

The Star-Ledger/**Eagleton-Rutgers Poll**

The New Jersey 2000 Senate Race: Here We Go Again!

*Election Looks Competitive with Whitman as Frontrunner
Most Satisfied with Whitman-Florio Matchup*

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Sunday, May 16th Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

Despite engendering a very mixed public reaction, former Governor Jim Florio runs a surprisingly close second to Governor Christie Whitman and does better against her than two lesser-known Democrats in early matchups for the 2000 U.S. Senate race tested by the *Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll*.

The survey found Whitman running ahead of Florio by a fairly narrow margin of 46 to 39 percent. She received an identical 46 percent of the reported vote when matched against Congressman Frank Pallone, who received 35 percent, and former State Democratic Chair Thomas Byrne, who received a similar 34 percent. The poll was conducted with a statewide sample of 623 registered voters contacted by telephone between April 28 and May 6. The overall sampling error is ± 4 percent.

Whitman and Florio are clearly the two heavyweights in the field. Virtually all registered voters have an opinion about both the current and former governors. Both are popular within their own parties, and both carry negative images with the opposition. At this point in time, Independents tilt positively toward Whitman and negatively toward Florio.

Governor Whitman is viewed positively by a majority of registered voters—53 percent have a favorable opinion of her, and 34 percent have an unfavorable opinion. Opinion about Florio is split—40 percent view him favorably, 38 percent unfavorably, and 22 have a mixed or no opinion. However, Florio is clearly popular among Democrats, where positive opinions outnumber negative ones by 57 to 21 percent.

In contrast, the survey found little public awareness of Pallone, Byrne and former Morris County Prosecutor Michael Murphy, all of whom have talked about running for the Senate. Only one-third of registered voters expressed an opinion about Pallone (24

percent favorable and 9 percent unfavorable), one-quarter about Byrne (20 percent favorable, 6 percent unfavorable) and one-sixth about Murphy (11 percent favorable, 5 percent unfavorable). The poll did not test other Democrats considering running for the Senate.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll gave three reasons why he thought the race would be competitive, no matter who the Democratic candidate might be. "First, Christie Whitman's history in New Jersey electoral politics is not terribly impressive. She has run for statewide office three times against very different opponents—Bill Bradley, Jim Florio and Jim McGreevy—and has received just under 50 percent each time. Second, our polling suggests the state has become increasingly Democratic over the past two years. Third, Democratic turnout generally spikes above Republicans in those years that the office of President is on the ballot, as will be the case in 2000. So, while Whitman clearly starts out ahead, there are a number of reasons to believe the election should be competitive."

Paradoxically, while a majority of New Jersey's registered voters are not enamored with either candidate, a clear majority say they would be content if the choice of candidates came down to Whitman versus Florio. When asked their opinion of a year 2000 Senate rematch of the 1993 Florio--Whitman gubernatorial election, 60 percent of the state's registered voters said they would be satisfied with their choice of whom to vote for. Just over one-in-three (35 percent) said they would not be satisfied and the remaining five percent offered no opinion. When asked why they would be dissatisfied, an equal number cited each candidate's presence on the ballot.

While Whitman and Florio get enthusiastic support from members of their own party to make the race, neither receives encouragement from a majority of the state's registered voters. Just 35 percent say they would like to see Whitman run for Senate, if it means doing so a year before her term as Governor is up. Forty percent would not like to see her be a candidate, and the remaining quarter express no opinion. The majority of Republicans would urge Whitman to run, by a margin of 57 to 26 percent.

Statewide, registered voters are evenly divided about a Florio run—36 percent would like to see him do so, 36 percent would not, and the remaining quarter offers no opinion. A majority of registered Democrats—51 percent—would like to see the former Governor run for the Senate, while 22 percent would not. If they were candidates for the US Senate, Whitman would start with a significant image and performance advantage over Florio in five different attributes tested by the poll:

- Whitman is on top by 19 percentage points when registered voters are asked, "Who has been a better Governor?" by a margin of 52 to 33 percent.
- Whitman leads Florio by 17 percentage points when voters respond to the question, "Who would do a more effective job representing New Jersey in the Senate?" by 51 to 34 percent.

