

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Monday's *Star-Ledger*. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll."

In this release *The Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll includes a classification of voters that is based on how firmly they support a candidate. A "firm voter" is one who selects a candidate and says they are "very sure" about their choice and will not change their mind before the election. "Not firm voters" are those who select a candidate and say they might change their mind or who are initially undecided.

All of the percentages in this release, unless otherwise indicated, are based on New Jersey residents who report that they are registered to vote.

The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll web address: <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~eaglepol>

1997 GUBERNATORIAL RACE:

ISSUES: AUTO INSURANCE, TAXES, EDUCATION CIVILITY OF CAMPAIGN

Auto insurance, taxes, and education are three issues being discussed in the New Jersey Gubernatorial Election. By a margin of 42 to 25 percent, more voters say Democratic challenger Jim McGreevey would do a better job at handling auto insurance than incumbent Governor Christie Whitman. On the issue of taxes, Whitman (39%) has a slight advantage over McGreevey (34%). The voters are about evenly divided on which candidate would do a better job improving education with 35 percent selecting McGreevey and 34 percent saying Whitman would be more successful handling this issue.

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“Auto insurance has been the core issue in the 1997 Governatorial race. While McGreevey has effectively used auto insurance to attract voters, Whitman’s support on this issue has eroded,” commented Janice Ballou, Director of the Poll.

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll of 631 registered voters conducted by telephone between October 12 and 15, 1997 also found that about half of the voters say the campaign for Governor has been positive. This impression is in sharp contrast to the 1996 U.S. Senate race between Republican Dick Zimmer and Democrat Robert Torricelli when half of the voters said the campaign was negative.

AUTO INSURANCE

At this time, about seven-in-ten (70%) voters say that they have read or heard a great deal (26%) or some (44%) about the candidates’ suggestions on how to reform auto insurance while 3-in-10 have read or heard not much (20%) or nothing at all (9%). This awareness of the candidates’ plans for auto insurance reform is about the same as it was in the September Poll.

Among those who have heard about the candidates’ suggestions to reform auto insurance, more have heard about Whitman’s plan (41%) than McGreevey’s proposal (29%). Another 21 percent say they have heard equally about both of the candidates’ plans for auto insurance, and 10 percent have not heard of either plan (6%) or don’t know whose plan they’ve heard more about (4%).

By a margin of 42 to 25 percent, more voters say that McGreevey will do a better job of handling the issue of auto insurance than Whitman. However, 32 percent don’t have an opinion on which candidate can better handle this issue. Since September there has been a 5 percentage point decline in those who select Whitman as better able to handle this issue and a 6 percent point increase in those who feel McGreevey is the better candidate on this issue. As would be expected, firm Whitman supporters (65%) select the Governor as being able to do a better job on this issue. However, this is a 14 percentage point decline from the 79 percent of her supporters that thought she would do a better job in September. Firm McGreevey voters (85%) select their candidate as the best to handle auto insurance which is about the same as in the September Poll. Among those who are not firm in

their selection of a candidate, McGreevey (41%) has more support than Whitman (16%) while 43 percent say that they don't know which candidate will do a better job. The support for McGreevey among those who are not firm in their choice of a candidate is a 6 percentage point increase from 35 percent in the September Poll and for Whitman it is a 6 percentage point decline from 22 percent among these voters.

TAXES

At this time, about two-thirds (66%) of the voters say that they have read or heard a great deal (13%) or some (53%) about the candidates' suggestions to on how to reform taxes while one-third percent have not heard much (24%) or nothing at all (10%). Awareness of the candidates' plans for tax reforms has increased about 22 percentage points from 44 percent in the September Poll.

Among those who have heard about the candidates' suggestions to reform taxes, more have heard about Whitman's plan (42%) than McGreevey's proposal (24%). Another 21 percent have heard equally about both of the candidates' plans and 13 percent have not heard of either plan (8%) or don't know whose plan they've heard more about (5%).

By a margin of 39 to 34 percent, voters are somewhat more likely to select Whitman over McGreevey as the candidate they think will do a better job of handling the tax issue while 26 percent don't know who they would select. Ninety percent of the voters who are firm in their selection of Whitman say that she would be best to handle the tax issue. Among firm McGreevey supporters, 88 percent select the Democrat on this issue. Voters who are not firm in their support for a candidate are about equal in their support for Whitman (32%) and McGreevey (29%) with 39 percent still undecided about who will do a better job with the tax issue.

EDUCATION

Less than half of the voters say that they have read or heard a great deal (8%) or some (37%) about the candidates' suggestions to improve education in New Jersey while 54 percent have heard not much (33%) or nothing at all (21%).

