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## **Murphy and Democrats in Legislature Hold Lead Heading Into Election Day; Four in Ten Voters Say Opposing Candidate, Partisanship Fuel Their Choice**

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J. (Nov. 1, 2021) – Governor Phil Murphy holds onto a solid lead against former New Jersey Assemblyman and Republican nominee Jack Ciattarelli, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll. Fifty percent of registered voters in New Jersey say they will – or already have – cast their vote for the governor, versus 42 percent who side with his opponent. Likely voter models do little to change the race.

“Any good poll consumer needs to remember – especially in an election cycle – that any single poll is a snapshot in time, that poll numbers are estimates with some level of statistical uncertainty, and that they are meant more to explain than predict,” said Ashley Koning, an assistant research professor and director of the [Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling \(ECPIP\)](#) at [Rutgers University–New Brunswick](#). “But if we look at the several statewide polls conducted in the last week, the big picture points to a sizable margin for Murphy that – despite narrowing throughout the campaign – will be difficult for Ciattarelli to overcome in the final days, especially in a state where Democrats outnumber Republicans two-to-one in registration.”

Many are casting their vote not necessarily out of support for their candidate but in opposition to the opponent (24 percent) or because of their partisanship (18 percent). When asked verbatim why they are voting for their chosen candidate, voters say things like their choice is “better than the other guy” or the “lesser of two evils.” Fifteen percent say their choice is based on their satisfaction with the overall job Murphy has been doing as governor. Six percent say their candidate choice shares their views and values, and another 4 percent say they are looking for a change or something new. Two percent specifically mention former President Trump as their reason.

Substantive issues play a small role in candidate choice: 6 percent cite the pandemic as influential to their vote – 1 percent specifically mention something about vaccine and mask mandates – and 6 percent mention something about taxes or the economy.

“New Jersey typically gets some national attention as one of two gubernatorial elections always

scheduled in the year after a presidential, but this year, the campaigns themselves have become nationalized,” said Koning. “The race has become more about referendums on the national parties, politicians and policies rather than on New Jersey-centric issues, and more about automatic partisan-based opposition than genuine support of either candidate or their positions.”

“Based on voters’ responses, Murphy’s strategy of tying Ciattarelli to Trump seems to be working with some voters, as all but one who mention Trump do so as a reason not to vote for Ciattarelli,” Koning also noted. “Voters cite Murphy’s handling of the pandemic as a reason to vote both for him and against him, with a few voters specifically mentioning nursing homes and mask mandates as reasons for their opposition.”

Half (50 percent) of New Jerseyans continue to have a favorable impression of the governor, while 35 percent have an unfavorable one; 11 have no opinion on him at all, and 4 percent claim they do not know who he is. These latest numbers remain on par with an ease in the governor’s favorability ratings last spring after reaching record highs during the pandemic.

Ciattarelli’s name recognition among New Jerseyans has improved in the final months of the campaign. Thirty-three percent of all New Jerseyans are now favorable toward the Republican nominee, almost triple what it was last spring (then at 12 percent). Yet unfavorable impressions of him have also tripled in this same time, now at 34 percent (from 11 percent). 21 percent continue to have no opinion of Ciattarelli (down a few points from 26 percent in May). Thirteen percent still do not know who Ciattarelli is, just a third of what it was in the spring.

Few voters hold any impression on the two lieutenant governor candidates. Two-thirds either have no opinion on Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver or do not know who she is; three-quarters say the same about Ciattarelli’s running mate, former state Senator Diane Allen.

Over half of voters feel the gubernatorial candidates lean toward the end of the ideological spectrum in their respective parties. Thirty-seven percent perceive Murphy as very liberal and another 25 percent somewhat liberal; 21 percent think he is moderate, just 7 percent feel he is on the more conservative end of the spectrum, and 10 percent are unsure. Likewise, 26 percent believe Ciattarelli is very conservative, and another 29 percent say he is somewhat conservative; 18 percent think he is moderate. Just 7 percent believe Ciattarelli is either somewhat or very liberal, and 20 percent are unsure.

In contrast to how they perceive the ideologies of the two gubernatorial candidates, almost half of New Jersey voters identify themselves as moderate: 46 percent say they are ideologically in the middle, compared to 25 percent who say they are liberal and 24 who say they are conservative.

Democrats lead Republicans by wide margins in generic head-to-heads for both the state Senate and General Assembly. Most voters are unaware that elections for these offices are on the ballot, however. While 79 percent are aware that a gubernatorial election is happening this year, 30 percent correctly identify the state Senate and 25 percent the General Assembly as being up

for election; 13 percent say the state Legislature, in general. Just one in five (22 percent) voters correctly say that all of the above are up for election tomorrow.

More than four in 10 have no impression of the New Jersey State Legislature: 30 percent have a favorable view, 26 percent an unfavorable one, 31 percent have no opinion, and 13 percent are unfamiliar with the legislative body.

