

**NEW JERSEY OPINIONS ON  
ADOPTED PERSONS' ACCESS  
TO BIRTH RECORDS**

*Conducted for:*  
**New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education**

*Conducted by:*



*Data Collection:*  
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# **NEW JERSEY OPINIONS ON ADOPTED PERSONS' ACCESS TO BIRTH RECORDS**

## **I. Introduction**

In order to assess New Jerseyans' opinion on the ability of residents who were adopted obtaining access to their birth certificate and family history, the New Jersey Coalition for Adoption Reform and Education commissioned the Monmouth University Polling Institute to conduct an independent statewide survey of New Jersey residents.

The survey involved telephone interviews conducted between April 17 and 20, 2006 with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years old and older. Percentages for this survey have a sampling error of  $\pm 3.5$  percent at a 95 percent confidence level with 50/50 proportions. This report also describes findings for certain demographic groups in the population. Smaller sub-groups will have a higher margin of sampling error. A more comprehensive description of the research methodology is included in the appendix.

This report and the interpretation of the survey findings are the sole responsibility of the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

## **II. Survey Results**

Currently, many persons who were adopted in New Jersey do not know their family medical history or other information about their heritage. Overwhelmingly, 9-in-10 New Jerseyans feel that it is important for persons who were adopted to have access to this kind of information (Table 1). This includes 70 percent who say it is very important for adopted persons to have access to information about their family medical history and cultural

background and another 19 percent who say it is somewhat important. Only 8 percent of residents feel that access to this information is not important.

About 1-in-10 New Jerseyans have an immediate family member who was adopted (either themselves, a child, parent, spouse or sibling). Practically all (98%) of those residents with an adopted family member view access to birth family information as important. However, recognition of the importance for this access is not limited to those who are most affected. Among New Jerseyans without an adopted person in their immediate family, fully 88 percent see having access to biological family information as important.

Currently, adopted persons in New Jersey are given a revised birth certificate naming their adopted parents, but they do not have access to their original birth certificate which names their birth parents – the parents who placed them for adoption. A bill has been introduced in the New Jersey legislature that would allow an adopted person to get a copy of their original birth certificate with the names of their birth parents. Fully 3-in-4 New Jersey residents (75%) support passage of such a law (Table 2). Only 17 percent oppose such a law and 8 percent have no opinion. Support for this proposal comes from Democrats (79%), Republicans (70%) and independents (73%) alike.

Support for this measure does not increase significantly if the law were to give birth parents the option of having their names removed as long as they provide family medical history and other relevant information. With this qualification added to the legislation, support notches up just 4 points to 79 percent.

Most of those who initially registered opposition or no opinion on this law would support it with the option of allowing birth parents to remove their names. However, it is also worth noting that about 1-in-6 supporters of granting adopted persons access to their birth

certificates feel that birth parents should not be allowed to remove their names from the document.

Another possible provision being discussed regarding this legislation would allow birth parents to tell the State Registrar whether they want contact from their son or daughter. This information would be shared with an adopted person who requests his or her birth certificate. Again, more than 3-in-4 residents (79%) support this provision.

The levels of support for all these proposals are nearly identical for both immediate relatives of adopted persons and for other residents of New Jersey.

**TABLE 1**  
**Importance of Adopted Persons' Knowing About**  
**Their Family Medical History and Heritage [Q1]**

	<u>Very Important</u>	<u>Somewhat Important</u>	<u>Not too/ Not at all Important</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>April 2006</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<b>All New Jerseyans</b>					
<u>Registered Voter</u>					
--Yes	69	20	8	2	(652)
--No	74	16	6	3	(151)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	75	20	5	1	(278)
--Republican	63	20	14	2	(174)
--Independent	71	17	8	4	(303)
<u>Gender</u>					
--Male	64	20	12	3	(381)
--Female	76	18	5	2	(422)
<u>Anyone in Family Adopted</u>					
--Yes	85	13	1	1	(75)
--No	69	19	9	2	(721)

