

Poll: Christie's 'tough Jersey Guy' routine turns off voters

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More than 56% see him as arrogant

Gov. Chris Christie's rough and tough Jersey Guy persona has gotten him into trouble with the very people he is trying to impress, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

Voters have become more likely to ascribe negative traits to the governor when compared to October, the poll finds. More than half (56 percent) say arrogant applies very well, up 15 points. The terms self-centered and bully each gained 11 points.

Stubborn, which may be seen as either positive or negative, is up 12 points; 62 percent say it fits the governor very well.

Voters are also more likely to express anger (up 11 points to 42 percent) and worry (up nine points to 46 percent) than six months ago, while no more likely to feel proud (35 percent, down four points) or enthusiastic (36 percent, down one point) about Christie.

Half the respondents use positives, such as strong leader, independent, and smart to describe Christie, but the only positive trait to increase significantly is independent (nine percentage points).

"After becoming less negative in October compared to April last year, voters are again more willing to ascribe negative traits to Governor Christie," Prof. David Redlawsk, the poll's director, said. "In the late part of 2011, as the presidential talk increased, the governor was less visibly combative in his public appearances. But as we were polling this time, several high profile events made people think again about traits they find

less positive.”

While Christie’s favorability ratings show little change since a February Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, voters have become more likely to describe him as stubborn, arrogant and self-centered than they were six months ago, a new survey finds. At the same time, a majority thinks strong leader, independent and smart are also good descriptors of the governor.

46 percent of voters feel favorably toward Christie while 42 percent do not, virtually unchanged since February. The governor received an “A” or “B” for his job performance in both polls from 43 percent of voters while 30 percent gave him a “D” or “F.”

Voters’ impressions of Christie have remained relatively consistent since August 2010. His worst rating came last August, when 45 percent were favorable and 47 percent unfavorable. At his best, Christie was up 12 points in November, 49 percent to 37 percent.

“It’s rather fascinating that across such a long period we have stable ratings,” Redlawsk said. “Given the strength of his personality and the battles he has picked and won, we would expect more ups and downs than we have seen. Following the initial honeymoon period, those who like him have pretty much stayed with him, while those opposed have not been won over.”

A gender gap continues in the governor’s favorability ratings, with men preferring him over women, 49 percent to 43 percent. Conversely, more women feel unfavorable, 45 percent to 38 percent. Women are also more prone to give

Christie a “D” or “F” on his job and men are more likely to bestow an “A” or “B.”

More Republicans (85 percent) feel favorably toward Christie than Democrats who feel unfavorably (61 percent). Independents are split at 43 percent favorable and 42 percent unfavorable.

Since August 2010, the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll has been asking voters to describe Christie with characteristics drawn mostly from media accounts. The governor’s high point came last April when more than half said smart, strong leader and independent applied very well. More than 40 percent called him a reformer. Today, 50 percent choose the first three and only 31 percent say reformer describes him very well.

Christie’s negatives have increased since October. The new results are similar to those of last April and represent the strongest negative responses seen over time, with 56 percent saying arrogant describes the governor well, along with 44 percent self-centered and 41 percent bully.

Although 62 percent of respondents call Christie stubborn, this trait has different connotations among supporters and detractors. “Stubborn, the top trait, is both a positive and a negative,” Redlawsk said. “Eighty-one percent of those who feel unfavorably about Christie say the word fits very well but so do 48 percent who like the governor.”

Not surprisingly, more Democrats choose negative traits to describe Christie while his backers choose positives. Stubborn is the Democrats’ top choice at 76 percent while strong leader tops the poll for Republicans (79 percent). Republicans are least likely to say bully describes Christie (12 percent) and Democrats are least likely to call him fair (10 percent). Independents are much more divided, giving relatively equal weight to both positive and negative traits.

“One reason why the governor’s favorability rating and job performance stay in a narrow range is the strong reactions people have to him on both sides,” Redlawsk said. “These reactions are grounded in perceptions of the governor tapped by this series of trait questions.”



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Men are more likely to characterize Christie as smart and a strong leader. Women are more apt to say independent applies. Men are also more likely describe Christie as fair. Both sexes equally agree about the appropriateness of the negative labels applied to the governor.

“This suggests the gender gap is driven more by a less positive view of the governor’s traits than a more negative view among women,” Redlawsk said. “Men are more likely to think the governor is effective as well, which may drive some of the difference.”

Voters also were asked how they felt when hearing or reading about Christie (proud, enthusiastic, worried or angry). Compared to October, more voters express worry and anger about the governor, while positive emotions show little change. Women are somewhat more likely than men to express the negative emotions. Not surprisingly, those who do not favor Christie are much more likely to be worried (81 percent) or angry (76 percent); those in his corner are proud (67 percent) and enthusiastic (66 percent) yet are less likely to express positive emotions than opponents are to be negative.

“Emotions drive a great deal of evaluation of the governor,” Redlawsk said.

Results are from a poll of 601 New Jersey adults, including a subsample of 518 registered voters conducted statewide by telephone from March 21 to 27. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 4.3 percentage points.

—TOM HESTER SR., NEWJERSEYNEWSROOM.COM



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