New poll shows bridge scandal is taking a toll on governor

Maddie Hanna, Inquirer Staff Writer

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie delivers his State of the State address before the New Jersey State Assembly on Tuesday January 14, 2013. (MICHAEL BRYANT / Staff Photographer)

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As Gov. Christie’s administration faces allegations of political retribution, his favorability rating among New Jerseyans has fallen 19 points since before his blowout reelection win in November, according to a Rutgers-Eagleton poll released Wednesday.

The Republican governor’s favorability rating fell from 65 percent to 46 percent — and dropped 26 points among Democrats — in the poll conducted Jan. 14 through 19, entering the second week of controversy surrounding the apparent involvement of Christie allies in a plot to create gridlock at the George Washington Bridge.

“Other polls taken immediately after the bridge scandal broke showed relatively small effects,” said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton poll and a political science professor at Rutgers University. A Monmouth University poll released Jan. 13 found Christie’s job approval rating had taken “a slight hit,” dropping to 59 percent from 65 percent in December.

With “another week of revelations, damage appears to have been done,” Redlawsk said. “The goodwill the governor built up among Democrats with his handling of the Sandy aftermath is gone, at least for now.”

Two-thirds of the poll was conducted before Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer added to the allegations, on Saturday claiming she had been told by top Christie officials to push forward a redevelopment deal or risk losing Sandy relief money. The administration has denied Zimmer’s claims.

The poll — conducted of 826 adults across the state — found that Republicans have stuck with Christie, who has said he had no knowledge of the scheme to snarl traffic. Of Republicans, 80 percent at least partially accept his explanation for the bridge controversy, according to the poll.

Democrats, meanwhile, are less accepting: 62 percent said they do not believe Christie’s explanation at all, the poll found.

Poll respondents were split on the Democratic-led legislative investigation into the controversy: 49 percent said lawmakers should continue the probe, while 47 percent called for moving on to more important issues.

A national Quinnipiac poll released Tuesday found that Christie had slipped in a hypothetical 2016 matchup with former Democratic Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. While Christie had led Clinton in a December poll, 42 percent to 41 percent, he now trails her 46 percent to 38 percent, the poll found.

The poll found Christie still runs better against Clinton than other possible Republican contenders, including Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

Maddie Hanna Inquirer Staff Writer Twitter