**TABLE 2**  
**Support for Adopted Persons' Access To Records [Q2/3/4]**

<i>Those who Support a...</i>	<u>Law to give access to original birth certificate with birth parent names</u>	<u>Law to give access to birth certificate with birth parent option to provide family history in lieu of identity</u>	<u>Provision for birth parents to indicate whether they want contact from child</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>April 2006</b>	<b>75%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>(803)</b>
<b>All New Jerseyans</b>				
<u>Registered Voter</u>				
--Yes	74	79	79	(652)
--No	80	76	79	(151)
<u>Party ID</u>				
--Democrat	79	77	80	(278)
--Republican	70	83	79	(174)
--Independent	73	79	80	(303)
<u>Gender</u>				
--Male	74	72	74	(381)
--Female	76	84	84	(422)
<u>Anyone in Family Adopted</u>				
--Yes	74	79	74	(75)
--No	75	79	80	(721)

**APPENDIX:**  
**SURVEY METHODOLOGY**

The questionnaire for this survey was drafted by MUPI research staff in consultation with research concerns raised by the sponsor. The draft questionnaire was pretested with a random group of New Jersey residents and modifications were made to the survey instrument in order to increase the understandability and accuracy of the questions asked. MUPI retained final authority over question wording.

A random proportional probability sample was used to select the 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older who were contacted to participate in this study. The sample was designed to make sure that each of six regions (defined by area code) and population gender were proportionately. The three digit exchange was used to match telephone numbers and geographic areas. The remaining four digits were randomly selected. This procedure insures that those with unlisted or new telephone numbers are included in the sample. Each working phone number was called a minimum of three times, at different times of the week, in an effort to reach people who were infrequently at home.

The study involved CATI interviews with a random probability sample of 803 New Jersey residents 18 years of age and older. The CATI interviews were conducted by telephone April 17 to 20, 2006 by experienced professional interviewers who were monitored by the MUPI research staff.

While those interviewed in a survey ideally will have the same characteristics as the population they represent, samples frequently may under-represent groups that are more difficult to interview, such as the elderly or those with less than a high school

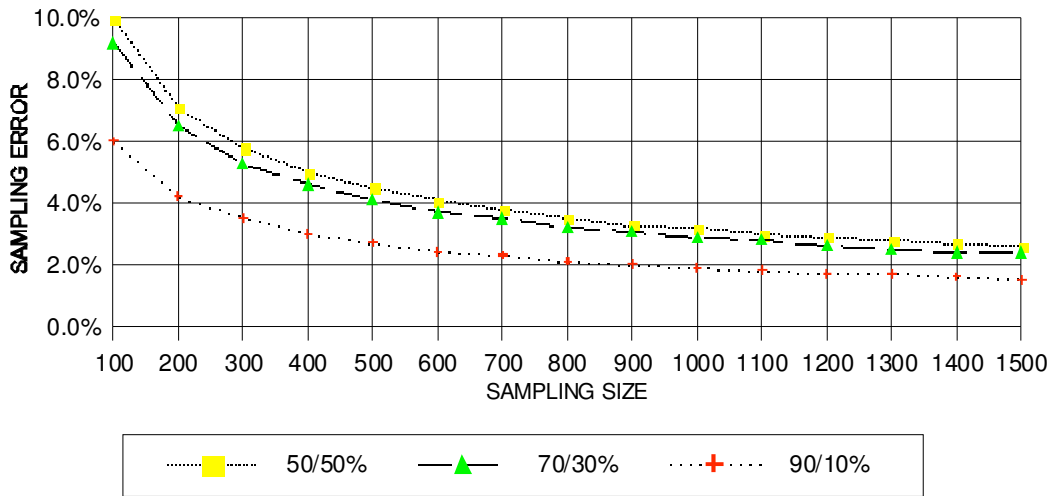
education. To correct this imbalance, a statistical technique known as "weighting" is used. The weighting procedure compares New Jersey population figures for age and education based on census data with those of the sample.

