

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

May 11, 2003
(Release 143-2)

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A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo appears in the Sunday, May 11, 2003 Star-Ledger. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "*The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll.*"

GOVERNOR MCGREEVEY: "NOT DEAD AT ALL. THANKS FOR ASKING."

GOVERNOR'S JOB PERFORMANCE RATING STABILIZES— EQUAL NUMBERS APPROVE AND DISAPPROVE

Trying to find anyone inside of Trenton with something nice to say about Jim McGreevey lately has been a little like trying to find Saddam Hussein. Republicans are openly enthusiastic about the prospect of running against McGreevey in two years; some Democratic leaders are quietly whispering about a primary challenge to the Governor. But the ordinary citizens of New Jersey have now spoken and their voice should be read as a note of caution to the ambitious: The current assessment is: "He's OK—not great, but not a disaster either." Or, back off--he ain't dead yet.

The latest Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers poll finds as many who approve of the job McGreevey is doing as governor (43%) as who disapprove (42%). The most recent survey, conducted with a scientifically selected sample of 1,002 state residents between April 24 and May 4 paints a portrait of ambivalence:

- While the public doesn't necessarily think McGreevey has been doing a good job in managing the state's budget crisis, they also believe he was dealt a lousy hand of cards to play.
- While most see him as a "politics as usual" governor rather than a reformer, a plurality also gives him credit for being willing to make hard choices rather than taking the easy way out.
- When compared to the state's two previous governors, McGreevey is on par with Christie Whitman and viewed as better than Jim Florio.

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

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Poll director Cliff Zukin commented, “This is a case where the inner circle of New Jersey politicians and pundits is out of step with general public opinion. McGreevey might well start quoting Mark Twain who said, ‘The report of my death was an exaggeration.’ As far as the public is concerned, the Governor is very much alive and remains a central, powerful figure in the state.”

In February of this year, the poll found more disapproving than approving of the job McGreevey is doing as Governor, with approval being on the short end by a margin of 34 to 45 percent. There has been upward movement since that reading to the current split assessment of 43 to 42 percent, with the remainder offering no opinion. Poll analysts speculate that this change from negative to neutral might be a reflection of slightly less budget angst now when compared to a few months ago. The February survey, which was conducted on each side of the Governor’s budget message announcing severe spending cuts, found 55 percent describing New Jersey’s budget problems as “very serious.” In contrast, just 39 percent of those interviewed in the current survey describe the state’s budget problems in these same stark terms.

Currently more disapprove than approve of the way McGreevey is handling problems with the state budget by a margin of 44 to 37 percent. The remaining 19 percent do not express an opinion on this question.

There is no question that New Jerseyans believe that the governor was handed a difficult task upon coming into office. When asked to consider the state of the economy and current budget situation, almost half—48 percent—say McGreevey has had a harder time when compared to the last few Governors. Just four percent say he has had an easier time, while the remaining 42 percent believe he has faced the same challenges as previous governors of the state.

Still, many believe he has fallen short in their hopes for him as the state’s chief executive. Just nine percent of Garden State residents feel McGreevey has done a better job as Governor than they expected. One-quarter—roughly equal numbers of Democrats, Republicans and independents alike—say he has done a worse job than they expected, while most say he had done “about the same” job as they thought he would. These new figures show a negative tilt since February, when roughly as many said his performance had bettered (13%) rather than fallen short of their expectations (15%).

In some ways the public is also of two minds in how they would characterize McGreevey's leadership thus far. On the one hand, two-thirds (67%) say he is a "politics as usual governor," compared to just one-fifth (20%) who say he favors "reform of the political system." Given the citizenry's low regard for the functioning of the political system uncovered in earlier polls this year, that is hardly a ringing endorsement. On the other hand, however, almost half (48%) credit McGreevey for being a governor who is "willing to make hard decisions," while a lesser number (36%) believe he is the kind of governor "who takes the easy way out."

When compared to previous governors, McGreevey clearly holds his own against his immediate predecessor Christie Whitman, and is more highly regarded than his Democratic forerunner Jim Florio. The state is evenly divided about whether Whitman (40%) or McGreevey (40%) has been a better governor, but McGreevey (44%) is more favorably regarded than Florio (24%) by a substantial margin.

