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Rutgers Poll: Obama has 17-pt. lead over Romney in NJ

By Politicker Staff | October 3rd, 2012 - 7:43am

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On the eve of today's first presidential debate, likely New Jersey voters give President Obama a 17-point lead over former Mass. Gov. Mitt Romney – a three-point increase since August. According to a new Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, 56 percent of New Jersey voters say they prefer Obama while 39 percent support Romney. Another 2 percent would like to see someone else, and only 4 percent are undecided.

Reflecting a national trend since the Democratic convention, voters have become slightly more positive about Obama over the past month: 56 percent now hold a favorable impression, up two points since August, while 39 percent view him unfavorably, unchanged over the past month. During the same time, voters have become increasingly negative about Romney. While 38 percent continue to view him favorably, 54 percent are now unfavorable, up five points from August.

The "economy and jobs" remains the most important election issue by far, named by 56 percent of voters. The president continues to be seen as better able to manage the economy with a 52 percent to 43 percent edge over the challenger. Many fewer voters (10 percent) pick the federal budget deficit as most important, followed by education at 9 percent and "Social Security and Medicare" at 6 percent. Romney holds nearly a 3 to 1 edge (66 percent to 23 percent) among voters who name the budget as the most important issue.

"This poll reflects recent national trends," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers University. "Romney's missteps on Libya and his '47 percent' comments may have had effects, though he was already well behind here. We've also seen a pickup in voters who say they are Democrats, which is reflected in the poll's partisan makeup. More people calling themselves Democrats means higher Obama numbers.

Results are from a poll of 790 registered voters conducted statewide among both landline and cell phone households from September 27-30. Within this sample, 645 respondents are identified as likely voters and are the subjects of this release. The likely voter sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.8 percentage points.

Obama increases large lead

President Obama's increased lead is due to several factors. Voters have become more likely to self-identify as Democrats, 95 percent of whom now support Obama. Romney, too, has solidified support among his party, as 94 percent of Republicans are now in his camp, up 11 points since August. Undecided voters and those wishing for another choice have dropped by half, as only 6 percent of likely voters cannot choose between the challenger and incumbent, with the president gaining a larger share of formerly undecided voters.

Most importantly, men have become more supportive of Obama. He now leads among men, 53 percent to 42 percent, compared to a 45 percent to 42 percent lead a month ago. Women remain stronger supporters, with 58 percent for Obama, and 36 percent for Romney, but the previously wide gender gap has closed considerably in recent weeks.

More independents are supporting Obama than when last polled. Romney also gained among this group as fewer independents remain undecided. Obama now leads among independents, 47 percent to 39 percent, compared to 44 percent to 36 percent last month.

"The president's improving numbers among men, combined with the fact that more younger voters, women and minority voters are entering the likely voter pool than last month, accounts for much of his gain in New Jersey," said Redlawsk. "If groups that traditionally support the president are increasingly likely to vote, then his position in New Jersey is probably not at risk."

White voters favor Romney by a single point, 47 percent to 46 percent. Nonwhite voters overwhelmingly prefer Obama and comprise nearly 30 percent of likely voters. The Republican holds a seven-point lead among Catholics and a five-point edge among likely voters 65 or older. In contrast, more than half of voters in all other age groups support Obama, with those ages 18 to 34 and 50 to 64 most likely to vote for him, at 63 percent and 62 percent respectively.

Regionally, voters in the shore and exurban counties of New Jersey are stronger Romney supporters, by 11 points and 25 points, respectively. Urban, suburban and south Jersey voters are all strong for Obama, with urban voters overwhelming for the president.

Likely voters are more positive about Obama personally and more negative about Romney than a month ago. While 56 percent of all likely voters have a favorable impression of Obama, he does not do as well among independents (48 percent). Romney does slightly better among independents at 40 percent favorable, than he does overall (38 percent), a 4-point improvement among independents since August. Romney also receives a huge favorability boost from his own party – 90 percent of Republicans now have a favorable impression of him, compared to just 78 percent before the Republican National Convention. In comparison, 94 percent of Democrats like Obama, virtually unchanged over the past month.