- Whitman bests Florio by 14 percentage points in response to the question of "Who would best represent your positions about what the government should do?" by 49 to 35 percent.
- Whitman appears more personally engaging than Florio, with an 11 percentage point advantage on the question of "Who do you like more?"—48 to 37 percent.
- Whitman is 7 points up on the question of "Who cares more about people like you?" She has a 41 to 34 percent advantage over Florio on this score.

Zukin commented, "There is no doubt that Governor Whitman is more highly regarded than former Governor Florio at this point in time, and that New Jersey voters know both of them well. In such cases perceptions are difficult to change. In this sense Whitman is the clear frontrunner in the Senate election. However, the greater number of Democrats expected to vote in that election may level the playing field to a significant degree. Since the presidential candidates and the way that campaign unfolds is unknown, one can only be certain that the top of the ticket will be a major factor in the New Jersey Senate election, but at this point it would be foolhardy to speculate about exactly how that might play out among those going to the polls a year-and-a-half from now." Zukin noted that exit polls conducted in New Jersey in 1996 and 1992 estimated that Democrats outnumbered Republicans by about 10 percentage points in the composition of the electorate both times.

This early survey finds that Florio commands the support of fewer Democrats than Whitman does of Republicans, suggesting both that he has work to do to shore up his base and that he has the potential to narrow the divide between himself and Whitman if he is successful in doing so. Just 64 percent of all registered Democrats currently say they would vote for Florio, while about one-quarter (27 percent) say they would defect to Whitman's candidacy. In contrast, Whitman retains the voting loyalty of three-quarters of self-identified Republicans, while just 10 percent say they would crossover to vote for Florio. Those critical independent voters—who made up 30 percent of the New Jersey electorate in the last presidential election—are divided 44 percent for Whitman to 34 percent for Florio.

At this time Whitman runs ahead of Florio by 14 percentage points in the northern part of the state (48 to 34 percent), and by five percentage points in central New Jersey (45 to 40 percent). Florio leads Whitman in his home base of south Jersey by four percentage points (46 to 40 percent).

SIDEBAR 1: THE ANONYMOUS ACTING GOVERNOR

If Governor Whitman wins the November 2000 election for the U.S. Senate the current Senate President Donald DiFrancesco would become Acting Governor of New Jersey. The *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll asked a few questions looking at how much New Jerseyans know about the man who might be their next Governor. The answer, "*Not Much.*"

- Just 2 percent were able to come up with DiFrancesco's name when asked "Do you know the name of the person who would become the Acting Governor" if Whitman won.
- When told "The Acting Governor would be Donald DiFrancesco" 58 percent said they had never heard of him, while 40 percent could recognize his name (in addition to the 2 percent who named him).
- Just 9 percent report having a favorable opinion of DiFrancesco, while only 3 percent report having a negative one. The figures are 12 to 1 percent among Republicans.

SIDEBAR 2: REPUBLICAN BASE APPEARS TO BE SHRINKING OVER LAST 2 YEARS

Findings from the most recent *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll suggest that the state has become slightly more Democratic in its partisan orientation. In its quarterly surveys of 800 state residents, each person is asked if they think of themselves as a Democrat, Republican, Independent or something else. Those not identifying themselves as Democrats or Republicans are then asked if they "lean" toward either party.