In assessing the overall results Zukin noted, "It is useful to remember that even as controversial a figure as Florio was, he came within about 25,000 votes of winning re-election. And Brendan Byrne--dubbed 'one-term Byrne' in 1977--easily defeated Ray Bateman for re-election. Those who think Governor McGreevey dead are just whistling past the graveyard. By structure and stature, the Governor of New Jersey is one of the most powerful offices in the land. And in politics, two years from now is an eternity."

While controversy over some of the Governor's appointments--such as his nomination of John Wallace rather than Zulima Farber to fill the upcoming Supreme Court vacancy-- has dominated print headlines and the discussion of political insiders in the state, it appears to have been beneath the radar of New Jersey's rank and file. Half of the poll's 1002 respondents were asked "So far, do you generally approve or disapprove of the people McGreevey has nominated or appointed to top positions in state government?" The other half were asked, "So far, do you generally approve or disapprove of how McGreevey has handled the nominations and appointments of people to top positions in state government?"

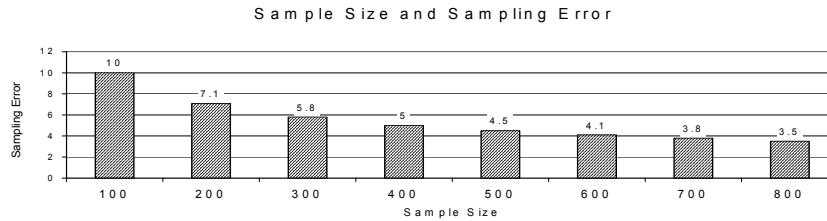
By either measure substantial portions of the citizenry are not attentive to any controversy surrounding the Governor's appointments: Roughly equal numbers say they approve (35%), disapprove (31%) and have no opinion of the people the Governor has

appointed to office. There is a slightly more negative coloration in responses to the question about how McGreevey has handled the appointments process—33 percent approve, 43 percent disapprove, 24% no opinion.

In assessing the overall up-tick in McGreevey's job performance rating from February to now, poll analysts note that it is generally an across the board phenomenon, suggesting a general change in the political culture of the state over the last few months. However, the change has been slightly more pronounced among Democrats and women, suggesting that key pieces in McGreevey's core of support may be returning home.

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP143-2) May 11, 2003

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll was conducted by telephone from April 24 to May 4 with a scientifically selected random sample of 1002 New Jersey adults. 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 1002 is ± 3.1 percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey residents were found to be less likely to agree with a statement, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.9 and 53.1 percent (50 ± 3.1) had all New Jersey 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 residents of North, Central and South Jersey, 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:

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way James McGreevey is handling his job as Governor?”
[JM1]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	43%	42%	15%	100%	(1002)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	58	29	13	100	(313)
--Independent	40	45	16	101	(322)
--Republican	29	57	15	101	(242)
<i>Region</i>					
--North	51	34	15	100	(461)
--Central	39	48	14	101	(251)
--South	34	50	16	100	(274)
<i>Gender</i>					
--Male	44	42	15	101	(482)
--Female	42	42	16	100	(520)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>					
--February 2003	34	45	21	100	(802)
--September 2002	43	32	26	101	(804)
--June 2002	50	24	26	100	(801)
--March 2002	45	21	34	100	(803)

“And has McGreevey done a better job as Governor than you expected, a worse job, or about the same as you thought he would do?” [JM2]

	<u>Better</u>	<u>Worse</u>	<u>Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	9%	24%	59%	8%	100%	(1002)
<u>Party Affiliation</u>						
--Democrat	14	21	59	6	100	(313)
--Independent	6	27	61	7	101	(322)
--Republican	6	27	58	8	99	(242)
<u>Region</u>						
--North	13	21	58	8	100	(461)
--Central	6	31	58	5	100	(251)
--South	5	25	60	9	99	(274)
<u>Gender</u>						
--Male	10	24	57	9	100	(482)
--Female	9	24	60	8	101	(520)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
September 2002	13	15	61	12	101	(804)

