

**mt survey** Rate the Minister survey

# Cabinet thrives, but Fenech and Gatt hit rock bottom



**James Debono**

Finance Minister Tonio Fenech and Infrastructure Minister Austin Gatt have seen their popularity nosedive in the past nine months, MaltaToday's 'Rate the Minister' survey – the second held in 2009 – shows.

On the other hand, Education Minister Dolores Cristina kept her top-notch position on the ministers' league table. Despite his fall from grace, Tonio Fenech – whose squeaky-clean image was tainted by a controversy over a freebie trip aboard a businessman's private jet – remains slightly more popular than Austin Gatt, who hits rock bottom for the second consecutive time.

This results from a telephone survey conducted among 300 randomly selected respondents during the past week, which was compared to a similar survey held in January 2009. The number of respondents rating Fenech's performance positively slipped by 4 percentage points, while those rating his performance negatively increased by a staggering 27 percentage points.

The number of respondents rating Gatt's performance positively has slipped by two points, while those rating his performance negatively increased by 16 points. The survey shows all ministers, except Gatt and Fenech, increasing their positive ratings. But all Cabinet members saw an increase in negative ratings as the number of 'don't knows' fell when compared to last January's survey. The number of don't knows was higher in the first survey, as it was held less than a year after the appointment of the present Cabinet. Nine months later, respondents were more willing to rate their ministers. Labour voters showed a greater tendency to rate ministers negatively than in last January's survey.

**Austin Gatt**

The abrasive minister, whose portfolio includes Enemalta as well as transport and communications, is judged positively by just 19%. For the second consecutive time, Austin Gatt emerges as the least popular minister in Lawrence Gonzi's Cabinet. The number of respondents who rate him negatively has increased by 16 points from 33% to 49% over the past nine months. Significantly, Gatt has seen his positive rating among Nationalist Party voters slip by 14 points. Those who rate him negatively within his own party have also increased by five percentage points. A quarter of Nationalist voters now rate Gatt negatively and only little more than a third rate his performance positively. Gatt emerges as the least popular minister among Nationalist respondents.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	19.2 (-1.8)	34.9 (14.4)	4.7 (-1.9)
<b>Negative</b>	48.5 (15.8)	25.6 (5.3)	80.2 (26.3)
<b>Fair</b>	22.3 (3.6)	30.2 (11.4)	12.8 (-4.3)
<b>Don't know</b>	10 (-17.7)	9.3 (-2.3)	2.3 (-20.1)



**Tonio Fenech**

Finance Minister Tonio Fenech – who will be presenting the budget next week – has not only seen his positive rating slip by 4 percentage points but has seen his negative ratings increase by a staggering 27 percentage points. Fenech's poor result comes in the wake of revelations of his trip on a private jet owned by businessman George Fenech to watch an Arsenal match in the company of businessman Joe Gasan. Despite the loss in popularity, Fenech's losses among PN voters were more contained than amongst other categories of voters. While among PN voters his negative ratings increased by 3 percentage points, the number of Labour voters who now judge his performance negatively rose by a staggering 41 percentage points. In fact, Fenech emerges as the least popular minister among Labour respondents. Among this category only 1.2% judge his performance positively. Among PN voters his positive trust rating his slipped by 9 percentage points. But PN respondents were more likely to rate Fenech's performance as 'fair' rather than 'bad'.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	24.2 (-3.6)	48.8 (-9.1)	1.2 (-6.7)
<b>Negative</b>	46.8 (26.7)	18.6 (+2.7)	82.6 (+40.5)
<b>Fair</b>	22.9 (0.4)	31.4 (+16.9)	12.8 (-9.6)
<b>Don't know</b>	6.1 (-23.4)	1.2 (-10.4)	3.4 (-24.2)



**Dolores Cristina**

For the second consecutive time since her appointment as Education Minister, and for the fourth time since MaltaToday commenced its surveys, Dolores Cristina emerges as the most popular minister. Over the past nine months Cristina has seen her positive rating increase by a staggering 19.5%. Her gains come the wake a 21% reduction in the number of don't knows. Cristina also emerges as the most popular minister among Labour voters. She emerges as the only Nationalist minister to receive more positive than negative ratings among Labour voters. Cristina is presiding over one of the most radical reforms in educational history through the setting up of educational colleges which are set to decrease streaming on the secondary level. But her ministry was also subject to political controversy over the tendering process for MCAST. This could be reflected in the increase of 11 percentage points among Labour voters who judge her performance negatively.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	62.1 (19.5)	81.4 (+13.3)	40.7 (+3.9)
<b>Negative</b>	11.6 (3.9)	1.2 (-3.1)	30.2 (+10.5)
<b>Fair</b>	21.6 (-2.2)	15.1 (-0.8)	24.4 (+3.3)
<b>Don't know</b>	4.7 (-21.1)	2.3 (-9.3)	4.7 (-17.7)



