

Poll: Unemployment and taxes top list of N.J. residents' concerns

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By



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Unemployment was among the top issues New Jersey residents care about, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

TRENTON — In 1971, the Pittsburgh Pirates won the World Series. Apollo 14 landed on the moon. The New York Times published the Pentagon Papers. And the number one concern of New Jersey residents surveyed in the very first Rutgers-Eagleton poll was "crime and drug addiction."

That was then.

Now, crime hardly registers as a top concern among New Jerseyans, tying "Gov. Chris Christie" with just 3 percent of the responses, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton poll released this morning to mark the polling institute's 40th anniversary.

Instead, unemployment and taxes overshadow everything as today's top issues in Eagleton's latest poll — the 176th since 1971.

Other big worries from 40 years ago that hardly made a blip four decades

later: the environment, housing and civil rights.

"Today most people are worrying about their finances, their ability to get and keep jobs, and New Jersey's continuing high taxes," said poll director David Redlawsk.

Indeed, 27 percent of those polled picked "unemployment/jobs" as the most important problem facing New Jersey, while taxes came in a close second at 25 percent. Ten percent said the economy generally, 8 percent chose education and schools and 7 percent chose government spending.

The original survey was taken just four years after riots rocked Newark, and as crime rates were on the rise across the nation.

"For anyone who lived or worked in Newark, crime in 1971 was more of a companion than it is in 2011," said Rutgers University Police Institute Director Wayne Fisher, who worked as a detective in Newark 40 years ago. "And the perception of crime was more on peoples' radar, I think, than it is now. That was an accurate perception."

The first Rutgers-Eagleton survey was taken less than a year after President Richard Nixon signed the Clean Air Act. Back then, 10 percent of residents cited pollution as their top concern. Today, that number is just 1 percent.

"Back in 1970, you had rivers catching fire," said Sierra Club New Jersey Director Jeff Tittel. "It was much more in your face. Today the pollution is a lot more subtle. Pollution doesn't look like a belching smokestack. Nonpoint pollution from urban runoff doesn't look like raw sewerage discharge."

Some New Jersey concerns, however, do survive the test of time. Four decades ago, 22 percent of residents picked education and schools as one of their "top three issues". Today, the percentage is exactly the same.

Rutgers-Eagleton surveyed 903 New Jersey adults from Oct. 6 to Oct. 9, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points.

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