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Politics

Gov. Murphy wins high approval ratings in first poll of this election year

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Gov. Phil Murphy holds a coronavirus briefing in May 2020.

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By [Jonathan D. Salant | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com](#)

As Gov. [Phil Murphy](#) prepares to face the voters this November for a second term, a [Stockton University Poll](#) released Wednesday said that nearly 6 in 10 New Jerseyans approved of the job he was doing in office.

Murphy's approval rating stood at 58% with 36% disapproving, according to the poll. It was Murphy's highest rating ever in the Stockton poll. It was also the first poll on his job performance released this year.

While the poll did not specifically ask the question, John Froomjian, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, attributed the high poll rating to Murphy's handling of the [coronavirus pandemic](#).

"Crises give leaders a chance to show their chops," Froomjian said. "There's a sense that people got that when the chips were down, he stood tall and did what he had to do."

Murphy's stewardship [hasn't been without controversy](#). His administration has faced criticism for how the pandemic [hit nursing homes](#) in the state especially hard, as well as big problems with the state's unemployment system and the operation of Motor Vehicle Services offices. In addition, [small businesses criticized](#) Murphy's actions to shut down the state in the pandemic's initial phase and how his administration responded afterwards.

Murphy is up for a second term this November. Former state Assemblyman [Jack Ciattarelli](#) is [the frontrunner](#) in the race for the Republican nomination, which also has drawn former Franklin Mayor Brian Levine, pastor Phillip Rizzo, businessman Joseph Rudy Rullo, and businessman Hirsh Singh.

The Stockton poll has given Murphy lower approval ratings than other surveys throughout his first term as governor. His previous high was 53% approval and 39% disapproval in October.

That compared with a [Rutgers-Eggleton Poll](#) released in November that had Murphy at 62% positive and 33% negative, and a [Fairleigh Dickinson University survey](#) released in October giving the governor 60% approval and 31% disapproval ratings.

Also in the Stockton poll, a plurality, 49%, said the state was going in the right direction, with 40% saying wrong direction and 10% unsure.

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Froonjian said that Murphy, like predecessor [Chris Christie](#), got high marks for leadership during a crisis. A year after Hurricane Sandy ravaged New Jersey, Christie [was re-elected](#) with 60% of the vote in 2013.

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There are impressions that are formed when elected officials demonstrate leadership,” Froonjian said.

“He’s been flexible in recent months in terms of trying to open up where possible. People see him as trying to walk the line between protecting our safety and our health and trying to give small businesses and restaurants a break.”

The survey of 647 New Jersey adults was conducted March 11-22 with margin of error of plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

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