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## NEW JERSEY'S QUALITY OF LIFE BY COUNTY

*Highest in Morris, lowest in Cumberland*

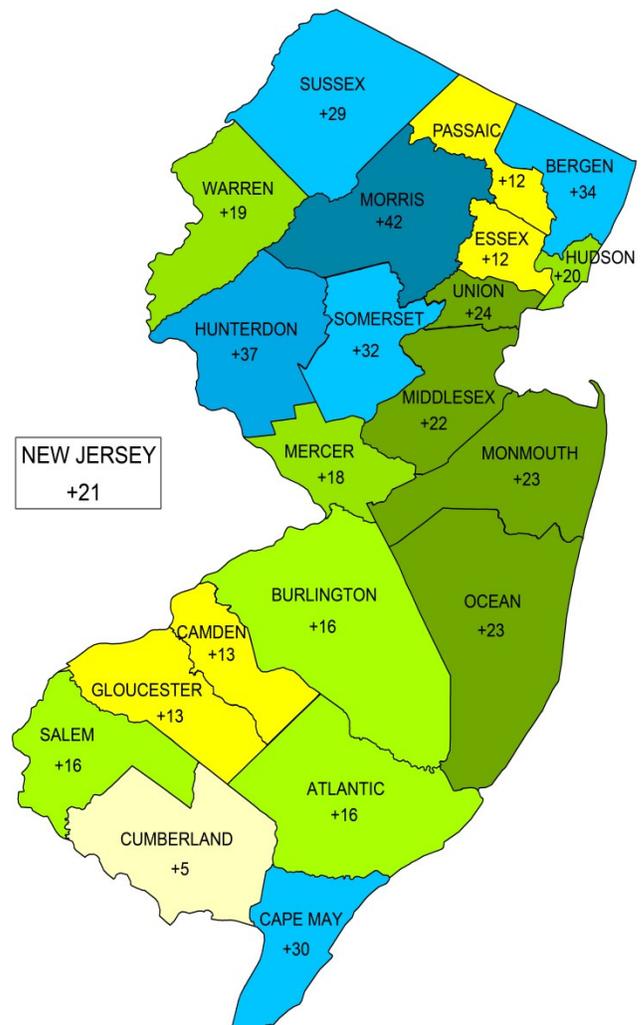
New Jersey residents' outlook on the state depends a lot on which corner of it they occupy. In the fourth installment of a series on the Garden State's Quality of Life, the *Monmouth University Poll* focuses on how the views of state residents vary from county to county.

The Monmouth University Poll's Garden State Quality of Life Index shows a wide disparity at the county level compared to the statewide average of +21 (on a scale -100 to +100). This ranges from a high of +42 among Morris County residents to a low of +5 in Cumberland County.

The Garden State Quality of Life Index is not a rating of each county as a place to live, but rather an overall perception of New Jersey's quality of life. The index is comprised of two major components – ratings of the state as a whole and ratings of one's hometown and local area.

Joining Morris in the top tier of the Garden State Quality of Life Index are Hunterdon (37%), Bergen (+34), Somerset (+32), Cape May (+30), and Sussex (+29) counties. The second tier is composed of Union (+24), Monmouth (+23), Ocean (+23), and Middlesex (+22).

### GARDEN STATE QUALITY OF LIFE INDEX



Source: Monmouth University Polling Institute

Counties that score slightly below the statewide average are Hudson (+20), Warren (+19), Mercer (+18), Atlantic (+16), Burlington (+16), and Salem (+16). Rounding out the list are the counties, other than Cumberland, where residents have the least positive views of New Jersey's quality of life, including Camden (+13), Gloucester (+13), Essex (+12), and Passaic (+12).

Counties with the highest scores on the Garden State Quality of Life Index come from every part of the state – north, central, and south – and represent a range of affluence, although the “wealth belt” of Hunterdon, Morris, and Somerset is fully represented in the top tier. On the other hand, the lowest scoring counties are either from South Jersey or the urban north.

