



NJ MIDTERM TURNOUT IN '18 HASN'T INCREASED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: POLL



PATRICK LAVERY | June 4, 2019

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GALLOWAY – With New Jersey having just registered its **highest voter turnout in a congressional midterm election since 1982**, the casual political observer might be led to believe that Garden State residents are becoming more civically engaged.

But like the popular refrain from "Porgy & Bess," it ain't necessarily so, according to a Stockton University poll released Tuesday.

The poll revealed that out of 852 respondents, 32% self-reported a higher level of political engagement now than in 2015. Yet in looking at the general public's specific civic activities over the past year, those levels remained largely unchanged from four years ago.

In fact, the percentages of total respondents who contributed to a candidate or campaign, wrote to a representative or their local newspaper, signed a petition, worked to solve a problem in their community, or served on a local government board all declined in the 2019 survey. Only the numbers of those who worked or volunteered for a campaign, or attended a protest, increased versus 2015 figures.

Among the nearly one-third of respondents who reported being more engaged, those percentages were higher than the general public in all but one category – actually serving in local government.

"People are saying they're more engaged today, but the results don't show any real statistical difference from four years ago," John Froomjian, interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton, said. "They talk about politics more, they may be paying attention to the news more, and they may be relating engagement to voting."

Diving deeper into the civic habits of those who said they were more engaged, Froomjian said two particular trends emerged. He said one could infer the responses to be tied to the presidency of Donald Trump, but the poll did not ask about that connection specifically.

"Democrats (are) doing it more than Republicans and more than independents, and it's a little more balanced between men and women, but women are a little more active than men," he said. "We didn't mention any names; we didn't mention the president's name or any political party. We just asked, 'Are you more engaged today, or four years ago?'"

Nearly a quarter of the respondents who said they were more politically active cited opposition to President Trump and/or the Republican Party as motivating factors; only 5% who said they were more active said support of Trump and the GOP were their reasons. Another 5% said they felt that democracy or the rule of law was being threatened.

The poll was conducted via landline and cell telephone in late February and early March, and has a margin of error of +/- 3.4 percentage points. The 2015 poll's margin of error was +/- 3.6 points.

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