

The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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PRESIDENT BUSH'S APPROVAL DECLINES

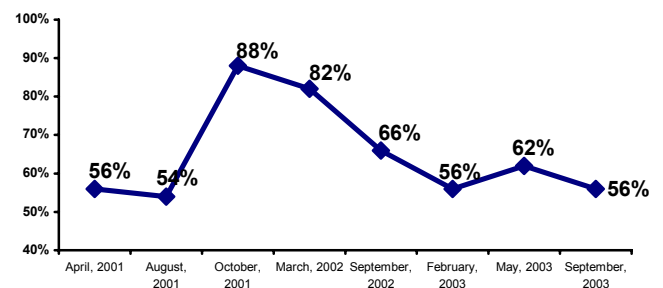
JOB RATINGS BECOME MORE PARTISAN

Echoing findings in the nation as a whole, President George W. Bush's job approval rating has declined here in New Jersey. However, he is generally well regarded in the state, with a majority of 56 percent who approve of the job he is doing. But there are some key shifts as we approach the 2004 election. Evaluations of Bush have become increasingly partisan over the past year and New Jerseyans are of two minds when it comes to evaluating the president's performance in specific policy areas.

Overall, by a margin of 56 to 37 percent, more New Jerseyans approve than disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as president, with the remaining 7 percent offering no opinion. But earlier in May of this year, positive assessments outnumbered negative ones by a wider margin of 62 to 29 percent.

While residents generally give the president positive marks for his handling of the war on terrorism, more disapprove than approve of the job he is doing handling the country's economy. And by a significant and growing margin, a greater number of

Approve of the way President Bush is handling his job



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

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Garden State residents feel that it is more important for Bush to focus on the economy rather than on terrorism.

These are some of the main findings of the latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll*, conducted with a statewide sample of 802 adult residents by telephone between September 2 and 8. The poll has a sampling error of ± 3.5 percentage points.

If the 2004 presidential election were held today, the poll indicates that Bush could be in trouble in New Jersey, which he lost by a wide margin to Democrat Al Gore in 2000. At this point, 43 percent of registered voters say they would cast their ballot for Bush while 35 percent expect to vote for the Democratic candidate. Another 10 percent say they will wait to see who the Democratic nominee turns out to be, and the rest are undecided or say they would vote for some other candidate.

Cliff Zukin, director of the Rutgers-based poll commented, "It is significant that the number who say they would vote for Bush runs far behind his job approval rating. It indicates that the approval rating may still be swelled by some who are giving a patriotic response of 'support for the president' while the country is at war. This number has been declining over time, and may do so further in the context of a partisan re-election campaign."

While New Jerseyans generally support the president, his job performance rating is taking on increasingly partisan overtones. While 90 percent of Republicans approve of the job Bush is doing, support drops to 61 percent of independents and to 34 percent of Democrats. Almost all of the drop in Bush's job performance rating from May to September of this year is the result of decreasing support among Democrats.

A Tale of Two Concerns

There has been a shift over the past year in the importance of economic issues relative to foreign concerns. Last September a greater number of New Jerseyans felt it was more important for Bush to focus on the war on terrorism (40%) than on the economy (31%). The current survey on the second anniversary of 9/11 finds quite a different state of affairs. At this point, more feel Bush should concentrate his efforts on the economy (48%) rather than on terrorism (30%). The remainder volunteer he should focus equally on both concerns or offer no opinion. This shift has come from Democrats, Republicans and independents alike, although it is slightly stronger among Democrats.

-- *The Economy* --

Just under one-quarter (23%) of New Jerseyans describe the national economy as being in “good times,” while two-thirds (66%) say the country is going through economic “bad times.” Bush’s policies receives the lion’s share of credit and blame for the economy, but are not seen as singularly responsible: One quarter (24%) say his policies have had a “great deal” of impact, half (48%) say they bear “some” responsibility, while a fifth (20%) say Bush’s policies are not really responsible for current economic conditions.

Statewide, the current poll finds 44 percent of New Jersey residents approve of the way Bush is handling the economy, while 49 percent disapprove. One year ago, approval ratings outnumbered disapproval by a margin of 48 to 38 percent. Just 26 percent of Democrats approve of Bush’s stewardship of the economy as do 46 percent of independents, compared to a much larger 79 percent of Republicans. Comparing the findings of this September to last shows almost all the slippage coming from Democrats.

