

Republican Christie leads poll by 7 percent against governor

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With only six weeks left until the Nov. 3 state gubernatorial election, Republican candidate Chris Christie has the lead with New Jersey voters.

Christie, challenging Democrat Gov. Jon S. Corzine, holds a seven-point lead over the incumbent, according to a poll yesterday conducted by the Rasmussen reports — one of the nation's top polling services.

While Christie leads Corzine 48 percent to 41 percent, Independent Chris Daggett holds 6 percent of the vote and the remaining 5 percent are undecided, according to the poll.

Associate Director of the University's Eagleton Institute of Politics John Weingart said the state of the economy could be a reason for Christie's lead.

"I think there is a lot of concern about the state of the economy, which is making voters perhaps less enthusiastic about incumbents," he said.

According to the poll, 38 percent of voters approve of Corzine's role as governor.

Weingart said the favorable attention Christie received with his former work as a U.S. attorney may also be reflected in the results.

But while Christie leads now and has been leading since last spring, there is no defined front-runner yet, he said.

"It's too early to tell if that's going to be what the outcome will be," Weingart said.

According to the polls, 48 percent of voters have a favorable opinion of the Republican, while 46 percent do not.

Member of the College Republicans Ben Demarzo, a Rutgers College senior, said Christie is the choice for University students.

Christie has offered a comprehensive plan for higher education and keeping companies in the state, he said.

"Chris Christie's biggest proposal is trying to keep jobs in New Jersey to make New Jersey more affordable so we can stay in New Jersey after we graduate," Demarzo said.

School of Arts and Sciences sophomore Syed Murtaza said he would vote for Corzine because he approves of his plans for roads and transportation and of his incumbency.

"Because of his history, because of what he's been doing, it's been successful," he said.

Weingart said the polls indicate that Daggett's candidacy does not have enough support to win in November.

Forty-five percent of voters did not know enough about Daggett to form an opinion, and 8 percent had a strong opinion of the candidate, according to the poll.

His presence could affect the outcome by pulling votes from another candidate if the results are close, but it is not clear yet if he is pulling from either candidate.

Weingart said Daggett used to be a Republican, which could pull votes from Christie, but his moderate ideology and past record with environmental advocacy could pull from Corzine.

Eight percent of Democrats, 5 percent of unaffiliated voters and 2 percent of Republicans plan to vote for Daggett, according to the poll.

While Independents across the nation do not fair well in elections, Daggett has set himself apart, Weingart said. His ability to raise enough money to receive matching state funds for his candidacy and thus qualify for the debates is rare.

"That's a major asset that previous Independent candidates didn't have, and it gives him a chance to shine in those debates and pick up more support and become more of a factor in the race," Weingart said.

He said since the race is so close, it could go either way.

“Part of what makes politics interesting is you don’t know until the votes are counted,” Weingart said.

One important aspect in this election is the expectation of low voter turnout, so every vote counts, he said.

Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy first-year student Ashok Vegesna said he does not know whom he would vote for.

“I don’t really follow politics that much,” he said.

Rutgers College senior Karla Panchana said she was following the race, but now does not know which candidate she is leaning toward.

“It just seems like a lot of back and forth between them,” she said.

Six percent of voters say this year’s gubernatorial campaign has been less negative than most, while 24 percent say it’s been more negative, according to the poll. Sixty-eight percent feel it is about the same as usual.

The issues most important for University students do not differ from those of everyone else, Weingart said. Welfare, health care, transportation, taxes, the budget deficit and other key issues affect all.

“I think voters of all ages would be affected by and should be interested in how the candidates are going to be able to meet those challenges,” Weingart said.

Voters should focus on the wide policy gulf between the two frontrunners, he said.

“They have pretty profound differences in opinion in what government should do and how it should be run,” Weingart said. “I think it is a race well worth paying attention to if you live in New Jersey.”