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Contact: Krista Jenkins, Ph.D.
kjenkins@fdi.edu
973.443.8390

A TIGHT CONTEST FOR MENENDEZ; MANY DEMOCRATS STILL UNDECIDED *TRUMP CASTS A LONG SHADOW IN NJ RACE*

Fairleigh Dickinson University, October 3, 2018 – Incumbent Senator Robert Menendez is locked in a statistical dead heat with his Republican challenger, pharmaceutical executive Bob Hugin. The most recent statewide survey of registered voters, including a subsample of likely voters in the November election, finds the senator with a fight incumbents are unaccustomed to experiencing.

Among registered voters, Menendez is up over Hugin 37 to 32%; among likely voters, the spread increases to six points (43 to 37%). However, it's important to note that once the margin of error is taken into account, the election remains anyone's game.

“There's no denying that this is tighter than one would expect for an incumbent senator. But, as the undecided numbers show, there's still time for either candidate to capture more support,” said Krista Jenkins, director of the poll and a professor of politics at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Almost a third (29%) of registered voters say they are undecided in the contest between Menendez and Hugin. This is down from the 46 percent of registered voters who were undecided in a pre-primary, hypothetical match-up when the same question was asked in [May](#). There remains a sizable number of Democrats who are undecided. In May, 46 percent of registered Democrats said they were undecided. Today, that number has dropped to 29 percent. Many registered Republicans have already found their way home, as only 16 percent remain undecided, down from 35 percent in May. Sixty-one percent of independents remain on the fence.

Among likely voters, almost a fifth (18%) are undecided. More than three times the number of Democrats (22%) than Republicans (6%) are undecided among likely voters. Forty-two percent of independent likely voters have yet to commit to any candidate.

“It's both a blessing and a curse that a good number of Democrats remain up for grabs. Partisan leanings are usually a strong indicator of how someone will vote. If Menendez is able to capture the support of undecided Democrats, plus some of the independents, he will be able to decisively pull ahead of Hugin by November. It will be harder for Hugin to do the same, given the smaller base of undecided Republicans in the state. But, as they say, the only poll that matters is the one on Election Day,” said Jenkins.

Senator Menendez enters the final month before the critical midterm elections with favorability ratings that are upside down. About a third of registered (33%) and likely voters (35%) view the senior senator favorably, with around half who have an unfavorable view of Menendez (49% registered; 53% likely). As for the Republican challenger, about equal numbers favor as disfavor him. Favorability stands at about a third for registered (31%) and likely voters (36%) with unfavorable ratings at 26 percent among registered voters and 30 percent among likely voters.

“It looks like Hugin still has room to define himself to voters. As for Menendez, having a third of likely Democratic voters with unfavorable opinions about him is complicating his re-election efforts. He has some work to do in his own party if he is to expand his margin before November,” said Jenkins.

Gender dynamics are also at play in this race. A double digit difference separates support for Menendez over Hugin among women. Almost half of likely female voters support Menendez (48%) as compared with 28 percent who say they will vote for Hugin. A more modest seven point difference separates candidate support among male likely voters, with the non-statistical edge going slightly to Hugin (39 versus 46%).

President Trump

President Trump is casting a long shadow over the Senate race in the Garden State. Although presidential approval ratings are, by and large, a proxy for partisanship, those who approve of the president’s job performance decidedly support Hugin among both registered (82%) and likely voters (86%). Disapproval and support for Menendez also go hand-in-hand, although slightly less so. A good many of those opposed to the president are undecided in the Senate contest (33% registered voters; 22% likely voters).

Speaking of the president, his approval ratings remain stuck in the 30s among both registered and likely voters. The president is also significantly unpopular with women. Whether the question concerns favorability ratings or his job performance, only about a quarter of women – registered and likely voters – give him high marks. Almost seven-in-ten women view him unfavorably and believe he’s doing a poor job as president.

“Trump is a gift to Democratic candidates, including the incumbent senator. If they can make it a referendum on the President, that blue wave becomes increasingly possible,” said Jenkins.

