

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 the Sunday, January 17 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

RELEASE: SL/EP 71-1 (EP121-1)

**JOB PERFORMANCE: WHITMAN GOOD; CLINTON GREAT
WHITMAN'S POLITICAL FUTURE: ANOTHER CLOSE RACE (vs. LAUTENBERG)?
And
THE MYSTERY OF THE DISAPPEARING REPUBLICANS**

Time appears to have stood still for Governor Christie Whitman. A new poll, largely completed before her State of the State address last week, finds virtually no change over the last year in her job performance rating (good, but not great) or the number of state residents feeling she has some major accomplishment to point to (about one-in-four).

While few in the state feel Whitman has brought about a major reduction in the taxes people pay, many see some positive movement in that direction. Moreover, the majority believes the Governor has a clear vision for making the state a better place to live. The latest Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll finds that Whitman would run a close race for the seat currently held by Frank Lautenberg should she decide to run for the Senate in the year 2000, as would former Governor Tom Kean.

These are some of the main findings of a statewide survey of 800 residents conducted between January 7 and 13. The poll also indicates that Democrats may be gaining strength in the State. The number of citizens identifying themselves as Republicans has dropped and the number calling themselves Democrats has increased since the 1997 gubernatorial election. In addition, President Clinton's job performance rating remains strongly positive in the face of his trial in the Senate.

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

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Half of New Jersey residents give Governor Whitman a positive job performance rating of excellent or good; one-third think she is doing only a fair job as Governor and 14 percent say she is doing a poor job. Whitman receives positive marks from three-quarters of Republicans, just under half of Independents and from 37 percent of Democrats.

In comparison, two-thirds of Garden State residents think Clinton is doing an excellent or good job as President, with another fifth saying he is doing only a fair job and a tenth saying he is doing a poor job. Democrats (87%) and minorities (83%) are extremely strong supporters of Clinton, although he receives positive marks from the vast majority of Independents (63%) and from a substantial minority of New Jersey Republicans (42%) as well.

Whitman's job performance rating has hovered at about 50 percent positive since June of 1994, shortly after she was elected. The only noticeable dip in her popularity came during her re-election battle of 1997 with Democratic gubernatorial candidate Jim McGreevy. As McGreevy focused his campaign advertising on the state's high car insurance cost and property taxes Whitman's job performance rating dropped to 43 percent in October, just before the election. Whitman won re-election by about one percent of the vote.

But while Whitman has recovered from the blows landed during the gubernatorial campaign, that election appears to have been the first of a one-two punch that currently has rank and file New Jersey Republicans on the ropes, according to Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll. Zukin commented, "Following McGreevy's class-oriented campaign, the Republican-led impeachment of a very popular President is the second action in a short period of time that has worked to the Democrats advantage. We are finding fewer self-identified Republicans in New Jersey than at any time in at least the last few years."

The current survey finds just 22 percent of New Jersey residents saying they think of themselves as Republicans, with another 13 percent saying they are Independents who lean

towards the GOP. In contrast to this total of 35 percent Republican, 52 percent either identify themselves as Democrats or as Independents who lean towards the Democratic party.

Zukin noted, "The net democratic advantage was about 7 percentage points before the 1997 gubernatorial election. It increased to about 10 to 12 points before the election and stayed there in the year afterwards. It has now jumped again to a gap of 17 points with the Republican-led impeachment of Clinton. Whether the gap recedes after the Senate trial is concluded remains to be seen, but at this point the Republicans appear to be in danger of seeing their base shrink in New Jersey."

Just over one-quarter (28%) feel that Whitman has some major accomplishment to point to during her time in office, and another half of the public feels she has at least minor accomplishments. But it appears that the Governor has only a mild reputation as a tax-cutter in her home state. At the time of the survey, largely completed before her State of the State speech proposal for a tax rebate, just 6 percent said Whitman has cut the taxes people in New Jersey pay by "a lot." About half said she had cut taxes by "a little," and 36 percent said she had cut the taxes that people in New Jersey pay "not at all."

A relatively small number--16 percent--said they felt Whitman has increased the state's future debt "a lot" through the sale of bonds, with another 34 percent saying she increased future debt at least "a little." Many--44 percent--said they were unfamiliar with the Governor's record in this area.

