Sherrill leads by Single Digits in Governor's Race

Local issues help Ciattarelli among independents, but national issues hurt

Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, NJ, July 29, 2025 – With the primary election behind us, the race to be the next governor of New Jersey is close, with Democratic nominee Mikie Sherrill holding an eight-point lead over Republican nominee Jack Ciattarelli among likely voters, 45 percent to 37 percent, and 16 percent still undecided. An experiment embedded in the poll shows the extent to which how the race is framed – around local or around national issues – changes who independent voters favor and could be decisive in a close election.

Though the general election is still a few months off, both Democrats and Republicans have largely lined up behind their candidates: 87 percent of Democrats say that they'll vote for Sherrill, and 86 percent of Republicans for Ciattarelli. Ciattarelli's support among Republicans is a little softer than Sherrill's among Democrats, with 23 percent of Republicans saying that they'll "probably," rather than "definitely" vote for their party's nominee, versus 15 percent among Democrats.

"Unless something goes horribly awry, partisans are going to vote for their party's candidate," said Dan Cassino, a Professor of Government and Politics at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and the Executive Director of the FDU Poll. "While Republicans have been narrowing the gap, there are still more Democrats than Republicans in the state, and Ciattarelli needs to start pulling in more independents and Democrats if he wants to win."

The survey included an experiment designed to measure the impact of framing the race around either national or local issues. Respondents were first asked which candidate they would support in the governor's race. Then, they were randomly assigned to get a series of questions either about local issues like energy, flooding and NJ Transit, or a series of questions about national issues, like President Trump and immigration. Afterwards, they were again asked about their preference in the governor's race. None of these questions mentioned the governor's race, or any stances taken by either candidate.

Of course, most voters – especially devoted partisans – aren't going to change their minds about vote preference after a few minutes of questions, but some do, and the differences reveal the likely effects of framing the election around local or national issues.

Asking questions about local issues didn't significantly change preferences among Democrats or Republicans, but it *increased* support for Ciattarelli among independent voters by 7 percentage points, largely by moving voters who initially weren't sure about their vote into his camp.

Similarly, asking questions about national issues *decreased* Ciattarelli's support among independents by 4 points, with those voters mostly moving into the "not sure" category. However, the national issues condition also tended to crystallize support for Ciattarelli among Republicans, moving 3 percent of Republicans from "probable" Ciattarelli supporters to "definite" supporters. Neither condition significantly changed support for Sherrill.

Note that these are changes in the second time the governor's race question was asked, so the overall results reported do not include these effects.

"There's a reason why Ciattarelli is focusing so much on local issues, and trying not to talk about President Trump," said Cassino. "The more nationalized this race is, the worse Ciattarelli does overall, even as it helps him a bit among Republicans."

The effects of nationalizing the governor's race are likely enhanced by the fact that New Jersey voters who approve of Trump aren't universally in Ciattarelli's corner, nor are Trump disapprovers fully lining up behind Sherrill. Fully 81 percent of New Jersey likely voters who say that they approve of the job Trump is doing say that they'll support Ciattarelli, but 13 percent say that they aren't sure who they'll vote for, and four percent say that they intend to support Sherrill. There are more New Jersey voters who disapprove of Trump's performance in office, but Sherrill has the support of just 77 percent of them, and five percent of Trump disapprovers say that they'll support Ciattarelli.

"Ciattarelli is walking a fine line with Trump: he needs to consolidate Trump supporters, but do so without making the race too national, or turning off voters who don't like what's happening in Washington," said Cassino. "For Sherrill, on the other hand, there's no downside to bashing Trump as much as she likes."

While the two candidates are tied among white voters (43 for Sherrill, 42 for Ciattarelli), Sherrill has a substantial lead among Black voters (58 to 20). Sherrill also has a lead among Hispanic or Latino/a voters (41 to 27), but 27 percent say that they remain undecided. Sherrill has a substantial lead among voters 30 and under (46 to 24), but the candidates are tied (41 to 40) among middle aged voters 45 to 64. Older people are typically the most reliable voters in any election, and the two candidates are close among voters 65 and older, with Sherrill holding a fairly narrow lead of 7 points, 46 to 39.