“New Jersey has always been a tale of two, or three, states. The index shows that how you feel about the state's quality of life depends on where you live,” said Patrick Murray, director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. “It's interesting to note that residents of counties where the local quality of life is particularly high also tend to view the entire state as a good place to live. In most cases, though, residents make a distinction between their own backyards and the state as a whole.”

When asked to rate their own hometown as a place to live, residents of Morris (89%), Hunterdon (87%), Somerset (86%), and Bergen (85%) are the most positive. In general, more New Jerseyans give high marks to their hometown than say the same about the state as a whole. This is especially true in Somerset (86%) and Gloucester (72%) counties, where town ratings are 25 points higher than the state rating. Only in the heavily urbanized counties of Hudson (64%), Essex (59%), and Passaic (57%) do residents to rate their own towns less positively than they do the state.

Counties with higher concentrations of urban communities tend to score below the state average on the Garden State Quality of Life Index, but this effect is not consistent. Mercer County excluding Trenton would score +29 on the index, which is an 11 point increase from the entire county's score. Union County's score would also jump if only its suburban communities were considered, from an already above average +24 to a top tier score of +32. Index scores would also increase in other urbanized counties if only suburban communities were included in the calculations, but by a much smaller margin. This includes Passaic at +19, Essex at +18, and Camden at +15. Since Hudson is an entirely urban county, there is no different score to report.

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A more comprehensive description of the survey results with details for each county can be found in the full Monmouth University Polling Institute report, available at:

[http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/NJQualityofLife\\_County\\_August2011.pdf](http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/NJQualityofLife_County_August2011.pdf)

Funding for the Garden State Quality of Life project was provided by the Plangere Foundation, New Jersey Resources, First Energy Corporation, and sanofi-aventis.

**Survey Methodology:** The *Garden State Quality of Life* survey was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute from December 1 to 15, 2010 with a statewide random sample of 2,864 adult residents. Sampling and live telephone interviewing services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. Smaller counties were oversampled so that the final survey included at least 100 survey respondents from each of New Jersey's 21 counties. Racial and ethnic minorities were also oversampled by screening for appropriate respondents in areas of minority population concentration. The survey results were then weighted to accurately reflect the New Jersey adult population for gender, age, education, race, and county.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 1.8 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The sampling error for the county level data discussed in this report ranges from  $\pm 6\%$  (Bergen, Middlesex), to  $\pm 7\%$  (Essex, Hudson),  $\pm 8\%$  (Monmouth, Morris, Passaic),  $\pm 9\%$  (Burlington, Camden, Mercer, Ocean, Somerset, Union), and  $\pm 10\%$  (Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Salem, Sussex, Warren). In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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# The Garden State's Quality of Life

*A survey of New Jersey residents*

## **New Jersey's Quality of Life Varies by County**

by Patrick Murray, Director  
Monmouth University Polling Institute

### **Introduction**

For such a small state, New Jersey contains strong local identities. North Jersey residents identify with New York City while South Jersey residents look toward Philadelphia. But even those divisions can be too general to fully describe the state's regional differences. The northwestern and southeastern parts of the state tend to see few similarities between themselves and their neighbors closer to urban areas. And those in the central part of the state carve out their own identity, with northern residents seeing them as part of the south and southern residents placing this area firmly in the north.

The question, then, is whether perceptions of New Jersey's quality of life depend on which part of the state you come from. The Garden State Quality of Life Index designed by the Monmouth University Polling Institute offers a clue. The index, which ranges from -100 to +100, combines residents' evaluations of the state, their hometowns, local schools, the environment, and crime. This survey interviewed at least 100 residents in each of the state's 21 counties to determine which can claim the most content populace.

Morris County residents (+42) are the most satisfied with the Garden State's Quality of Life, having an index score double the statewide average of +21. They are closely followed by Hunterdon County (37%). Other counties with well above average Quality of Life Index scores are Bergen (+34), Somerset (+32), Cape May (+30), and Sussex (+29).

At the other end of the spectrum, Cumberland County (+5) residents register the lowest Garden State Quality of Life Index score. Also scoring significantly below the statewide average are Camden (+13), Gloucester (+13), Essex (+12), and Passaic (+12).