Methodology - The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was conducted by landline and cellular telephone September 26-30, 2018 using a random sample of registered voters in New Jersey aged 18 and older (N = 746). Results have a margin of sampling error of +/- 3.9 percentage points, including the design effect. Among likely voters, or those whose responses to a variety of questions about their behavior and attentiveness concerning the November election suggest a likelihood of voting, 508 respondents were identified. The sampling error for this group is +/- 4.3, including the design effect.

Survey results are also subject to non-sampling error. This kind of error, which cannot be measured, arises from a number of factors including, but not limited to, non-response (eligible individuals refusing to be interviewed), question wording, the order in which questions are asked, and variations among interviewers.

Interviews were conducted by Clear Insights Group of Lehi, Utah, with professionally trained interviewers using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) system. Random selection is achieved by computerized random-digit dialing. This technique gives every person with a landline or cellular telephone number (including those with unlisted numbers) an equal chance of being selected.

The total combined sample is mathematically weighted to match known demographics of age, sex, and race. 259 interviews were conducted on landlines and 487 were conducted on cellular telephones. Interviews were conducted in English.

The sample was purchased from Marketing Systems Group and the research was funded by Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll received an “A” rating from statistician Nate Silver’s FiveThirtyEight blog. The ratings measure both accuracy and bias for all major polling services in the United States, providing an update to similar research the poll watchers conducted in 2014. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll’s “A” rating puts it in the top 14 of the more than 380 polling institutes reviewed and graded from A+ through F. The Fairleigh Dickinson University Poll was found to have a 94 percent accuracy rate for predicting election results, and is one of only two A-rated polling institutes with zero bias to their rankings.

Tables

		Registered voters	Likely voters
If the election for US Senate were held today, who would you vote for [insert names and rotate], or are you undecided?	Menendez	37%	43%
	Hugin	32%	37%
	Undecided	29%	18%
	Other	1%	1%
	Don't know (vol)	1%	1%
	Refused (vol)	1%	1%

Registered Voters		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	2.00 35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
If the election for US Senate were held today, who would you vote for [insert names and rotate] or are you undecided?	1 Menendez	65%	3%	13%	35%	39%	36%	40%	43%	32%	38%	31%	41%	4%	60%
	2 Hugin	5%	79%	20%	41%	23%	38%	18%	19%	32%	40%	35%	30%	82%	6%
	3 Undecided	29%	16%	61%	21%	36%	24%	38%	37%	33%	20%	31%	28%	12%	33%
	4 Other	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	0%	1%	4%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

Likely voters		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
If the election for US Senate were held today, who would you vote for [insert names and rotate] or are you undecided?	1 Menendez	73%	3%	26%	39%	48%	40%	52%	60%	36%	41%	35%	47%	3%	71%
	2 Hugin	4%	89%	25%	46%	28%	42%	24%	24%	39%	41%	46%	33%	86%	6%
	3 Undecided	22%	6%	42%	12%	23%	16%	22%	16%	22%	15%	16%	19%	8%	22%
	4 Other	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	0%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	0%	1%	5%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%

		Registered voters	Likely voters
Robert Menendez	Favorable	33%	35%
	Unfavorable	49%	53%
	Never heard of	7%	3%
	Don't know (vol)	10%	8%
	Refused (vol)	1%	1%

Registered voters		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Robert Menendez	1 Favorable	55%	7%	17%	26%	40%	28%	42%	39%	31%	31%	33%	33%	7%	50%
	2 Unfavorable	30%	81%	50%	61%	38%	57%	34%	35%	51%	58%	45%	52%	83%	34%
	3 Never Heard	5%	6%	11%	6%	7%	5%	10%	16%	5%	1%	10%	5%	5%	4%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	10%	6%	19%	6%	14%	9%	13%	9%	11%	10%	11%	10%	5%	12%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	0%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Likely voters															
Robert Menendez	1 Favorable	58%	5%	22%	28%	41%	30%	48%	49%	31%	32%	33%	36%	6%	55%
	2 Unfavorable	29%	89%	61%	65%	42%	61%	34%	37%	54%	60%	58%	51%	88%	32%
	3 Never Heard	3%	2%	0%	1%	4%	2%	6%	7%	3%	1%	1%	4%	3%	3%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	10%	4%	14%	4%	12%	7%	11%	7%	11%	7%	7%	8%	3%	10%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	0%	0%	4%	1%	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%