Almost all registered voters say they will definitely or probably vote; almost nine in 10 similarly say they always or nearly always vote in elections. Thirty-three percent say they have been following the election very closely, and another 45 percent say somewhat closely. Three-quarters are interested at least “a fair amount” in politics.

Results are from a statewide poll of 1,008 adults contacted by live interviewers on landlines and cell phones from Oct. 21–27. The full sample has a margin of error of +/- 3.9 percentage points. The registered voter subsample with 901 self-identified registered voters has a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percentage points.

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**QUESTIONS AND TABLES START ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE**

### Questions and Tables

*The questions covered in this release are listed below. Column percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding. Respondents are New Jersey registered voters, unless otherwise noted; all percentages are of weighted results. Interpret groups with sample sizes under 100 with extreme caution.*

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**Q. How likely are you to vote in the general election this November? Do you think you will definitely vote, probably vote, probably not vote, definitely not vote, or have you already voted?**

|                     |     |
|---------------------|-----|
| Definitely vote     | 73% |
| Probably vote       | 13% |
| Probably not vote   | 2%  |
| Definitely not vote | 2%  |
| Already voted       | 10% |
| Don't know          | 1%  |
| Unweighted N=       | 899 |

**Q. Generally speaking, how much interest would you say you have in politics?**

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| A great deal       | 37% |
| A fair amount      | 38% |
| Only a little      | 18% |
| No interest at all | 7%  |
| Don't know         | 0%  |
| Unweighted N=      | 900 |

**Q. How often would you say you vote?**

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Always           | 60% |
| Nearly always    | 28% |
| Part of the time | 8%  |
| Seldom           | 3%  |
| Don't know       | 1%  |
| Unweighted N=    | 895 |

**Q. Have you been following news about the candidates running in the elections very closely, somewhat closely, not very closely, or not at all?**

|                  |     |
|------------------|-----|
| Very closely     | 33% |
| Somewhat closely | 45% |
| Not very closely | 16% |
| Not at all       | 6%  |
| Don't know       | 1%  |
| Unweighted N=    | 899 |

**Q. Are you aware of what state office or offices are up for election this year? [IF YES] Which state office or offices are on the ballot? [OPEN-ENDED, MULTIPLE ANSWERS ALLOWED; PERCENTAGES ADD UP TO >100%]**

|                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|
| Governor          | 79% |
| State Senate      | 30% |
| State Assembly    | 25% |
| State Legislature | 13% |
| Other             | 11% |
| None              | 1%  |
| Don't know        | 16% |
| Unweighted N=     | 899 |

***Correct identification of all state offices up for election:***

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Correct       | 78% |
| Incorrect     | 22% |
| Unweighted N= | 857 |

**Q. There is an election for governor this year. If the election for New Jersey Governor were being held today, and the candidates were [ROTATE ORDER: Democrat Phil Murphy and Republican Jack Ciattarelli], for whom would you vote?**

**[NOTE: If respondent already voted:] There is an election for governor this year. Thinking about the gubernatorial election, for whom did you vote? Was it [ROTATE ORDER: Democrat Phil Murphy] or [Republican Jack Ciattarelli]?**

**[Asked if answer given was not Phil Murphy or Jack Ciattarelli]**

**Q. If you had to choose, would you lean toward [ROTATE ORDER SAME AS G1: Democrat Phil Murphy, or Republican Jack Ciattarelli]?**

|               |     |
|---------------|-----|
| Murphy        | 50% |
| Ciattarelli   | 42% |
| Neither       | 3%  |
| Someone else  | 1%  |
| Don't know    | 3%  |
| Unweighted N= | 815 |

**Q. In just a few words, why are you voting for [NAME FROM G1B or G2]?**

|                                       |     |
|---------------------------------------|-----|
| Opposition to other candidate         | 24% |
| Partisan values/opposition to a party | 18% |
| Satisfied with job done               | 15% |
| COVID-19                              | 6%  |
| Taxes/Economy                         | 6%  |
| Share views/values                    | 6%  |
| Change/something new                  | 4%  |
| Mention of Trump (pos or neg)         | 2%  |
| Reproductive issues                   | 1%  |
| Mask/vaccine mandates                 | 1%  |
| Other                                 | 17% |
| Unweighted N=                         | 691 |





**Q. Would you consider Phil Murphy to be very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?**

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Very liberal          | 37% |
| Somewhat liberal      | 25% |
| Moderate              | 21% |
| Somewhat conservative | 4%  |
| Very conservative     | 3%  |
| Don't know            | 10% |
| Unweighted N=         | 819 |

**Q. Would you consider Jack Ciattarelli to be very liberal, somewhat liberal, moderate, somewhat conservative, or very conservative?**

