

It's Cory Booker's race to lose

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There are slightly more than two months until the Democratic primary in the New Jersey special election for Senate, and Newark Mayor Cory Booker starts as the prohibitive favorite. 

With Republicans unable to land a top-tier candidate, the real action is in the Democratic primary, and two new polls show Booker with a huge early lead.

According to a new [Rutgers-Eagleton poll](#), Booker leads Rep. Frank Pallone 55 percent to 9 percent, with Rep. Rush Holt bringing up the rear at 8 percent.

And a new [Quinnipiac University poll](#) shows very

much the same picture, with Booker at 53 percent, Holt at 10 percent and Pallone at 9 percent.



Newark Mayor Cory Booker, left, and Gov. Chris Christie (Mel Evans/Associated Press)

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State Assembly Speaker Sheila Oliver, who also entered the primary before the filing deadline Monday, was not included in either poll.

Booker's early advantage has a lot to do with how much better known he is than the two congressmen — the Q poll shows more than 60 percent of voters aren't familiar with either Pallone or Holt, while just a quarter don't know Booker — but it's also a reflection of Booker's overwhelming popularity.

Booker's favorable/unfavorable split is 57-14 among all voters and 70-5 among Democrats, according to the Q poll. And the Rutgers poll shows Democratic-leaning independents give him a 66-9 split.

About the only area where Booker appears less-than-strong is in South Jersey, where his favorable/unfavorable split is 37-10 because voters don't know him as well.

Booker got a big break, though, because no candidates from South Jersey got into the race, and South Jersey Democratic power broker George Norcross — perhaps bowing to the inevitability of Sen. Cory Booker — endorsed the Newarker.

In other words, unless some serious damage is done to Booker's reputation over the next two months, there's little reason to believe he won't be in the driver's seat.

The primary is Aug. 13, while the special election is set for Oct. 16. Former gubernatorial candidate Steve Lonegan leads the GOP field