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2008 NEW HAMPSHIRE STATE OF THE STATE POLL

CONDUCTED BY STUDENTS AND FACULTY  
OF THE POLICY RESEARCH SHOP  
IN THE NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY  
AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

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During the week of April 28-May 2, 2008, students in the Policy Research Shop conducted a telephone survey of New Hampshire registered voters. Calls were made between the hours of 6:30pm and 9:30pm on Monday through Thursday evenings. Additional calls were made during daytime hours on Tuesday through Friday when requests were made to call during the day. Over the course of the week, a total of three attempts were made to contact each of the registered voters drawn in the sample. A total of 401 survey interviews were completed during the week, yielding an error rate of  $\pm 5.0$  percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Survey respondents were asked a wide range of questions relating to the current political and economic state of affairs in New Hampshire. The sample drawn is quite representative of the voting population in New Hampshire; just over half of the respondents were male (51.7 percent) while just under half were women (48.3 percent). Respondents were divided evenly between the two congressional districts (47.9 percent from the 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District and 52.1 percent from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District). The mean and median ages of the respondents were 56.7 and 56, respectively. Regarding the partisan identification of the respondents, 27.6 percent are registered as Democrats, 29.8 percent are registered Republicans, and 42.6 percent are undeclared/independents.

**State of the New Hampshire Economy**

Regarding the general state of the economy in New Hampshire, just over half of the respondents (51.1 percent) state that the economy is WEAK; roughly 40 percent of the respondents believe that the economy is STABLE (41.2 percent). Only 3.5 percent of the respondents think that the economy in New Hampshire is STRONG. Just under five percent of the respondents are unsure about the economy (4.2 percent).

Regarding their personal economic situations, the largest plurality of respondents (46.0 percent) believe that compared to one year ago their own economic situation remains the SAME. However, 42.8 percent of the respondents feel that their own economic situation is WORSE than it was one year ago. Just over ten percent of the respondents feel that they are BETTER OFF today than they were one year ago (11.3 percent).

Nearly fifteen percent of the respondents state that they personally or a member of their family has been negatively affected by the current mortgage crisis (14.9 percent). Close

to one-in-five respondents considers his or her own personal credit card debt situation to be among the top personal financial concerns at the present time (18.8 percent). Regarding saving for retirement, approximately 70 percent of respondents are currently investing in retirement savings plans (70.4 percent). For those who currently invest, roughly half of the respondents invest in both employer-based retirement savings plans and personal retirement plans (47.6 percent). The remaining investors are split roughly evenly between employer-based plans (27.9 percent) and personal retirement plans (24.5 percent).

Regarding future economic prospects, the largest plurality of respondents believe that their own financial situation will be ABOUT THE SAME one year from now (42.2 percent). Just over one-quarter of the respondents believe that their financial situation will be BETTER one year from now (27.0 percent); just under one-quarter of the respondents believe that they will be in a WORSE financial situation in one year (22.4 percent). Less than ten percent are unsure (8.4 percent) regarding their future financial situation.

More than three-quarters of the respondents (76.1 percent) expect to receive a federal tax rebate check resulting from the economic stimulus package passed by Congress and signed by President Bush. For those anticipating a federal rebate check, the respondents plan on utilizing the money in the following ways:

Pay bills-----	24.5 percent
Save it-----	19.3 percent
Normal daily purchases-----	17.6 percent
Purchase large consumer item---	9.3 percent
Pay off credit card debt-----	8.6 percent
Spend on vacation-----	7.9 percent
Something else-----	12.8 percent

At least for the state of the economy in New Hampshire, perhaps 25 percent of the money sent to New Hampshire residents will actually serve to stimulate the economy. The proposed uses of the federal rebate checks by respondents will do little to stimulate economic growth in the state.

