

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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CONTACT: CLIFF ZUKIN

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Friday, September 18 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

SEX, LIES AND...THE PRESIDENCY

New Jersey's take on the Bill Clinton--Monica Lewinsky sex scandal can be summed up pretty easily, according to the most recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll: *"OK, so the President had a sexual relationship with an intern, lied about it and got caught. Impeach him? Are you people crazy? Get a life."*

The survey of 400 residents taken between Monday and Wednesday of this week finds that while seven-in-ten believe that Clinton lied under oath, only one-in-four thinks he should resign or that the House should begin impeachment proceedings. About 30 percent feel Clinton should be censured and just over 40 percent think no formal disciplinary action should be taken.

While not wanting to severely punish the President, the public is unconvinced by his contriteness. More believe his apology is motivated by politics (51 percent) than believe he is "truly sorry" (41 percent) for his actions. But even though many think less of Clinton as a person because of the affair, most continue to feel positively about his performance in office. Sixty-three percent say he is doing an "excellent" or "good" job as President, basically unchanged from June of this year. The poll's margin of error is plus or minus 5 percentage points.

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics

191 Ryders Lane, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901

Phone: 732-932-9384 - Website: <http://slerp.rutgers.edu> - Fax: 732-932-6778

The survey also shows a public concerned with how its political system is handling the White House sex scandal. Just one-third believe the political process is working well, while 62 percent say it is "out of control." And there is concern that Bill Clinton will emerge from the process crippled in his ability to lead the country. One-third feel he will be hurt "a lot" in his ability to be an effective president for the rest of his term and another 30 percent expect him to be hurt "some." By way of comparison, just one-fifth of New Jersey residents felt Ronald Reagan would be hurt a lot by Congressional hearings into the Iran-Contra scandal in 1987.

There has been tremendous media exposure to the Independent Council Kenneth Starr's report, with 72 percent saying they had followed news reports at least fairly closely, including one-third who followed this story "very" closely. One-quarter of New Jerseyans reported being "shocked or surprised" by something in the report.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll commented, "It's hard to tell what New Jerseyans are more upset with. Bill Clinton for having the affair or the Independent Council and the media for keeping it alive. The situation has turned into a political tar-baby. No one who touches it comes out looking good."

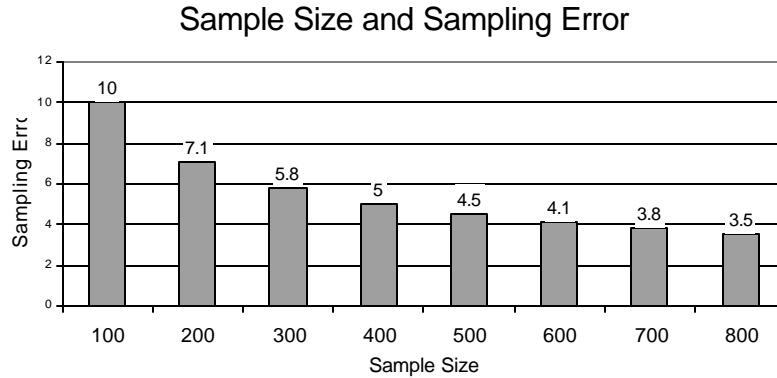
Respondents were asked if felt better or worse about a number of actors in the unfolding drama since the Starr report was released. Significant numbers said they felt worse about Clinton, Starr, Lewinsky, Congress, the news media, and the political process as a whole. Positive changes outnumbered negative ones only for First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, while opinion about Vice President Al Gore seems largely unaffected.

Interestingly, New Jerseyans reacted almost identically to both Clinton and Starr, the two main combatants. Forty-three percent said they came to think worse of Clinton after the Starr report, while 10 percent said they actually thought better of him and the remainder said their views were unchanged. Forty-three percent also said they came to think worse of Starr himself, compared to 13 percent better. An even larger number, 51 percent, said they thought worse of Monica Lewinsky, only 4 percent said they thought better of the former White House intern. New Jerseyans also generally critical of the institutions involved. They expressed great scorn for the messenger--a majority of Garden State residents (51 percent) said their view of the news media had worsened as a result of their role in reporting the affair. Only 7 percent said their view of the media had changed for the better. There were more reported negative than positive changes in views of Congress, by a margin of 25 to 12 percent. And far more claimed to have a worse view of the political system as a whole (37 percent) than have been comforted by what they have seen in Washington (7 percent).