“The Republican National Convention did at least one thing it was meant to do. It greatly improved Romney’s standing among his base voters and somewhat improved how independents perceive him,” said Redlawsk.

Likely voters are generally less favorable toward Vice President Joe Biden than they are toward Obama: 49 percent have a favorable impression of Biden, with 39 percent unfavorable. Voters are slightly less negative toward Paul Ryan than they are toward Romney, though Ryan is still viewed unfavorably overall, 36 percent favorable to 48 percent unfavorable.

While the earlier gender gap has closed somewhat, women remain much less positive about Romney than do men while there is now no gender difference in feelings about Obama. Thirty-four percent of women feel favorable toward Romney, compared to 42 percent of men. But while women’s favorability toward Obama declined six points to 57 percent, men increased their rating by nine points to 56 percent favorable. Obama is now viewed as more likeable by both genders.

Changes in favorability among income groups shows some unexpected patterns in the face of Romney’s “47 percent” comments about those he does not believe will support him. The lowest income New Jersey voters, those with less than \$50,000 in household income, have become somewhat more favorable toward Romney in the last month, increasing from 33 percent favorable (55 percent unfavorable) to 38 percent favorable (51 percent unfavorable). At the same time, those earning more than \$150,000 show little change, barely moving from 44 percent favorable (48 percent unfavorable) to 43 percent favorable (50 percent unfavorable). Voters between these income groups have become significantly more unfavorable toward the Republican challenger.

“It does not look like Romney’s widely reported comments actually moved lower-income voters further away from him,” noted Redlawsk. “In fact, lowest-income group became slightly more likely to vote for Romney over the past month, rather than less likely. On the other hand, middle class voters with incomes between \$50,000 and \$150,000 are the ones who moved in Obama’s direction, while those who make more show relatively little change.”

Voters pick Obama to handle economy but Romney still deemed stronger leader More than half of likely voters name the economy as their most important issue in the election – though this is down six points from August. No other issue comes close to the economy as most important to voters. Among voters who care most about the economy, 52 percent say Obama is the right candidate to handle the issue, while 43 percent say Romney would do the better job.

More voters (28 percent) say “strong leader” is the quality they want most in a presidential candidate; among these voters, Romney is preferred 61 percent to 35 percent, an increase for Romney of seven points since August. But the next two qualities – “cares about me” (19 percent choose this quality) and “shares my values” (17 percent) clearly play into Obama’s strengths, as voters who want those qualities strongly support Obama. The president wins on values, 67 percent to 31 percent, and overwhelms Romney on caring, 80 percent to 14 percent. While Obama support among voters choosing “cares about me” has changed little, “shares my values” voters have moved strongly into Obama’s column, up 18 points in the past month. These voters eliminate any advantage Romney has on leadership.

Interest in the election is high among most registered voters. Almost three-quarters (73 percent) report they are “very interested,” while 23 percent are “somewhat interested” and 4 percent are “not interested at all.” Among those who are deemed likely voters based on history, turnout intent, political interest and campaign interest, an overwhelming 88 percent say they are “very interested” in this year’s presidential election.

“If there is an enthusiasm gap for Democrats, or at least compared to past elections, we’re not seeing it very clearly in New Jersey,” said Redlawsk. “At least among registered voters, interest is quite strong, and turnout appears likely to be similar to past presidential elections here.”



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rjc2341 · 6 days ago

No one believed me when I said that Romney & Kyrillos were going to get creamed, even running against incumbents who aren't held in high regard. Surprise, surprise: I was right again. What is it going to take to get through the thick skulls of the state GOP establishment that running wishy-washy liberal candidates simply doesn't inspire the electorate to go out and vote. The right Republican (Mike Doherty) definitely could have had a fighting chance against Menendez. And while there's no guarantee that he would have come out on top, if Ron Paul had been the presidential candidates instead of Flip-Flop Mittens, the race would be a heck of a lot more interesting.

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