**John Dalli**

Being the minister responsible for Health and Social Policy, John Dalli emerges as the fourth most popular minister – losing two notches from last January's survey. Significantly, the controversial minister – who recently described himself the "father confessor" of the disgruntled backbench – has seen his positive rating slip by 5 percentage points among PN voters. His positive ratings also fell by 7 points among Labour voters. But overall the minister has gained 3 percentage points because of respondents who

did not reveal who they had voted for in the 2008 general election. In fact, among this category Dalli was judged positively by 35% and negatively by 11%. Despite a 20 percentage point-increase in negative ratings, Dalli emerges as the third-favourite Nationalist minister among Labour respondents. Among Labour voters, Dalli is only surpassed in popularity by Dolores Cristina and Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	39.3 (3.1)	58.8 (-5)	24.4 (-7.2)
<b>Negative</b>	19 (8.6)	5.9 (-1.3)	38.4 (+20)
<b>Fair</b>	32.3 (9.9)	27.1 (+9.7)	30.2 (+9.1)
<b>Don't know</b>	9.4 (-21.5)	8.2 (-3.4)	7 (-21.9)



**Tonio Borg**

Despite his role as second to command in the Nationalist Cabinet, Foreign Minister Tonio Borg emerges as the fifth most popular minister. Borg has seen his positive ratings increase by 8 percentage points, mainly because of a drop in don't knows over the past nine months. But the minister has also seen his negative rating increase by 10.2 percentage points. Among Nationalists, Borg has seen a small increase in popularity, with his positive ratings rising by 3 percentage points.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	31.5 (8.4)	56.3 (+2.7)	9.3 (-1.2)
<b>Negative</b>	20.2 (10.2)	4.6 (-2.6)	48.8 (+26.4)
<b>Fair</b>	33.4 (4.3)	27.6 (+3)	29.1 (+4.1)
<b>Don't know</b>	14.9 (-22.9)	11.5 (-3)	12.8 (-29.3)



**Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici**

The Justice and Home Affairs minister, who is also responsible for the immigration and police 'hot potatoes', has seen a remarkable rise in popularity with his positive ratings increasing by 15 percentage points. His gains come mainly as a result of a sharp 27 percentage point drop in the number of 'don't knows'. Mifsud Bonnici has gained two notches, overtaking John Dalli and Giovanna Debono to become the second most popular Nationalist Minister. Significantly, he was the only Nationalist minister apart from Dolores Cristina to improve his positive rating among Labour voters.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	46.8 (14.7)	64 (+1.7)	29 (+4)
<b>Negative</b>	14 (5.9)	2.3 (-2)	30.2 (+13.1)
<b>Fair</b>	28.9 (5.9)	26.7 (+10.8)	34.9 (+9.9)
<b>Don't know</b>	10.3 (-26.5)	7 (-10.5)	5.9 (-27)



**Giovanna Debono**

Gozo minister Giovanna Debono emerges as the third most popular minister, gaining 12 percentage points since January. But despite a drop in 'don't knows', a fifth of respondents still could not rate her performance. Debono's ministry has attracted little controversy or criticism during the past months.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	42.2 (11.9)	68.2 (+11.7)	18.6 (-0.2)
<b>Negative</b>	16.3 (4.3)	7.1 (-0.1)	38.4 (+13.4)
<b>Fair</b>	21.2 (-1)	17.6 (+0.2)	24.4 (+0.7)
<b>Don't know</b>	20.2 (-15.3)	7.1 (-11.8)	18.6 (-14.3)



**Ministers' league table**

	Positive Rating	% points gained or lost since Jan 2009
Dolores Cristina	62.1	(+19.5)
Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici	46.8	(+14.7)
Giovanna Debono	42.2	(+11.9)
John Dalli	39.3	(+3.1)
Tonio Borg	31.5	(+8.4)
George Pullicino	31.2	(+10.2)
Tonio Fenech	27.8	(-3.6)
Austin Gatt	19.2	(-1.8)

  

	Negative Rating	% points gained or lost since Jan 2009
Austin Gatt	48.5	(+15.8)
Tonio Fenech	46.8	(+26.7)
George Pullicino	21.9	(+5.6)
Tonio Borg	20.2	(+10.2)
John Dalli	19	(+8.6)
Giovanna Debono	16.3	(+4.3)
Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici	14	(+5.9)
Dolores Cristina	11.6	(+3.9)

**George Pullicino**

Freed from the MEPA burden, George Pullicino seems to be recovering in popularity, gaining 10 percentage points in the past nine months during which the minister assumed a more visible role in embellishment projects in different parts of the island. The minister, who hit rock bottom alongside Austin Gatt nine months ago, has climbed two notches, surpassing both Gatt and Fenech in the ministers' league table. Pullicino's gains also come in the wake of a massive drop in the people who could not assess his ministry last year. The minister also seems to have weathered controversy on the Resources Authority handling of utility bills with his colleague Austin Gatt assuming most of the blame.

	All (% change)	PN voters	PL voters
<b>Positive</b>	31.2 (10.2)	51.2 (+7.7)	7 (-0.9)
<b>Negative</b>	21.9 (5.6)	9.3 (-3.7)	43 (+12.7)
<b>Fair</b>	39.5 (8.8)	34.9 (+3)	44.2 (+13.9)
<b>Don't know</b>	7.4 (-24.6)	4.7 (-6.9)	5.8 (-25.7)



*Methodology*  
The survey was held between Tuesday 27 and Thursday 30 October. A total of 461 respondents were randomly chosen from the telephone directory. 301 accepted to be interviewed. The results were weighed to reflect the age and sex balance of the population as represented in the 2008 demographic review. The survey has a margin of error of +/-5.7%.