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Poll: New Jersey Struggling to Recover Following Sandy

A Rutgers-Eagleton poll asked residents various questions about the state's recovery since the storm.

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Life in New Jersey has yet to return to normal following Hurricane Sandy, and many residents believe recovery is a process that will take years, according to results from a new Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll conducted earlier this month gauged public reaction to the ongoing rebuilding and recovery effort as well as issues like coastal protection and government spending.

According to poll results, 74 percent of respondents said the state is not back to normal following Sandy against 21 percent who said that it is. The remaining 5 percent reported that they were unsure.

The percentage of residents who doubt the state's quick recovery fluctuates based on several factors, including location and if they were personally affected by the storm or not.

In all, 83 percent of residents in shore regions answered in the negative to New Jersey's recovery.

Results were collected from 923 New Jersey adults during a statewide polling from April 3 to 7. The margin of error is plus or minus 3.2 percentage points, according to a release.

Though a majority of New Jersey residents feel the state has not made a comeback, most are optimistic that it will, though it could take years.

Among those polled who said normalcy has not returned to New Jersey, 15 percent believe it the state could return to pre-Sandy condition in one year. Sixty four percent see a one to five year delay in full recovery, while the remaining 20 percent are somewhat more pessimistic.

Some 11 percent think a return to normal will take between five and 10 years; 2 percent see full recovery taking more than a decade, and 7 percent said the state will never get back to normal.

Typically, younger people are more optimistic about New Jersey's recovery. Those under 30 are three times more likely to believe the state's comeback has already happened when compared to those over 50.

David Redlawski, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers, said most residents polled have a realistic outlook about New Jersey's recovery.

"For the most part, New Jerseyans seem realistic about the challenges facing the state," said Redlawsk. "While some see things as already back to

normal, most recognize the recovery effort is a long-term event. While people hope it will all go well, they recognize it's a long slog."

Residents also weighed in on the issues of rebuilding and protecting coastal areas prone to storm-surge flooding. The poll found a large majority of residents support a range of preventative measures to limit future damage during storms like Sandy.

Nearly 90 percent either strongly or somewhat favor the mandatory use of pilings to elevate buildings in flood-prone areas and require the building of sand dunes or seawalls. Support for dunes is shared by Gov. Chris Christie, who has publicly criticized property owners who object to the state's plan to erect dunes along much of the state's coast.

Though New Jersey residents are split on whether shore development should be repaired to pre-Sandy standards without changes - 48 percent in favor and 47 percent opposed, more than 80 percent want to encourage the reconstruction of homes and businesses further from the waterfront.

Cost is an issue, too. Just over half of respondents are somewhat supportive of abandoning parts of waterfront towns if repairs are too costly. To that end, about 70 percent of those polls are somewhat supportive of converting formerly developed land into public beaches, parks or wetlands.

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll also provides insight into the variety of perspectives contemplating New Jersey's recovery, like political affiliation, age, and average income.

Among those residents with incomes under \$50,000, seven in 10 strongly support a requirement to build dunes or seawalls along the beachfront. That percentage drops as income increases. In all, 57 percent of respondents with incomes over \$150,000 strongly support requirements to build dunes or seawalls.

Among shore residents, 61 percent strongly support dunes and seawalls.

Across the state, 64 percent strongly support and 23 percent somewhat support elevating buildings on pilings to reduce the risk of future flood damage. Democrats are more likely to support this risk-reducing measure, 71 percent to 58 percent. Lower income and younger residents are also stronger supporters of building elevation than average.

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