Other relatively positive county results include Union (+24), Monmouth (+23), Ocean (+23), and Middlesex (+22). The remaining counties score slightly below the statewide average: Hudson (+20), Warren (+19), Mercer (+18), Atlantic (+16), Burlington (+16), and Salem (+16).

It should be noted that the counties where residents report the highest satisfaction with New Jersey's quality of life tend to be wealthier, but this is not universally the case. For example, the percentage of residents in the top counties with six-figure household incomes ranges widely, including 27% in Morris, 38% in Hunterdon, 24% in Bergen, 44% in Somerset, 17% in Cape May, and 17% in Sussex. And while Cumberland, the county at the bottom of the list, has the fewest residents reporting six figure incomes (8%), the county with the next fewest \$100,000+ earners, Hudson (11%), scores near the statewide average on the Garden State Quality of Life Index.

### **Overall Rating of State and Hometown**

A key component of the Garden State Quality of Life Index score is residents' rating of the state as a place to live. On this measure, residents of Morris (80%) and Bergen (75%) are the most likely to say New Jersey is excellent or good, while the lowest state ratings come from the southern counties of Burlington (51%), Camden (50%), Salem (50%), Cumberland (47%), and Gloucester (47%).

When asked whether they would like to move out of the state at some point, Atlantic (60%) and Burlington (59%) residents are the most likely candidates to say yes. Residents of Hunterdon (44%), Bergen (42%), and Union (40%) are the least likely to want to leave New Jersey – although it's worth noting that 4-in-10 residents in these counties still would prefer to move elsewhere at some point in their lives.

When asked to rate their own hometown rather than the state as a place to live, residents of Morris (89%), Hunterdon (87%), Somerset (86%), and Bergen (85%) are the most positive. In general, more New Jerseyans give high marks to their hometown than say the same about the state as a whole. This is especially true in Somerset (86%) and Gloucester (72%) counties, where town ratings are 25 points higher than the state rating. Only in the heavily urbanized counties of Hudson (64%), Essex (59%), and Passaic (57%) do residents rate their own towns less positively than they do the state.

## Quality of Life by Community Type

The study also divided New Jersey towns into five different types of communities: Major Urban Centers, the six largest cities; Other Urban Areas, any municipality with a population over 25,000 or a high population density (including Atlantic City, Vineland, and some Union municipalities); Rural Areas, any town with a population density less than 1,000 people per square mile or a population less than 1,000 (excluding shore towns); Older Towns & Suburbs, any non-urban or non-rural municipality with slower population growth; Growing Suburbs; any non-urban or non-rural municipality with high population growth over the past two decades.

Urban areas score lower than suburban or rural areas on the Garden State Quality of Life Index. The major urban centers score lowest of all at +1 on the index. Other urban areas score slightly below the state average at +17. Suburban and rural areas tend to cluster together at a few points above the state average, ranging from +23 to +27.

<b>Garden State Quality of Life Index</b>	
<b>All New Jersey</b>	<b>+21</b>
<i>by Community Type</i>	
Major Urban Center	+1
Other Urban Area	+17
Older Town/Suburb	+23
Growing Suburb	+27
Rural Area	+23

Counties with higher concentrations of urban communities tend to score below the state average on the Garden State Quality of Life Index, but this effect is not consistent. Mercer County excluding Trenton would score +29 on the index, which is an 11 point increase from the entire county's score. Union County's score would also jump if only its suburban communities were considered, from an already above average +24 to a top tier score of +32. Index scores would also increase in other urbanized counties if only suburban communities were included in the calculations, but by a much smaller margin. This includes Passaic at +19, Essex at +18, and Camden at +15. [Since Hudson is an entirely urban county, there is no different score to report.]

Residents of New Jersey's six major urban centers are much less likely to rate their home town positively (41%) than say the same about the state (54%). Rural New Jerseyans, on the other hand, are as likely as their big city counterparts to rate the state positively (56%), but much more likely to give their hometowns high marks (79%).

