

## Stockton Poll: Murphy Leading Ciattarelli with Pandemic as Major Issue

### Voters leaning against N.J. college sports betting

*For immediate release*

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**Galloway, N.J.** – Incumbent Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy, buoyed by support for his COVID-19 policies, leads Republican challenger Jack Ciattarelli by 9 percentage points, according to a Stockton University Poll released today.

But Murphy reaches only the 50-percent mark, leading Ciattarelli 50%-41% including voters who lean toward one candidate or the other. Nine percent are undecided or not liking either candidate in the statewide New Jersey poll of 552 likely voters. The poll was conducted for the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University the week before Tuesday night's first gubernatorial debate.

Murphy received positive job ratings from 54%, with 41% disapproving of his performance. He is viewed favorably by 50% and unfavorably by 43%, with only 5% unfamiliar with the governor.

The pandemic was named the top issue by the largest percentage (25%), and respondents said Murphy would better manage the pandemic over Ciattarelli at 50%-34%. They voiced even stronger support for policies aimed at controlling the virus.

- 58% support mask mandates in schools, to 37% opposed
- 56% support a mandate that employers with more than 100 workers require them to be vaccinated or be tested weekly for the virus to 44% opposed
- 63 % support a vaccine requirement for health care workers to 34% opposed.

However, half of those polled oppose requiring proof of vaccination to enter restaurants, public events, or entertainment venues, 50% to 46% in support.

After the pandemic, the election's next top issues are identified as taxes in general (12%), property taxes (10%) and the economy (6%).

The Stockton Poll includes some positives for the Republican challenger. Forty-six percent see Ciattarelli as better at handling New Jersey tax policy – with taxes being a major line of his attack against Murphy – compared to 38% for Murphy on that issue. Results showed a tie for who would better manage the state economy (43% for Ciattarelli to 42% for Murphy).

And those who think New Jersey is heading in the wrong direction (45.5%) just topped those who think the state is going in the right direction (44.3%).

“Even though this result is a statistical tie, an incumbent wants more people feeling good about how things are going in the state,” said John Froomjian, director of the Hughes Center.

In a spring 2021 Stockton Poll of registered (but not necessarily likely) voters, 49% said New Jersey was headed in the right direction and 40% said it was going in the wrong direction.

One challenge for Ciattarelli: Despite running TV and online ads for the past month, nearly half were not familiar with him (45%) or not sure how they feel about him (3%), including 33% of Republicans. Among those who recognized him, he was viewed favorably by 32% and unfavorably by 21%.

“As a clean slate to many, Ciattarelli has the chance to tell his story and introduce himself to voters. The Murphy campaign will likely try to define him first in negative terms.” Froomjian said.

Another challenge is the state’s political makeup. The poll finds strong polarization between Democrats and Republicans, with strong Democratic support for the governor and his anti-COVID policies and equally strong GOP opposition, said Alyssa Maurice, Hughes Center research associate. However, there are one million more registered Democrats in New Jersey than Republicans.

### **Voters leaning against gambling on N.J. college sports**

In a finding unrelated to the gubernatorial race, a plurality of voters (45%) opposed a constitutional amendment on the ballot that would allow gambling on college games held in the state or games in which New Jersey college teams participate, while 40% support the proposal and 14% are unsure.

### **Methodology**

The poll of New Jersey adults screened as likely voters was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy September 17-25, 2021. Live interviewers, who are mostly Stockton University students, called cell phones and landlines from the Stockton University campus. Overall, 85 percent of interviews were conducted on cell phones and 15 percent on landline phones. A total of 552 registered voters were interviewed after being screened as likely voters on criteria including self-professed intention to vote on a scale of 1 to 10, having voted in New Jersey’s 2017 election, and how closely voters are following the election. Both cell and landline samples included a mix of voter list and random digit dialing (RDD) sample.

Data are weighted based on U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data for New Jersey on variables of age, race, ethnicity, education level, sex and region. The poll's margin of error is +/- 4.1 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets.

### **About the Hughes Center**

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy ([www.stockton.edu/hughescenter](http://www.stockton.edu/hughescenter)) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for the late William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found on [YouTube](#), and can be followed on Facebook [@StocktonHughesCenter](#), Twitter [@hughescenter](#) and Instagram [@stockton\\_hughes\\_center](#).

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