

Tough winter for Chris Christie as his home-state standing drops

By David Lauter

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie speaks to a Republican gathering earlier this month in Iowa, which holds the first contest in next year's presidential nominating process. (Steve Pope / Getty Images)

Only 37% of New Jersey voters have a favorable view of Christie, a new statewide poll finds
Weakness at home could worsen concerns among party activists, donors about Christie's personality

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie has had a tough winter, and it's not getting any better with a new poll showing his favorability dropping sharply in his home state.

[Mitt Romney's exit opens up Republican presidential primary race](#)

Christie, who hopes to get his party's presidential nomination, wins a favorable view from only 37% of registered New Jersey voters in the [latest survey](#) from Rutgers University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, one of the state's leading polls. That's a seven-point drop in two months. For the first time, a majority in the Rutgers-Eagleton survey, 53%, viewed him negatively.



Although the GOP nomination race has no official candidates yet, it has plenty of competition. This is the season in which presidential hopefuls try to win over important party activists, major donors and experienced staff, all of which are crucial to putting together a successful run. In that invisible primary, weakness at home can become a major liability.

Christie has a lot of problems beyond poll numbers. He has a difficult fight ahead with Democratic legislators over the state budget. Investigations into the role that his appointees played in blocking traffic on the George Washington Bridge appear to have widened into other alleged wrongdoing. And a recent trip to London generated unfavorable headlines over Christie's remarks about vaccinations.

But the more immediate political problem, which the home state disapproval could worsen, is the widespread perception that Christie's outspoken personality doesn't wear well with voters.

Just over a year ago, Christie was still at the top of the field of potential GOP presidential candidates. Then, in January 2014, the scandal over the bridge became a major national story. As Christie's appointees were accused of orchestrating the traffic tie-ups as a form of political retribution, his popularity began to sink. The drop hasn't stopped.

No one has come up with proof that Christie was personally involved in the bridge closure, but the continuing investigations have combined with other voter doubts to harm him at home and in states that hold key early primaries.

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A recent [Des Moines Register poll](#) in Iowa, for example, showed just 36% of likely voters in that state's Republican caucuses had a favorable impression of Christie. By a significant margin, that was the lowest standing of any of the major potential candidates. Similar findings have come from other state and national surveys.

As Amy Walter of the nonpartisan [Cook Political Report](#) noted a month ago, "poll after poll shows that the GOP base isn't ambivalent about New Jersey's governor - they simply don't like him."

A few numbers stand out in the latest New Jersey survey. Christie's overall drop in the poll appears to be driven by self-described independents souring on him in large numbers. Christie carried independent voters handily in both of his elections as governor, but now, the share giving him a favorable rating has dropped to 31%, down 16 points since December.

Part of the rationale for Christie's candidacy has been the argument that his victories in New Jersey show he can broaden the party's appeal beyond core Republican voters. His decline among independents challenges that.

And while the George Washington bridge scandal continues to take a toll, it's not Christie's biggest problem. Asked to say in their own words why they thought Christie's standing had declined, 15% cited the bridge scandal. But one-fifth of the voters surveyed mentioned something more fundamental -- Christie's overall personality or attitude.

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