Methodology

The FDU Poll is a proud member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative and is devoted to ensuring that our results are presented in such a way that anyone can quickly and easily get all of the information that they may need to evaluate the validity of our surveys. We believe that transparency is the key to building trust in the work of high-quality public opinion research, and necessary to push our industry forward.

The survey was conducted between July 17 and 23, 2025, using a voter list of registered voters in New Jersey carried out by Braun Research of Princeton, New Jersey. Contact attempts were limited to registered voters who had voted in one or both of the last two NJ gubernatorial elections or were newly registered since the last NJ gubernatorial election. These respondents were considered likely voters if they met these criteria and said that they intended to vote in November's gubernatorial election.

Respondents were contacted via either live caller telephone interviews, or text-to-web surveys sent to cellular phones, resulting in an overall sample of 806 registered voters in the state. Surveys were carried out via live caller telephone interviews to landlines (282) and cellphones (82) and the remainder (442) were done on a web platform via weblinks sent via SMS to cell phones. Surveys were conducted only in English.

The data were weighted to be representative of the population of registered voters in New Jersey. The weights used, like all weights, balance the demographic characteristics of the sample to match known population parameters. The weighted results used here are balanced to match parameters for sex, age, education and race/ethnicity.

SPSSINC RAKE, an SPSS extension module that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables using the GENLOG procedure, was used to produce final weights. Weights were trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results. The use of these weights in statistical analysis helps to ensure that the demographic characteristics of the sample approximate the demographic characteristics of the target population. The size of these weights is used to construct the measure of design effects, which indicate the extent to which the reported results are being driven by the weights applied to the data, rather than found in the data itself. Simply put, these design effects tell us how many additional respondents would have been needed to get the weighted number of respondents across weighted categories: larger design effects indicate greater levels of under-representation in the data. In this case, calculated design effects are approximately 1.2, largely driven by the weights used on the race/ethnicity variable.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. Sampling error should be adjusted to recognize the effect of weighting the data to better match the population. In this poll, the simple sampling error for 806 registered voters is +/-3.4 percentage points, at a 95 percent confidence interval. Including the design effects, the margin of error would be +/-3.9 percentage points, though the figure not including them is much more commonly reported.

This error calculation does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording, differences in translated forms, or context effects. While such errors are known to exist, they are often unquantifiable within a particular survey, and all efforts, such as randomization and extensive pre-testing of items, have been used to minimize them.

Weighted Telephone Sample Characteristics

806 Likely Voters in New Jersey

Figures do not include individuals who declined to answer demographic items.

Man	47%	N = 375
Woman	51%	N = 414
Some Other Way	1%	N = 6

18-30	16%	N = 128
31-44	22%	N = 179
45-64	32%	N = 262
65+	30%	N = 237

White	68%	N = 550
Black	12%	N = 95
Hispanic/Latino/a	12%	N = 96
Asian	3%	N = 25
MENA	2%	N = 12
Other/Multi-racial	3%	N = 27

No college degree	57%	N = 458
College degree or more	42%	N = 334

Democrat (including leaners)	45%	N = 324
Independent (no lean)	16%	N = 115
Republican (including leaners)	38%	N = 272

Question Wording and Order

[Earlier questions held for later release]

Now, we'd like to ask you a few questions about the upcoming Gubernatorial Election

First off, we'd like to ask you about this Fall's race for governor.

NJ1. In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, or do you think you'll not vote? [Shuffle order of Sherrill and Ciattarelli in question]

1. Definitely vote for Democrat Mikie Sherrill
2. Probably vote for Sherrill
3. Definitely vote for Republican Jack Ciattarelli
4. Probably vote for Republican Jack Ciattarelli
5. Probably won't vote
6. Not sure [Vol]
7. Vote for Someone else [Vol]
8. [DK/REF]

Respondents are randomly assigned (50/50) to get either:

NJ1 -> Local Items -> NJ2 -> National Items or

NJ1 -> National Items -> NJ2 -> Local Items

[Intervening items held for later release]

NJ2. Just to confirm, in this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, or do you think you'll not vote? [Shuffle order of Sherrill and Ciattarelli in question]

1. Definitely vote for Democrat Mikie Sherrill
2. Probably vote for Sherrill
3. Definitely vote for Republican Jack Ciattarelli
4. Probably vote for Republican Jack Ciattarelli
5. Probably won't vote
6. Not sure [Vol]
7. Vote for Someone else [Vol]
8. [DK/REF]

