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Poll: Guadagno expands lead over Ciattarelli

By **MATT FRIEDMAN** | 05/25/2017 12:42 PM EDT

Two polls released Thursday suggest Lt. Gov. Kim Guadagno is widening her lead over Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli in the Republican gubernatorial primary.

Guadagno leads Ciattarelli, her chief Republican rival, 37 percent to 18 percent, according to a Stockton University survey conducted from May 16 to May 23 and released today. That's up from Guadagno's 29-19 lead in a Stockton survey that was conducted from April 26 to May 1 but not released until today.

There has been little public polling in the primaries for governor, but the talk of political circles has been that Ciattarelli is running a competitive race against Guadagno, despite being out-funded and having a disadvantage in organizational support. A Quinnipiac University poll released May 3 showed Ciattarelli gaining on Guadagno.

The two Stockton surveys counter that idea, with less than two weeks until the June 6 primary. The second Stockton survey was conducted after Ciattarelli and Guadagno held their first debate, which only aired on television on News 12 New Jersey, a cable channel that not even all New Jersey cable subscribers have access to. The two candidates met for their second debate while the poll was being conducted.

In a press release accompanying the poll results, Sharon Schulman, executive director of Stockton's Hughes Center said the debates and their news coverage may have reduced the number of undecided voters, which in the Republican primary went from 41 percent in the earlier survey to 31 percent in the later one.

None of the other three Republican candidates — Steve Rogers, Joseph Rullo and Hirsh Singh — got above 4 percent support in either of the surveys. All three were excluded from the two debates because they did not raise the \$430,000 required to participate by the April deadline.

The Stockton polls also shows Democratic frontrunner Phil Murphy losing a small amount of ground to Democratic rival Jim Johnson, but that change is inside of the poll's 4.9 percentage point margin of error. Murphy leads the Democratic primary with 34 percent support to attorney Johnson's 10 percent and Assemblyman John Wisniewski's 9 percent. None of the other three Democratic contenders — state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, activist Bill Brennan and Teaneck Councilman Mark Zinna — break 4 percent support.

The Democrats held both of their primary debates before the second poll was conducted. Stockton surveyed 403 Democrats and 389 Republicans.