Among those who have heard about the candidates' suggestions to improve education, more have heard about Whitman's plan (44%) than McGreevey's proposal (14%). Another 14 percent have heard equally about both of the candidates' plans and 28 percent have not heard of either plan (19%) or don't know whose plan they've heard more about (9%).

Equal percentages of voters select McGreevey (35%) and Whitman (34%) as the candidate they think will do a better job of improving education while 32 percent don't know who they would select. Seventy-seven percent of the voters who are firm in their selection of Whitman say that she would be best to handle education issues. Among firm McGreevey supporters, 79 percent select the Democrat on this issue. Among voters who are not firm in their support for a candidate, McGreevey (28%) and Whitman (26%) are about equal.

Overall, half of the voters say that the public schools in New Jersey are doing an excellent (9%) or good (41%) job compared to 44 percent who rate the schools only fair (28%) or poor (16%). Firm Whitman supporters (58%) are more likely than firm McGreevey voters (44%) to give the public schools positive ratings. About half (52%) of the voters who are not firm in their choice of candidates give the public schools positive ratings.

While 38 percent of the voters say the quality of education in New Jersey has been about the same over the last few years, 28 percent report it has gotten better, and 25 percent feel it is worse. Firm Whitman supporters (39%) are more likely than firm McGreevey voters (21%) and those who have not yet firmly decided about a candidate (28%) to say the quality of education in New Jersey has gotten better.

CIVILITY OF THE CAMPAIGN

Half (54%) of New Jersey voters say that, in general, this year's campaign for Governor has been positive while 32 percent rate it as negative. In comparison, 55 percent thought the 1996 Presidential race between Bob Dole, and Bill Clinton, and Ross Perot was positive and 17 percent rated the 1996 U.S. Senate race between Dick Zimmer and Bob Torricelli as positive. Firm Whitman

supporters (63%) are more likely than firm McGreevey supporters (48%) and those who are not yet firm in their choice of a candidate (54%) to say the campaign has been positive.

Among those who think the campaign has been negative, 35 percent say Whitman's campaign has been more negative, 31 percent say McGreevey's has been more negative, and 25 percent rate both campaigns as being equally negative. Half (54%) of the firm Whitman supporters who rate the campaign as being negative say McGreevey's campaign is more negative than the Governor's campaign. In comparison, 70 percent of firm McGreevey supporters who rate the campaign as negative feel Whitman has been more negative. Voters who are not firm in their choice of candidate and who think the campaign is negative select Whitman (29%) and McGreevey (32%) about equally with 35 percent saying both campaigns have been negative. Overall, 8-in-10 voters report that the way this year's campaign for Governor has been conducted will not make any difference in their intention to vote on Election Day.

- 30 -

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The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between October 12 and October 15, 1997, when a random sample of 800 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about ± 3.5 percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets. This data has been weighted using voter registration information from the New Jersey Secretary of State ' s office for party identification.

NOTE: FOR THIS RELEASE THE FINDINGS ON THE ELECTION ARE BASED ON 631 REGISTERED VOTERS AND HAVE A MARGIN OF ERROR OF ± 4 PERCENT.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE SL/EP65-2 (EP115-2), MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1997

“How much have you read or heard about the candidates’ suggestions to reform taxes in New Jersey--a great deal, some, not much, or nothing at all?” [Q.24]

	A Great <u>Deal</u>	Some <u>Some</u>	Not <u>Much</u>	Nothing <u>At All</u>	Don ' t <u>Know</u>	Total	(n)
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	13%	53%	24%	10%	1%	101%	(631)
--Likely Voters	14	54	24	8	1	101	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	13	47	27	12	1	100	(201)
--Independent	12	56	23	8	1	100	(205)
--Republican	16	50	22	12	--	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	17	47	24	11	2	101	(184)
--Undecided	7	57	25	10	--	99	(266)
--McGreevey	24	50	19	6	1	100	(140)
PAST SURVEYS							
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	5	39	39	17	--	100	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	5	43	38	14	--	100	(219)
--Independent	6	37	40	17	--	100	(219)
--Republican	5	38	37	19	--	99	(213)

AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD ABOUT TAX REFORM PROPOSALS:

