

BOOKER OVER BELL BY DOUBLE DIGITS; MIDTERMS DEFINED BY VOTER DISCONTENT

With Labor Day, the unofficial start to the general election, now behind us, Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind asked registered voters about the upcoming Senate race, which candidate they're likely to support in their Congressional district, and what they think of the president. Taken as a whole, the numbers underscore a good amount of discontent with the status quo.

Booker v. Bell

Beginning with the Senate race, the Republican underdog challenger to incumbent Senator Cory Booker is thirteen points behind among registered voters. If the election were held today, 42 percent say they'd support Booker with 29 percent favoring his Republican challenger, Jeff Bell. Over a quarter (27%) say they remain unsure whom to support.

"Although Jeff Bell is not a political newcomer to the state, his absence from politics for decades has left him a relative unknown among this generation of voters. The fact that he trails an incumbent senator with rock star appeal by a smaller margin than expected suggests anti-incumbency is operative in this election," said Krista Jenkins, professor of political science and director of PublicMind. "Add to this the high percentage of undecideds, and it's clear that even someone with the appeal of Senator Booker is up against tough but still navigable anti-incumbency winds."

Democrats and Republicans are lined up predictably behind their respective candidates, but independents remain largely on the fence. Almost half (46%) of those who don't identify with either of the two major parties say they're unsure whom they'll support in the race for the Senate. However, among those who do have a preference, Booker trumps Bell by a ratio of more than two-to-one (36 versus 13%, respectively).

Evaluations of President Obama do more to help Booker than Bell. Three-quarters (78%) of those who approve of the president's job performance intend to vote for Booker, with half (51%) of those who disapprove expressing their preference for Bell.

House of Representatives

As for the generic ballot question, support for Republican and Democratic candidates is evenly divided. Virtually identical numbers of voters say they intend to vote for the Democratic (35%) as Republican candidate (34%). A quarter (24%) say they don't know who they'll vote for in November.

Democrats had a significantly greater edge over Republicans just a few months ago. In June of this year, the generic ballot question gave Democrats an eleven percentage point edge over Republicans.

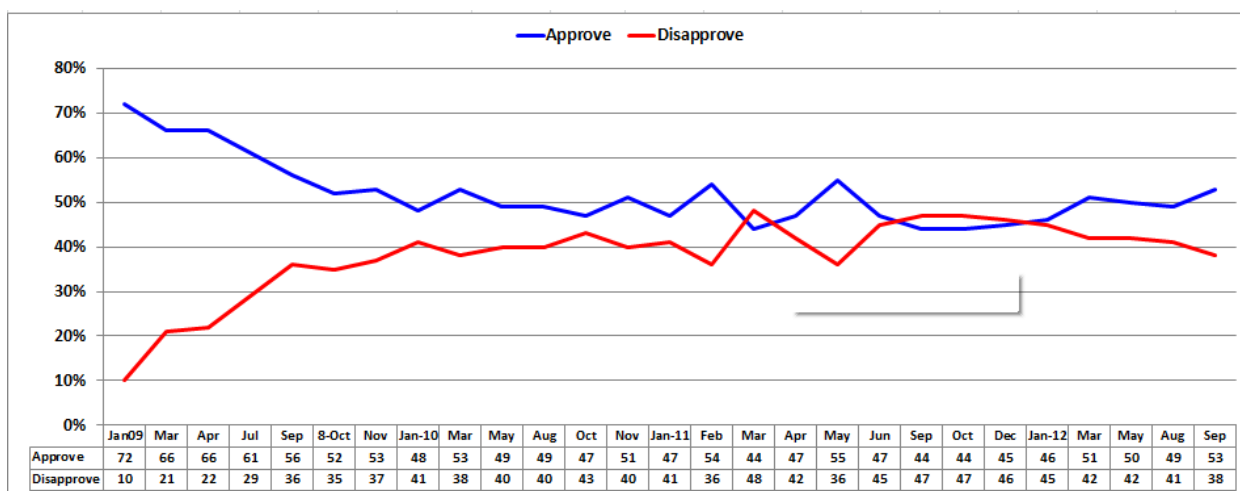
“That gap from a few months ago is now gone. A sign, perhaps, of the continued frustration voters feel with Obama’s leadership that’s trickling down to Democratic candidates,” said Jenkins.

The same survey finds opinion divided over whether the country works best when Congress and the President share the same or hold a different party affiliation. Half (50%) say the same party who occupies the White House should also control Congress with a third (34%) who favor divided government. Democrats are more decidedly on the side of unified government (62%) as compared with Republicans (42%). Republicans and those unhappy with presidential leadership are the most divided over whether greater (42%) or less (45%) partisan cohesion would improve things in Washington.

