



Surrounded by female supporters, New Jersey Senator Robert Menendez federal corruption trial last year has not endeared him to voters, the poll found. | Spencer Platt/Getty Images

New Stockton poll shows Menendez opening up a 12-point lead

By **MATT FRIEDMAN** | 11/02/2018 02:29 PM EDT

Sen. Bob Menendez has opened up a 12-point lead against Republican challenger Bob Hugin, according to a new poll released Friday that runs counter to widespread talk of a tight race.

Menendez (D-N.J.) leads Hugin 51 percent to 39 percent among likely voters, according to the Stockton University survey. Libertarian Murray Sabrin gets 3 percent support, while 6 percent want another candidate or are undecided.

Just one month ago, a Stockton poll shocked the political world when it found Menendez leading Hugin by just 2 points, a result that was within the poll's margin of error. That poll was widely touted by Republicans and Hugin, but a rival pollster, Patrick Murray, threw cold water on it because, he said, the respondents were on balance too old and too white for a statewide election.

Respondents in the poll released Friday were more likely to be significantly younger and less likely to be white than those questioned for last month's survey.

According to the latest poll, Menendez's lead is the result of voters wanting a check on President Donald Trump.

Fifty-five percent of those questioned said they want a senator who will oppose Trump's agenda, compared to 37 percent who said they want one who will support it. Trump's approval rating in New Jersey is 37 percent, according to the poll.

Menendez's federal corruption trial last year has not endeared him to voters, the poll found. Just 23 percent of those surveyed said they have a favorable view of him, while 44 percent have an unfavorable view. Still, far more voters — 35 percent — cited Trump as their motivating factor for heading to the polls compared to the 19 percent who cited Menendez's trial.

"Even though his name is not on the ballot, President Trump's presence appears to be at the top of the ticket in New Jersey," Michael Klein, interim executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton, said in a press release that accompanied the poll results. "Our poll indicates that New Jersey's voters oppose the president, and the best way to express that opposition at the ballot box is to re-elect Senator Menendez, despite any misgivings they might have about the senator himself."

The poll comes as Democratic operatives in New Jersey are nervous about Menendez's chances, even though New Jersey has more than 900,000 more registered Democrats than Republicans and hasn't elected a Republican to the U.S. Senate since 1972.

Hugin, a former pharmaceutical executive who's running as a "different kind of Republican" despite his past major financial support for Trump, is out-spending Menendez by more than 3 to 1, thanks to \$36 million of his own money he's put into the race so far. Much of it has gone toward negative ads against Menendez.

Although every public poll has shown Menenedez leading the race, the Cook Political Report recently revised its rating of the race to "toss-up."

The Stockton poll of 598 likely voters was conducted from Oct. 25-31 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

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