Interestingly, there is very little variation by community type when residents are asked to rate the amount of development in their area – ranging from 44% to 50% positive – and local traffic – ranging from 30% to 37% positive in the urban and suburban areas, with only rural areas having a majority (51%) who rate this positively. There is also little variation in the availability

of jobs locally – about 1-in-4 urban and rural residents (23% major urban center, 26% other urban area, 24% rural area) rate this positively compared to 1-in-3 suburban residents (36% older town/suburb and 34% growing suburb). Similarly, few residents across the state say housing is affordable in their area, including 30% in major urban centers, 26% in other urban areas, 29% in older towns and suburbs, 31% in growing suburbs, and a slightly more positive 40% in rural areas.

As may be expected, some quality of life factors are rated much lower in urban areas than in other parts of the state, but there are also wide disparities between the state's six biggest cities and other urban communities in New Jersey. For example, between 74% and 79% of suburban and rural residents give positive marks to crime and safety in their local area. In the state's six big cities, this drops dramatically to 30%. Residents in other urban areas (55%) also feel significantly less safe than their suburban and rural neighbors, but at the same time feel significantly more safe than those who live in New Jersey's major urban centers.

In line with most stereotypical views, rural areas of New Jersey are seen as being the most neighborly. According to the survey's Neighborliness Index, 43% of rural residents score their neighbors high on this attribute, while only 16% score them low. Suburban residents are also more likely to view their area as neighborly, although not by the same margin as rural residents. In older towns and suburbs 36% give a high score and 21% give a low score, while in growing suburbs, 33% score high and 20% score low. Residents of other urban areas are split on the neighborliness of their communities – 24% high to 26% low. Major urban center residents, on the other hand, are much more negative about their neighbors, with just 18% scoring them high on the Neighborliness Index and 39% scoring them low.

## **Key County Findings**

This section presents thumbnail sketches of residents' views in each of New Jersey's 21 counties, presented in descending order of their Garden State Quality of Life Index score. The description does not list every facet of quality of life for that county, but focuses on areas where the county scores notably higher or lower than other counties in the state.

## New Jersey Quality of Life Metrics

*Percent giving a positive rating to:*

Quality of Life Index		New Jersey	Hometown	Environmental quality	Open space	Local schools	Crime and safety	Road conditions	Traffic	Public transit	Job opportunities	Affordable housing	Race relations	Cultural activities
+21	<b>NEW JERSEY</b>	63%	73%	66%	46%	64%	70%	53%	34%	58%	32%	31%	67%	64%
+42	<b>Morris</b>	80	89	77	64	72	86	67	34	57	49	28	79	82
+37	<b>Hunterdon</b>	69	87	85	73	74	89	64	44	25	44	28	75	76
+34	<b>Bergen</b>	75	85	63	46	71	83	61	23	69	44	25	74	74
+32	<b>Somerset</b>	61	86	78	51	71	83	57	21	42	41	23	75	83
+30	<b>Cape May</b>	64	78	86	63	68	84	58	61	29	10	24	71	49
+29	<b>Sussex</b>	63	76	87	69	69	80	75	37	13	21	33	68	54
+24	<b>Union</b>	65	69	58	44	64	65	51	31	78	36	26	72	63
+23	<b>Monmouth</b>	60	77	73	53	58	77	52	28	54	32	27	72	67
+23	<b>Ocean</b>	67	77	77	40	59	80	51	36	32	19	38	65	55
+22	<b>Middlesex</b>	65	77	65	42	64	73	49	34	56	35	33	70	71
+20	<b>Hudson</b>	70	64	50	33	61	51	48	28	88	29	28	57	62
+19	<b>Warren</b>	58	74	83	54	60	87	70	46	23	19	45	80	46
+18	<b>Mercer</b>	57	74	66	54	64	65	49	37	62	43	35	67	68
+16	<b>Atlantic</b>	59	73	75	42	65	68	56	48	59	18	44	58	53
+16	<b>Burlington</b>	51	70	73	60	71	76	61	46	37	31	26	68	57
+16	<b>Salem</b>	50	67	71	61	62	70	55	63	28	20	54	66	50
+13	<b>Camden</b>	50	68	63	41	70	62	43	26	64	28	38	70	56
+13	<b>Gloucester</b>	47	72	68	47	69	71	58	35	47	32	38	67	55
+12	<b>Essex</b>	63	59	53	33	55	51	44	39	74	29	25	60	57
+12	<b>Passaic</b>	64	57	54	42	56	53	46	42	64	28	25	52	58
+ 5	<b>Cumberland</b>	47	51	61	32	62	41	41	52	40	15	39	53	44