New Jerseyans are fairly ambivalent about Governor Whitman taking on U.S. Senator Frank Lautenberg in 2000. Just under a majority of the state's registered voters--44 percent--say they would like to see Whitman run against Lautenberg, even if it meant she had to leave office as Governor one year before her term is up. Another 36 percent said they would not like to see her run against the three-term Democratic incumbent, and the remaining fifth said they had no opinion one way or the other. A majority of Republicans (54%) said they would like to see

Whitman run, although a sizeable plurality of those in her own party say they would not like to see her make the race (29%).

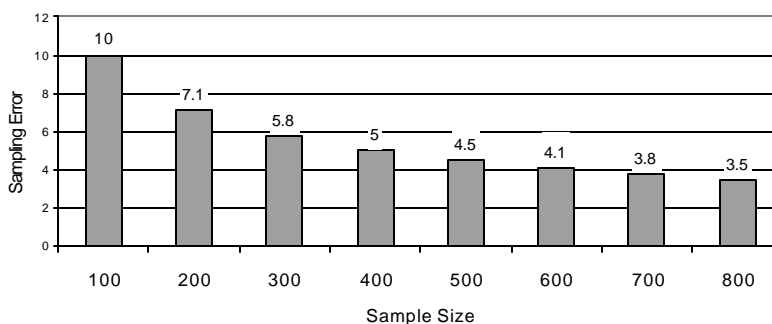
Whitman and former Governor Thomas Kean are the two Republicans who have almost universal name recognition in New Jersey and fare identically when matched up against incumbent Lautenberg. The initial polling among all registered voters found Lautenberg ahead of each by 42 to 40 percent, a statistical tie given the poll's margin of error of ± 4 percentage points.

Zukin commented, while there are more in the state who identify with the Democratic party, Republicans are generally more likely to actually go to the polls, offsetting the Democrats advantage. This is one of the reasons why our last two gubernatorial elections have been so close and a potential match-up between Lautenberg and two popular Republicans looks close. But Republicans have to worry that they will come out of the Clinton impeachment and trial disadvantaged as they look to the legislative elections in New Jersey later this year.”

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP71-1 (EP121-1) SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1999

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagle* Poll was conducted between January 7 and 13, 1999, when a scientifically selected random sample of 800 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 800 is ± 3.5 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 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) 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.

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.

AHow would you rate the job Christie Whitman is doing as Governor--excellent, good, only fair or poor?≡ [CW.1]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	10%	40%	32%	14%	3%	99%	(800)
<u>Party</u>							
--Democrat	6	31	37	22	4	100	(247)
--Independent	7	40	36	15	3	101	(331)
--Republican	22	53	19	4	2	100	(184)
<u>Race</u>							
--White	11	42	33	12	2	100	(595)
--Non-white	8	36	28	21	7	100	(193)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
--September, 1998	9	39	33	14	6	101	(804)
--June, 1998	11	36	34	15	4	100	(602)
--February, 1998	10	39	33	13	4	99	(802)
--October, 1997	9	34	32	21	5	101	(800)
--September, 1997	10	37	32	16	5	100	(800)
--June, 1997	9	40	29	17	5	100	(800)
--February, 1997	10	42	29	15	5	101	(800)
--September, 1996	12	41	29	12	6	100	(808)
--February, 1996	9	40	34	15	3	101	(804)
--November, 1995	9	43	32	10	6	100	(803)
--September, 1995	8	40	36	10	6	100	(804)
--May, 1995	11	42	29	11	7	100	(802)
--February, 1995	13	43	28	12	4	100	(801)
--September, 1994	12	40	33	9	6	100	(801)
--June, 1994	11	39	29	7	14	100	(801)
--February, 1994	9	28	28	5	31	101	(801)

Overall, how much do you think Christie Whitman has cut the taxes people pay in New Jersey--a lot, a little or not at all?≡ [CW.4]

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Not At All</u>	<u>Don=t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	6%	49%	36%	9%	100%	(800)

Party ID

--Democrat	4	45	40	11	100	(247)
--Independent	5	48	38	9	100	(331)
--Republican	11	57	24	7	99	(184)

AAAnd how much has Christie Whitman increased the state=s future debt through the sale of bonds--by a lot, a little or not at all?≡ [CW.5]

	<u>A Lot</u>	<u>A Little</u>	<u>Not At All</u>	<u>Don=t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	16%	34%	7%	44%	101%	(800)

Party ID

--Democrat	17	28	10	44	99	(247)
--Independent	18	36	5	41	100	(331)
--Republican	14	37	3	46	100	(184)