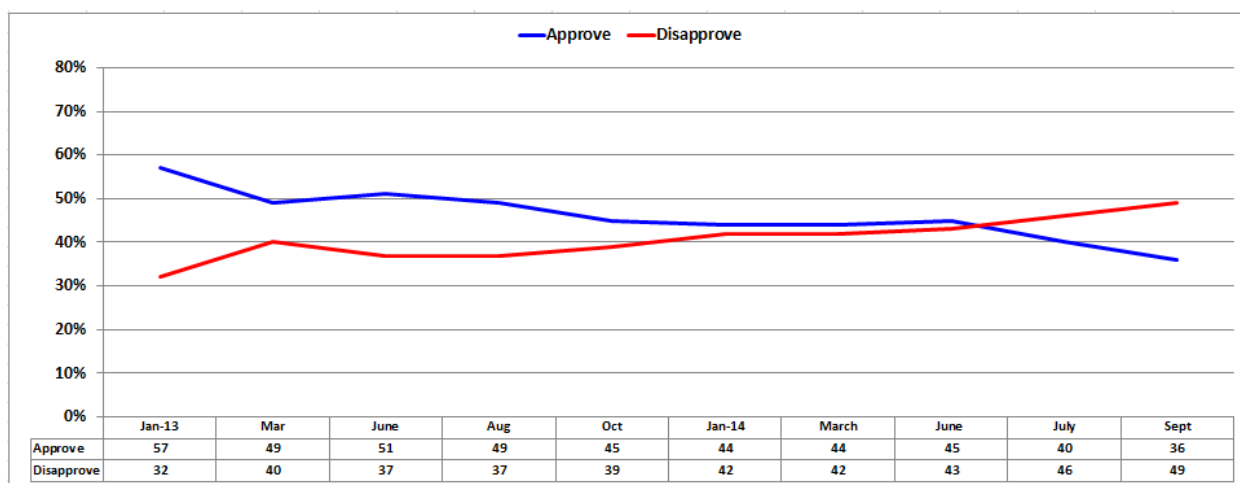
President Obama and State of the Country

Turning to the president, he remains daunted by upside down job approval numbers among Garden State voters. Right now barely a third (36%) approve of the president, with half (49%) who say they disapprove.

Presidential approval – Obama’s first term



Presidential approval – Obama’s second term



Similar numbers appear when the question turns to the state of the nation. Half (55%) are pessimistic about the direction the country is headed, with significantly fewer (31%) who express optimism. These numbers continue a trend observed in earlier polls. Confidence in the country's trajectory has hovered in the 30s since at least last fall.

"Even though Tip O'Neil once famously declared 'All politics is local,' it's also true that midterm elections are increasingly nationalized contests. The president is often seen as a proxy for what's both good and bad in the US," said Jenkins. "Obama's numbers, coupled with frustration over the direction the country seems headed, doesn't bode well for members of his party."

Bail Reform

Finally, the same survey asked about bail reform. The November ballot will contain a question regarding a law that would allow judges to deny bail to those accused of committing a violent crime. Rather than let the defendant go free while awaiting trial, the law would keep him/her locked up in order to ensure the public's safety. Three-quarters (77%) favor the ballot question, with 16% who would reportedly vote no. Although a majority of all groups considered intend to vote yes, Democrats (67%) and non-whites (65%) are the least enthusiastic about the reform.

"This is an issue upon which elected officials and the public are clearly in agreement. With support running high, it looks like this is a rare example of voter and policymaker preferences lining up to promote change," said Jenkins.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University poll of 721 registered voters in New Jersey was conducted by telephone with both landline and cell phones from September 1 through September 7, 2014, and has a margin of error of +/-3.7 percentage points.

<i>Methodology, questions, and tables on the web at: http://publicmind.fdu.edu Radio actualities at 201.692.2846</i>	<i>For more information, please call 201.692.7032</i>
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Methodology

The most recent survey by Fairleigh Dickinson University's PublicMind was conducted by telephone from September 1 through September 7, 2014 using a randomly selected sample of 721 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.

The following tables are based on all registered voters in the sample.

Tables

<i>If the election for Senate was held today, for whom would you vote? Republican Jeff Bell or Democrat Cory Booker? [Randomize names]</i>													
		PID			Obama approval		Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Approve	Disapprove	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Booker	42%	78	36	10	78	18	42	43	34	63	56	37	39
Bell	29%	4	13	64	6	51	31	27	37	12	20	31	34
Neither/other (vol)	1%	0	4	1	0	2	1	2	1	0	0	2	1
DK/Ref (vol)	27%	18	46	24	16	29	25	29	28	24	24	30	25

<i>I know it's early, but if the elections for Congress were to be held today, would you vote for the Democratic or Republican [ROTATE] candidate in your congressional district?</i>													
		PID			Obama approval		Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Approve	Disapprove	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Democratic	35%	71	24	4	67	12	34	36	27	53	44	30	34
Republican	34%	3	25	72	9	57	36	32	42	15	22	37	39
Neither/Other (vol)	7%	3	17	6	3	8	8	7	8	3	7	8	7
DK/Ref (vol)	24%	23	33	18	21	22	22	26	22	29	28	26	20