Morris (+42) – The county with the highest overall Garden State Quality of Life Index score also has the most positive state (80%) and hometown (89%) ratings. They also tend to be among those most satisfied with the availability of cultural activities (82%), positive toward their local schools (72%), confident in the quality of their drinking water (60%), satisfied with the amount of open space (64%), and positive about job prospects in their area (49%). Morris residents have among the highest sense of personal safety in their own neighborhoods (84%) and the crime rate in general (86%).

Residents of Morris County are also among those most likely to see the state’s diversity as a good thing (57%), although – with the exception of a sizable Asian community – this county has one of the least diverse populations in New Jersey.

Hunterdon (+37) – Hunterdon residents are among those most positive toward their hometowns (87%) and among those least likely to express a desire to leave New Jersey (44%). This county ranks as one of the most positive when it comes to residents' rating the quality of their local environment (85%) and satisfaction with the amount of open space (73%). Like their Morris neighbors, Hunterdon residents exhibit the highest sense of personal safety in their own neighborhoods (84%) and the crime rate in general (89%). They also give high ratings to their local schools (74%).

Hunterdon County also has the state's most engaged population – 55% say they are very interested in following state politics and 56% feel that they can personally make a difference in their own communities. Hunterdon residents are also among the least likely to express a low level of satisfaction with their own lives (16%). But if you live in this county expect to spend a lot of time in your car; 47% of residents drive more than 90 minutes a day.

Bergen (+34) – Residents of the northeastern corner of New Jersey give better than average ratings to both the state (75%) and their hometowns (87%) and are among the least likely to say they want to leave New Jersey someday (42%). On the other hand, Bergen's population rates housing affordability (25%) and traffic conditions (23%) less positively than, with nearly half (47%) saying they get stuck in traffic jams at least once a week.

Somerset (+32) – Somerset residents are among the most likely to give their hometown a positive rating (86%), but are only average in saying the same about New Jersey as a whole (61%). This 25 point differences ties with Gloucester as the largest disparity between state and town ratings among New Jersey's 21 counties. Somerset residents are the most positive New Jerseyans when it comes to rating access to health care (85%) and cultural activities (83%). But they are among the least positive on affordable housing (23%) and local traffic (21%). Somerset residents are also the most likely to see the state's racial and ethnic diversity as a good thing (59%).

Cape May (+30) – Perched on the southern tip of the Jersey Shore, Cape May residents stand out for the high ratings they give to the quality of their local environment (86%) and above average satisfaction with the amount of open space in their area (63%). This is also a county with one of the highest ratings for local traffic conditions (61%) even while it has one of the lowest ratings for public transit access (29%). Cape May residents also give very low ratings to the availability of jobs (10%) and affordable housing (24%) in their area. On the other hand, they are more likely than other New Jerseyans to say that their local services are worth what they pay in taxes, although this sentiment is still expressed by only 45% of the public.

Cape May residents consider their neighbors to be among the friendliest in the state, with 50% giving their local area a high rating on the survey's Neighborliness Index compared to just 17% who give a low rating. Also of note, Cape May residents are the least likely to report being lifelong New Jerseyans (32%).

Sussex (+29) – Tucked in the northwestern corner of the state, Sussex County residents are among those most positive about their local environment (87%), the condition of their local roads (75%), and the amount of open space in their area (69%). Even though roads and other services receive decent ratings, Sussex residents are the least likely to report that their local services are worth the taxes they pay (21%). Perhaps this is why there is a relatively high level of interest in following local politics (37%).

Sussex joins Cape May as the most neighborly counties in New Jersey, with 48% giving their local area a high rating on the survey's Neighborliness Index compared to just 14% who give a low rating. Unlike their counterparts at the opposite end of the state, though, Sussex residents are among the most likely to report being lifelong New Jerseyans (57%).