In surveys conducted in February and September of 1997, Democrats and Democratic "leaners" outnumbered Republicans by about six percentage points. In four subsequent surveys conducted from November of 1997—when Democratic candidate Jim McGreevy ran an aggressive campaign against Governor Whitman on the issues of auto insurance and property taxes—through the end of 1998, the Democratic advantage ran between 10 and 12 percentage points. The gap increased to 17 percentage points in January of 1999, when public attention focused on the Republican-led impeachment of popular president Bill Clinton. The current survey conducted in late April and early May shows a significant, continuing gap in party identification of 14 percentage points—50 percent say they are Democrats or lean Democratic, 36 percent are Republican or say they lean Republican, 10 percent say they are Independents who lean toward neither party, and the remainder identify with some, or no other political party.

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BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP72-2 (EP122-2), SUNDAY, MAY 16, 1999

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton* Poll was conducted between April 28 and May 6, 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. Click here for a [chart](#) that 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 are 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.

All figures reported in this release are for people *who reported being registered to vote* in New Jersey.

"I'd like to get your opinion of some people in New Jersey. For each name I read just tell me if your general opinion is favorable or unfavorable. If you don't have an opinion about some just say so. First, (RANDOMIZE LIST)... Favorable, unfavorable or no opinion?" [P1]

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
New Jersey Congressman Frank Pallone	24%	9%	67%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	33	7	60	100	(215)
--Independents	23	10	67	100	(219)
--Republicans	17	10	73	100	(165)
Former Democratic State Chair Tom Byrne	20	6	75	101	(623)
--Democrats	27	3	70	100	(215)
--Independents	20	4	76	100	(219)
--Republicans	12	11	77	100	(165)
Former Morris County Prosecutor Michael Murphy	11	5	84	100	(623)
--Democrats	15	9	76	100	(215)
--Independents	9	2	89	100	(219)
--Republicans	9	5	86	100	(165)
Former Governor Jim Florio	40	38	22	100	(623)
--Democrats	57	21	22	100	(215)
--Independents	34	40	26	100	(219)
--Republicans	26	61	13	100	(165)
Governor Christie Whitman	53	34	12	99	(623)
--Democrats	45	40	15	100	(215)
--Independents	48	38	14	100	(219)
--Republicans	74	22	4	100	(165)

The table below shows registered voters sentiments about Whitman and Florio. The cell numbers show the percentage who hold each pattern of views. For example, 22 percent of registered voters simultaneously like Whitman and dislike Florio. *Total of all cells equals 100%*

SIMULTANEOUS	<u>Whitman--Favorable</u>	<u>Whitman-Unfavorable</u>	<u>Whitman--No Opinion</u>
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OPINIONS OF:

Florio-Favorable	21	15	4
Florio--Unfavorable	22	14	2
Florio--No Opinion	10	6	6

"Governor Whitman plans to run for the U.S. seat now held by retiring Democrat Frank Lautenberg. How do you feel about Whitman running for the Senate a year before her term as Governor is up. Would you like to see her run, not like to see her run, or don't you care much one way or the other?" [P2]

	<u>Like</u>	<u>Not Like</u>	<u>Don't Care Much</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	35%	40%	26%	101%	(623)
--Democrats	27	49	24	100	(215)
--Independents	27	39	34	100	(219)
--Republicans	57	26	16	99	(165)

"Another person who plans to run for the Senate is former Governor Jim Florio. How do you feel about Florio running for the Senate--Would you like to see him run, not like to see him run, or don't you care much one way or the other?"(P6)

	<u>Like</u>	<u>Not Like</u>	<u>Don't Care Much</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	36%	36%	28%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	51	22	27	100	(215)
--Independents	29	42	29	100	(219)
--Republicans	24	50	25	100	(165)

QUESTIONS P7-9 WERE RANDOMIZED WITH CANDIDATE NAMES ROTATED WITHIN QUESTIONS)

"If the election for U.S. Senator from New Jersey was held today, would you vote for Christie Whitman the Republican, or Jim Florio the Democrat?" (P7)

