

N.J. Republican primary expected to test Trump's hold on GOP

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June 2 (UPI) -- New Jersey Republicans are gearing up for one of the nation's first real tests of former President Donald Trump's hold on the party -- the state's gubernatorial primary next week, which includes a few candidates with different views on the GOP.

New Jersey is one of several states that have primaries scheduled through August. Even traditional Democratic states like New Jersey will have a litmus test for Republicans hoping to win public office.

Two of the four main GOP candidates have tied themselves to Trump. In the fall, one will go up against incumbent Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy. But even the primary Tuesday should indicate whether voters are following the former president.

Experts say the public's reaction to coronavirus restrictions and a growing, but not yet dominant, ultra-conservative movement in New Jersey has made the race interesting. Even a strong showing against Murphy could be a sign of trouble for Democrats in 2022, when they will try to grow a slim majority in the House and a razor-slim margin in the Senate.

New Jersey has not elected a Republican U.S. senator since 1972, but there has been parity in governor's mansion -- five Democrats and five Republicans since 1994. Before Murphy, it was conservative and Trump supporter Chris Christie for two terms. And Tuesday's vote might indicate whether residents favor a return to that type of governing.

Experts say the apparent GOP favorite is former Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli, who finished second in the 2017 Republican primary. Once a critic of Trump, Ciattarelli eventually grew to support him -- although his loyalty [has been questioned](#).

Ciattarelli's main competitor is Hirsh Singh, a South Jersey resident who also ran in 2017 and challenged Sen. Cory Booker last year. Singh is seen by most in the party as Trump-like, mainly owing to his anti-establishment rhetoric, and he's been endorsed by former Trump campaign manager Brad Parscale.

Experts say it will be interesting to see if those connections give him an edge over the front-runner.

Singh [has said](#) election integrity and immigration are New Jersey's biggest issues and he opposes critical race theory and
LGB

"I'm not criticizing [the poll], or saying it's not believable, but as a social scientist, I would want to see the methodology before I can have faith in it," John Froonjian, executive director of the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, told UPI.

"Did they screen for registered Republicans, those who have voted in primaries before? Only 20% of Republicans voted in primary in 2017."

A different [poll this week](#) shows Ciattarelli with a 29% to 23% edge, with almost 40% of likely GOP voters undecided.

Froonjian noted that Ciattarelli has vastly outraised Singh, and suggests that Singh may not have grass-roots support among Republicans that is usually key to making a serious run. Both are far behind Murphy in fundraising, according to the [New Jersey Globe](#).

Froonjian said if Singh or another Trump-connected candidate, Pastor Phil Rizzo, make some noise in Tuesday's primary, it could be becam