“So far, do you generally approve or disapprove of the people McGreevey has nominated or appointed to top positions in state government?” [JM3A]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	35%	31%	34%	100%	(501)

“So far, do you generally approve or disapprove of how McGreevey has handled the nominations and appointments of people to top positions in state government?” [JM3B]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	33%	43%	24%	100%	(501)

“Considering the state of the economy and the current budget situation, do you think McGreevey has had a harder or easier time compared with the last few governors, or has he faced the same challenges as previous governors?” [JM4]

	<u>Harder time</u>	<u>Easier time</u>	<u>About the Same</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	48%	4%	42%	6%	99%	(1002)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	60	2	32	6	100	(313)
--Independent	54	3	37	6	100	(322)
--Republican	34	6	54	6	100	(242)
<i>Region</i>						
--North	54	4	37	6	101	(461)
--Central	52	2	41	5	100	(251)
--South	40	4	49	7	100	(274)
<i>Gender</i>						
--Male	49	4	42	6	99	(482)
--Female	48	3	42	6	99	(520)

“And do you approve or disapprove of the way McGreevey is handling problems with the state budget?” [JM5]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	37%	44%	19%	100%	(1002)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	44	39	18	101	(481)
--Independent	26	54	20	100	(94)
--Republican	32	53	15	100	(366)
<i>Region</i>					
--North	41	39	20	100	(461)
--Central	33	51	16	100	(251)
--South	33	49	18	100	(274)
<i>Gender</i>					
--Male	41	43	16	100	(482)
--Female	34	45	21	100	(520)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>					
-- June 2002	35	35	30	100	(801)
-- March 2002	37	28	35	100	(803)

“Which description better fits Jim McGreevey: a Governor who favors REFORM of the political system, or a POLITICS AS USUAL Governor?” [JM6]

	<u>Reform of the system</u>	<u>Politics as usual</u>	<u>Depends/ Both (VOL)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	20%	67%	1%	12%	100%	(1002)
<i><u>Party Affiliation</u></i>						
--Democrat	31	56	--	13	100	(313)
--Independent	18	71	2	9	100	(322)
--Republican	10	78	--	12	100	(242)
<i><u>Region</u></i>						
--North	23	64	--	12	99	(461)
--Central	20	69	1	10	100	(251)
--South	19	66	2	14	101	(274)
<i><u>Gender</u></i>						
--Male	22	68	--	9	99	(482)
--Female	19	65	1	15	100	(520)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
--February 2003	23	61	1	16	101	(802)

“Would you say Jim McGreevey is more the kind of Governor who is willing to make hard decisions or more the kind of Governor who takes the easy way out?” [JM7]

	<u>Willing to make hard decisions</u>	<u>Takes the easy way out</u>	<u>Depends/ Both (VOL)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	48%	36%	1%	15%	100%	(1002)
<i><u>Party Affiliation</u></i>						
--Democrat	62	24	1	13	100	(313)
--Independent	46	40	2	12	100	(322)
--Republican	34	47	2	17	100	(242)
<i><u>Region</u></i>						
--North	53	32	1	14	100	(461)
--Central	43	44	2	12	101	(251)
--South	44	37	1	17	99	(274)
<i><u>Gender</u></i>						
--Male	49	40	1	10	100	(482)
--Female	46	33	2	19	100	(520)

“Comparing Jim McGreevey to New Jersey’s last governor Christie Whitman, who do you think has been a better governor – McGreevey or Whitman?” [JM8A]

	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Whitman</u>	<u>Neither (Vol)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	40%	40%	7%	13%	100%	(501)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
--February 2003	34	39	10	16	99	(802)
--September 2002	35	37	7	20	99	(804)

“Comparing Jim McGreevey to former Governor Jim Florio, who do you think has been a better governor – McGreevey or Florio?” [JM8B]

	<u>McGreevey</u>	<u>Florio</u>	<u>Neither (Vol)</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
May 2003	44%	24%	10%	22%	100%	(501)