Union (+24) – Union County residents express opinions in line with state averages on most issues, but there are some apparent contradictions. They are the least likely to say they want to leave the state at some point (40%) while also expressing a high degree of distrust in their local government (38%). Union residents give high ratings to public transportation in their area (78%), but are also more likely than most to report getting caught in regular traffic jams (47%). Union County also has among the highest proportion of lifelong New Jersey residents (59%).

Monmouth (+23) – Monmouth County residents tend to trend along the state averages on nearly every metric in the survey. They are either a few points above the state average, such as when rating their hometowns and open space, or slightly below average, such as when rating their local schools and traffic conditions. One distinction is having a high number of lifelong New Jerseyans (57%).

Ocean (+23) – Ocean County residents tend to score slightly above average on most Garden State Quality of Life metrics, but give slightly lower than average ratings to the way land has been developed (41%) and the availability of public transportation (32%) in their area. There is also a relatively greater lack of confidence when it comes to their local government (39%). Ocean has a high proportion of lifelong New Jersey residents (58%). Residents of this county are among those most negative about the impact of immigration in New Jersey with 25% who say it has been good for the state compared to 48% who say it has been bad.

Middlesex (+22) – As their Garden State Quality of Life Index score suggests, Middlesex residents tend to be right down the middle. They score at or near the statewide average for most indicators measured in the survey including positive ratings of the state (65%) and their hometowns (77%). However, there is relatively more concern with water quality here than in other parts of the state – only 34% say they have no concern with their drinking water. Middlesex residents are also among those most likely to report getting stuck in traffic jams on a weekly basis (45%), although their rating of local traffic conditions (34%) is average for the state.

Hudson (+20) – Hudson is one of the few counties where residents actually give lower ratings to their hometowns (64%) than to the state as a whole (70%). However, they are much more satisfied than other New Jerseyans with public transportation access (88%) and the pace of development (60%) in their area. Nearly 2-in-3 (64%) Hudson residents use transit on at least a monthly basis, which is much higher than in any other county. On the other hand, crime and safety (51%), the environment (50%), open space (33%), and traffic (28%) get low marks in this county.

Hudson residents also lack confidence in their local government more than most New Jerseyans (40%) and express little interest in following state politics (27%). They are more likely to rate the neighborliness of their area low (32%) rather than high (21%), one of only three counties in New Jersey where this is the case. Hudson residents, who are among the poorest in the state, are also the least likely to express high levels of satisfaction with their personal lives (19%). Hudson County has one of the smaller populations of lifelong New Jerseyans (36%).

Warren (+19) – Warren County residents tend to be more positive than most New Jerseyans about local crime (87%), the quality of their environment (83%), and the condition of their roads (70%), but they are less positive about their access to cultural activities (46%), the pace of development (38%), access to public transportation (23%), and the availability of jobs (19%).

While Warren residents, with a population that is nearly 9-in-10 Caucasian, say race relations are good in their area (80%), they are among the most negative about immigration – 20% say it has been good for New Jersey while 40% say it has been bad. Warren County has a higher concentration of lifelong New Jerseyans (59%) than most other counties.

Mercer (+18) – Home to the seat of New Jersey’s government, Mercer residents express a higher than average interest in following both state (49%) and local (41%) politics. This may or may not be a good thing, as Mercer residents also express a relatively high lack of confidence when it comes to their local government (40%).

Atlantic (+16) – Atlantic County residents tend to score near the statewide average on most Garden State Quality of Life Index metrics. However, they are the most likely New Jerseyans to say they want to get out of the state (60%). Atlantic County residents are divided on the value of racial diversity – 31% say it has been good for the state and 27% bad – and are negative on the impact of immigration – 28% good to 39% bad.

Burlington (+16) – Burlington is another country where most residents (59%) say they want to leave New Jersey eventually, with only 51% rating the state a positive place to live. On the other hand, Burlington residents tend to be more satisfied than most New Jerseyans with the amount of open space in their area (60%).

