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## Poll results say budget cuts face less disapproval

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**A**n Eagleton Institute of Politics poll released last Thursday suggests that New Jersey residents may be less likely than last year to oppose budget cuts in certain programs following Gov. Chris Christie's budget address.

New Jersey voters are eight points less likely to argue against budget cuts, 10 points less likely to favor environmental protection programs and 12 points less likely to oppose budget cuts applying to colleges and universities than they were after Christie's budget address last year, according to a press release from the Governor's Office.

Poll Director David Redlawsk said the results are an interesting situation.

«Christie has spent the last year talking about [budget] cuts that need to be made and of course he made cuts last year,» said Redlawsk, also a University political science professor. «What we're finding is that the public as a whole is ... recognizing or believing there is a need for budget cuts.»

Twenty-nine percent of respondents oppose any cuts in environmental programs, only 23 percent say no cuts should be made to municipal aid, and 37 percent oppose any cuts to colleges and universities — a drop from last year's poll when nearly half said higher education should have no cuts at all.

Redlawsk said Christie talked about shared sacrifice and budget cuts, and people are paying attention to this in ways they would not otherwise have done before he came into office.

«I think what happens is that there has been now a year of constant drumbeat that the budget is broken and that it has to be fixed,» he said. «It's important to fix it, and fixing it requires sacrifice.»

But 50 percent of New Jersey residents are still most supportive of education, saying there should be no state aid cuts to schools at all, according to the poll. Even so, this new number is a decrease compared to last year's 57 percent.

Support for programs to help low-income residents also decreased 9 percent from last year, with only 42 percent of residents remaining in favor, according to the poll.

«What we tried to understand was what [voters are] willing to cut and what they're less willing to cut, and we continue to see voters supporting schools [and] programs for the poor,» he said. «They're much more willing to see cuts in other areas like environmental programs and public transit.»

University political science Professor Richard Lau said the popularity of specific programs might influence whether people support cuts.

«When you mention a specific program, it's always the popularity or the lack thereof of that program or the beneficiaries from that program that people care about,» he said.

Despite greater support for specific budget cuts, New Jerseyans were split regarding their reaction to Christie's budget, with 45 percent pleased and 48 percent displeased, according to the poll.

Lau said the difference lies in what questions are asked, with Christie-related topics bringing up a certain set of thoughts related to Christie as governor.

«When we ask about specific programs and cutting, people think differently, and they think about what they know or what they think they know about those

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programs,» Lau said. «That's why you can see some differences in opinion.»

When people are asked whether they are pleased or displeased with the budget, respondent's answers depend largely on whether they like Christie, he said.

According to another poll released Tuesday, voters are nearly evenly split over their favorability of Christie post-budget address. Forty-six percent have a favorable impression, and 44 percent who do not.

The governor's ratings have stayed around the same general range over the past year no matter what actions he takes, Redlawsk said.

«He's got people who really like him no matter what and people who really hate him no matter what, and neither of those groups are going to change their opinion too much,» he said.

High earners who make more than \$150,000 per year are also more likely to support a luxury tax than those making under \$50,000 per year by a 17-point margin, 81 percent to 64 percent, according to the poll.

«So much of the focus has been on cutting the budget, which hurts primarily people of lower income levels, so New Jerseyans overwhelmingly believe that very high-income people should be subject to an additional tax surcharge to help close the budget gap,» he said.

School of Arts and Sciences senior Dan Herbert said support for budget cuts could be related to whether the cuts affect people personally.

«When people asked about specific things, they think, 'Oh, that doesn't really affect me as much, so I don't care if that budget goes away,» he said. «So everyone is fighting for their piece of the pie, and they're ignoring everyone else's slice.»