law that would require dog owners to put their animal in a safety restraint or crate when in the car. According to the latest results from Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind poll, 45 percent of registered voters in the state support the law, with 40 percent opposing it. The bill, introduced in the New Jersey state legislature last month, would require that pets not traveling in a crate be restrained by a harness or similar device, with violators subject to a \$20 ticket and possible animal cruelty charges.

The bill has been proposed partly to eliminate confusion over whether New Jersey law currently allows dogs to ride shotgun in the car. Earlier this year, officials from the New Jersey Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals held a press conference in which they said that failure to restrain animals would be construed as animal cruelty, subject to criminal fines and penalties. Confusion over the current state of the law also led to the introduction of a rival bill, which would specify that driving with an unrestrained dog does not constitute cruelty to animals.

"These proposals have received both attention and ridicule," said Dan Cassino, a professor of political science at Fairleigh Dickinson, and a survey analyst for the poll. "But it seems like New Jersey voters are taking this seriously."

Although this is a new issue to emerge on the political scene, the divide on the dog restraint proposal falls along existing party lines. Democrats, and their usual supporters, are much more likely to support it than Republicans. A majority of Democrats – 51 percent – say they support the legislation, compared with just 36 percent of Republicans.

"It's pretty rare that we find such a clear partisan split on an issue that's outside of the normal political discussion," said Cassino. "But here we have a clear instance in which Democrats support government intervention in what had been a private sphere, and Republicans oppose it."

The other major split on the legislation comes from animal ownership: the bill has the support of 48 percent of voters who don't own a dog, compared with only 38 percent support among people who do. A majority of those who own dogs– 52 percent – oppose the bill. However, only about 1 in 3 New Jersey voters – 35 percent – own a dog.

"The people who are going to be most impacted by this bill – people who actually own dogs – don't like it. If nothing else, buying a restraint is going to cost them money," said Cassino. "However, if politicians are just looking at the overall numbers, the dog owners are outnumbered pretty badly."

Whites are less likely to support the bill than non-whites: 39 percent of white respondents support the legislation, compared with 59 percent of their non-white peers. This difference could be driven by partisan views – non-white voters in New Jersey are more likely to be Democrats – but could also be driven by animal ownership. Thirty-eight percent of whites in the state have a dog, compared with 27 percent of non-whites.

Though the proposal has been in the news, voters still don't know too much about it. Thirty-five percent of New Jersey voters say that they've heard "a lot" or "some" about the proposed law, with 44 percent saying that they've heard nothing at all. Those who own dogs seem to be paying attention to the law: 47 percent say that they've heard "a lot" or "some" about the bill.

"Support for these proposals is still pretty soft," said Cassino. "Most people haven't heard too much about it, and that means opinions could change pretty quickly."

Still, there is one point of agreement on the proposal: 86 percent of Garden State voters, across party lines, say that it's "unacceptable" to transport a dog in a safety crate on the roof of a car, as Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney admitted doing during a family road trip.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University statewide poll of 901 registered voters was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from September 6, 2012 through September 12, 2012, and has a margin of error of +/-3.3 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 registered New Jersey voters statewide. One can be 95 percent confident that the error attributable to sampling has a range of plus or minus 3.3 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 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.

Tables – Registered Voters

How much have you heard or read about proposed legislation to require that dogs traveling in a car be crated or restrained with a safety harness?						
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Owns Dog	No Dog
A lot	16%	14	15	20	24	11
Some	19%	16	18	24	23	17
Just a little	20%	22	19	17	22	19
Nothing at All	44%	46	46	37	31	51
Don't Know	2%	1	2	1	1	2

Do you favor or oppose legislation that requires safety restraints or crates for dogs while traveling in a car?								
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Owns Dog	No Dog	White	Non-White
Favor	45%	51	42	36	38	48	39	59
Oppose	40%	33	42	50	52	34	45	27
Don't Know	15%	15	17	14	10	18	16	14

%

Would you say it is acceptable or unacceptable for dog owners to carry their dogs in safety crates that are strapped to the roof of their car?								
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Owns Dog	No Dog	White	Non-White
Acceptable	7%	5	7	10	5	8	6	9
Unacceptable	86%	90	85	80	90	83	86	85
Don't Know	8%	5	9	10	4	9	8	6

Do you own a cat, a dog, both, or neither?						
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	White	Non-White
Cat	13%	14	11	13	15	8
Dog	28%	26	26	32	29	25
Both	7%	6	7	9	9	2
Neither	48%	50	53	41	43	60
Doesn't Own Pets	4%	3	2	4	3	5
Don't Know/Refused	0	0	0	0	0	0

Exact Question Wording and Order

PET1 How much have you heard or read about proposed legislation to require that dogs traveling in a car be crated or restrained with a safety harness?

- 1 A lot
- 2 Some
- 3 Just a little
- 4 Nothing at all
- 9 DK

PET2 Do you favor or oppose legislation that requires safety restraints or crates for dogs while traveling in a car?

- 1 Favor
- 2 Oppose
- 9 DK

PET3 Would you say it is acceptable or unacceptable for dog owners to carry their dogs in safety crates that are strapped to the roof of their car?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 9 DK

Sample characteristics – Registered voters**Gender**

Male	49
Female	51

Age

18-29	13
30-44	18
45-59	35
60+	33
Refused	2

Race/Ethnicity

White	70
Black/African-American	12
Latino or Hispanic	10
Asian	5
Other/refused	3

Public employee household

Yes	23
No	74
Unsure/refused	3

Party identification

Democrat/Lean Democrat	48
Independent/DK/refused	19
Republican/Lean Republican	33