

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 Wednesday, April 25 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

NEW JERSEY GOVERNMENT GETS MIDLING MARKS *RACIAL PROFILING AND ETHICS LOOM LARGE*

In the midst of swirling political controversies in New Jersey engulfing the acting Governor, a United States senator, and a Supreme Court justice, a narrow majority of residents surveyed between April 11th and 17th rated the quality of their state government as good, while more than four in ten rated it as only fair or poor. In addition, New Jerseyans said their government and politicians are no better or worse than those in other states.

Other key findings of the most recent Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll include:

- While just over a third had been paying attention to a federal investigation into Senator Robert Torricelli at the time of the survey, those that had been following it thought he did something unethical, or worse.
- African-American New Jerseyans and those residents who see racial profiling as a big problem gave the government more negative marks than did others.
- Residents are generally skeptical about politicians – most said that people enter politics for reasons of personal gain rather than public service.
- And more than six in ten residents statewide said they consider the ethics and integrity of government and public officials to be an extremely important issue for the next governor to address.

Associate director of the Poll, Monika McDermott sums up: "The state senate hearings into racial profiling and the persistence of the issue have apparently taken a toll on attitudes towards government. In addition, with all that's happened, it's not surprising that New Jerseyans have maintained their skepticism about the motives and ethics of politicians. But they don't single out their own – as of last week, they felt their politicians measured up, or possibly down, to those in other states."

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

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According to the poll, 54 percent of Garden State residents rated the quality of their state government as “excellent” (5 percent) or “good” (49 percent). Thirty-seven percent of residents rated the government quality as “only fair,” and six percent considered it “poor.” The poll included 802 residents statewide, and has a margin of error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

Attitudes toward state government appear to be conditioned by at least one of the recent controversies: racial profiling and charges that Supreme Court Justice Peter Verniero may have misled the state senate during his 1999 confirmation hearings. Among residents who think racial profiling is a “big problem” a 51 percent majority rated the quality of state government to be “only fair” or “poor.” And among blacks, a staggeringly low 28 percent rated the quality of New Jersey government as good or better, while more than two thirds – 69 percent – rated it fair or poor. In sharp contrast, 58 percent of whites rated the quality of state government positively, and only 39 percent rated it negatively.

Overall, New Jerseyans also displayed a continuing cynicism about politicians in general. Nearly six in ten residents said that most people go into politics for “personal gain” rather than for “public service.” Only one quarter felt that most politicians entered politics for “public service reasons.” While a majority felt this way, the numbers were down somewhat from a survey in 1998, when 65 percent said most people entered politics for “personal gain.”

But at the same time, New Jerseyans said they consider both their government and their politicians to be of equal quality to those in other states. Sixty-three percent said that their government is of the same quality as most other state governments; 17 percent thought New Jersey government is better than most other states, and 8 percent thought it worse. Over three-quarters of New Jerseyans (77 percent) felt their politicians were of similar quality to most other states’ politicians. Seven percent rated New Jersey politicians as better than most, and eight percent thought them worse.

Garden State residents are concerned with ethics: sixty-two percent said that the issue of “government ethics and the integrity of public officials” was an “extremely important” issue for the next governor to address. Another 29 percent rated the issue as “fairly important,” and only 10 percent felt it was “not that important” of an issue for the next governor. These feelings get stronger the closer one gets – among those who said they follow politics at least somewhat regularly, 65 percent considered ethics an extremely important issue, compared to 57 percent of those who did not follow politics regularly.

At the point at which this survey was taken, few residents had focused on two recent controversies: the federal investigation into New Jersey Senator Robert Torricelli, and questions surrounding the business dealings of acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco. Only 38 percent said they had heard or read “a lot” or “some” about the investigation into Torricelli’s 1996 fundraising.

If the controversy continues, however, and attention to the investigation increases, the poll results demonstrate potential problems for Torricelli. Among those who were paying at least some attention to

reports of the investigation, 55 percent felt the Senator did “something unethical, but nothing illegal.” Another 10 percent thought he had done something illegal. Only 16 percent of those paying some attention to the matter thought he did not do “anything seriously wrong.”

And while more New Jerseyans had a favorable than unfavorable view of Torricelli when the survey was taken – 25 percent favorable to 14 percent unfavorable – among those who had been paying attention to the investigation, opinions were evenly divided – 30 percent favorable to 29 percent unfavorable. Overall, 61 percent of New Jerseyans expressed no opinion of their senior Senator.

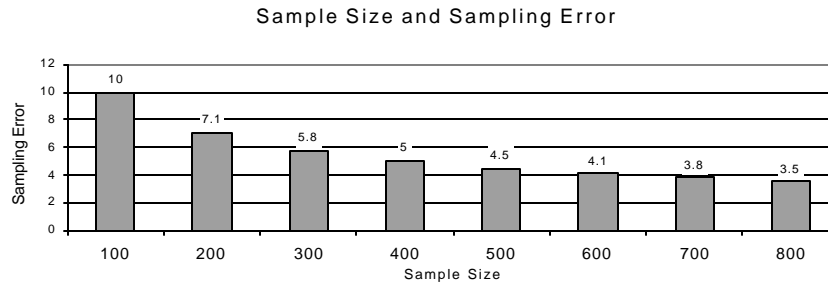
Still fewer residents were paying attention to questions surrounding DiFrancesco’s real estate and business dealings, but among those who had been, reviews were nearly equally negative. Among the 33 percent of residents who had heard or read at least some of the coverage, 46 percent thought DiFrancesco had done something unethical, and 16 percent thought he had done something illegal. One in five thought he did nothing seriously wrong.

