

Carl Golden, a former aide to Govs. Tom Kean and Christie Whitman, is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

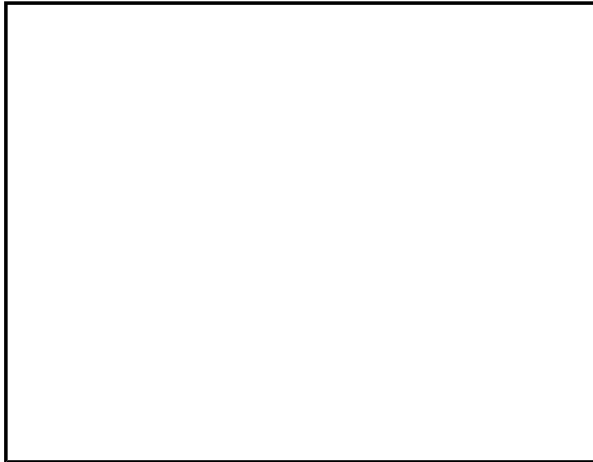


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WHILE Gov. Christie continues to hold a commanding lead over his Democratic opponent, Middlesex County State Sen. Barbara Buono, emerging polling trends indicate his strength ebbs significantly in the down ballot legislative contests.

Early polls suggest that despite his leads of more than 20 points holding steady, Christie's coattails will be either non-existent or too small

for the Republican candidates running with him to grasp.

Gubernatorial landslides that change the balance of power in the Legislature — Brendan Byrne in 1973 and Tom Kean in 1985, for instance — appear to have become a phenomenon of the past. Both former governors enjoyed reelection victories approaching 70 percent, a level not likely to be reached again.

A gain of five seats would hand Republicans control of the Senate and with a pickup of nine seats, they would control the Assembly. Even with a Christie landslide, it doesn't appear likely.

Several dynamics are in play that mitigate against a partisan turnabout in the Legislature.

The most significant, perhaps, is the legislative district map in place for the first time in the 2011 election that not only tilted in Democrats' favor, but winnowed the number of competitive districts to fewer than a half dozen. Only one seat changed hands that year.

Moreover, the inherent benefits of incumbency are both strong and considerable. Serving legislators enjoy greater name recognition in their districts, can rely on

organizational strength to produce large Election Day turnout, and have an easier time of it in raising campaign funds.

It has always been an uneven playing field for challengers — Republican and Democratic alike — as they struggle to unseat a better-funded opponent who, if a long-serving one, can call on extensive political relationships built up over time to mobilize on their behalf.