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Very liberal          | 3%  |
| Somewhat liberal      | 4%  |
| Moderate              | 18% |
| Somewhat conservative | 29% |
| Very conservative     | 26% |
| Don't know            | 20% |
| Unweighted N=         | 819 |

**Q. There will also be elections for the New Jersey state legislature in November. Please think about the election for your representatives to the *General Assembly*. Do you plan to vote for [ROTATE: Democrats or Republicans] for the General Assembly?**

[Asked if answer given was neither Democrats nor Republicans]

**Q. Are you leaning toward voting for Democrats for the New Jersey Assembly or for Republicans? [ROTATE PARTIES; same order as Q25]**

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Republicans                 | 39% |
| Democrats                   | 48% |
| Neither                     | 2%  |
| Someone else                | 0%  |
| Would not vote              | 1%  |
| A Democrat AND a Republican | 3%  |
| Don't know                  | 7%  |

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Unweighted N= 881

**Q. Now think about the election for your representative to the *State Senate*. Do you plan to vote for [ROTATE: the Democrat or the Republican] for the New Jersey Senate?**

**[Asked if answer given was neither Democrat nor Republican]**

**Q. Are you leaning toward voting for the Democrat for the New Jersey State Senate or for the Republican? [ROTATE PARTIES; same order as Q26]**

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|                |     |
|----------------|-----|
| Republican     | 40% |
| Democrat       | 50% |
| Neither        | 2%  |
| Someone else   | 1%  |
| Would not vote | 1%  |
| Don't know     | 7%  |
| Unweighted N=  | 881 |

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**Q.** I'd like to ask you about some people. Please tell me if your general impression of each one is favorable or unfavorable, or if you do not have an opinion. If you do not know the person, just say so.

[NOTE: SPLIT SAMPLE—HALF OF RESPONDENTS RECEIVED VERSION A AND HALF RECEIVED VERSION B]

**[REGISTERED VOTERS]**

**VERSION A**

|                   | <b>Phil Murphy</b> | <b>Jack Ciattarelli</b> | <b>Sheila Oliver</b> | <b>Diane Allen</b> |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Favorable         | 50%                | 33%                     | 21%                  | 14%                |
| Unfavorable       | 35%                | 34%                     | 15%                  | 9%                 |
| No opinion        | 11%                | 21%                     | 28%                  | 30%                |
| Don't know person | 4%                 | 13%                     | 37%                  | 48%                |
| Unweighted N=     | 412                | 411                     | 398                  | 397                |

**[ALL ADULTS]**

**VERSION A**

|                   | <b>Phil Murphy</b> | <b>Jack Ciattarelli</b> | <b>Sheila Oliver</b> | <b>Diane Allen</b> |
|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Favorable         | 49%                | 29%                     | 18%                  | 12%                |
| Unfavorable       | 33%                | 32%                     | 14%                  | 9%                 |
| No opinion        | 14%                | 22%                     | 28%                  | 30%                |
| Don't know person | 4%                 | 17%                     | 41%                  | 50%                |
| Unweighted N=     | 494                | 489                     | 486                  | 489                |

**[REGISTERED VOTERS]**

**VERSION B**

|                   | <b>Joe Biden</b> | <b>Bob Menendez</b> | <b>Cory Booker</b> | <b>State Legislature</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Favorable         | 48%              | 34%                 | 46%                | 30%                      |
| Unfavorable       | 45%              | 40%                 | 40%                | 26%                      |
| No opinion        | 7%               | 13%                 | 9%                 | 31%                      |
| Don't know person | 1%               | 13%                 | 5%                 | 13%                      |
| Unweighted N=     | 429              | 428                 | 428                | 415                      |

**[ALL ADULTS]**

**VERSION B**

|                   | <b>Joe Biden</b> | <b>Bob Menendez</b> | <b>Cory Booker</b> | <b>State Legislature</b> |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Favorable         | 48%              | 31%                 | 43%                | 30%                      |
| Unfavorable       | 43%              | 38%                 | 38%                | 26%                      |
| No opinion        | 9%               | 15%                 | 12%                | 31%                      |
| Don't know person | 1%               | 16%                 | 8%                 | 14%                      |
| Unweighted N=     | 481              | 479                 | 477                | 468                      |

### Methodology

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted by telephone using live interviewers October 21-27, 2021, with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,008 New Jersey adults, 18 or older. Persons without a telephone could not be included in the random selection process. Respondents within a household are selected by asking randomly for the youngest adult male or female currently available. If the named gender is not available, the youngest adult of the other gender is interviewed. The poll was available in Spanish for respondents who requested it. This poll included 308 adults reached on a landline phone and 700 adults reached on a cell phone, all acquired through random digit dialing; 475 of the cell phone completes were acquired through one-to-one SMS text messaging by live interviewers that led respondents to an online version of the survey. Distribution of phone use in this sample is:

|                                  |     |
|----------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Cell Only</b>                 | 46% |
| <b>Dual Use, Reached on Cell</b> | 20% |
| <b>Dual Use, Reached on LL</b>   | 49% |
| <b>Landline Only</b>             | 2%  |

