Poll: More Voters Think Christie Is A Bully

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More voters think words like "stubborn," "arrogant," and "self-centered" fit the governor very well, poll says.

More New Jersey voters believe Gov. Chris Christie is a bully than don’t, according to new poll released Friday.

A Rutgers-Eagleton poll says that 43 percent of residents believe that “bully” is an apt description for the currently embattled second-term governor, an all-time high. Another 21 percent think the moniker fits him somewhat well.

Only about a third think the description does not fit Christie at all, according to the poll.

The poll is the latest in a series of surveys showing the once-stellar approval numbers and popularity of the Christie administration is falling dramatically in the wake of revelations that those in the governor’s inner circle were involved in the September lane closures that gridlocked Fort Lee for nearly a week.

Recent developments involving accusations by the Hoboken mayor that Lt. Governor Kim Guadagno threatened to withhold Hurricane Sandy recovery money unless a real estate deal in Hoboken was fast-tracked surfaced only halfway thought this poll, which was conducted Jan. 14-19, according to a release.

More voters think “fighter” describes Christie best, with two-thirds of those surveyed saying that word fits him well. One in five said it fits him somewhat well, while 8 percent say it does not fit him at all, the poll says.

The number of those surveyed who would use the word “trustworthy” to describe the governor is at an all-time low, with just 27 percent saying the word suits Christie very well, down 16 percentage points from October, the poll says.

"Bridgegate has taken a toll on perceptions of Christie," said David Redlawsk, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll and professor of political science at Rutgers. "Positive views of his leadership buoyed ratings post-Sandy but negative traits are becoming more prevalent in light of recent events."

Use of the description “fighter,” cuts across party lines: 59 percent of Democrats, 70 percent of independents and 76 percent of Republicans agree that Christie is a fighter, according to the poll.

Partisan opinions on “bully” are more divided. For Democrats, it is a top trait; 60 percent say Christie’s a bully, but only 17 percent of Republicans think the same. Forty percent of independents say the word applies very well.

Republicans have remained steady in their unwillingness to call the governor a bully, but both Democrats and independents are 11 points more likely to feel this way, the poll says.

Voters are now more inclined to say “stubborn” fits Christie very well, up 10 points to 64 percent. Half those surveyed see Christie as “arrogant,” up five points, and “self-centered,” up 11 points, according to the poll.

More than half still say “strong leader” describes Christie very well, but that’s down 10 points since October. Other positive-trait words have also declined: “Fair” is down 11 points to 30 percent; “Smart” has declined five points, to 58 percent and “Effective” has dropped 6 points to 44 percent, according to the poll.

As with Christie’s favorability and job performance, trait perceptions have turned significantly more negative following the Bridgegate revelations, returning to levels last seen before Superstorm Sandy, the poll says.

Democrats are a driving the numbers down, but they are not the only factor, the poll says.

Overwhelmingly, Democrats think Christie is “Stubborn,” with 76 percent agreeing the description fits the governor very well, while 60 percent of Independents agree and half of Republicans survey also agree, up nine points.

Democrats think Christie is “Arrogant,” at 71 percent, and self-centered, at 65 percent. About 43 percent of independent voters find the governor arrogant and 39 percent say he’s self-centered. About three in 10 Republicans say the same for each trait, the poll says.

Since Superstorm, voters have increasingly identified Christie with more positive characteristics, but that pattern has reversed in Bridgegate’s aftermath. Like with negative traits, partisanship is a driving factor, the poll says.

The starkest example is trustworthy, now rated lowest of all positive traits. Just 12 percent of Democrats say the term describes Christie very well, down 12 points. For Republicans, 53 percent say the same, an even larger 22-point decline. Independents are down 14 points to 30 percent. Women are nine points less likely than men to find Christie trustworthy, according to the poll.

“Trust in most politicians has been very low in recent years, but Christie has enjoyed comparatively high trust post-Sandy,” Redlawsk said. “That appears to have evaporated
outside of the GOP while dropping significantly among Republicans as well.”

The term “sincere,” asked by pollsters for the first time, gets similar ratings. Sixteen percent of Democrats, 39 percent of independents and 57 percent of Republicans say this describes Christie very well. About a quarter of regular GW Bridge users say the same, compared to a third of other voters, the poll says.

Feelings of pride and enthusiasm are down across the board, the poll says.

While 67 percent of GOPers say Christie still makes them proud, this is an 11-point drop. Only 39 percent of independents are proud, down 10 points, and just 14 percent of Democrats feel pride in Christie, down 14 points. Women are 10 points less proud than men, and more frequent GWB commuters are 10 points lower than those not using the bridge.

Just 17 percent of Democrats are enthusiastic, down off eight points, as are 38 percent of independents, down seven points. While 63 percent of GOPers remain enthusiastic, that number is down 19 points, the poll says.

Negative feelings have increased for independent voters, with over a third feeling both angry and worried, double-digit increases for both emotions.

Over half of Democrats now say Christie makes them worried, up seven points, and angry, up 13 points.

Just one in five Republicans feels worried or angry toward the governor, increases of five and nine points, respectively. Women are 10 points more likely than men to say the governor worries them, but there is no gender difference for anger. Half of those who use the GWB most frequently are worried and angry, compared to about 40 percent of those who use it less, the poll says.

The Rutgers-Eagleton poll surveyed 826 residents statewide between Jan. 14-19, with margin of error of 3.4 percentage points.