

Life not yet normal after Sandy, poll finds

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Long Beach Island following Superstorm Sandy. Credit: New Jersey Army National Guard

Nearly three-quarters of New Jerseyans say life is not yet back to normal almost four months after Superstorm Sandy, and 77 percent call the storm a "transformative event," according to a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. A quarter of those personally affected by the storm report not having fully recovered, with more than 60 percent of those respondents reporting unrepaired damage to their home.

However, most New Jerseyans are not in a rush to repair damage at the shore; 62 percent say assessing potential for future damage should take precedence over rushing to rebuild before the summer tourist season. Almost eight in 10 (78 percent) want government to pay for repairs and rebuilding, although about half of these residents say property owners should share the cost. Seventeen percent want property owners to

shoulder the entire burden.

"New Jersey will be dealing with the effects of Superstorm Sandy for years," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers. "Whether Sandy will prove transformative depends on how its effects influence decisions about rebuilding and future [mitigation](#)."

Results are from a poll of 796 adult New Jerseyans conducted statewide among landline and cell phone households from Jan. 30 – Feb. 3 with a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percentage points.

Government's efforts earn good grades

Ninety-two percent of Garden Staters say Gov. Christie is handling Sandy recovery efforts at least "somewhat well"; 62 percent say "very well" though this top mark is down seven points from a November Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. President Obama doesn't fare quite as well – 82 percent say his post-Sandy work is going at least somewhat well, but only 44 percent say his efforts are going very well, a 12-point drop since November.

Respondents continue to give generally positive marks to FEMA and the Red Cross, although both are clearly down since November. Twenty-five percent say FEMA has handled its duties very well, a 12-point dip since the last poll. The Red Cross has experienced a nine-point drop to 42 percent very well over the same period. About 12 percent of Garden Staters affected by the storm report using the services of any disaster-assistance agency, up just three points from November.

Local government also receives positive ratings on Sandy recovery. Thirty-nine percent say their local government is doing very well with recovery, while another 38 percent say somewhat well.

"New Jerseyans continue to feel that first responders and political leadership have done a good job handling Sandy and its aftermath," said Redlawsk, "but some drop in sentiment from November is probably inevitable as the recovery continues. Few feel truly negative, however."

Those personally affected by Sandy are five points more likely than those who were not to say the governor is handling recovery very well. Even eight of 10 residents who don't like Christie personally give him positive ratings on Sandy recovery. In a reversal of his typical support, more women (66 percent) than men (58 percent) are likely to say Christie as doing very well.

Although Obama also receives strong marks for his Sandy efforts, partisanship defines his support: 15 percent of his detractors say he has handled Sandy recovery very well. Only 28 percent of Republicans, 41 percent of independents and 55 percent of Democrats give the president top marks. Like Christie, those directly affected by Sandy give Obama higher ratings than those who were not. Overall, though, majorities in every demographic group give both the governor and the president positive ratings.

Sandy's impact and recovery

In an interesting anomaly, only 46 percent of respondents said they had been "personally" affected by Superstorm Sandy, a large decline from the two-thirds who said so in a poll taken in Sandy's immediate aftermath. "It may simply be that for those least affected – perhaps losing power for a few hours, or having fallen trees blocking roads – the effects have faded from memory," Redlawsk said. "It is likely that right after Sandy, even small inconveniences felt large. Months later, those who faced more significant disruptions are most likely to still say Sandy had personal impact."

Fifty-one percent of shore residents say they were personally affected; the number rises to 62 percent in northwest exurban counties, while only 23 percent of South Jersey/Philadelphia area residents say they were affected by Sandy. Fifty-four percent of urban and 46 percent of suburban residents felt Sandy's impact.

Almost three-quarters of New Jerseyans say the state is not back to normal, and women are 13 points more likely than men to feel this way (80 percent versus 67 percent). At least 80 percent of older residents feel the same.

Similarly, residents of the storm-battered exurban and shore areas, as well as women statewide are most likely to see Sandy as a transformative event (80 percent, 84 percent, and 82 percent respectively). Feelings about Sandy and its aftermath are not conditioned by personal experience.

Those personally affected by Sandy have the highest regard for FEMA: 28 percent say FEMA has done very well compared to 22 percent of those not personally impacted by the storm. But being directly affected by the [superstorm](#) does not influence beliefs about the performance of local government or the Red Cross. While one in eight residents used a disaster-assistance agency's services, there is little reported difference in frequency of use by region.

Still, one-third of those affected reported property damage to their insurance companies, with residents of exurban and shore counties most likely to do so (39 and 41 percent, respectively). Most (72 percent) who contacted insurance companies have received compensation for damages.

Residents in no rush to rebuild shore but want

government to pay

More than six in 10 residents (62 percent) are cautious about rebuilding at the shore and believe assessments of the potential for future damage should be made before rebuilding, compared to the third who want to rebuild before the summer tourism season. Those personally affected by the storm are slightly less likely to want immediate action; 32 percent want to rebuild immediately while 37 percent of unaffected residents agree. Residents of Ocean, Monmouth, and Atlantic counties are more anxious than most to get started, with 39 percent supporting immediate rebuilding. Forty-two percent of those in south Jersey, including Cape May County, feel the same. New Jerseyans distant from the shore favor assessment first.

As for who foots the bill, 17 percent say that individuals should pay for their own property damage – but most expect government to pay, either alone (38 percent) or in combination with property owners (40 percent).

Partisanship plays a major role in determining financial liability. Republicans and independents are twice as likely as Democrats to say property owners are responsible for the cost. Half of Democrats believe government alone should pay, versus 35 percent of independents and 26 percent of Republicans. Forty-seven percent of Republicans favor sharing costs between owners and government compared to 38 percent of independents and Democrats.

Of those who say only government should pay, almost half (48 percent) think it is the responsibility of the federal government, while 22 percent say the state should pay. One in five (21 percent) say payment should come from a combination of governmental levels and 9 percent say local government should bear the cost.

Provided by Rutgers University

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