

Golden: No Christie coattail in election

Governor's popularity won't impact legislative races

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While Gov. Chris Christie continues to hold a commanding lead over his Democratic opponent, state Sen. Barbara Buono, D-Middlesex, emerging trends indicate his strength ebbs significantly in 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 Republican candidates to grasp.

Gubernatorial landslides that change the legislative balance of power — Brendan Byrne in 1973 and Tom Kean in 1985, for instance — appear to have become a phenomenon of the past. And Kean's 1985 re-election victory of 70 percent is a level unlikely to be reached again.

Republicans would gain control of the Senate with a pickup of five seats and of the Assembly with a gain of nine seats. 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 benefits of incumbency are strong and considerable. 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.

Voters as well have become increasingly sophisticated and

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