

NJ Gov Race: Guadagno Rises, Murphy Protects His Lead

By [Salvador Rizzo](#) • 05/25/17 1:10pm



Kim Guadagno. Kevin B. Sanders for Observer

Kim Guadagno and Phil Murphy have double-digit leads over their rivals with less than two weeks to go before the June 6 primaries in the governor's race, according to a [Stockton University poll](#) released Thursday.

Murphy, the former U.S. ambassador to Germany who has spent millions on his campaign, led the Democratic field with 34 percent support from likely voters, the poll found. His closest rival was former

U.S. Treasury undersecretary Jim Johnson, who got 10 percent.

Both men are first-time candidates for public office who made their names outside New Jersey, but the poll showed them ahead of Assemblyman John Wisniewski and state Sen. Ray Lesniak, two former chairmen of the New Jersey Democratic State Committee.

Wisniewski, however, got 9 percent support and is in a statistical tie with Johnson.

Guadagno, the lieutenant governor for the last seven years under Gov. Chris Christie, led the Republican field with 37 percent support from likely voters. That was slightly more than double the 18 percent support earned by her closest rival, Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli of Somerset County.

The margin of error was plus or minus 4.9 percentage points on both sides.

Stockton polled likely voters who cast ballots in the 2016 primary — 403 Democrats and 389 Republicans — both before and after a series of debates held earlier this month. All the candidates mostly treaded water, except Guadagno, who increased her lead from 29 percent before the debates to 37 percent afterward.

“These results show Kim Guadagno’s message of making New Jersey more affordable by lowering taxes is resonating with voters and she clearly has the momentum in the crucial days leading up to the June 6th primary,” said Guadagno campaign manager David Huguenel.

Murphy, who weathered a barrage of tough attacks at the second Democratic debate, dropped from 37 percent before to 34 percent after the debates. But the slip was within the margin of error, and with his double-digit lead mostly intact, the Stockton survey showed Murphy successfully defending his lead.

Sharon Schulman, executive director of Stockton’s William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, theorized that the debates and news coverage of them helped around 10 percent of undecided voters make up their minds.

The poll showed that one-third of Democrats and one-third of Republicans remained undecided after the second poll was taken from May 16 to May 23, down from 41 percent on each side before the debates.

But she added, “It’s hard to break through when the news from Washington dominates coverage.”

All other candidates on both sides of the aisle earned less than 5 percent support each.