

## Christie's Self-Depiction as Lonely Maytag Man, Outsider Both Ring False

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Gov. Chris Christie recently compared himself to the lonely [Maytag Man](#) of the long-running TV commercial, saying he's spending days all alone in the State House while lawmakers are out campaigning in advance of next month's full Assembly election. He was referring to his claim that he's the only elected official doing any work in New Jersey state government, which will come as a surprise to many given that he's been out of the state more than he's been in this year and is now back in New Hampshire this week campaigning.

But Christie also could have been attributing his loneliness to his oft-made claim that he's one of the very few Republicans in a true-blue state.

As he still struggles to appeal to a GOP primary electorate that has consistently been telling pollsters they prefer non-politicians like Donald Trump and Carly Fiorina over more seasoned leaders like Christie and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Christie has begun to make the case that as a Republican in New Jersey, he too is an outsider.

"What sets me apart is that I've worked in one of the most hostile areas that you can ever work as a Republican, in the state of New Jersey, where every day I wake up as an outsider," Christie said [over the weekend](#) while appearing on ABC's "This Week with George Stephanopoulos."

It's a statement that at first blush seems reasonable, given that Democrats control the state Legislature, hold both of New Jersey's seats in the U.S. Senate, and maintain a nearly 700,000 edge in voter registration compared with Republicans.

But a closer look at the state's political makeup reveals a more nuanced picture, one in which Democrats are certainly not the underdogs, but where Republicans -- including Christie -- also hold a good deal of power.

For example, when Christie is in New Jersey he wakes up every day in Morris County, where the county Board of Freeholders is all-Republican and the state legislative delegation is all-Republican as well.

And in Congress, Christie is represented by GOP U.S. Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, one of six Republicans from New Jersey currently serving in the House of Representatives, where the state's delegation is split evenly 6-6 between Democrats and Republicans.

Christie himself has also won the last two gubernatorial elections, and since 1982 when former Republican Gov. Tom Kean Sr. was elected to the first of two terms, Republicans including Christie have held the governor's office for 21 of the past 33 years.

David Redlawsk, a Rutgers University political science professor who is also the director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll, said the state's electoral map is not one solid patch of blue voters, but more like a barbell with deep pockets of both red and blue.

"Statewide, you can feel a bit as an outsider (as a Republican), but there are certainly large swaths in New Jersey where Republicans run everything," Redlawsk said, pointing to Christie's home county of Morris as a prime example.

"It really is conditional on where your focus is," Redlawsk said.

When it comes to voter registration, Democrats in New Jersey definitely have an advantage, with 1.75 million registered voters, compared with the 1.06 million registered Republicans, according to the [latest statistics](#) compiled by the state Division of Elections. But both parties are outnumbered by the state's 2.575 million unaffiliated registered voters.

When pushed to make a choice between the two parties, the unaffiliated voters tend to skew Democratic, but not by a wide margin, said Krista Jenkins, a Fairleigh Dickinson University political science professor and the director of the PublicMind poll. And some remain truly independent, she said.

"I think we're a moderate state as opposed to being blue or red," Jenkins said.

Still, even though [all 80 seats in the state Assembly](#) are up for grabs next month, no one in the State House is expecting to see the Democrats lose their comfortable 48-32 edge. The state Senate is also solidly under Democratic control, with a 24-16 advantage.

Part of the explanation for the Democrats' advantage in the Legislature lies in the makeup of the state's electoral map, which tends to favor protecting incumbents in the 40 legislative districts more than it does one particular political party. At one point, it was the Republicans who held both houses of the Legislature for a decade, from 1992 to 2002.

But there's been little change since the map was last redrawn in 2011, when the tiebreaking member of the state's redistricting panel [chose a design](#) proposed by Democrats over the Republicans' version.

Despite that setback, Christie has been able to work with the Democratic-controlled Legislature on numerous occasions to advance his agenda, striking compromises on big issues like pension reform, new teacher tenure rules, and capping property taxes. Part of his leverage is derived from the state constitution, which gives the governor here broad authority compared to those in some other states.



"It's really hard to make the case that you're truly an outsider when you're at the apex of political power in the state," Redlawsk said.

Jenkins said Christie's shift to an outsider message likely has something to do with current voter sentiment in the 2016 Republican primary, with candidates who have no political experience like Trump, Fiorina, and Ben Carson outpolling the officeholders in the race.

Yet New Jersey may eventually find itself looking more like a true Democratic bastion due to population and immigration trends that show the state is slowly [becoming more diverse](#). Such a shift will likely help out Democrats more than Republicans down the line, Redlawsk said, though the change won't come overnight.

Jenkins largely agreed, saying for the short-term "the status quo will prevail."