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Christie secures satisfactory ratings

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Just shy of two months after his inauguration as New Jersey's 55th governor, Gov. Chris Christie is winning over a large chunk of the state's voters.

In a recent telephone poll conducted by the University's Eagleton Institute of Politics, about 45 percent of the 953 randomly selected adults view the new governor favorably. About 26 percent view him unfavorably, and another 26 percent have no opinion.

"I think the key thing is that Christie really has gotten a good running start in terms of the voters feeling favorable towards him, while a little more than a quarter have no opinion at all," said David Redlawsk, political science professor and Rutgers-Eagleton Poll director.

He said this is impressive given the state's fiscal climate.

"[Christie]'s been really visible in saying, 'I'm going to do something about the mess in New Jersey,'" said Redlawsk, adding that this general rhetoric appeals to many voters.

Some of this positivity could also be due to the honeymoon period new political figures receive when they enter office, but Redlawsk said the results show that those voters who did not support Christie during the election still do not support him.

It does not appear that the state is generally shifted toward a more conservative ideology either, he said.

"But independents right now like him, and I think it's mainly because of how he's addressing things," Redlawsk said.

The main concern Christie will address in his budget address Tuesday is closing the state's 40 percent budget deficit of \$11 billion, he said.

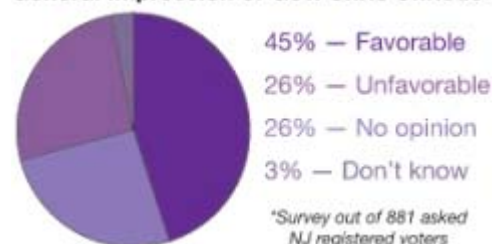
Christie has already said he is committed to not raising taxes, so the only possible course of action is to make deep cuts, Redlawsk said.

"There are very few — if any — places that are going to be safe from cutting," he said.

But ironically, not many voters support a tax cut in these times.

According to the poll, most voters agree that taxes for residents making more than \$400,000 annually should not be cut, despite Christie's support for allowing the surcharge imposed on high earners to

General Impression of Gov. Chris Christie



graphic by Taylere Peterson / Design Editor

A telephone poll conducted by the Eagleton Institute of Politics shows that a large portion of the state's voters favor Gov. Chris Christie.

expire. Even voters making more than \$150,000 per year oppose the tax cut. Only 35 percent support the cut, and 64 percent oppose it.

“Across the board, people don’t support [cutting taxes], but I don’t think by itself it’s driving opinion on Christie per se,” Redlawsk said.

Despite this initially high favorability rate, voters are skeptical about Christie’s ability to implement sweeping change.

“New Jersey voters have seen governor after governor shape things up, and most of the time, their impression has been nothing has [improved],” Redlawsk said. “Of course they are skeptical.”

Forty-two percent feel the state will remain the same, while 27 percent think Christie will make improvements, according to the poll. Eighteen percent of voters think the state will decline.

“Many people do think he’s got somewhat of a chance to make sweeping changes, but there isn’t an overwhelming sense that he’s going to do it,” Redlawsk said.

According to the poll, younger voters are less inclined to believe Christie will improve the state for the better. Twenty-nine percent of registered voters under 30 think the future will be worse, while only 14 percent think it will get better for New Jersey.

Saif Mohamed, a School of Arts and Sciences first-year student, said he is not confident Christie will keep his campaign promises.

“I don’t think [taxes] would be cut,” said Mohamed, believing Christie could end up raising taxes or not cutting them at all.

Meanwhile, 31 percent of voters over 65 feel New Jersey’s future will be better, while only 9 percent think it will worsen, according to the poll.

“The numbers specifically show that younger voters are somewhat less positive toward him,” Redlawsk said. “As the age of the voter goes up, support goes up. It’s clear that his support is stronger among older voters.”

He said this could be because young people typically vote more democratic and not necessarily because of Christie’s conservative stance on social issues, which has not dominated his administration yet.

“The social issues haven’t really come to the front at this stage of the game,” Redlawsk said.

But some University students are concerned with the finances of the state more than anything, citing public school funding as a major area to watch.

Sara Jamshidi, a School of Environmental and Biological Sciences junior and a Democrat, is against Christie.

“He cut funding for public education when it’s already ridiculous for students to pay for school,” she said.

“Don’t we already pay enough?”

She also did not agree with his decision to cut millions from NJ Transit funding, which could potentially lead to an increase in ticket prices.

“I feel like there could’ve been something he could’ve done,” Jamshidi said.

She thinks Christie and his cuts will not help out the state’s budget in the long run..

“I think it’s going to get so expensive to live here, that everyone’s going to move out,” Jamshidi said.

Redlawsk said Christie's main test of support would be when it comes time to implement specific courses of action.

"But right now, he's mostly talking big picture and many people are finding that quite refreshing," Redlawsk said.

