

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

GENERAL ELECTION PREVIEW:

GORE AND BUSH IN CLOSE RACE; MANY SAY "NEITHER"

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in the Sunday, March 12 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*."

If first impressions matter, New Jersey will be a key state in the 2000 general election, but not necessarily a happy one. A new Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers poll finds the presumptive nominees—Democrat Al Gore and Republican George W. Bush—locked in a tight race with fully a quarter of those registered saying they are undecided or want to vote for neither man.

The survey, conducted with 626 registered voters between February 28 and March 9, found Gore with 39 percent and Bush with 36 percent, a statistically insignificant difference well within the poll's margin of error. Another 13 percent say they are undecided between Gore and Bush; a similar 12 percent say they will vote for neither candidate, with many preferring someone else.

These findings are quite different from the New Jersey electorates in the last two presidential elections at similar, early points in those campaigns. In June of 1996, 9 percent told interviewers they were undecided and 2 percent said they would vote for someone else. In April of 1992, 7 percent said they were undecided and just 1 percent said they planned to vote for someone else.

Poll director Cliff Zukin commented, "We did conduct this poll a little earlier and our findings may reflect that the nominations were not as 'closed' as those years—McCain and Bradley supporters may simply have refused to choose between Bush and Gore out of loyalty to their candidates. But they do underscore that neither candidate has a strong mooring in New Jersey right now. The state starts off the general election campaign as a toss-up, with a large number of voters open to persuasion by either candidate."

The Rutgers-based survey also tested a John McCain—Al Gore match-up. It seems clear that McCain would have been more attractive than Bush to New Jersey's independent-minded electorate. McCain ran ahead of Gore by 6 percentage points (40 to 34), while Bush trailed Gore by 3.

Neither Gore nor Bush yet receive rock solid support from members of their own party. Three-quarters of Republicans say they plan to vote for Bush. This number is down from 93 percent of New Jersey Republicans who in April of 1992 said they planned to vote for Bush's father when he ran for reelection in November of that year. In fact, it is quite close to the 73 who said they planned to vote for Bob Dole in his ill-fated presidential bid against Bill Clinton in 1996.

Three-quarters of Democrats say they plan to vote for Gore, less than the 88 percent Clinton got in the summer of 1996, but actually more than the 64 percent Clinton received in the Spring of 1992 when he ran for President the first time.

With Democrats and Republicans fairly evenly balanced, New Jersey's independent voters often hold the critical balance of power in an election. And in March of 2000 they are an undecided lot. At this point one-third prefer Bush (34%), one-third Gore, and one-third tilt toward neither candidate—16 percent say they are undecided and another 19 percent say they like neither or prefer someone else. Stay tuned.

In other findings, Bill Clinton remains in good stead among New Jerseyans. Statewide, 58 percent give him clearly positive marks of "excellent" or "good" for his performance in office. Another 21 percent feel he is doing "only fair" and 17 percent say he is doing a "poor" job running the country. The figures are virtually identical for registered voters and the state as a whole.

Clinton's shadow will clearly loom over the general election. Among those who give Clinton positive marks—mainly Democrats and independents—Gore leads Bush by a margin of 58 to 20 percent. Among those giving Clinton negative marks—mainly Republicans—Bush leads Gore by 61 to 12 percent.

BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE (EP125-1) SUNDAY, MARCH 12, 2000

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted between February 28 and March 9 with a scientifically selected random sample of 800 New Jersey adult residents interviewed by telephone. The data have been weighted on education, age and gender to conform to known population parameters. This sampling yielded a total of 626 respondents who reported being registered to vote. The figures in this release are based on this sample size; President Clinton's job performance rating is based on the full sample size. 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 registered voters is ± 4 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey registered voters were found to have a favorable opinion of the President, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46 and 54 percent (50 ± 4) had all New Jersey registered voters 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. 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, gender and education to insure an accurate proportional representation of the state. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

NOTE: The questions on presidential voting intention in this release were asked only of registered voters. The order of questions S1 and S2 were rotated as were the order of the candidates within each question. Two hundred and thirty interviews were done after Super Tuesday. There will be an election for President in November.

"If the election was held today would you vote for (ROTATE CANDIDATES) John McCain, the Republican; or Al Gore, the Democrat?" [Q.S2]

	<u>McCain</u>	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Other/ Neither</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>(n)</u>
March, 2000	40%	34%	15%	11%	100%	(617)

Party ID

--Democrat	18	64	11	7	100	(188)
--Independent	42	29	16	13	100	(235)
--Republican	66	10	11	12	99	(157)

"If that election were held today would you vote for (ROTATE CANDIDATES) George W. Bush, the Republican; or Al Gore, the Democrat?" [Q.S1]

	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Gore</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Other/ Neither</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>(n)</u>
March, 2000	36%	39%	13%	12%	100%	(617)

Party ID

--Democrat	11	74	10	6	101	(189)
--Independent	34	31	16	19	100	(235)
--Republican	75	12	5	7	99	(157)

Ideology

--Liberal	16	67	11	6	100	(111)
--Moderate	32	40	14	14	100	(354)
--Conservative	64	16	11	9	100	(135)

Gender

--Male	39	36	11	14	100	(275)
--Female	34	42	15	10	101	(342)

Age

--18-29	30	45	19	7	101	(75)
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--30-49	34	40	12	15	101	(264)
--50+	39	37	12	11	99	(250)

Region

--North	35	42	11	12	100	(254)
--Central	38	36	14	12	100	(160)
--South	37	39	14	10	100	(178)

Race

--White	40	37	11	12	100	(482)
--Black & Hispanic	22	52	16	10	100	(91)

Clinton Rating

--Favorable	20	58	14	8	100	(369)
--Unfavorable	61	12	12	16	101	(234)

PREVIOUS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (EARLY READINGS):

"Suppose the election for President was held today and you had to choose right now. Would you vote for Bob Dole, the Republican; or Bill Clinton, the Democrat?" [Q.17] (Candidates' names were rotated.)

	<u>Dole</u>	<u>Clinton</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Other Candidate</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>(n)</u>
June, 1996	35%	54%	9%	2%	100%	(646)

Party ID

--Democrat	6	88	3	1	98	(212)
--Independent	35	50	12	3	100	(228)
--Republican	73	18	8	1	100	(176)

"If next fall's presidential election was between George Bush, the Republican, and Bill Clinton, the Democrat, who would you vote for?" [Q.10A]

	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Clinton</u>	<u>Undecided</u>	<u>Other Candidate</u>	<u>Total %</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 1992	57%	35%	7%	1%	100	(610)

Party ID

--Democrat	31	64	4	1	100	(178)
--Independent	54	35	11	1	101	(231)
--Republican	93	5	2	--	100	(201)

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

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
March 2000	17%	41%	21%	17%	3%	99%	(800)
<u>Past Surveys</u>							
-- September 1999	16	45	23	15	1	100	(802)
-- April/May 1999	16	43	21	18	2	100	(802)
-- January 1999	23	44	21	10	2	100	(800)
-- 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)
<u>March 2000</u>							
--Democrat	28	56	11	5	1	101	(247)
--Independent	15	41	24	16	4	100	(320)
--Republican	8	25	30	33	4	100	(184)
<u>March 2000</u>							
--Registered Voters	17	42	22	17	3	101	(626)