

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 Thursday, April 19 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

Most New Jerseyans Are Unaware As DiFrancesco Comes Under Fire But The More People Know, The Worse It Looks

Despite recent press coverage of questionable real estate transactions and allegations of unethical conduct while serving as Scotch Plains City Attorney, acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco is flying under the public radar. Nearly two-thirds of New Jersey residents say they are unfamiliar with the recent controversy over his real estate and business dealings with major state contractors.

However, in what could be an ominous sign, among the third of the public reporting at least some familiarity with the questions surrounding DiFrancesco's actions, six-in-ten feel he did something either unethical or illegal. Just one in five believe he did nothing wrong.

The great majority of residents express no overall assessment of DiFrancesco – over two-thirds say they have no opinion of him. Among those who do have opinions, favorable views outweigh unfavorable ones by a slim margin. However, the job rating for the acting Governor is fairly strong. Half of Garden State residents approve of the job DiFrancesco is doing as acting governor, while fewer than one in five disapprove.

But on both of these measures DiFrancesco may be suffering from the continuing controversy: those who are paying attention to the coverage have more negative views than the public at large.

While there are reports that some Republican county leaders are pressuring DiFrancesco to abandon his bid for a full four-year term as Governor, a majority of New Jerseyans also express no opinion of the man most often mentioned as his replacement – former Congressman Bob Franks. Among the few residents who do have opinions of Franks, views are mostly favorable.

These are some of the main findings of the most recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll, conducted by telephone with a scientific sample of 802 New Jersey residents between April 11 and 17, 2001. The sampling error for the survey is ± 3.5 percentage points.

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

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Before this week's revelations of a critical report of DiFrancesco's actions as City Attorney for Scotch Plains, significant media coverage had focused on \$225,000 he accepted from one of New Jersey's largest development firms (K. Hovnanian Companies) to help him pay off an outstanding loan, and other questions surrounding a failed real estate venture in Scotch Plains in which DiFrancesco and his relatives were involved. Despite continued coverage, however, only one third (33 percent) of New Jerseyans say they have heard or read much about questions surrounding DiFrancesco's business dealings. Eight percent say they have heard or read "a lot" while 25 percent report having heard or read "some." An overwhelming 65 percent say they have heard "not much" or "nothing at all."

Among the few who have kept up with recent developments, nearly half feel that DiFrancesco has done something unethical. Forty-six percent of those paying attention feel he has done "something unethical but nothing illegal," while 16 percent think he did "something illegal," and 21 percent think he "did not do anything seriously wrong." Seventeen percent do not know how they feel about DiFrancesco's business deals.

Opinions of DiFrancesco remain largely unformed, even though he has served as acting Governor for the past two months. Sixty-eight percent say they do not have an opinion of him. Currently, just 19 percent of Garden State residents view him favorably, while 13 percent view him unfavorably. But the continuing questions of impropriety, while not widely known, may already be hurting his image. Among those who have heard or read either a lot or some about the questions surrounding his business dealings 29 percent view him unfavorably and 24 percent view him favorably.

This could spell continued trouble for the acting Governor, as Monika McDermott the associate director of the Rutgers based poll explains: "The good news for DiFrancesco is that people haven't been paying much attention to media coverage of his troubles so far. The bad news is people may still be unfamiliar with him, and as they get to know him these issues are likely to be among the first things they learn."

Residents are even less likely to have opinions of former Congressman Bob Franks than of DiFrancesco, despite Franks' strong showing in last year's race for United States Senate from New Jersey. Over three quarters of residents do not currently have an opinion of Franks. But among those who do, opinions are largely favorable. Eighteen percent of residents view him favorably while only 5 percent view him unfavorably. Among Republicans, Franks has generated fewer unfavorable feelings than DiFrancesco – only 3 percent of Republican residents view Franks unfavorably, compared to 12 percent who have unfavorable views of DiFrancesco. Equal numbers of Republicans view the two favorably – 34 percent have favorable views of Franks and 33 percent feel the same about DiFrancesco.

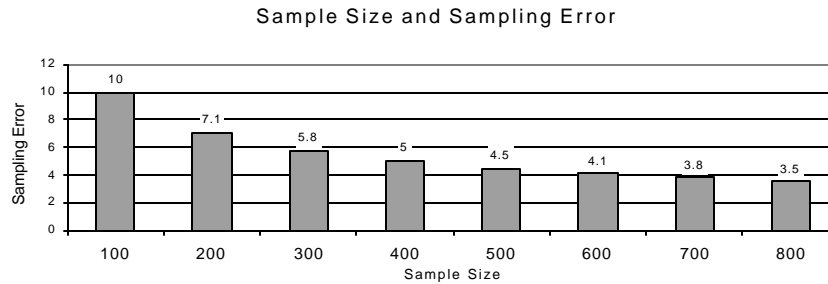
The acting Governor receives mostly positive ratings for his job performance to date. Nearly half – 48 percent – of residents approve of the job he's doing, while only 17 percent disapprove. Thirty-five

percent neither approve nor disapprove at this point. Here again, however, there is some evidence that the continuing controversies may be affecting public perceptions – among those who have heard or read at least some of the coverage of his business dealings, 28 percent disapprove of his job performance.