When there is significant difference between these two figures, the sample is weighted so it more accurately reflects the population of the state. For example, if census figures show 39 percent of New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, to have a high school education, and the sample consists of 32 percent with a high school education, each respondent in this category would be counted as 1.21 persons to adjust for this difference.

The percentages obtained in a sample survey are estimates of what the distribution of responses would be if the entire population had been surveyed. "Sampling error" is a statistical term which describes the probable difference between interviewing everyone in a given population and a sample drawn from that population. For example, the sampling error associated with a sample of this size is  $\pm 3.5$  percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus, if 47 percent in this sample are found to agree with a particular statement, the percentage of agreement within the population from which the sample was drawn would be between 43.5 and 50.5 percent ( $47 \pm 3.5\%$ ) 95 times out of 100.

Sampling error increases as the sample size is reduced. For, example, if statements are made based on a sub-group of 600, the sampling error is  $\pm 4$  percent. This fact must be kept in mind when comparing the responses of different groups within a sample (e.g. men compared with women). Readers should note that sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.

### SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING ERROR



### Demographic Characteristics (n=803)

<u>Registered Voter</u>		<u>Age</u>	
77%	Yes	21%	18 to 29
23	No	42	30 to 49
		20	50 to 64
		17	65 and older
<u>Party Identification</u>		<u>Child in the home</u>	
40%	Democrat	36%	Yes
38	Independent/Other	64	No
22	Republican		
<u>Gender</u>		<u>Years in New Jersey</u>	
47%	Male	28%	20 or less
53	Female	32	21 to 40
		40	More than 40/entire life
<u>Education</u>		<u>Region of the State</u>	
47%	High School or Less	48%	North
23	Some College	24	Central
30	College Grad	28	South
<u>Race</u>		<u>Type of Municipality</u>	
66%	White, non-Hispanic	13%	Major Urban Center
34	Hispanic, Black, Asian, other	13	Other Urban Area
		37	Older Town & Suburb
<u>Family Income</u>		32	Growing Suburb & Town
42%	Under \$50,000	5	Rural Area
36	\$50-99,999		
23	\$100,000 or more		

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## STATEMENT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE OF DATA

**Any public release of these data must include the following information in addition to the actual text of the questions in the survey instrument:**

This survey was conducted by telephone from April 17 to 20, 2006 with a scientifically selected random sample of 803 New Jersey adults. The figures in this release are based on this sample size. All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error is  $\pm 3.5$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to think the state was in good economic condition, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.5 and 53.5 percent ( $50 \pm 3.5$ ) had all New Jersey residents been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by race or age, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. The verbatim wording of all questions asked is reproduced in this memo. The sample has been stratified based on county and the data have been weighted on age and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows. This study was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute.

## SURVEY INSTRUMENT

(n=803)

1. Currently, many adopted persons do not know their family medical history and other information about their heritage. How important is it that they be able to have access to this kind of information – very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

70% Very important  
19 Somewhat important  
4 Not too important  
4 Not at all important  
3 No opinion

2. Currently, adopted persons in New Jersey are given a revised birth certificate naming their adopted parents but they do NOT have access to their original birth certificate which names their birth parents – the parents who placed them for adoption. Do you support or oppose a law that would allow an adopted person to get a copy of their original birth certificate with the names of their birth parents?

75% Support  
17 Oppose  
8 No opinion

3. Would you support or oppose this law if the birth parents are given the option of having their names removed if they agree to provide a family medical history and other relevant information?

79% Support  
16 Oppose  
6 No opinion

4. Would you support or oppose a provision that would allow birth parents to tell the State Registrar whether they want contact from their son or daughter? This information would be shared with the adopted person who requests the birth certificate.

79% Support  
15 Oppose  
6 No opinion

5. Is any member of your immediate family adopted? [IF “YES” ASK: Is that yourself, your child, or someone else?]

3% Yes, Self/Respondent  
3 Yes, Respondent’s child/children  
3 Yes, Other  
90 No, no one in immediate family  
1 Don’t Know