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Poll: Christie's popularity not expected to help Republicans in Legislature

 (http://connect.nj.com/user/jennaportnoy/index.html) By Jenna Portnoy/The Star-Ledger
 (http://connect.nj.com/user/jennaportnoy/posts.html)
 on February 12, 2013 at 9:00 AM, updated February 12, 2013 at 4:26 PM

TRENTON

(<http://www.nj.com/politics>) — Voters prefer Gov. Chris Christie to state Sen. Barbara Buono by a 3-to-1 margin, but the Republican incumbent's coattails do not extend to the Legislature, according to a poll released today.



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State Sen. Barbara Buono (D-Middlesex) is the only major Democrat committed to taking on Gov. Chris Christie in November.

file photos

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll of 698 registered voters found 63 percent would vote for Christie if the election were held today compared to 21 percent who would vote for Buono of Middlesex County, the only major Democrat in the race.

"It's not at all typical to see 40 percent leads in a governor's race at all, at any point in the race," said professor David Redlawsk, the director of the poll, "but it is the case that typically the non-incumbent isn't that well-known at the beginning of the campaign."

Though Republicans say they believe they can pick up majorities in the Senate or Assembly, only 25 percent of voters say they plan to vote for Republicans in the Legislature while 40 percent say they'll vote Democratic. Another quarter of voters are undecided.

The split reflects the Democrats' significant registration advantage over Republicans in the blue state. Still, Redlawsk said, the dynamics of the race for governor, the only

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statewide elected official, are unique from the individual legislative races.

"It's also the case that in 2011 when the governor actively campaigned for Republicans for the Legislature, Democrats in our generic polling were typically up 10 to 15 points and they easily held control," Redlawsk said.



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Asked for their general impression of Buono, 67 percent of voters have no opinion. Overcoming this name recognition disadvantage will be a major challenge for Buono, but with only two governor's races in the nation this year, she will garner attention as the person taking on the popular Republican. More than twice as many Democrats feel favorable toward her in the new poll, compared to one taken in November.

"From the standpoint of being a candidate, she's moving in direction that a candidate needs to move. People are becoming more aware of her," Redlawsk said. "The question is, will she have the kind of money in this state she needs to get her name out there?"

About two-thirds of voters think Christie should be re-elected as opposed "someone new," — a measure that spiked after Hurricane Sandy — and 86 percent of approve of how he handled Sandy specifically. However, more voters disapprove when asked about how Christie has handled the economy and taxes.

"How much do voters focus on the great job he did with Sandy or how much do voters begin to focus on their discontent with other issues?" Redlawsk said.

The poll was conducted via landline and mobile phone from Jan. 30 to Feb. 3, and has a margin of error of 3.7 percentage points.



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