The data were weighted to be representative of the non-institutionalized adult population of New Jersey. The weighting balanced sample demographics to target population parameters. The sample is balanced, by form, to match parameters for sex, age, education, region, race/ethnicity and phone use. The sex, age, education, race/ethnicity, and region parameters were derived from 2019 American Community Survey PUMS data. The phone use parameter was derived from estimates provided by the National Health Interview Survey Early Release Program.<sup>1</sup>

Weighting was done in three stages. The first stage of weighting corrects for different probabilities of selection across the RDD samples associated with the number of adults in each household and each respondent's telephone usage patterns. This adjustment also accounts for the overlapping landline and cell sample frames and the relative sizes of each frame and each sample.<sup>2</sup>

The second stage of weighting involved running a propensity score model on all cell sample. A logit model was used to predict the propensity of cell respondents to respond by text, and the inverse of the predicted probability was used as propensity score adjustment for the text respondents. The independent variables in the model included sample demographics plus a handful of substantive questions.

The third and final stage of weighting balances sample demographics, by form, to match target population benchmarks. This weighting was accomplished using SPSSINC RAKE, an SPSS extension module that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using the GENLOG procedure. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on survey estimates. The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target population.

Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate

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<sup>1</sup> NCHS, National Health Interview Survey, 2014–2018; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2013–2018.

<sup>2</sup> Buskirk, T. D., & Best, J. (2012). Venn Diagrams, Probability 101 and Sampling Weights Computed for Dual Frame Telephone RDD Designs. *Journal of Statistics and Mathematics*, 15, 3696-3710.

adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.<sup>3</sup>

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. Sampling error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population.

In this poll, the simple sampling error for 1,008 New Jersey adults is +/-3.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval.<sup>4</sup> This means that in 95 out every 100 samples using the same methodology, estimated proportions based on the entire sample will be no more than 3.1 percentage points away from their true values in the population. The design effect<sup>5</sup> is 1.59, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 3.9 percentage points. Thus, if 50 percent of New Jersey adults in this sample favor a particular position, we would be 95 percent sure that the true figure is between 46.1 and 53.9 percent (50 +/- 3.9) if all New Jersey adults had been interviewed, rather than just a sample.

In this poll, the simple sampling error for 901 New Jersey registered voters is +/-3.3 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence interval. The design effect<sup>6</sup> is 1.60, making the adjusted margin of error +/- 4.1 percentage points.

Sampling error does not consider other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, or context effects.

This Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was fielded by Braun Research, Inc. with sample from Dynata. The questionnaire was developed and all data analyses were completed in house by the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling (ECPIP). Jessica Roman and Dr. Kyle Morgan assisted with analysis and preparation of this report. The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll is paid for and sponsored by the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, a non-partisan academic center for the study of politics and the political process. Full questionnaires are available on request and can also be accessed through our archives at [eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu](http://eagletonpoll.rutgers.edu). For more information, please contact [poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu](mailto:poll@eagleton.rutgers.edu).

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<sup>3</sup> The composite design effect for a sample of size  $n$ , with each case having a weight,  $w$ , is computed as  $deff = \frac{\sum w^2}{n}$ .

<sup>4</sup> The survey's maximum margin of error is the largest 95% confidence interval for any estimated proportion based on the total sample – one around 50%.

<sup>5</sup> Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.

<sup>6</sup> Post-data collection statistical adjustments require analysis procedures that reflect departures from simple random sampling. We calculate the effects of these design features so that an appropriate adjustment can be incorporated into tests of statistical significance when using these data. The so-called "design effect" or *deff* represents the loss in statistical efficiency that results from a disproportionate sample design and systematic non-response.

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**Weighted Sample Characteristics  
901 New Jersey Registered Voters**

|               |     |                    |     |              |     |                     |     |                 |     |
|---------------|-----|--------------------|-----|--------------|-----|---------------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| <b>Male</b>   | 48% | <b>Democrat</b>    | 40% | <b>18-34</b> | 23% | <b>HS or Less</b>   | 28% | <b>White</b>    | 61% |
| <b>Female</b> | 52% | <b>Independent</b> | 32% | <b>35-49</b> | 22% | <b>Some College</b> | 30% | <b>Black</b>    | 13% |
|               |     | <b>Republican</b>  | 28% | <b>50-64</b> | 32% | <b>College Grad</b> | 24% | <b>Hispanic</b> | 15% |
|               |     |                    |     | <b>65+</b>   | 24% | <b>Grad Work</b>    | 19% | <b>Other</b>    | 12% |