Salem (+16) – Residents of New Jersey’s least populated county are also among the least positive about their state as a place to live (50%). They do give high ratings, though, to traffic conditions (63%), the amount of open space (61%) and housing affordability (54%) in their area. On the negative side is a lack of public transportation access (28%). Salem residents express ambivalence about the state’s racial diversity – 31% good to 25% bad – and are the most negative county on immigration – 23% good to 51% bad. Salem residents have a higher than average level of interest in following local politics (38%).

Camden (+13) – Camden County residents are among the least positive about the state as a place to live (50%). In their own area, few give positive marks to the conditions of local roads (43%) and traffic (26%). Nearly half report getting stuck in weekly traffic jams (46%). On a personal note, more Camden residents express low (34%) rather than high (25%) satisfaction levels with their own lives.

Gloucester (+13) – Gloucester joins Cumberland County in having the fewest residents willing to give New Jersey a positive rating as a place to live (47%). However, unlike their neighbors to the south, Gloucester residents are fairly positive about their own hometowns (72%). This matches the large 25 point state-town differential registered by Somerset residents. This low state rating is the main factor that brings down Gloucester’s overall Quality of Life Index score. This county’s residents are the most ambivalent New Jerseyans when it comes to the impact of diversity on the state – while 26% say it has been good and 21% say it has been bad, most residents take no position on this issue.

Essex (+12) – Essex is one of three counties where residents are slightly less positive about their towns (59%) than they are about the state (63%). While Essex gets high marks for the availability of public transportation (74%), they score lower than average on local schools (55%), the environment (53%), crime (51%), road conditions (44%), open space (33%), and affordable housing (25%). Essex is among the counties with the fewest lifelong New Jerseyans (38%). An above average 40% say they have little confidence in their local government and just 24% say that their local services are worth the taxes they pay.

Passaic (+12) – Passaic residents join Essex and Hudson residents in giving the state (64%) better ratings than their hometowns (57%). Passaic residents tend to be less positive than other New Jerseyans about their local schools (56%), local environment (54%), crime (53%), race relations (52%), the pace of development (41%), and the availability of affordable housing (25%). Passaic residents are also the least likely to say their area is a good place to raise a family (52%) and only 31% express a lot of confidence in how their local schools are run. Just 37% of Passaic residents are lifelong New Jerseyans.

Cumberland (+5) – Cumberland residents are the least likely to give either the state (47%) or their own hometowns (51%) positive ratings. They are significantly more negative than most other New Jerseyans on race relations (53%), access to health care (51%), availability of cultural activities (44%), crime (41%), the condition of their roads (41%),

and the availability of jobs (15%). In an area with a sizable migrant workforce, Cumberland residents tend to be more negative than most on the impact of immigration, with 23% saying it is a good thing to 43% who say it is bad for the state.

Most Cumberland residents (58%) are lifelong New Jerseyans. They have above average levels of interest in local politics (39%), although 39% say they have little confidence in their local government and just 24% say that their local services are worth the taxes they pay. While Cumberland County scores the lowest on the Garden State Quality of Life Index, its residents tend to feel the most empowered – 58% say they personally can make a difference in their community.

## **Conclusion**

There is a wide variation in how New Jerseyans from different parts of the state view the Garden State’s quality of life. Some like their town and local area much more than the state as a whole, while others feel the opposite. At the extreme end are Morris County residents, who say both their own backyard and by extension the entire Garden State are great places to live. At the other end of the spectrum are Cumberland County residents, who are much less positive about either their local area or the state as a whole. Most New Jerseyans, however, give mixed reviews. They tend to feel their own corner of the state is fine, but are less fond of the state as a whole.

When it comes to ratings of the local environment, the most positive residents tend to live along the upper reaches of the Delaware River or at the lower end of the Jersey Shore. The northwestern portion of the state also has the best roads according to residents there, while the most poorly rated roads are in Essex, Camden, and Cumberland. Housing prices tend to be most affordable in New Jersey’s more rural counties and less affordable practically everywhere else.

Interestingly, the counties with the highest scores on the Garden State Quality of Life Index come from every part of the state – north, central, and south – and represent a range of affluence, although the “wealth belt” of Hunterdon, Morris, and Somerset is fully represented here. On the other hand, the lowest scoring counties are either from South Jersey or the urban north.

