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CAUCUS ROOM

Hughes Center Poll Finds Election Distrust Persists with One-Third of N.J. Voters

By Insider NJ | October 3, 2024, 12:14 pm | in **Caucus Room** (<https://www.insidernj.com/category/caucus-room/>)



One-third of all New Jersey voters still doubt the legitimacy of the 2020 election for United States president, according to a poll released Thursday, Oct. 3 by the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

As many as 24% of New Jersey voters disagreed strongly and 9% disagreed somewhat that the 2020 election for president was fair and secure. The rate remains steady from a March 2021 Stockton poll which found that 34% of New Jerseyans disagreed, at least to some extent, that the 2020 election was fair.

Election distrust persists in 2024. Nearly one-third (31%) said they have little (18%) to no confidence (13%) that votes will be accurately cast and counted in November's election.

Majorities agree, at least somewhat, that the 2020 election was fair (63%) and are at least somewhat confident that the result will be accurate this year (68%). There is a clear split in election doubt and distrust along party lines.

“The poll goes to show that years after Jan. 6 and the election turmoil of 2020, election distrust is pretty much baked in among a certain group of voters,” said Alyssa Maurice, the center's director of Research. “Despite the lack of evidence of widespread fraud, this skepticism is not budging.”

The poll of 630 registered voters was released by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy and has a margin of error of +/- 3.9 percentage points.

With distrust looming over the electoral process, more than one-third (36%) of voters say they have little (26%) to no confidence (10%) that there will be a smooth and peaceful transition of leadership after the election when a new president is sworn into office. About 1 in 5 (22%) are very confident in a smooth transition of power, while 36% are at least somewhat confident and 6% are not sure.

Voters' trust in other democratic institutions, like a free press, is also low with less than half (45%) saying they are very (12%) or somewhat (34%) confident that journalists will report news related to the election fairly and accurately. One in five are not too confident and one-third are not at all confident. The Hughes Center recently hosted an event (<https://youtu.be/MwAhef8Rky8?si=Qn7DffNcdYmtvVsQ>) with Peter Baker, chief White House correspondent for The New York Times, on journalistic ethics and challenges in the current media landscape, including declining trust.

A majority (62%) of voters are very concerned about the spread of misinformation this election season and 28% are at least somewhat concerned. Less than 10% are not too worried about it.

A little more than half (53%) are very concerned about political violence in the U.S. and nearly one-third (32%) are somewhat concerned. A total of 14% were not too concerned or not at all worried. Consensus was found in denouncing

political violence. The overwhelming majority (90%) said political violence is never justified, while small minorities felt it was sometimes warranted to achieve political goals or were not sure (9%).

Republicans and Democrats were equally concerned about misinformation and political violence at rates ranging from 87% to 95% but differed drastically on trust in the media and the electoral process.

	Democrats	Republicans
Agree that the 2020 election for U.S. president was fair and secure	96%	25%
Confident that votes will be accurately cast and counted in this year's election	96%	38%
Confident that journalists will report news related to the election accurately and fairly	79%	15%

Other findings

The top issues cited by voters in this year's election are the economy or inflation (33%), followed by border security (13%), abortion rights (12%), foreign policy and preserving democracy (tied at 5%).

When it comes to the presidential ticket, Kamala Harris had the highest favorability rating of all the candidates at 50% (31% very favorable, 19% somewhat favorable). Nearly the same rate (48%) had a somewhat (7%) or very (42%) unfavorable impression of her.

Donald Trump's favorability rating is 43% (31% favorable, 12% somewhat favorable), while a majority (54%) of voters have a very (46%) or somewhat (8%) unfavorable impression of him. Trump's favorability among New Jersey voters has improved since an October 2020 Stockton poll. According to that poll before the last presidential election, his rating was 37% favorable and 60% unfavorable.

Vice presidential candidate Tim Walz prevailed over J.D. Vance in favorability ratings with 44% viewing him positively and 36% saying they have an unfavorable impression. One in five voters were not sure or unfamiliar with Walz. Vance was viewed favorably by 34% of voters and unfavorably by 50%, while 16% were not sure or unfamiliar. Data was collected for this survey before the vice-presidential debate took place Tuesday.

A majority of 78% said the vice-presidential candidate impacts their vote choice for president greatly (22%) or somewhat (56%), while 21% said the nominees for vice president do not influence their vote at all. However, at the time of this poll, the overwhelming majority of voters were already certain (82%) or somewhat certain (8%) of their choice for president, while only 9% said they are still deciding. Vice-presidential selection is one of many factors driving vote selection.

Most voters were unfamiliar with both candidates for the U.S. Senate race in New Jersey. The vast majority (81%) were unfamiliar or unsure about Curtis Bashaw, while a slimmer majority (55%) were unfamiliar with Andy Kim.

	Favorable	Unfavorable	Not sure/Unfamiliar
Kamala Harris	50%	48%	1%
Donald Trump	43%	54%	2%
J.D. Vance	34%	50%	16%
Tim Walz	44%	36%	20%
Curtis Bashaw	9%	7%	81%
Andy Kim	27%	17%	55%

Read the full results of the poll here (<https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/index.html>).

Methodology

The poll of New Jersey registered voters was conducted by the Stockton Polling Institute of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy from Sep. 27-Oct. 1, 2024. Stockton University students texted cell phones with invitations to take the survey online and Opinion Services supplemented the dialing portion of the fieldwork, which consisted of cell and landline telephone calls. Overall, 93% of interviews were conducted on cell phones and 7% on landline phones. In terms of mode, 63% were reached via dialing and 37% were reached via text-to-web. A random sample of 630 New Jersey registered voters were interviewed. Both cell and landline samples consisted of random digit dialing (RDD) and voter list sample from MSG. Data are weighted based on U.S. Census Bureau ACS 2023 data for the citizen voting age population in New Jersey on variables of age, race, education level and sex. The poll's margin of error is +/-

3.9 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. MOE is higher for subsets. Sampling error does not account for other potential sources of bias in polls such as measurement error or nonresponse.

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for the late William J. Hughes, whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found on YouTube @StocktonHughesCenter, and can be followed on Facebook @StocktonHughesCenter and X @HughesCenter.

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