Bob Hugin	Registered voters		Likely voters	
	Favorable	31%	Favorable	36%
Unfavorable	26%	Unfavorable	30%	
Never heard of	22%	Never heard of	17%	
Don't know (vol)	19%	Don't know (vol)	16%	
Refused (vol)	2%	Refused (vol)	2%	

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Registered voters															
Bob Hugin	1 Favorable	11%	66%	20%	38%	24%	37%	19%	21%	29%	39%	30%	31%	70%	12%
	2 Unfavorable	42%	4%	22%	25%	28%	27%	23%	27%	21%	30%	20%	30%	3%	41%
	3 Never Heard	25%	13%	27%	19%	25%	18%	31%	35%	22%	13%	26%	20%	12%	25%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	20%	15%	28%	18%	21%	17%	24%	16%	24%	18%	23%	18%	15%	20%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	2%	3%	1%	3%	1%	3%	1%	4%	1%	2%	2%	0%	2%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Likely voters															
Bob Hugin	1 Favorable	10%	77%	27%	42%	30%	41%	22%	25%	35%	41%	42%	33%	78%	10%
	2 Unfavorable	50%	3%	25%	28%	33%	31%	27%	33%	24%	33%	25%	33%	2%	49%
	3 Never Heard	21%	10%	14%	14%	19%	14%	26%	29%	16%	12%	17%	16%	9%	21%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	17%	10%	30%	14%	17%	13%	22%	13%	21%	13%	15%	16%	11%	17%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	2%	0%	4%	1%	2%	1%	3%	0%	4%	1%	1%	2%	0%	2%

		Registered voters	Likely voters
Donald Trump	Favorable	35%	39%
	Unfavorable	60%	59%
	Never heard of	0	0
	Don't know (vol)	4%	2%
	Refused (vol)	2%	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education		Trump approval	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +	Approve	Disapprove
Registered voters															
Donald Trump	1 Favorable	6%	82%	28%	44%	26%	43%	18%	22%	35%	43%	43%	30%	97%	2%
	2 Unfavorable	91%	13%	57%	50%	69%	54%	72%	72%	58%	53%	47%	66%	3%	96%
	3 Never Heard	0%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	2%	3%	7%	4%	3%	2%	7%	6%	4%	2%	7%	2%	0%	1%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	1%	5%	2%	2%	1%	3%	0%	3%	1%	2%	2%	0%	0%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +
Likely voters													
Donald Trump	1 Favorable	5%	90%	33%	49%	28%	44%	23%	24%	42%	43%	51%	33%
	2 Unfavorable	93%	9%	55%	48%	69%	54%	74%	75%	54%	55%	46%	64%
	3 Never Heard	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't know	1%	1%	9%	2%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	0%	4%	1%	1%	0%	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%

		Registered voters	Likely voters
First, do you approve or disapprove [rotate] of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?	Approve	33%	38%
	Disapprove	58%	59%
	Don't know (vol)	6%	3%
	Refused (vol)	3%	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +
Registered voters													
First, do you approve or disapprove [rotate] of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?	1 Approve	5%	80%	24%	42%	24%	41%	15%	19%	33%	42%	39%	29%
	2 Disapprove	91%	13%	52%	48%	68%	54%	70%	69%	57%	53%	47%	64%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't Know	4%	5%	16%	5%	6%	4%	9%	8%	6%	4%	9%	4%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	2%	9%	4%	2%	2%	6%	4%	5%	1%	5%	2%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +
Likely voters													
First, do you approve or disapprove [rotate] of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?	1 Approve	5%	90%	28%	48%	27%	43%	22%	20%	41%	43%	49%	33%
	2 Disapprove	92%	9%	60%	47%	69%	53%	74%	77%	52%	55%	46%	64%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't Know	2%	1%	8%	3%	3%	2%	3%	3%	4%	1%	4%	2%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	0%	4%	2%	0%	1%	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%