Looking ahead to the gubernatorial election in November, partisanship also plays a role in attitudes toward government. Just over half of Democrats – 51 percent – rated the quality of state government as only fair or poor, while 46 percent thought of it as good or excellent. In contrast, 66 percent of Republicans thought the quality of New Jersey government was good or better, and only 34 percent rated it negatively.

McDermott noted: “Even before the most recent revelations about both DiFrancesco and Torricelli last week, New Jersey residents expressed significant concerns about government ethics. If these kinds of issues continue to arise, ethics and integrity could have an impact on the November elections for governor and the state legislature.”

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP131-4) April 25, 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 is ± 3.5 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey adult residents were found to rate New Jersey government as excellent, 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:

“I am going to read a list of some of the issues that might come up in this year’s election for Governor. As I read each one, please tell me how important you think that issue is for the next Governor to deal with – Extremely important, fairly important, or not that important?
Is government ethics and the integrity of public officials extremely important, fairly important or not that important of an issue for the next Governor to deal with?” (QG5G)

	<u>Extremely Important</u>	<u>Fairly Important</u>	<u>Not That Important</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
Government ethics and the integrity of public officials	62%	29%	7%	3%	101%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>						
-- Democrat	61	31	6	3	101	(285)
-- Independent	64	26	8	2	100	(281)
-- Republican	64	29	7	1	101	(182)
<u>How often follow politics</u>						
--Regularly-sometimes	65	27	6	2	100	(574)
--Once in a while-almost never	56	31	8	4	99	(226)

Is your opinion of Bob Torricelli (Tor - uh - sell - ee) favorable or unfavorable, or don't you really have an opinion of him? (PF4)

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion/DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	24%	14%	61%	99%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	29	12	59	100	(285)
--Independent	23	14	62	99	(281)
--Republican	25	22	54	99	(182)
<u>Heard/read about fundraising investigation</u>					
--A lot-some	30	29	41	99	(333)
--Not much-not at all	21	5	73	99	(463)

Is your opinion of Jon Corzine (Core – zign) favorable or unfavorable, or don't you really have an opinion of him? (PF5)

	<u>Favorable</u>	<u>Unfavorable</u>	<u>No opinion/DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	27%	15%	58%	101%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>					
--Democrat	40	7	53	100	(285)
--Independent	26	12	62	100	(281)
--Republican	13	32	54	99	(182)

“Overall, how would you rate the quality of government in New Jersey -- excellent, good, only fair, or poor?” (QC1)

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	5%	49%	37%	6%	3%	100%	(802)
January, 1981	4	36	48	10	2	100	(1003)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	5	41	43	8	3	100	(285)
--Independent	4	49	37	6	4	100	(281)
--Republican	7	59	31	3	1	101	(182)
<u>Race</u>							
--White	5	53	33	6	2	101	(582)
--Black	3	25	56	12	4	100	(101)
<u>Racial profiling a problem</u>							
--Big problem	5	40	41	10	4	100	(320)
--Somewhat of a problem	3	58	35	2	2	100	(182)
--Small / Not a problem	7	53	32	5	3	100	(240)

“Compared to most other states is the quality of government in New Jersey better, worse, or about the same?” (QC2)

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	17%	8%	63%	13%	99%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	14	7	69	10	100	(285)
--Independent	15	8	61	16	100	(281)
--Republican	22	8	61	9	100	(182)

“Do you think that politicians here in New Jersey are better than those in other states, worse than others, or about the same?” (QC3)

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	7%	8%	77%	8%	100%	(802)
September, 1998	7	9	79	5	100	(403)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	10	7	77	6	100	(285)
--Independent	6	9	75	9	99	(281)
--Republican	5	9	81	5	100	(182)

“Do you think most people decide to GO INTO politics for public service reasons, or for personal gain?” (QC4)

	<u>Public Service</u>	<u>Personal Gain</u>	<u>Both (VOL)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	26%	57%	11%	5%	%	(802)
September, 1998	21	65	10	5	101	(403)
February, 1981	20	64	14	3	101	(1003)
<u>Party ID</u>						
--Democrat	26	58	12	5	101	(285)
--Independent	27	59	10	4	100	(281)
--Republican	28	57	13	2	100	(182)

“How much have you heard or read about federal investigations into New Jersey Senator Bob Torricelli’s 1996 campaign fundraising – a lot, some, not much, or nothing at all?” (QC5)

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	9%	29%	29%	33%	1%	101%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	10	27	30	32	1	100	(285)
--Independent	8	26	30	36	1	101	(281)
--Republican	10	38	25	26	--	99	(182)

“Which of the following statements best describes your view of Torricelli’s 1996 fundraising activities: Torricelli did something illegal, OR he did something unethical but nothing illegal, OR he did not do anything seriously wrong?” (QC6)

Asked only of people who responded that they had heard or read "a lot" or "some" to QC5.

	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Unethical</u>	<u>Nothing wrong</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	10%	55%	16%	18%	99%	(333)

“How much have you heard or read about questions surrounding acting Governor Donald DiFrancesco’s real estate and business dealings with major state contractors?” (QC7)

	<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not Much</u>	<u>Nothing</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	8%	25%	25%	40%	2%	100%	(802)
<u>Party ID</u>							
--Democrat	8	25	26	39	1	99	(285)
--Independent	9	22	25	43	1	100	(281)
--Republican	8	31	24	35	1	99	(182)

“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 that they had heard or read "a lot" or "some" to QC7.

	<u>Illegal</u>	<u>Unethical</u>	<u>Nothing wrong</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
April, 2001	16%	46%	21%	17%	100%	(297)