Release Tables

In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, someone else, or do you not plan to vote?				
	All	Dem	Indp	Rep
Definitely vote for Sherrill	35%	72%	21%	2%
Probably vote for Sherrill	10%	15%	9%	3%
Total Sherrill	*45%*	*87%*	*30%*	*5%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	11%	1%	10%	23%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	25%	1%	12%	63%
Total Ciattarelli	*37%*	*2%*	*23%*	*86%*
Not Sure	16%	9%	41%	8%
Vote for Someone Else	3%	2%	6%	1%

In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, someone else, or do you not plan to vote?					
	All	Under 30	31-44	45-64	65+
Definitely vote for Sherrill	35%	35%	35%	32%	40%
Probably vote for Sherrill	10%	11%	13%	10%	6%
Total Sherrill	*45%*	*46%*	*48%*	*41%*	*46%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	11%	10%	9%	13%	9%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	25%	14%	23%	27%	30%
Total Ciattarelli	*37%*	*24%*	*33%*	*40%*	*39%*
Not Sure	16%	23%	16%	17%	13%
Vote for Someone Else	3%	7%	3%	2%	2%

In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, someone else, or do you not plan to vote?					
	Liberal	Moderate	Conservative	Progressive	MAGA
Definitely vote for Sherrill	71%	41%	11%	61%	2%
Probably vote for Sherrill	12%	13%	4%	7%	2%
Total Sherrill	*83%*	*54%*	*15%*	*68%*	*3%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	2%	10%	16%	4%	16%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	4%	16%	55%	9%	70%
Total Ciattarelli	*6%*	*26%*	*70%*	*13%*	*86%*
Not Sure	10%	18%	13%	16%	10%
Vote for Someone Else	1%	2%	2%	3%	1%

In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, someone else, or do you not plan to vote?				
	All	White	Black	Hispanic
Definitely vote for Sherrill	35%	35%	45%	29%
Probably vote for Sherrill	10%	8%	13%	12%
Total Sherrill	*45%*	*43%*	*58%*	*41%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	11%	12%	5%	11%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	25%	29%	15%	16%
Total Ciattarelli	*37%*	*41%*	*20%*	*27%*
Not Sure	16%	15%	19%	24%
Vote for Someone Else	3%	2%	3%	7%

In this November's gubernatorial election, do you think you will vote for the Democrat Mikie Sherrill, the Republican Jack Ciattarelli, someone else, or do you not plan to vote?			
	All	Approve of Trump	Disapprove of Trump
Definitely vote for Sherrill	35%	2%	62%
Probably vote for Sherrill	10%	2%	15%
Total Sherrill	*45%*	*4%*	*77%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	11%	21%	3%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	25%	60%	2%
Total Ciattarelli	*37%*	*81%*	*5%*
Not Sure	16%	13%	14%
Vote for Someone Else	3%	1%	4%

Effect of Questions about New Jersey Issues on Second Statement of Vote Choice				
	Overall	Dem	Indp	Rep
Definitely vote for Sherrill	0%	-1%	-2%	+1%
Probably vote for Sherrill	0%	+1%	0%	-1%
Total Sherrill	*0%*	*-1%*	*-2%*	*0%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	0%	0%	+4%	-2%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	+1%	-1%	+4%	+3%
Total Ciattarelli	*+1%*	*-1%*	*+7%*	*+1%*
Not Sure	-1%	0%	-5%	-1%
Vote for Someone Else	+1%	+1%	0%	0%

Effect of Questions about National Issues on Second Statement of Vote Choice				
	Overall	Dem	Indp	Rep
Definitely vote for Sherrill	0%	+1%	+1%	-1%
Probably vote for Sherrill	0%	0%	0%	-1%
Total Sherrill	*0%*	*+1%*	*+1%*	*-1%*
Probably vote for Ciattarelli	-2%	0%	-5%	-3%
Definitely vote for Ciattarelli	+1%	0%	0%	+4%
Total Ciattarelli	*-1%*	*0%*	*-4%*	*0%*
Not Sure	0%	-1%	+6%	0%
Vote for Someone Else	0%	+1%	-2%	+1%