

Stockton Poll: Incumbents Have Slight Lead in Tight 2nd District Assembly Race

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Contact: Maryjane Briant
News and Media Relations Director
Galloway Township, NJ 08205
Maryjane.Briant@stockton.edu
(609) 652-4593
www.stockton.edu/media

Galloway, NJ - Two incumbent state assemblymen are leading in the highly competitive 2nd Legislative District election, with less than 10 percentage points separating the four Assembly candidates, according to a Stockton Poll released today.

Incumbent Democrat Vincent Mazzeo leads with 26 percent, when voters who say they lean toward supporting Mazzeo are included. Republican Chris Brown, also an incumbent, polls second-highest with 24 percent including those who lean. Democratic challenger Colin Bell, an Atlantic County freeholder, is pulling 21 percent, while Republican labor leader Will Pauls is at 17 percent.

The poll was conducted with 430 likely 2nd District voters by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University. Live interviewers on the Stockton campus called both landlines and cell phones from Oct. 7-14, 2015. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.7 percentage points.

Twelve percent of voters are undecided or not expressing a choice among the four party-backed candidates.

"A large percentage of voters remain up for grabs in an extremely tight race. Candidates have the opportunity to improve their position in the next weeks," said Daniel J. Douglas, director of the Hughes Center.

With state Assembly the highest office on this year's ballot and no statewide questions or races to draw voters to the polls, election experts are predicting low turnouts. Name recognition and get-out-the-vote efforts will likely be strong factors in the election, Douglas said.

Not surprisingly, the poll finds the incumbents with stronger name recognition, but they remain unknown to a sizable percentage.

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Twenty-five percent are unfamiliar or unsure about Mazzeo, with 49 percent whose views of him are very favorable (21 percent) or somewhat favorable (28 percent). Twenty-nine percent are not familiar with incumbent Brown, while 45 percent view him as very favorable (20 percent) or somewhat favorable (25 percent).

Nearly 43 percent are not familiar with Bell, and 46 percent are not familiar with Pauls. Of those who know Bell, 39 percent have views of him that are very favorable (10 percent) or somewhat favorable (29 percent). For Pauls, 31 percent view him as very favorable (7 percent) or somewhat favorable (24 percent).

Only 40 percent rate Mazzeo's job performance in positive terms, while 39 percent rate him as fair or poor. Twenty percent are not sure or refuse to answer. Brown's ratings are similar, with 42 percent rating him positively, 37 percent rating him as fair or poor, and 21 percent being not sure or refusing to answer.

On a more positive note, a majority of 55 percent feels the candidates are addressing issues that are important to them, while 37 percent feel they are not and 8 percent are unsure. Jobs is identified as the most important issue in the election by 19 percent, followed by 12 percent identifying casino issues as most important in the district that includes Atlantic City. Taxes in general (12 percent), the economy (11 percent) and property taxes (9 percent) are next in order of importance.

The election will be held on Tuesday, November 3, 2015. Brown, an attorney, has served in the Assembly since 2012. Mazzeo, a former mayor and councilman in Northfield, NJ, owns B.F. Mazzeo, a specialty produce and grocery store. He has served in the Assembly since 2014. Pauls, an Atlantic County freeholder, is president of the South Jersey Building Trades Council. He served as business manager and financial secretary for the Ironworkers Local 350 of Atlantic City for over 16 years, and is a member of the executive board of the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council of Atlantic City. Bell, an Atlantic County freeholder, is an attorney with Hankin Sandman Palladino & Weintrob.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.stockton.edu/hughescenter). Live interviewers on the Stockton campus called both landlines and cell phones from Oct. 7-14, 2015. The poll was conducted with 430 adults who are likely voters in New Jersey's 2nd Legislative District. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.7 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets. Data are weighted based on United States Census Bureau demographics for the 2nd District population.

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.