-- *The War on Terrorism* --

Bush still receives good marks for his handling of the war on terrorism, although this too has declined in the past twelve months. Currently, 57 percent approve of the way the president has been handling the war on terrorism—roughly the same number as his overall job approval rating. Another 38 percent disapprove of the job he has been doing in this area. Last September, approval outnumbered disapproval by a wider margin of 64 to 28 percent. And, assessments of the president’s performance in this area have become increasingly partisan. There has been no change among Republicans, where 85 percent approved of his handling of the war on terrorism last September and 86 percent continue to do so now. However, the percentage of independents approving has dropped from 66 to 56 percent, and the percentage of Democrats approving has declined from 56 to 41 percent in the last twelve months.

And, a significant number of New Jerseyans voice serious reservations about the country’s success in the war on terrorism and the wisdom of invading Iraq. At this point in time roughly equal numbers describe the war on terrorism as a failure (37%) and as a

success (35%), with another 16 percent saying it is too early to tell and the remaining 12 percent expressing no opinion.

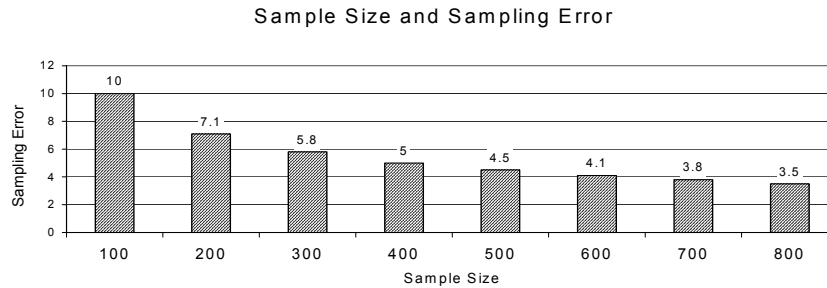
And, when asked whether removing Saddam Hussein from power “was worth the loss of American life and other costs of attacking Iraq,” 44 percent say “yes” while 45 percent say “no.” Echoing this deep division, 47 percent say the effort to bring stability and order in Iraq is going well, while 48 percent believe it is going badly.

Zukin summarized, “In New Jersey at least, the president is on increasingly shaky ground. Should the basis of evaluation on his job performance shift from international to domestic concerns we could well see a reprise of what happened to his father. A bubble of his support is now based on a patriotic “rally-round-the-flag” mindset that has been well-documented by political scientists. Should that bubble burst before November of 2004, we would expect to see a decline of support for the President and a very competitive election.”

 **AUDIO COMMENTARY ON THIS POLL IS** 
AVAILABLE BY DIALING 732-932-9384 ext. 302

BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP144-4) September 15, 2003

The latest *Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers* Poll was conducted by telephone from September 2 to 8 with a scientifically selected random sample of 802 New Jersey adults. 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 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 46.5 and 53.5 percent (50 ± 3.5) 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 George W. Bush is handling his job as President?”
[GB1]

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>DK</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	56%	37%	7%	100%	(802)
<u>Party Affiliation</u>					
--Democrat	34	55	10	99	(285)
--Independent	61	36	3	100	(212)
--Republican	90	8	2	100	(195)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>					
--May 2003	62	29	8	99	(1002)
<u>Party Affiliation</u>					
--Democrat	43	47	10	100	(313)
--Independent	61	33	6	100	(322)
--Republican	89	6	5	100	(242)
--February 2003	56	33	12	101	(401)
--September 2002	66	24	10	100	(804)
<u>Party Affiliation</u>					
--Democrat	55	35	10	100	(257)
--Independent	68	21	10	99	(212)
--Republican	89	8	2	99	(227)
--March 2002	82	14	4	100	(803)
--October 2001	88	8	4	100	(454)
--August 2001	54	33	13	100	(660)
--April 2001	56	33	11	100	(802)

“If the 2004 election for president was held today, would you vote for George W. Bush or the Democratic candidate?” [GB2]