		Registered voters	Likely voters
In your opinion, do you believe the country is headed in the right direction or is it on the wrong track [rotate]?	Right direction	35%	38%
	Wrong track	57%	59%
	Don't know (vol)	6%	3%
	Refused (vol)	2%	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +
Registered voters													
In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track [rotate]?	1 Right direction	7%	78%	34%	44%	26%	41%	21%	24%	34%	42%	41%	31%
	2 Wrong track	87%	16%	41%	49%	64%	54%	65%	65%	56%	53%	44%	64%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't Know	5%	4%	20%	4%	8%	4%	10%	9%	6%	4%	11%	4%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	2%	5%	2%	2%	1%	5%	2%	4%	1%	4%	1%

		Party ID			Gender		Race/Ethnicity		Age			Education	
		Dem	Repub	Ind	Male	Female	White	Non-white	18-34	35-54	55+	HS or Less / Some College	College +
Likely voters													
In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track [rotate]?	1 Right direction	5%	87%	36%	48%	28%	41%	27%	26%	39%	42%	49%	32%
	2 Wrong track	92%	11%	53%	50%	67%	55%	69%	73%	56%	55%	46%	65%
	8 (DO NOT READ) Don't Know	3%	1%	11%	2%	4%	3%	3%	1%	4%	3%	5%	2%
	9 (DO NOT READ) Refused	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%

Exact question wording and order

US1. First, do you approve or disapprove [rotate] of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as President?

- 1 Approve
- 2 Disapprove
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

	1/17	3/17	10/17	1/18	5/18	9/18
Approve	37	28	31	31	33	33
Disapprove	50	61	62	60	57	58

US2. In your opinion, do you believe the country is moving in the right direction or is it on the wrong track [rotate]?

- 1 Right direction
- 2 Wrong track
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

	1/17	3/17	10/17	1/18	5/18	9/18
Approve	37	28	31	31	35	35
Disapprove	50	61	62	60	55	57

NJ1 and NJ2 withheld for future release

NJ3 If the election for US Senate was today, would you vote for Robert Menendez, the Democrat, or Bob Hugin [Hugin], the Republican, or are you undecided [rotate]?

- 1 Menendez
- 2 Hugin
- 3 Undecided
- 4 Other
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Registered voters	5/18	9/18
Menendez	28%	37%
Hugin	24%	32%
Undecided	46%	29%
Other	1%	1%

I'm going to read you a few names. Please tell me if you have a favorable or unfavorable opinion of each, or if you have not heard of them before tonight.

[Rotate names]

NJ4A Robert Menendez

NJ4B Bob Hugin

NJ4C Donald Trump

- 1 Favorable
- 2 Unfavorable
- 3 Never heard
- 8 DK (vol)
- 9 Refused (vol)

Menendez: Trend	Haven't heard	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
9/18	7%	33%	49%	10%
5/18	14%	33%	39%	13%
10/17*	6%	26%	57%	11%
5/16	19%	31%	36%	14%
11/15	14%	31%	38%	17%
4/15	18%	23%	39%	20%
3/14	17%	30%	33%	19%
8/12	20%	36%	23%	22%
5/12	22%	32%	24%	23%

*Sample drawn from list of registered voters with known history of voting in past elections

Hugin: Trend	Haven't heard	Favorable	Unfavorable	Unsure
9/18	22%	31%	26%	19%
5/18	57%	19%	10%	14%

Weighted sample characteristics	Registered voters	Likely voters
Dem (with lean)	53%	56%
Repub (with lean)	33%	36%
Ind	11%	8%
Male	48%	50%
Female	52%	50%
18-34	26%	22%
35-54	36%	36%
55+	36%	43%
White	66%	70%
African American	11%	9%
Asian	7%	5%