

# The Star-Ledger/Eagleton-Rutgers Poll

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## RELEASE INFORMATION

A story based on the survey findings presented in this release and background memo will appear in Sunday's *Star-Ledger*. Other newspapers may also use this information in their Sunday editions. Electronic media may release after 5:00 P.M. Saturday, February 1, 1992. We ask users to properly attribute this copyrighted information to "The Star-Ledger/Eagleton Poll."

## BUSH RATINGS SINK/FLORIO RATINGS STABLE

President George Bush's positive job performance rating is at an all time low of 37 percent in New Jersey. In addition, the President has an even lower positive rating of 16 percent for his handling of economic problems.

Governor Jim Florio continues to have positive overall ratings from about 1-in-4 state residents and a similar percent gives him positive ratings on the way he handles the economy.

The latest *Star Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone with 800 New Jerseyans between January 20 and January 27, 1992, which was before President Bush made his State of the Union speech and prior to Governor Florio's budget message. The poll also found that the overall mood of the public in New Jersey is still bleak with about 6-in-10 state residents reporting that they feel things in the state are "on the wrong track."

### Presidential Job Performance Ratings

In the past three months there has been a 19 point drop in the positive job performance rating New Jerseyans give President George Bush. Thirty-seven percent feel the President is doing an "excellent" (5%) or "good" (32%) job, compared to October 1991, when he received positive ratings from 56 percent of the state's residents. Sixty percent now rate his

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performance as "only fair" (38%) or poor (22%). In addition, the current rating is a 32 point decline from the 69 percent positive rating Bush had in June 1991.

There has been a decrease in the President's positive rating in all partisan groups. The largest change is among Republicans where there is a 22 point drop to 56 percent. The Democratic shift is 16 points to 18 percent, and there is an 18 point decline among independents to 38 percent.

"As the presidential campaign begins to heat up, positive evaluations of Bush are rapidly cooling down," commented Poll Director, Janice Ballou. "In fact, New Jerseyans' feelings about Bush are significantly more negative than what the national polls are showing."

Economic issues clearly continue to be a major difficulty for Bush. Only 16 percent of the state's residents feel the President is doing an "excellent" (2%) or "good" (14%) job handling the problems of the economy. This is a 4 point drop from October 1991, when he had a 20 percent positive rating. More than 8-in-10 now rate his economic performance as "only fair" (40%) or "poor" (42%).

Since October, the decline in Bush's positive rating for economic management is 9 points among Republicans, 3 points among Democrats, and unchanged among independents.

**Gubernatorial Job Performance Ratings**

For the past year and a half, Governor Jim Florio's positive job performance rating has hovered around 23 percent. Currently Florio has a 26 percent positive rating of "excellent" (3%) or "good" (23%), while 71 percent give him "only fair" (35%) or "poor" (36%) evaluations. In September 1991 the Governor's positive rating was 23 percent, a year ago it was 22 percent, and 23 percent in July 1990.

More Democrats (41%) than independents (26%) or Republicans (15%) give the Governor a positive job performance rating. While the positive ratings given by Democrats

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and Republicans have remained about the same as in the last poll, there has been a 10 point increase among independents from 16 percent in September.

Ballou noted, "For the past year and a half Florio's positive ratings have been at about 23 percent. This is very similar to what we saw in the 70's when Governor Byrne's positive ratings stayed at about 22 percent for two years until his re-election in 1977."

When it comes to handling economic problems, Florio receives a 24 percent positive rating of "excellent" (2%) or "good" (22%), compared to 67 percent who rate him "only fair" (41%) or "poor" (26%). This is the first time Florio has been rated on his management of the economy.

More Democrats (32%) than independents (23%) or Republicans (17%) give the Governor positive ratings on his economic performance.

### **Reasons for the Florio Rating**

New Jerseyans give a variety of reasons for their overall job performance evaluation of the Governor. While 47 percent name a specific policy issue, 25 percent refer to how he is handling his job, and 13 percent identify a personal characteristic that was used to evaluate the Governor. Among those who rate the Governor positively, 46 percent named a characteristic related to Florio's job performance, 25 percent name a policy issue and 7 percent a personality characteristic. In comparison, those who rate the governor "only fair" or "poor" are more likely to identify a specific policy issue (55%) than say they based their rating of the Governor on his performance in office (17%) or personal characteristics (16%).

Impressions of Florio that are based on issues are more likely to focus on comments about "taxes" than any other issue. New Jerseyans who mention taxes explain their evaluation of the Governor with statements such as: "He increased taxes so I can't keep my head above water;" "With the taxes and all you can't afford to live in New Jersey;" "Tax reform cut into the middle class;" "He neglected to inform us what he was going to do when he made the tax changes;" and "He has handled the tax situation very poorly."

Examples of New Jerseyans' opinions about how the Governor does his job include comments such as: "I think what he is doing is right for New Jersey, but the way he did it is wrong;" "I think he

is doing the best with what he was handed;" "His ideas are good, but the results are poor;" and "Because he did everything without checking with the people."

### **Overall climate in New Jersey**

Overall, New Jerseyans still feel the state is in poor condition. Sixty-two percent feel things in New Jersey "have pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track," compared to 29 percent who say things "are going in the right direction." These feelings are about the same as four months ago.