According to McDermott: “DiFrancesco may have really missed an opportunity to establish a favorable image of himself through the governorship. The shortage of opinions about him is not a good sign. Either people are still unfamiliar with him, or they’re familiar with him but they’re having trouble reaching a judgment. Neither of these is a good place to be at this point in time.”

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP131-1) April 19, 2001

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted by telephone from April 11-17 with a scientifically selected random sample of 802 New Jersey adult residents. The figures in this release are based on this 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 802 respondents is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of the respondents were found to have a favorable opinion of Donald DiFrancesco, 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 Jersey adult residents 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 Republicans, Independents or Democrats, 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. The questions referred to in this release are as follows:

“Is your opinion of Donald DiFrancesco (Dee – fran – sess – ko) favorable or unfavorable, or don’t you really have an opinion of him?” (PF1)

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>DK/No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	19%	13%	68%	100%	(802)
<u>Registered Voters</u>	21	15	64	100	(632)
<u>Party ID</u>					
-- Democrat	11	17	72	100	(285)
-- Independent	18	12	70	100	(281)
-- Republican	33	12	54	99	(182)
<u>Heard/read about DiFrancesco business dealings?</u>					
-- A lot-some	24	29	47	100	(297)
-- Not much-nothing	16	5	79	100	(489)
<u>Previous Surveys</u>					
-- January, 2001	9	2	89	100	(803)
-- May, 1999*	9	3	89	101	(623)

* registered voters only

“Is your opinion of Bob Franks favorable or unfavorable, or don’t you really have an opinion of him?” (PF6)

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>DK/No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	18%	5%	77%	100%	(802)
<u>Registered Voters</u>	20	6	74	100	(632)
<u>Party ID</u>					
-- Democrat	13	7	80	100	(285)
-- Independent	13	4	82	99	(281)
-- Republican	34	3	62	99	(182)

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald DiFrancesco is handling his job as acting Governor?” (PF8)

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK/No Opinion</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	48%	17%	35%	100%	(802)
<u>Registered Voters</u>	50	20	30	100	(632)
<u>Party ID</u>					
-- Democrat	40	24	36	100	(285)
-- Independent	52	16	32	100	(281)
-- Republican	64	10	25	99	(182)
<u>Heard/read about DiFrancesco business dealings?</u>					
-- A lot-some	52	27	22	101	(297)
-- Not much-nothing	48	12	40	100	(489)

“How much have you heard or read about questions surrounding acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco’s real estate and business dealings with major state contractors – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all?” (QC7)

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>Don’t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	8%	25%	25%	40%	2%	100%	(802)
<u>Registered Voters</u>	9	29	28	34	1	101	(632)

**For more breakdowns see table on page 6.

“Which of the following statements best describes your view of DiFrancesco’s business dealings with state contractors: DiFrancesco did something illegal, OR he did something unethical but nothing illegal, OR he did not do anything seriously wrong?” (QC8)

Asked only of people who responded they had heard / read “a lot” or “some” in QC7

	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Unethical</u>	<u>Nothing wrong</u>	<u>Don’t Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	16%	46%	21%	17%	100%	(297)
<u>Registered Voters</u>	16	49	20	15	100	(264)

“How much have you heard or read about questions surrounding acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco’s real estate and business dealings with major state contractors – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all?” (QC7)

	<u>A lot-Some</u>	<u>Not much- Nothing at all</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	33%	65%	2%	100%	(786)
<u>Party ID</u>					
-- Democrat	34	65	1	100	(285)
-- Independent	31	68	1	100	(281)
-- Republican	40	59	1	100	(182)
<u>Ideology</u>					
-- Liberal	36	63	2	101	(178)
-- Moderate	34	65	--	99	(429)
-- Conservative	35	65	--	100	(166)
<u>Education</u>					
-- High school or less	27	72	2	101	(244)
-- Some college	35	62	2	99	(258)
-- College grad	44	54	2	101	(298)
<u>Income</u>					
-- Less than \$35,000	24	74	2	100	(184)
-- \$35,000 to \$70,000	33	66	2	101	(246)
-- \$70,000 and over	44	55	1	100	(287)
<u>Regular newspaper reader</u>					
-- Yes	43	56	1	100	(512)
-- No	19	79	2	100	(289)
<u>Age</u>					
-- 18-29	18	82	--	100	(136)
-- 30-49	32	66	1	100	(324)
-- 50-64	49	48	3	100	(185)
-- 65+	34	64	2	100	(134)