Positive changes of Mrs. Clinton outnumbered negative ones by a margin of 29 to 17 percent with the remainder saying their opinion of her had not changed. Five percent said they thought better of Al Gore, 12 percent worse, with the vast remainder saying their opinion of him had not changed.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP70-1 (EP120-1), FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1998

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between September 14 and 16, 1998, when a scientifically selected random sample of 400 New Jersey adult residents was interviewed by telephone. 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 for the total sample size of 400 is just over ± 5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jerseyans were found to have a favorable opinion of the Governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 45 and 55 percent (50 ± 5) had all New Jerseyans 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 for men and women, are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error.



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 background 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. Two versions of the questionnaire were used in this study. Not all questions were on both versions.

“How would you rate the job Bill Clinton is doing as President -- excellent, good, only fair or poor?” [C1]

	Excellent	Good	Only Fair	Poor	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	20%	43%	21%	15%	2%	101%	403
PAST SURVEYS							
June, 1998	14%	47%	27%	10%	3%	101%	(602)
February, 1998	27%	42%	19%	10%	2%	100%	(802)
October, 1997	9%	48%	30%	10%	4%	101%	(800)
February, 1997	8%	43%	34%	13%	1%	99%	(800)

“How closely have you been following news reports of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr’s report on the sexual relationship between Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky -- very closely, fairly closely, not too closely or not at all closely?” [C2]

	Very closely	Fairly	Not too	Not at all	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	34%	38%	19%	9%	1%	101%	(403)

“Has there been anything in the report that shocked or surprised you, or did you already know most of the story?” [C3]

	Shocked/Surprised	Already knew	Don't Know/Refused	Total	(n)
September, 1998	27%	62%	10%	99%	(403)

“How much do you think the Monica Lewinsky affair will hurt Clinton’s ability to be an effective president for the rest of his term – will this hurt him a lot, some, a little or not at all?” [C4]

	Lot	Some	A little	Not at all	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	34%	30%	13%	21%	3%	101%	(403)

Similar question asked in SL/EP115-1 (EP65-1). Released June 14, 1987.

“How much do you think the Congressional hearings into the Iran-Contra arms affair will hurt Reagan’s ability to be an effective president for the rest of his term – will they hurt him a lot, some, a little or not at all?”

	Lot	Some	A little	Not at all	Don't Know	Total	(n)
June, 1987	21%	36%	22%	15%	6%	100%	(800)
<i>Party—June 1987</i>							
Democrat	27	38	18	12	5	100	(234)
Independent	19	35	21	17	8	100	(312)
Republican	16	39	24	18	3	100	(214)

“Do you think Bill Clinton lied under oath or not?” [C5]

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	73%	16%	11%	100%	(403)

“Do you think Bill Clinton is truly sorry for what he did, or is he just saying that because he has to?” [C6]

	Truly sorry	Has to say so	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	41%	52%	8%	101%	(403)

“Do you think Bill Clinton should or should not resign as President?” [C7]

	Should	Should not	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	26%	70%	4%	100%	(403)

“Do you think the House of Representatives should begin impeachment proceedings against Clinton, or not?” [C8]

	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	26%	69%	4%	99%	(403)

“What do you think would be the most appropriate action in this case: Should Clinton have to leave office, be censured by the Congress, or should there be no formal action taken?” [C9]

	Leave office	Censured	No action	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998	23%	29%	42%	7%	101%	(403)

“Overall in this matter, do you think the political process is working well, or are things pretty much out of control?” [C10]

	Working well	Out of control	Both (VOL)	DK/Refused	Total	(n)
September, 1998	33%	62%	3%	3%	101%	(403)

“I'm going to read you some people or groups who are involved in this matter. For each one please tell me if you think better of them, worse of them, or if your opinion hasn't changed since the Starr report came out. (The questions C11A to H have been rotated)” [C11]

	Better	Worse	No difference	Don't Know	Total	(n)
September, 1998						
(A) Bill Clinton	10%	43%	45%	2%	100%	(403)
(B) Hillary Clinton	29%	17%	50%	3%	99%	(403)
(C) Kenneth Starr	13%	43%	38%	7%	101%	(403)
(D) The news media	7%	51%	41%	1%	100%	(403)
(E) The political system as a whole	7%	37%	53%	3%	100%	(403)
(F) Al Gore	5%	12%	76%	7%	100%	(403)
(G) The Congress	12%	25%	57%	6%	100%	(403)
(H) Monica Lewinsky	4%	51%	38%	7%	100%	(403)