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Neither/Other</u>	<u>Wouldn't Vote</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	46%	39%	7%	2%	6%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	27	64	5	--	3	99	(215)
--Independents	44	34	10	5	7	100	(219)
--Republicans	75	10	7	1	6	99	(165)
Region							
--North	48	34	7	2	9	100	(279)
--Central	45	40	10	1	4	100	(165)
--South	42	46	4	4	3	99	(176)

"If the election for U.S. Senator from New Jersey was held today, would you vote for Christie Whitman the Republican, or Tom Byrne the Democrat?" [P8]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Byrne</u>	<u>Neither/Other</u>	<u>Wouldn't Vote</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	46%	34%	7%	2%	11%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	28	59	4	--	9	100	(215)
--Independents	44	29	13	4	12	100	(219)

--Republicans 77 9 5 1 9 101 (165)

"If the election for U.S. Senator from New Jersey was held today, would you vote for Christie Whitman the Republican, or Frank Pallone the Democrat?" [P9]

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Pallone</u>	<u>Neither/Other</u>	<u>Wouldn't Vote</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	46%	35%	7%	2%	9%	99%	(623)
--Democrats	28	60	5	1	7	101	(215)
--Independents	44	31	10	4	11	100	(219)
--Republicans	76	8	5	1	9	99	(165)

"If Christie Whitman and Jim Florio were the Republican and Democratic candidates for Senate do you think you would be very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with these choices of who to vote for?" [P10]

	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat Satisfied</u>	<u>Somewhat Dissatisfied</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	18%	42%	17%	18%	5%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	20	44	15	15	5	99	(215)
--Independents	14	42	17	21	6	100	(219)
--Republicans	23	41	16	17	2	99	(165)

"Would you be dissatisfied because Whitman was running, because Florio was running or because both were running?" [P11] Based only on those "dissatisfied" in [P10] above

	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	18%	21%	58%	3%	100%	(220)

"*Regardless of who you would vote for*, please give me your opinions about Florio and Whitman on each of the following. First (RANDOMIZE)...Florio or Whitman?" [P12]

"Who was a better Governor?"

	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	33%	52%	7%	8%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	54	35	5	6	100	(215)
--Independents	31	53	10	7	101	(219)
--Republicans	10	77	4	9	100	(165)

"Who cares more about people like you?"

	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	34%	41%	12%	12%	99%	(623)
--Democrats	57	24	7	13	101	(215)
--Independents	29	40	17	14	100	(219)
--Republicans	12	66	13	9	100	(165)

"Who would do a more effective job representing New Jersey in the Senate?"

	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	34%	51%	7%	8%	100	(623)
--Democrats	55	33	6	6	100	(215)
--Independents	31	49	8	11	100	(219)
--Republicans	8	78	8	6	100	(165)

"Who would best represent your positions about what the government should do?"

	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	35%	49%	7%	10%	101%	(623)
--Democrats	57	31	6	6	101	(215)
--Independents	30	47	8	15	100	(219)
--Republicans	11	77	8	5	100	(165)

"Who do you like more?"

	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	37%	48%	9%	6%	100	(623)
--Democrats	62	26	7	4	99	(215)
--Independents	34	48	11	6	99	(219)
--Republicans	9	77	8	7	100	(165)

"If Whitman won her race for the Senate, do you know the name of the person who would become the Acting Governor? IF YES, PROBE: Who is that?" [P3]

	<u>Donald Di Francesco</u>	<u>Other/Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	2%	98%	100%	(623)

The Acting Governor would be Donald Di Francesco. Have you ever hear of him before?" [P4]

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No/Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	42%	58%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	39	61	100	(215)
--Independents	40	60	100	(219)
--Republicans	48	52	100	(165)

And is your opinion of Di Francesco favorable, unfavorable or don't you have an opinion of him?" [P5]

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>	<u>Not Recognized</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Registered Voters	9%	3%	31%	58%	100%	(623)
--Democrats	8	3	28	61	100	(215)
--Independents	6	4	31	60	101	(219)
--Republicans	12	1	34	52	99	(165)