2023 VOTER’S GUIDE
THE YEAR OF THE NEW MAP
TRUE INNOVATION

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Good Luck to All of This Year’s Candidates!
INTRODUCTION

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE of Representatives just endured three weeks of speakerless chaos. Senator Bob Menendez is under indictment on explosive charges of bribery and acting as a foreign agent. War rages in Ukraine and has newly sprung up in Israel.

And through it all, New Jersey voters will head to the polls on November 7 to elect their next state legislature.

Outside of the most well-connected echelons of New Jersey politics, it can be surprisingly easy to forget that this year, like every year, is an election year in New Jersey. Voters themselves often seem to forget; voter turnout in 2011, the last time that the State Senate and Assembly were elected without any higher office on the ballot, was a measly 27%.

But for those in the know; those who are involved in this year’s races on one side or the other; those most likely to be reading this Voter’s Guide, it’s impossible to forget the importance of what’s on the ballot. This election – for 120 legislative seats, dozens of county positions, and countless local offices – will define the final two years of Gov. Phil Murphy’s reign and, possibly, the balance of power in New Jersey for quite a bit longer than that.

The story of this year’s election really began two years ago, when former Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli (R-Hillsborough) came 3.2 percentage points away from unseating Murphy. Ciattarelli himself didn’t win, but his coattails helped Republicans – who had been bracing for downballot losses – flip a net seven seats across the two chambers instead. Among the losers was Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-West Deptford), the second-most powerful person in state government and the longest-serving legislative leader in New Jersey history.

Democrats, having seen their fortunes rise dramatically over the course of the Trump presidency, were sent into a tizzy by their unexpected losses. The panic was especially acute among South Jersey Democrats, who had borne the brunt of the losses and who had lost a tremendous amount of power in the legislature as a result.

It was in that atmosphere that the 11 members of the New Jersey Apportionment Commission met in February 2022 to hash out a new legislative map, a process that happens once every decade. Traditionally, each party’s five-member delegation on the commission will secretly present draft maps to the 11th tiebreaking member, who will offer each party advice before ultimately selecting one of their edited submissions.

But under the tutelage of Philip Carchman, a former state appellate court judge and the commission’s tiebreaker, this year’s process went a little differently. Carchman had each party release its initial, gerrymandered proposal to the public, then worked behind-the-scenes to hash out a bipartisan deal map that both parties could agree to. It was the first bipartisan agreement in the history of the commission.

The resulting map is one that keeps much of the previous decade’s map in place, with some tinkering around the edges in swingy districts that tended to favor Republicans overall. It also completely reshaped district lines in much of North Jersey, resulting in rejiggered delegations in many safely Democratic districts, and overhauled the 4th district to make it much more competitive.

Thanks in part to the new map, retirements are a huge part of the story this year. 23 incumbents are retiring from the legislature, another two were defeated in primaries, and five members of the Assembly are trying to move up to the Senate. Essex, Hudson, Sussex, and Ocean Counties in particular are witnessing massive amounts of turnover.

That means that even if every single incumbent wins re-election on November 7, the New Jersey Legislature is still going to look wildly different starting next January. New committee chairs, reshuffled party leadership, a younger and (modestly) more diverse cohort of legislators; that’s what happens when fully one-quarter of the legislature chooses to retire or seek higher office.

When the new map was approved, Republicans, hugely energized after their 2021 wins, hailed it as a bipartisan victory that gave them a narrow path to a majority in 2023. Those hopes remain dimly alive, but there isn’t quite the same excited energy that there was in early 2022.

That’s largely because of fundraising and recruiting, two things that GOP leaders were hoping to smash out of the park – and didn’t. In many of the state’s most competitive districts, Republicans weren’t able to get the candidates they initially hoped for, and even some of their top recruits haven’t been able to raise the money they’d need to keep pace with Democrats.

A majority remains theoretically possible, though it’s far less likely than a tied chamber, which Republicans have a difficult but straightforward path to achieving. (If the chamber does end up tied with no deal in place like the one Thomas Kean cut with four Democrats to become Speaker in 1971, that would mean shared control of committees and board lists.)
On the Democratic side, money has never been an issue, and millions are flowing into races both via candidates themselves and via political action committees led by party leaders. And while Democrats didn’t have a stellar record recruiting candidates – some Republican-held districts have fallen further off the map thanks to mediocre Democratic challengers – their incumbents and recruits in the most important districts are quite capable.

But although Democrats may be favored to retain their majority, it’s still up in the air what that majority might look like. Sweeney’s defeat in 2021 led to the rise of new Senate President Nick Scutari (D-Linden), who has a difficult-at-best relationship with the South Jersey Democratic organization; how many seats South Jersey Democrats are able to defend or flip this year could shift the balance towards or away from Scutari and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-Woodbridge).

That conflict is shown clearly by patterns of outside spending. Leadership PACs associated with Scutari and Coughlin have spent millions, but mainly in the 11th, 16th, and 38th districts in Central and North Jersey; South Jersey Democrats have been left to fund their own campaigns in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 8th districts.