### **Public Policy Issues in New Hampshire**

Respondents were given a list of policy issues and asked to select the most important issue for New Hampshire policymakers to focus on in Concord. Respondents had the opportunity to offer their own most important issue (6.9 percent); none of these responses garnered more than two percent. Below is the list of policy issues and respondent choices:

1. building and maintaining a strong economy-----28.5 percent
2. relieving the property tax burdens of citizens----26.9 percent
3. improving education across the state-----17.3 percent
4. providing for the health care needs of citizens---12.8 percent
5. maintaining a clean and livable environment-----4.5 percent
6. maintaining roads and bridges-----3.2 percent
7. other-----6.9 percent

Respondents were then asked to identify from a list of issues the greatest threat to New Hampshire's future. Below is the list of issues presented to respondents and their choices:

1. public education system-----19.0 percent
2. lack of high paying jobs-----15.8 percent
3. availability of affordable housing-----15.6 percent
4. cost of health care-----15.3 percent
5. increased government spending-----12.7 percent
6. population growth-----11.6 percent
7. other-----10.0 percent

In their assessment of the level of government most important to ensure New Hampshire's future, respondents overwhelmingly identified the state government in Concord as most responsible (61.6 percent), followed by local government (20.0 percent) and the federal government in Washington, DC (18.4 percent).

### Education Policy

Moving to education policy, respondents rate the job the public schools are doing in New Hampshire as follows: excellent (7.5 percent), good (43.2 percent), fair (30.1 percent), and poor (13.1 percent); less than ten percent did not know enough about the public school system in New Hampshire to offer a response (6.1 percent). When comparing the current public education system to when the respondent was in school, roughly one-third of the respondents feel that the current system is BETTER (34.2 percent); another one-third believe the current system is WORSE (32.9 percent) and ten percent believe that it is the SAME as when they were in school (10.5 percent). Roughly one-quarter had no basis for comparison or were unsure (22.4 percent). When asked about the current state of public school financing in New Hampshire, most respondents express dissatisfaction with the progress being made by state officials to address the delivery of an "adequate" education to all public school children in New Hampshire (30.4 percent are somewhat dissatisfied and 27.8 percent are very dissatisfied; conversely 3.9 percent are very satisfied and 19.4 percent are somewhat satisfied. The remaining respondents are neutral on the issue (7.3 percent) or are unsure (11.3 percent).

### Budgetary Policy

Regarding the seriousness of the budget problems facing New Hampshire, three-quarters of the respondents find the current budget situation to be either very serious (27.1 percent) or somewhat serious (50.3 percent). Less than ten percent of the respondents believe the problem is not very serious (8.9 percent) or not serious at all (0.8 percent); thirteen percent are unsure. Looking at budget issues at the local level, respondents were offered the following scenario: "Currently many towns in New Hampshire are facing budget problems. In order to provide the same level of services they might have to raise taxes. If you had to choose between raising taxes or cutting services, which would you choose?" Just over 30 percent of respondents opt for raising taxes (30.4 percent) while more than 40 percent support cutting services (44.0 percent). Another 19 percent say it would depend on the particular service or program (19.1 percent) and six percent are unsure (6.5 percent). Respondents were then asked about a specific budgetary problem at the state level—funding for roads and bridges. "Over the next decade, according to the New Hampshire Department of Transportation, the state of New Hampshire faces a \$1.7 billion deficit for the repair and maintenance of the state's roads and bridges. I am going

to read you a list of proposed options to solve this budget deficit over the next decade. Please let me know if you approve or disapprove of each of the options:”

1. raising the gas tax five cents per gallon (27.6 percent approve)
2. a five percent increase in motor vehicle tax (54.8 percent approve)
3. a two percent increase in interest and dividends tax (36.9 percent approve)
4. increase in minimum cap on I and D tax (38.5 percent approve)
5. a one-percent sales tax (40.0 percent approve)
6. a 25-cent increase in the cigarette tax (81.0 percent approve)

#### Health Care Policy

An overwhelming percentage of respondents currently have health insurance (94.4 percent). In general, respondents are relatively satisfied with the current state of healthcare in the state with 11.9 percent of respondents being very satisfied and 32.0 percent being somewhat satisfied; an additional 14.3 percent are neutral with 18.8 percent somewhat dissatisfied and 13.2 percent very dissatisfied. Less than ten percent of the respondents are unsure (9.8 percent). Asked whether they would support or oppose the adoption of a system of required healthcare insurance for all citizens similar to the plan adopted in Massachusetts, roughly one-third of the respondents support such a plan (31.5 percent); roughly one-third oppose the plan (33.6 percent) and one-third of the respondents are unsure (34.9 percent).