<i>I know it's early, but if the elections for Congress were to be held today, would you vote for the Democratic or Republican [ROTATE] candidate in your congressional district? [TREND]</i>			
	Current	June 2014	Jan 2010
Democratic	35%	43	44
Republican	34%	32	46
Neither/Other (vol)	7%	6	2
DK/Ref (vol)	24%	18	8

<i>Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts about who should control Congress and the presidency, even if neither statement is perfect? The country benefits more when the president and majorities in Congress are NOT from the same party OR The country benefits more when the president and majorities in Congress are from the same party.</i>													
		PID			Obama approval		Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Approve	Disapprove	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Different parties	34%	21	36	45	21	43	33	35	40	21	33	35	34
Same party	50%	62	41	42	61	44	50	49	47	58	58	48	46
Neither (vol)	10%	8	15	10	11	8	11	9	8	12	4	10	13
DK/Ref (vol)	7%	9	7	4	7	5	7	7	5	9	6	7	6

<i>First, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?[randomize response choices]</i>													
		PID			Gender		Race		Dir. of country		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	Right dir	Wrong track	18-34	35-59	60+
Approve	36%	63	34	10	36	37	25	59	80	10	42	32	35
Disapprove	49%	21	45	82	51	47	59	28	11	78	40	52	54
Neither (vol)	13%	15	18	7	12	15	14	13	8	11	17	15	10
DK/Ref (vol)	1%	0	4	1	1	2	2	0	2	0	1	1	1

In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track? [randomize response choices]											
		PID			Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Right direction	31%	52	27	11	30	31	23	48	38	30	25
Wrong track	55%	28	58	82	55	54	64	33	48	56	59
Neither (vol)	14%	19	13	6	14	13	12	19	13	14	15
DK/Ref (vol)	1%	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

<i>In November, voters will be asked to vote on an amendment to the state constitution that would allow judges to deny bail to people accused of violent crimes who may pose a threat to public safety if released. If you had to vote today, would you vote yes or no on this amendment?</i>											
		PID			Gender		Race		Age		
	All	Dem	Ind	Rep	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-59	60+
Yes	77%	67	76	88	74	80	82	65	72	80	76
No	16%	23	19	7	19	13	12	24	22	12	16
DK/Ref (vol)	7%	9	6	4	7	7	5	10	6	7	8

Exact Question Wording and Order

US1. *First, do you approve or disapprove of the way Barack Obama is handling his job as President?[randomize response choices]*

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 DK/Unsure/mixed [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused [DON'T READ]

US2. *In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track? [randomize response choices]*

- 1 Right direction
- 2 Wrong track
- 8 DK/Unsure [DON'T READ]
- 9 Refused. [DON'T READ]

NJ1 and NJ2 released September 9, 2014

NJ3 If the election for Senate was held today, for whom would you vote? Republican Jeff Bell or Democrat Cory Booker? [Randomize names]

- 1 Republican Jeff Bell
- 2 Democrat Cory Booker
- 3 Someone else
- 8 Don't Know (vol)
- 9 Refused(vol)

NJ4 I know it's early, but if the elections for Congress were to be held today, would you vote for the Democratic or Republican [ROTATE] candidate in your congressional district?

- 1 Democratic
- 2 Republican
- 3 Other/neither
- 8 DK/Unsure (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

NJ5 Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts about who should control Congress and the presidency, even if neither statement is perfect?

- 1 The country benefits more when the president and majorities in Congress are NOT from the same party.
- 2 The country benefits more when the president and majorities in Congress are from the same party.
- 3 Other/neither
- 8 DK/Unsure (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

BAIL In November, voters will be asked to vote on an amendment to the state constitution that would allow judges to deny bail to people accused of violent crimes who may pose a threat to public safety if released. If you had to vote today, would you vote yes or no on this amendment?

- 1 Yes
- 2 No
- 8 DK/Refused (vol)

Sample Characteristics

		Registered voters N = 721; MoE = +/- 3.7
Gender	<i>Male</i>	49%
	<i>Female</i>	51%
Age	<i>18-34</i>	22%
	<i>35-59</i>	45%
	<i>60+</i>	31%
	<i>Refused</i>	2%
Race	<i>White</i>	67%
	<i>African American</i>	11%
	<i>Hispanic</i>	12%
	<i>Asian</i>	4%
	<i>Other/Refused</i>	6%
Public Employee Household	<i>Yes</i>	23%
	<i>No</i>	75%
	<i>Refused</i>	2%
Party (with leaners)	<i>Dem</i>	40%
	<i>Ind/DK/Refused</i>	23%
	<i>Repub</i>	38%