Regardless of region, Democrats will want plenty of money to fend off a barrage of Republican attacks on a variety of issues that seem to be proving quite effective.

At the top of the list is education, particularly sex education and parental involvement in schools. A number of school districts are embroiled in legal battles with the Murphy administration over their policies of alerting parents if a child identifies as transgender or gender-nonconforming, battles that Republican legislative candidates have latched onto as a fight for parents against the overreaching arms of big government.

There’s also offshore wind, once a non-controversial policy that skyrocketed into the news cycle after a spate of dead whales and dolphins washed up along the Jersey Shore last winter. There’s no clear evidence that offshore wind was responsible, but halting wind turbine construction has become a key issue for Republican legislative candidates – and they got a big win earlier this week when wind company Ørsted announced it was dropping its planned projects.

Democrats in competitive districts were caught so flat-footed by both issues that most of them still haven’t articulated a clear response, instead dodging the issue or even half-heartedly agreeing with Republicans.

That’s not to mention the salvo of other attacks Republicans have brought up, such as the Murphy administration’s plans to phase out gas stoves and gas-powered cars; Menendez’s indictment, which may cast a pall on New Jersey Democrats more broadly; and of course the New Jersey Republican staple of high property taxes. With a Democrat in both the White House and the governor’s office – Murphy’s job approval numbers are fine, but Biden is underwater – voters looking for someone to blame for high taxes and inflation will likely point the finger at Democrats.

The strongest issue Democrats have found in response is abortion, which they warn will be under threat if Republicans make serious gains in the legislature this year. That proved to be a highly effective argument in the 2022 federal midterm elections, but it’s less clear whether voters for a state-level election in New Jersey – which has a Democratic governor and some of the country’s strongest abortion protections – will view it with the same urgency.

Democrats have also found what may be an effective counter to Republican attacks on high property taxes: the ANCHOR and StayNJ property tax relief programs, which the legislature passed in 2022 and 2023, respectively. Republicans have derided both programs as election-year gimmicks, but for voters who receive an ANCHOR rebate check in the mail at the same time as their vote-by-mail ballot, the motivations may not matter much.
And Democrats, unlike Republicans, actually have the money to make their messaging reach prospective voters. Some Republican campaigns could have the winning message but lose anyways, simply because they didn’t raise enough money to compete.

Exactly how much money is being spent, though, is notoriously difficult to track. Campaign money in New Jersey winds its way through different campaign committees (individual committees, joint committees, party committees) and often ends up getting double counted; lots of the most important spending comes from more obscure independent expenditure committees rather than the candidates themselves; and the campaign finance reports themselves are often released days or weeks after the period they cover.

While there are some things we can say with certainty this year – the 11th and 16th district races are incredibly expensive, for example – getting a more precise read on the financial picture borders on impossible. That’s especially true in South Jersey, where Democrats are clearly spending quite a bit, but it’s coming from new and often deeply shady dark money groups that are hard to pin down.

In addition to money, South Jersey Democrats have another secret weapon up their sleeve: vote-by-mail. Politicians of both parties and in all regions of the state have gotten better at running absentee ballot operations, but no one is better at it than the South Jersey Democratic organization, which has already banked thousands of mail-in votes in key districts that Republicans will have to overpower on Election Day.

With all that being said, there are, in essence, three possible categories of outcome for this year’s election.

In one, the status quo from 2021 essentially holds, with neither party making revolutionary gains. Everyone on both sides of the aisle admits that the 4th and 11th districts are hyper-competitive and either party could win their seats, but beyond those two districts, both parties may hold onto everything they currently have and nothing more.

To put it another way, after a highly dramatic election year that’s witnessed dozens of retirements and millions of dollars in spending, the result could be that only a couple of seats flip (if that), and the legislature basically stays on its current trajectory.

In another outcome, Democrats – and specifically South Jersey Democrats – have a great night, reclaiming much of the territory they lost in 2021 and re-establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the legislature. Democrats could sweep through the 3rd and 4th districts and stage an upset or two in the 2nd or 8th districts, all of which would become part of a newly resurgent South Jersey Democratic organization.

(On a truly incredible Democratic night, Republican-held districts outside of South Jersey like the 21st or 39th districts might start getting close, but that looks like a fairly remote possibility.)

And in a third, it’s Republicans who have the amazing night, holding onto all of their gains from 2021 and building on top of them to come within reach of a legislative majority for the first time in two decades. Democratic-leaning districts like the 16th and 38th would be very threatened, and Republicans might even be able to make Democrats sweat in deep-blue territory like the 14th district.

If Republicans can win the 4th, 11th, 16th, and 38th districts (and hold onto everything they currently have), that’s a tied chamber. Getting to a majority would require one step further into even more challenging terrain.

What little polling there is suggests that Democrats have a modest lead on the statewide generic ballot, which probably makes the first option the likeliest.