#### Internet Usage and Broadband Access

With the February 2008 purchase of Verizon by Fairpoint Communications in New Hampshire, we asked questions regarding Internet usage and access to Broadband Internet service. Just under 80 percent of the respondents reported daily usage of the Internet (79.1 percent), with 20.9 percent reporting no usage and 26.4 percent reporting less than an hour of Internet usage per day. Just over one third of the respondents reporting spending one-to-two hours daily online (35.4 percent) and 17.2 percent of respondents spent more than two hours a day online. Regarding Broadband Internet access, 71.6 percent of the respondents reported having access to Broadband Internet service.

#### **New Hampshire Politics**

Respondents were asked about their opinions of statewide elected officials in New Hampshire—Governor John Lynch, Senator Judd Gregg, and Senator John Sununu. Their ratings are as follows:

- Governor John Lynch: 56.4 percent favorable  
27.4 percent neutral  
8.9 percent unfavorable  
7.0 percent unsure
- Senator Judd Gregg: 38.1 percent favorable  
27.3 percent neutral  
26.8 percent unfavorable  
7.8 percent unsure
- Senator John Sununu: 32.4 percent favorable  
26.2 percent neutral  
33.4 percent unfavorable  
8.1 percent unsure

The job approval rating for Governor Lynch is consistent with his high favorable ratings. More than 65 percent of respondents approve of the way Governor Lynch is handling his job as governor (65.2 percent); whereas only 13.2 percent disapprove of job performance. More than one-fifth of the respondents are unsure about his job performance, however (21.6 percent). The institutional job approval rating of the state legislature is less impressive as 36.6 percent of respondents approve of the way the members of the New Hampshire legislature are handling their jobs; almost one-third of the respondents disapprove of the job performance of the legislature (32.2 percent) while 31.2 percent are unsure.

Regarding the upcoming elections in the fall, respondents were presented with a series of choices for president and for the U.S. Senate. The Republican nominee, John McCain, fared well against Senators Clinton and Obama as well as against former Vice President Al Gore. In the Senate race, the Democratic challenger, Jean Shaheen, has a ten-point lead over incumbent Senator John Sununu. Undecided voters in all of the match-ups are consistently in the 18 percent range.

#### Race for the Presidency

John McCain	45.2 percent	John McCain	41.8 percent	John McCain	46.5 percent
Hillary Clinton	36.4 percent	Barack Obama	39.3 percent	Al Gore	35.2 percent
Undecided	18.4 percent	Undecided	18.9 percent	Undecided	18.3 percent

#### Race for U.S. Senate

Senator John Sununu	35.9 percent
Former Governor Jean Shaheen	46.0 percent
Undecided	18.1 percent

Finally, we asked two questions regarding the “Pledge” and the First in the Nation Primary. Regarding the first issue, we asked, “How important is it to you personally that candidates for elective office in New Hampshire sign the “Pledge” not to create an income tax or to create a sales tax?” Just over half of the respondents feel that the Pledge remains important (40.4 percent very important, 16.1 percent somewhat important). More than one-third of the respondents, however, find the “Pledge” to be not very important (11.8 percent) or not important at all (26.0 percent); 5.7 percent are unsure.

Regarding the place of New Hampshire as the first primary state in the nation, two-thirds of the respondents believe that remaining the first primary state is very important (42.5 percent) or somewhat important (25.1 percent). Roughly one-quarter of the respondents do not find the issue to be important (12.8 percent—not very important and 14.8 percent—not at all important); five percent are unsure (4.9 percent).

In addition to the questions presented above, respondents were asked a series of questions regarding their civic activism and media consumption as well as a variety of demographic questions. Later reports will analyze these data as well as provide greater depth of analysis of the data presented in this report.

Please contact Professor Ron Shaiko, Senior Fellow and Associate Director, Curricular and Research Programs, Nelson A. Rockefeller Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences, Dartmouth College, for any additional information regarding the 2008 New Hampshire State of the State Poll. Email: [Ronald.G.Shaiko@Dartmouth.edu](mailto:Ronald.G.Shaiko@Dartmouth.edu). Telephone: (603) 636-9146.