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Stockton University poll finds views on state, federal COVID-19 response influenced by political leanings

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Google Maps is mapping out COVID-19 areas

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — When New Jerseyans consider state and federal responses to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, their opinions are strongly influenced by their political views, according to Stockton University poll results released Tuesday morning.

The results of the poll of 721 adults conducted Oct. 7 to 13, completed by the Stockton Polling Institute, show ratings of Gov. Phil Murphy and President Donald Trump on their responses to the pandemic differed greatly based on partisan political identity.

“Even the pandemic is viewed through a partisan lens in today’s polarized political environment,” said John Froomjian, executive director of the center. “Donald Trump has criticized lockdowns and mask-wearing as he pushed to reopen the economy, while Democratic opponent Joe Biden has embraced such measures. These findings show the extent that the presidential election has influenced opinions on the coronavirus response.”

More than half, or 54%, gave positive ratings to Murphy, while only one in three did for Trump, according to the poll. A majority, or 55%, rated Trump’s response as poor.

Among those who identified as Republican, 85% gave Trump’s COVID-19 response a positive rating, while only 1% of Democratic respondents did the same, according to the poll. For Murphy, the difference was smaller but still stark, with 77% of those identifying as Democrats giving him a positive rating and 28% of Republicans doing so.

When characterizing the state’s actions on the pandemic, the majority of Republicans said the measures went too far (55%) while only 3% of Democrats thought the same. Most Democrats said the measures were the right course of action (73%).

Other New Jersey polls have found higher approval ratings for Murphy’s response, and these results from an election poll appear to be more influenced by partisan political feelings, Froomjian added.

Overall, 80% of respondents said the COVID-19 pandemic represents a major problem, while 16% said it is minor and only 2% said it is not a problem at all, according to the poll. Fifty-five percent said the measures taken by the state to control the spread of the virus were “just right.” Nearly one in four respondents said the measures taken by the state went “too far,” and 18% said they didn’t go far enough.

Alyssa Maurice, a research associate with the center, found racial disparities in the responses to COVID-19 questions as well.

For example, 30% of white respondents said New Jersey's measures to slow the spread went too far compared to only 3% of Black respondents, according to the poll. Similarly, 41% of white respondents gave Trump's handling of the virus a positive rating and only 3% of Black respondents said the same.

There were regional differences, too.

Thirty-two percent of respondents in South Jersey counties said the state's response to the virus went too far compared with 20% of those in northern counties, according to the poll. Southern counties also had more positive views of Trump's handling of the pandemic and slightly more negative views of Murphy's response than their northern counterparts.

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My beat is public safety, following police and crime. I started in January 2018 here at the Press covering Egg Harbor and Galloway townships. Before that, I worked at the Reading Eagle in Reading, Pa., covering crime and writing obituaries.