	<u>Bush</u>	<u>Democrat</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Depends on the Democrat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003							
Registered Voters	43%	35%	4%	10%	8%	100%	(648)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	15	65	3	9	8	100	(232)
--Independent	42	25	6	17	10	100	(174)
--Republican	87	3	3	3	4	100	(176)
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	45	32	6	9	8	100	(314)
--Female	41	38	2	11	9	101	(334)

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way President Bush is handling the war on terrorism?” [GB3]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Somewhat Approve</u>	<u>Somewhat Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	30%	27%	14%	24%	5%	100%	(802)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	17	24	18	38	3	100	(285)
--Independent	25	31	13	25	6	100	(212)
--Republican	58	28	6	5	3	100	(195)
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	37	27	13	20	3	100	(386)
--Female	23	27	15	28	6	99	(416)
<i>PAST SURVEYS</i>							
September 2002		64		28	8	100	(804)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat		56		38	6	100	(257)
--Independent		66		29	6	101	(212)
--Republican		85		9	6	100	(227)
March 2002		83		13	5	101	(803)

“Do you approve or disapprove of the way George W. Bush is handling the economy?” [GB4]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Somewhat Approve</u>	<u>Somewhat Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	12%	32%	18%	31%	7%	100%	(802)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	4	22	23	45	5	99	(285)
--Independent	8	38	19	32	4	101	(212)
--Republican	31	48	11	5	5	100	(195)
<i>Gender</i>							
--Male	15	31	22	28	4	100	(386)
--Female	9	33	15	35	9	101	(416)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>							
September 2002		48		38	13	99	(804)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat		38		52	10	100	(257)
--Independent		45		43	12	100	(212)
--Republican		75		14	10	99	(227)

“Right now, which is more important for President Bush to focus on -- the economy or the war on terrorism?” [GB5]

	<u>Economy</u>	<u>War on Terrorism</u>	<u>(VOL) Both Equally</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	48%	30%	18%	4%	100%	(802)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	58	25	16	1	100	(285)
--Independent	47	31	19	3	100	(212)
--Republican	35	44	16	4	99	(195)
<i>Gender</i>						
--Male	51	25	21	3	100	(386)
--Female	46	34	15	4	99	(416)
<u>PAST SURVEYS</u>						
September 2002	31	40	25	4	100	(804)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>						
--Democrat	36	36	25	3	100	(257)
--Independent	34	41	24	2	101	(212)
--Republican	23	48	26	4	101	(227)
<i>Gender</i>						
--Male	35	39	23	3	100	(379)
--Female	28	41	27	4	100	(425)

[ASKED OF HALF THE SAMPLE:]

“Would you say that the nation’s economy is in good times or bad times right now?” [GB6]

	<u>Good Times</u>	<u>Bad Times</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	23%	66%	11%	100%	(401)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	16	77	8	101	(134)
--Independent	22	66	12	100	(114)
--Republican	40	43	16	99	(93)

[ASKED OF HALF THE SAMPLE:]

“To what extent are President Bush’s economic policies responsible for the current state of the economy – a great deal, some, not much, or not at all?” [GB7]

	<u>Great deal</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not much</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	24%	48%	11%	9%	8%	100%	(401)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	35	43	11	4	7	100	(134)
--Independent	21	49	11	12	8	101	(114)
--Republican	15	51	18	10	6	100	(93)

[ASKED OF HALF THE SAMPLE:]

“Do you think removing Saddam Hussein from power was worth the loss of American life and other costs of attacking Iraq, or not?” [GB8]

	<u>Worth it</u>	<u>Not worth it</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	44%	45%	12%	101%	(401)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>					
--Democrat	36	50	14	100	(151)
--Independent	44	44	12	100	(98)
--Republican	59	31	10	100	(102)

[ASKED OF HALF THE SAMPLE:]

“How would you say things are going for the U.S. in its efforts to bring stability and order to Iraq. Would you say things are going very well, somewhat well, somewhat badly, or very badly?” [GB9]

	<u>Very well</u>	<u>Somewhat well</u>	<u>Somewhat badly</u>	<u>Very badly</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
September 2003	6%	41%	35%	13%	4%	99%	(401)
<i>Party Affiliation</i>							
--Democrat	6	30	42	18	5	101	(151)
--Independent	2	41	42	13	2	100	(98)
--Republican	12	55	28	2	3	100	(102)