"And, which candidate's suggestions to reform taxes have you heard the most about?" [Q.24a]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	42%	24%	21%	8%	5%	100%	(566)
--Likely Voters	43	24	20	8	6	101	(536)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	45	22	21	8	4	100	(175)
--Independent	42	25	22	7	4	100	(189)
--Republican	43	26	15	11	5	100	(176)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	47	23	18	8	4	100	(165)
--Undecided	45	20	21	9	6	101	(236)
--McGreevey	37	35	21	2	5	100	(129)
PAST SURVEYS							
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	55	20	9	12	3	99	(548)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	48	30	8	11	3	100	(184)
--Independent	55	19	9	14	3	100	(179)
--Republican	63	14	8	13	1	99	(170)

"Which candidate do you think would do a better job at handling the issue of taxes (Christie Whitman) or (Jim McGreevey)?" [Q.25]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997					
--Registered Voters	39%	34%	26%	99%	(631)
--Likely Voters	40	35	25	100	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	20	49	31	100	(201)
--Independent	34	38	28	100	(205)
--Republican	75	11	14	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	90	1	10	101	(184)
--Undecided	32	29	39	100	(266)
--McGreevey	2	88	10	100	(140)
PAST SURVEYS					
September, 1997					
--Registered Voters	40	30	30	100	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	25	49	26	100	(219)
--Independent	35	31	34	100	(219)
--Republican	70	10	20	100	(213)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	92	2	6	100	(180)
--Undecided	33	26	41	100	(344)
--McGreevey	3	85	13	101	(121)

"Both candidates have made suggestions on how to reform auto insurance. How much have you read or heard about these proposals--a great deal, some, not much, or nothing at all?" [Q.26]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	26%	44%	20%	9%	1%	100%	(631)
--Likely Voters	27	45	20	8	1	101	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	25	40	24	9	2	100	(201)
--Independent	26	46	19	9	--	100	(205)
--Republican	28	42	22	8	1	101	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	32	38	21	9	--	100	(184)
--Undecided	20	46	22	11	1	100	(266)
--McGreevey	34	43	17	6	--	100	(140)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	17	50	21	11	--	99	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	14	50	26	9	1	100	(219)
--Independent	18	47	21	13	--	99	(219)
--Republican	16	60	13	10	--	99	(213)
June, 1997							
--Registered Voters	10	39	30	19	1	99	(633)

AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD ABOUT AUTO INSURANCE PROPOSALS:

"And, which candidate's suggestions to reform auto insurance have you heard to most about?" [Q.26a]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	41%	29%	21%	6%	4%	101%	(569)
--Likely Voters	41	28	21	6	4	100	(537)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	41	34	18	5	2	100	(179)
--Independent	41	28	25	4	3	101	(186)
--Republican	45	25	14	11	4	99	(180)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	44	23	23	7	3	100	(168)
--Undecided	47	22	20	7	6	102	(232)
--McGreevey	25	48	20	3	3	99	(132)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
September, 1997							
--Registered Voters	61	20	14	2	3	100	(598)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	58	21	16	3	2	100	(196)
--Independent	61	23	12	1	3	100	(188)
--Republican	63	15	17	3	2	100	(194)

"Which candidate do you think would do a better job at handling the issue of auto insurance [Christie Whitman] or [Jim McGreevey]? [ROTATE]" [Q.27]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September, 1997					
--Registered Voters	25%	42%	32%	99%	(631)
--Likely Voters	26	42	33	101	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	13	57	30	100	(201)
--Independent	22	45	33	100	(205)
--Republican	51	24	25	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	65	8	27	100	(184)
--Undecided	16	41	43	100	(266)
--McGreevey	2	85	13	100	(140)
PAST SURVEYS					
September, 1997					
--Registered Voters	30	36	34	100	(673)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	16	57	27	100	(219)
--Independent	26	36	38	100	(219)
--Republican	56	16	28	100	(213)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	79	3	18	100	(180)
--Undecided	22	35	42	99	(344)
--McGreevey	--	85	15	100	(121)
June, 1997					
--Registered Voters	32	31	36	99	(633)

"In general, how would you rate the job public schools are doing here in New Jersey -- Excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.28]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	9%	41%	28%	16%	6%	100%	(631)
--Likely Voters	9	41	28	16	6	100	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	9	39	31	13	8	100	(201)
--Independent	10	36	30	19	5	100	(205)
--Republican	12	45	26	11	6	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	12	46	24	12	6	100	(184)
--Undecided	9	43	29	12	7	100	(266)
--McGreevey	7	37	30	24	3	101	(140)
PAST SURVEYS*							
February, 1996	10	42	28	11	9	100	(804)
September, 1993	7	32	33	22	6	100	(801)
January, 1992	9	33	32	20	6	100	(800)
October, 1987	11	42	29	10	8	100	(1,000)
August, 1985	9	36	31	14	11	101	(800)
October, 1983	8	40	32	12	8	100	(802)