AThinking back over Governor Whitman=s time in office, would you say that she has major accomplishments to point to, minor accomplishments, or no real accomplishments?≡ [CW.2]

	<u>Major Accomplishments</u>	<u>Minor Accomplishments</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don=t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	28%	49%	15%	7%	99%	(800)
February, 1998	28	50	16	5	99	(802)

Party ID

--Democrat	24	47	23	6	100	(247)
--Independent	24	53	17	6	100	(331)
--Republican	42	46	3	10	101	(184)

AAAnd do you think she does or does NOT have a clear vision for making New Jersey a better place to live?≡ [CW.8]

	<u>Does Have A Clear Vision</u>	<u>Does Not Have A Clear Vision</u>	<u>Don=t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
January, 1999	58%	30%	11%	99%	(800)
February, 1998	59	33	8	100	(802)

Party ID

--Democrat	47	40	13	100	(247)
--Independent	55	36	9	100	(331)
--Republican	80	12	8	100	(184)

ASKED OF REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY

ADemocrat Frank Lautenberg has announced he plans to run for re-election in 2000. Would you like to see Christie Whitman run against Lautenberg for the Senate--even if it meant she had to leave her office as Governor one year before her term is up? [NP.6]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	(n)
January, 1999	44%	36%	21%	101%	(623)

Party ID

--Democrat	38	39	22	99	(203)
--Independent	45	37	18	100	(232)
--Republican	54	29	17	100	(159)

ASKED OF REGISTERED VOTERS ONLY Questions NP7 and NP8 Rotated

If there was an election for U.S. Senator from New Jersey would you vote for Christie Whitman the Republican, or Frank Lautenberg, the Democrat? [NP.7]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Lautenberg</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Don't Vote</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	(n)
January, 1999	40%	42%	4%	1%	13%	100%	(623)

Party ID

--Democrats	14	76	2	--	8	100	(203)
--Independents	35	39	7	--	19	100	(232)
--Republicans	84	7	2	2	5	100	(159)

ASKED ONLY OF REGISTERED VOTERS Questions NP7 and NP8 Rotated

If there was an election for U.S. Senator from New Jersey would you vote for Tom Kean the Republican, or Frank Lautenberg, the Democrat?≡ [NP.8]

	<u>Kean</u>	<u>Lautenberg</u>	<u>Neither</u>	<u>Won't</u> <u>Vote</u>	<u>Don't</u> <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	(n)
January, 1999	40%	42%	3%	1%	14%	100%	(623)

Party ID

--Democrats	10	79	3	--	9	101	(203)
--Independents	39	34	6	1	20	100	(232)
--Republicans	86	9	--	1	4	100	(159)

AHow would you rate the job Bill Clinton is doing as President--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?≡ [C.1]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only</u> <u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't</u> <u>Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	(n)
January, 1999	23%	44%	21%	10%	2%	100%	(800)

Party ID

--Democrats	40	47	8	2	2	99	(247)
--Independents	16	47	25	11	1	100	(331)
--Republicans	9	33	32	22	4	100	(184)

Gender

--Male	19	44	23	12	2	100	(399)
--Female	27	43	19	8	3	100	(401)

Race

--White	18	44	25	12	2	101	(595)
--Non-white	38	45	12	4	2	101	(193)

PAST SURVEYS

September, 1998	20%	45%	19%	15%	2%	101%	(804)
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)

“In politics today, do you consider yourself a Democrat, Republican, Independent, or something else?”
[D.1]

THOSE NOT INITIALLY CHOOSING A PARTY WERE ASKED:

“Do you lean more toward the Democratic Party or more toward the Republican Party?” [D.1a]

THE RESPONSES TO THESE TWO QUESTIONS ARE COMBINED IN THE TABLE BELOW. ALL SAMPLE SIZES WERE APPROXIMATELY 800.

PARTY IDENTIFICATION 1997-1999

<i>Party ID</i>	Jan. 1999	Sept. 1998	June 1998	Feb. 1998	Oct. 1997	Sept. 1997	Feb. 1997
Democrats	34%	31%	36%	33%	35%	33%	31%
Ind. lean Democrat	18	17	14	18	15	15	16
Pure Independent	14	16	10	11	12	10	15
Ind. Lean Republican	13	12	13	15	10	11	13
Republican	22	24	27	24	28	31	26
Democrat and leans Democrat	52	48	50	50	50	48	47
Republican and leans Republican	35	36	40	39	38	42	39
Democratic Advantage	17	12	10	11	12	6	8