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**BACKGROUND MEMO — RELEASE SL/EP37-1 (EP87-1), SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1992**

The latest *Star-Ledger*/Eagleton Poll was conducted between January 20 and 27, 1992, when a random sample of 800 New Jerseyans, 18 years and older, was interviewed by telephone. Figures based on this sample size are subject to a sampling error of about  $\pm 3.5$  percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. Sampling error is the probable difference in results between interviewing everyone in the population versus a scientific sample taken from that population. Sampling error does not take into account other possible sources of error inherent in any study of public opinion. The questions and figures referred to in this release are presented below. The location of each question on the actual questionnaire is in brackets.

"How would you rate the job George Bush is doing as President--excellent, good, only fair or poor? [Q.2]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b><u>BUSH</u></b>							
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
<i><u>Party ID, January, 1992</u></i>							
--Democrat	2	16	45	36	1	100	(193)
--Independent	3	35	38	23	1	99	(350)
--Republican	11	45	32	9	3	100	(225)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
October, 1991	15	41	31	11	2	100	(800)
<i><u>Party ID, October, 1991</u></i>							
--Democrat	7	27	45	19	2	100	(225)
--Independent	9	47	30	13	--	99	(303)
--Republican	30	48	18	2	2	100	(242)
June, 1991	24	45	21	9	1	100	(800)
February, 1991	31	40	20	8	1	100	(800)
March, 1990	13	47	29	8	3	100	(800)
June, 1989	9	44	31	6	10	100	(800)

"And how would you rate Bush's handling of the problems of the economy--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.3]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b><u>BUSH</u></b>							
January, 1992	2%	14%	40%	42%	2%	100%	(800)
<i><u>Party ID, January, 1992</u></i>							
--Democrat	2	6	32	58	3	101	(193)
--Independent	1	13	43	42	1	100	(350)
--Republican	3	26	45	26	1	101	(225)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
October, 1991	2	18	36	41	3	100	(800)
<i><u>Party ID, October, 1991</u></i>							
--Democrat	--	11	30	57	2	100	(225)
--Independent	1	13	41	44	1	100	(303)
--Republican	5	33	37	20	5	100	(242)
March, 1990	3	32	45	17	3	100	(800)
June, 1989	4	30	41	16	9	100	(800)

"How would you rate the job Jim Florio is doing as Governor--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.4a]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b><u>FLORIO</u></b>							
January, 1992	3%	23%	35%	36%	2%	99%	(800)
<i><u>Party ID, January, 1992</u></i>							
--Democrat	3	38	30	27	2	100	(193)
--Independent	4	22	39	34	1	100	(350)
--Republican	1	14	34	49	1	99	(225)
<b><u>PAST SURVEYS</u></b>							
September, 1991	3		20	39	34	5	101 (800)
<i><u>Party ID, September, 1991</u></i>							
--Democrat	7	31	39	17	7	101	(217)
--Independent	3	13	41	38	6	101	(318)
--Republican	0	17	34	48	1	100	(223)
June, 1991	4	20	34	37	6	101	(800)
February, 1991	3	19	35	38	4	99	(800)
September/October, 1990	3	15	33	45	5	101	(800)
July, 1990	4	19	36	32	8	99	(800)
March, 1990	8	34	34	14	10	100	(800)

"What is the main reason why you give Governor Florio this rating?" [Q.4b]

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rates Governor Excellent/Good</u>	<u>Rates Governor Only Fair/Poor</u>
<u>Personal Characteristic</u>			
--Positive	2%	4%	1%
--Negative	11	3	15
<u>Job Performance</u>			
--Positive	17	46	6
--Negative	8	--	11
<u>Issues</u>			
--Positive	5	17	1
--Negative	30	--	41
--Neutral	12	8	13
Other	8	14	6
No Reason Given	2	2	1
Don't Know	6	5	5
TOTAL	101%	99%	100%
(n)	(789)	(198)	(575)

"And how would you rate Florio's handling of problems with the economy--excellent, good, only fair, or poor?" [Q.5]

	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Only Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(798)</b>

Party ID, January, 1992

--Democrat	5	27	41	19	8	100	(192)
--Independent	2	21	43	24	10	100	(349)
--Republican	1	16	40	36	8	101	(225)

"Generally speaking, would you say things in New Jersey are going in the right direction, or have they pretty seriously gotten off on the wrong track?" [Q.6]

	<u>Right Direction</u>	<u>Wrong Track</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(800)</b>

**PAST SURVEYS**

September, 1991	32	63	5	100	(800)
June, 1991	37	55	8	100	(800)
September/October, 1990	19	74	7	100	(800)

"The Republicans who were elected to the legislature say they will roll back the state sales tax from 7 to 6 percent. Overall, do you approve or disapprove of this state sales tax roll back? (PROBE: Do you mildly or strongly approve/disapprove of the roll back?)" [Q.28]

<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
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<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(800)</b>
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Party ID, January, 1992

--Democrat	41	28	10	19	2	100	(193)
--Independent	46	19	14	17	3	99	(350)
--Republican	46	25	13	11	5	100	(225)

"Rolling back the state sales tax may cause a budget deficit that could result in a reduction of state services. Do you approve or disapprove of the sales tax rollback if it results in a reduction of services? (PROBE: Do you mildly or strongly (approve/disapprove)?" [Q.29]

	<u>Strongly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Approve</u>	<u>Mildly Disapprove</u>	<u>Strongly Disapprove</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>(n)</u>
<b>January, 1992</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>101%</b>	<b>(800)</b>

Party ID, January, 1992

--Democrat	14	13	26	37	10	100	(193)
--Independent	21	14	26	36	4	101	(350)
--Republican	25	18	22	28	7	100	(225)