Taken from north to south, the urbanized counties on or near the Hudson River include an above average county (Bergen), two average counties (Union and Hudson), and two below average counties (Essex and Passaic). The mountainous northwestern region includes the top county of Morris and above average Sussex as well as the average scoring Warren. In Central Jersey, Hunterdon and Somerset score above average, while Middlesex and Mercer are about average on the Garden State Quality of Life Index.

Among the Jersey Shore counties, Cape May is above average, Monmouth and Ocean are about average, and Atlantic is slightly below average. The remaining South Jersey counties of Burlington, Camden, Cumberland, Gloucester, and Salem all score below average on the Garden State Quality of Life Index.

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This report is the fourth in a series of Monmouth University Polling Institute reports on state residents' perceptions of New Jersey's quality of life.

The full set of survey results and methodology for the statewide sample can be found in the initial report, "**The Garden State's Quality of Life: A survey of New Jersey residents,**" available at:  
[http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/MonmouthU\\_NJQualityofLife\\_April2011.pdf](http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/MonmouthU_NJQualityofLife_April2011.pdf)

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## APPENDIX

**Survey Methodology:** The *Garden State Quality of Life* survey was conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute from December 1 to 15, 2010 with a statewide random sample of 2,864 adult residents. Sampling and live telephone interviewing services were provided by Braun Research, Inc. Smaller counties were oversampled so that the final survey included at least 100 survey respondents from each of New Jersey's 21 counties. Racial and ethnic minorities were also oversampled by screening for appropriate respondents in areas of minority population concentration. The survey results were then weighted to accurately reflect the New Jersey adult population for gender, age, education, race, and county.

For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling has a maximum margin of plus or minus 1.8 percentage points. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups, such as separate figures reported by gender or party identification, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The sampling error for the county level data discussed in this report ranges from  $\pm 6\%$  (Bergen, Middlesex), to  $\pm 7\%$  (Essex, Hudson),  $\pm 8\%$  (Monmouth, Morris, Passaic),  $\pm 9\%$  (Burlington, Camden, Mercer, Ocean, Somerset, Union), and  $\pm 10\%$  (Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Hunterdon, Salem, Sussex, Warren). In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

### Garden State Quality of Life Index:

- Overall, how would you rate New Jersey as a place to live – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?
- How would you rate your town or city as a place to live – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?
- How would you rate the quality of the environment in your area – excellent, good, only fair, or poor?
- How would you rate the job your local schools are doing - excellent, good, only fair, or poor?
- How safe do you feel in your neighborhood at night – very safe, somewhat safe, or not at all safe?

### Life Satisfaction Index:

- For this question, please think about a picture of a ladder. Suppose that the top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you, and the bottom represents the worst possible life for you. If the top step is "10" and the bottom step is "0", on which step of the ladder do you feel you personally stand at the present time?
- I'm going to read you a few statements. For each one please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.
  - I have enough time to spend with my family
  - I stay up at night worrying how to make ends meet
  - I find myself wishing I could live somewhere else
  - I feel like I belong in my community

### Local Area Index:

- How would you rate your town or city as a place to live - excellent, good, only fair, or poor?
- Now, I'd like your opinion of some different aspects of life in the area where you live. For each one I read, please tell me whether you would rate it as excellent, good, only fair, or poor
  - The quality of the environment
  - The amount of building and development
  - The condition of local roads
  - Traffic
  - Access to public transportation
  - The availability of good-paying jobs
  - The availability of affordable housing
  - The availability of cultural and recreational activities
  - Personal safety and crime
  - Race relations
  - Providing programs for the needy
  - Access to health care
  - As a place to raise a family
  - The job your local schools are doing

### Neighborliness Index:

- I'd like to ask you a few questions about your neighborhood. For each one please tell me if you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree.
  - Most of the people in my neighborhood are trustworthy
  - People in my neighborhood are always in a hurry
  - If a garbage can fell in front of my home a neighbor would pick it up for me
  - I feel comfortable going to a neighbor if I feel sad and need someone to talk to
  - I can ask a neighbor if I need someone to run an errand for me
  - I talk to my neighbors every day