* Asked of all adults

"Thinking back over the last few years, would you say that the quality of education in New Jersey has been getting better, getting worse, or has it stayed the same?" [Q.29]

	<u>Getting Better</u>	<u>Getting Worse</u>	<u>Stayed The Same</u>	<u>Depends (Vol)</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	28%	25%	38%	1%	8%	100%	(631)
--Likely Voters	28	25	38	1	8	100	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	28	22	40	--	10	100	(201)
--Independent	27	29	37	1	6	100	(205)
--Republican	31	22	35	--	11	99	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	39	16	37	--	7	99	(184)
--Undecided	28	20	41	2	9	100	(266)
--McGreevey	21	36	38	--	5	100	(140)

"How much have you read or heard about the candidates' suggestions to improve education in New Jersey?" [Q.30]

	<u>A Great Deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing At All</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	8%	37%	33%	21%	2%	101%	(631)
--Likely Voters	8	37	34	20	2	101	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	9	42	32	16	2	101	(201)
--Independent	6	37	33	23	1	100	(205)
--Republican	10	35	40	14	1	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	9	32	35	21	2	99	(184)
--Undecided	5	35	34	25	1	100	(266)
--McGreevey	11	51	25	11	2	100	(140)

AMONG THOSE WHO HAVE HEARD ABOUT EDUCATION PROPOSALS:

"And, which candidates' suggestions to improve education have you heard the most about -- Jim McGreevey's or Christie Whitman's?" [ROTATE CANDIDATE CHOICES] [Q.30a]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	44%	14%	14%	19%	9%	100%	(502)
--Likely Voters	43	14	14	20	9	100	(474)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	44	20	7	20	9	100	(164)
--Independent	41	13	20	19	7	100	(156)
--Republican	49	12	6	22	11	100	(167)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	52	8	9	22	9	100	(149)
--Undecided	47	12	16	16	10	101	(201)
--McGreevey	29	25	18	20	9	101	(120)

"Which candidate do you think would do a better job at handling the issue of education -- [Christie Whitman] or [Jim McGreevey]?" [ROTATE CANDIDATE CHOICES] [Q.31]

Don't

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997					
--Registered Voters	34%	35%	32%	101%	(631)
--Likely Voters	33	35	32	100	(589)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	18	49	33	100	(201)
--Independent	28	36	36	100	(205)
--Republican	63	16	21	100	(196)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>					
--Whitman	77	8	15	100	(184)
--Undecided	26	28	46	100	(266)
--McGreevey	4	79	17	100	(140)

"Based upon what you have seen or heard of the campaign for Governor, would you say that in general this year's campaign has been positive or negative?" [Q.32]

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Negative</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997							
--Registered Voters	54%	32%	3%	2%	8%	99%	(631)
--Likely Voters	55	32	3	2	8	100	(589)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>							
--Whitman	63	26	4	2	5	100	(184)
--Undecided	54	32	3	2	9	100	(266)
--McGreevey	48	37	3	5	7	100	(140)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
October, 1996 - Presidential	55	33	5	3	5	101	(810)
October, 1996 - Senate	17	55	2	1	25	100	(810)

"[IF "NEGATIVE" OR "BOTH" IN Q.32] In your view, whose campaign has been more negative, [Whitman's] or [McGreevey's]?" [Q.32a]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
October, 1997						
--Registered Voters	35%	31%	25%	9%	100%	(224)
--Likely Voters	33	32	26	9	100	(208)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	51	18	22	9	100	(76)
--Independent	34	34	26	6	100	(76)
--Republican	14	55	26	6	101	(61)
<u>Firm Vote Choice</u>						
--Whitman	11	54	26	9	100	(56)
--Undecided	29	32	35	4	100	(93)
--McGreevey	70	6	8	17	101	(54)

"Has the way this year's campaign for Governor been conducted made you more likely or less likely to go out and vote, or hasn't it made a difference?" [Q.33]

	<u>More Likely</u>	<u>Less Likely</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
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October, 1997

--Registered Voters	13%	5%	81%	1%	100%	(631)
--Likely Voters	14	4	82	1	101	(589)

Firm Vote Choice

--Whitman	11	--	88	--	99	(184)
--Undecided	15	5	79	2	101	(266)
--McGreevey	14	6	80	--	100	(140)

View of Campaign

--Positive	16	2	83	--	101	(340)
--Negative/Both	12	10	78	--	100	(224)

PAST SURVEYS

October, 1996 - Presidential	19	4	77	1	101	(810)
October, 1996 - Senate	10	10	76	4	100	(810)