

Rutgers-Eagleton poll: Buono cuts into Christie's lead, but wide margin remains

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BY JOHN REITMEYER

Governor Christie's Democratic challenger is making some inroads, but remains far behind the popular Republican incumbent, according to a new Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

Christie now leads longtime state Sen. Barbara Buono by a comfortable 57 percent to 27 percent margin, the telephone poll of 923 adults conducted earlier this month shows. The margin of error was 3.7 percent.

A similar Rutgers-Eagleton survey from February found a wider, 42 point lead for Christie among registered voters.

Buono's biggest problem so far is name recognition. The new poll indicates 70 percent have no opinion of Buono, a former Senate majority leader from Middlesex County. The survey found 18 percent have a favorable opinion, while 12 percent reported an unfavorable impression.

"While Christie maintains a large lead, some tightening is all but inevitable, since we expect most Democrats to vote the party line in November," said David Redlawsk, a Rutgers political science professor and director of the Rutgers-Eagleton poll.

Christie enjoyed record popularity in the aftermath of superstorm Sandy last year, but he is starting to come back down to earth. His overall job approval is now 68 percent, down 5 points from February.

The poll found that 42 percent of voters approve of his handling of New Jersey's economy and jobs, and 37 percent approve of his tax policy.

Christie remains popular among independents, leading Buono by a 65 percent to 16 percent margin. And a quarter of those who voted for Christie's opponent in 2009 — then-Democratic Gov. Jon Corzine — say this time they are supporting Christie.

"While Buono has made some very noticeable gains among her base, many of the voters Democrats usually count on continue to support Christie," Redlawsk said.

On the issues, voters identified taxes and unemployment as their top concerns, followed by the economy and crime. Among those who said taxes that problem, while 59 percent who identified jobs as their key issue shared that same concern.

"Buono has to do more to convince voters who disapprove Christie's performance on the key problems to give her a chance," Redlawsk said. "Otherwise Governor Christie may coast to reelection on the strength of his overall job approval and favorability, even if the race gets a little closer."

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