

Stockton Poll: Murphy, Guadagno Lead in Primary Races for New Jersey Governor

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Contact: Christina Butterfield
News and Media Relations
Galloway, N.J. 08205
Christina.Butterfield@stockton.edu
(609) 626-3845
Stockton.edu/media

Galloway, N.J. - Republican Kim Guadagno and Democrat Phil Murphy both lead by double-digit percentages in the primary races to select their parties' nominees for New Jersey governor, according to a Stockton University Poll released today.

On the Republican side, Lt. Gov. Guadagno leads Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli by a margin of 37 percent to 18 percent, while GOP candidates Steven Rogers, Joseph Rullo and Hersh Singh all poll at less than 5 percent, with 34 percent undecided or naming a write-in candidate.

On the Democratic side, the poll shows Murphy, a former Goldman Sachs financier and ambassador to Germany, receiving triple the support of his closest rival with 34 percent. Former U.S. Treasury official Jim Johnson receives 10 percent, and Assemblyman John Wisniewski receives 9 percent. State Sen. Raymond Lesniak and Democrats Bill Brennan and Mark Zinna all poll at less than 5 percent.

The Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy conducted the statewide poll of 791 likely New Jersey voters, calling only registered Democrats and Republicans who voted in the 2016 New Jersey primary. Both landline and cell phones were called by live interviewers from May 16-23, 2017, reaching 403 Democrats and 389 Republicans. The poll's overall margin of error is +/- 3.5 percentage points and higher for data subsets. The MOE is +/- 4.9 percentage points for individual party results.

The new poll was the second Stockton University primary election poll, with the first having been conducted April 26-May 1, 2017 but not previously released. The two polls were taken before and after gubernatorial primary debates were held, including one for each party held May 9 at Stockton.

Between the polls, Guadagno solidified her lead, moving from 29 percent to 37 percent while the numbers for Ciattarelli, R-16th, barely changed from 19 percent to 18 percent. It appeared undecided voters mainly moved to Guadagno as their share of respondents declined by 10 points. Among only respondents who made a candidate choice in the latest poll, Guadagno would lead Ciattarelli 54 percent to 27 percent.

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Candidate (R)	April 26-May 1*	May 16-23*
Kim Guadagno	29%	37%
Jack Ciattarelli	19%	18%
Steven Rogers	4%	4%
Joseph Rullo	4%	3%
Hirsh Singh	2%	3%
Undecided	41%	31%

* All respondents

Sharon Schulman, executive director of the Hughes Center, theorized that the candidate debates and news coverage of them helped reduce the number of undecided voters. She noted that the Hughes Center committed to conducting two polls in its successful bid to host debates sanctioned by the N.J. Election Law Enforcement Commission.

The polls show that voters remain unfamiliar with the Republican field for governor. Only Guadagno is familiar to more than half the voters, with 45 percent viewing her favorably, 19 percent unfavorably and 31 percent unfamiliar. Fifty-three percent are not familiar with Ciattarelli, who has 27 percent favorable ratings over 11 percent unfavorable. The rest of the GOP candidates are unknown to more than 70 percent of poll respondents.

There was little change in support for the Democratic candidates between the pre- and post-debates polls. Murphy went from 37 percent to 34 percent, but his lead remains more than triple the numbers of his closest rivals. Among only respondents who made a candidate choice in the latest poll, Murphy would lead 50 percent to 14 percent for both Johnson and Wisniewski.

Candidate (D)	April 26-May 1*	May 16-23*
Phil Murphy	37%	34%
Jim Johnson	6%	10%
John Wisniewski	8%	9%
Raymond Lesniak	5%	4%
Bill Brennan	2%	3%
Mark Zinna	0%	1%
Undecided	41%	33%

* All respondents

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Like most of their Republican counterparts, the Democrats other than Murphy remain largely unknown. Murphy is seen favorably by 45 percent and unfavorably by 8 percent, with 40 percent unfamiliar. Wisniewski's ratings are 26 percent favorable to 10 percent unfavorable, with 58 percent unfamiliar. Johnson's ratings are 22 percent favorable, 7 percent unfavorable and 64 percent unfamiliar. Lesniak's ratings are 18 percent favorable to 13 percent unfavorable with 62 percent unfamiliar. Brennan and Zinna are unfamiliar to 71 percent and 85 percent, respectively.

Schulman said the gubernatorial candidates face the challenge of trying to attract media coverage in the face of major news stories coming out of the Trump administration.

"It's hard to break through when the news from Washington dominates coverage," Schulman said.

Primary elections are typically low-turnout events, making name recognition especially important, added Stockton Polling Institute manager John Froomjian.

Fourteen percent of respondents watched or listened to at least one gubernatorial primary debate, including a televised forum for each party sponsored by NJTV and NJ Spotlight, while 85 percent did not view debates. Among those who saw or heard at least one debate, 24 percent tuned in for the Democrats, 22 percent for the Republicans, and 48 percent for both parties.

Eighty percent saw at least one debate on TV. Twelve percent saw one on Facebook Live and 18 percent on a website. Stockton streamed its debates over both online media. Twenty-one percent listened to at least one debate on radio.

In both Stockton polls, property taxes is seen as the No. 1 state issue by 22.5 percent, and taxes in general is second. State pension funding and education also place high in voter concern in both polls. Also in both polls, three-quarters of respondents say New Jersey is going off on the wrong track, versus less than 20 percent saying it is going in the right direction.

Finally, 63 percent in the pre-debate poll and 66 percent in the post-debate poll say they would consider voting for an independent candidate for governor.

For full poll results, visit: <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/polling-results-2017.html>.

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.stockton.edu/hughescenter) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/StocktonHughesCenter> and can be followed on Twitter @hughescenter.

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