But there are a lot of unknowns to contend with. What voters will be showing up in an off-year election with no statewide race on the ballot? How many of those voters will know much of anything about the legislative and county-level candidates on the ballot? In an era where so much is defined by partisanship, how much can things like effective messaging and TV advertising sway voters anyways?

I started working at the New Jersey Globe in 2021, just a few months before that year’s general election. Like most other people in state media and politics, I thought I had a pretty good idea of what was going to happen – and then Democrats dramatically underperformed, Republicans unseated Steve Sweeney, and the equilibrium of New Jersey politics was upended. Those lessons were repeated in 2022, when most New Jersey politicos were bracing for another Republican wave that never arrived.

I’ve learned that trying to make conclusive predictions about New Jersey politics is usually a fool’s errand. There’s lots I can say about fundraising, and candidate strength, and partisan math – this Voter’s Guide features thousands of words on each of those subjects – but at the end of the day, I don’t know what will happen, and neither does anyone else.

I will, however, demand one thing quite conclusively: vote. Tell your family members to vote. Tell your friends to vote. Tell random people you see on the street to vote. Vote on Election Day. Vote early in-person. Turn in the mail-in ballot that you’ve hopefully already received. However you vote – vote.

Electoral years like 2023 are plagued by low voter turnout, by voter apathy, by simple voter ignorance about the issues at stake. I’m probably preaching to the choir, but this year, you can be part of the solution to that apathy. Let’s make this year the most exciting, energized off-off-year New Jersey has ever seen.

Happy voting,

Joey Fox
New Jersey Globe reporter
WILL THE 1ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT, which elected an entirely Democratic delegation just a few years ago, ever be competitive again? Not if State Sen. Mike Testa (R-Vineland) has anything to say about it.

For more than a decade, the 1st district was under the near-total control of then-State Sen. Jeff Van Drew (D-Dennis). Van Drew, a dentist and center-right Democrat, turned an initial Assembly win in 2001 into a durable political brand that allowed Democrats on “the Van Drew Team” to win again and again despite the 1st district’s Republican lean.

But when Van Drew was elected to Congress in 2018, things began to fall apart. Van Drew’s chosen slate of successors, led by appointed State Sen. Bob Andrzejczak (D-Middle), struggled to keep up the Van Drew brand – an effort that certainly wasn’t helped by Van Drew’s increasing estrangement from the Democratic Party.

Enter Mike Testa, the Cumberland County Republican chairman and the grandson of the late Vineland Mayor Frank Testa. (On his mother’s side, he’s also the grandson of Holocaust survivors.) Running alongside Ocean City Councilman Antwan McClellan and Lower Township Mayor Erik Simonsen, Testa made it clear that the days of Democrats effortlessly winning the 1st district were over.

After an arduous campaign, Testa, McClellan, and Simonsen all won by healthy margins, becoming the only legislative candidates to flip seats in the 2019 elections. Then, of course, Van Drew went on to switch parties just a month later, leaving Democrats in the far southern reaches of the state utterly rudderless.

1st district Republicans have only grown in strength since then. In 2021, with South Jersey Democrats far more focused on other races, Testa crushed Yolanda Garcia Balicki by a 65%-35% margin, and Simonsen and McClellan did similarly against two little-known Democratic opponents. Team Testa was born in 2019, and by 2021, it was already dominant.

This year looks like more of the same. Testa faces union electrician Charles Laspata, while Simonsen and McClellan will go up against security officer Eddie Bonner and early childhood educator Damita White-Morris. Even though the district gained Bridgeton in redistricting and became slightly more Democratic, no one on either side of the aisle thinks the contests will be remotely close.

In fact, Laspata almost didn’t make it onto the primary ballot at all, thanks to a petition challenge from Republicans. Enough of Laspata’s 115 signatures were deemed valid to allow him ballot access, but filing with so few signatures is the kind of mistake the South Jersey Democratic organization never would have allowed to happen if it was seriously invested in the race.

In the absence of a serious general election challenge, Testa can continue building up his stature both at home and in Trenton. He’s a member of both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee – probably the two most influential committees in the entire legislature – and was briefly one of the leading candidates to become Senate Minority Leader this year before he deferred to State Sen. Anthony M. Bucco (R-Boonton).

Down the road, Testa is considered a strong contender for higher office. He may find himself boxed out of the 2025 gubernatorial race, but at 47, he can afford to wait. In the meantime, he’s still the GOP chairman in a county where Republicans are ascendant; last year, Testa flipped control of the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners, and he’s aiming for a clean sweep this year.

McClellan and Simonsen have cultivated relatively lower profiles in their chamber of the legislature, though McClellan was a finalist for the lieutenant governor post on Jack Ciattarelli’s ticket in 2021, serves in a top leadership post, and remains the legislature’s lone Black Republican.

Following a mediocre 2019 and a disastrous 2021, South Jersey Democrats have a chance to rebound this year and replenish their ranks. But even in their most optimistic scenarios, the 1st district simply isn’t on the table. After so many years under Van Drew’s control, it’s Testa territory now.
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<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Cape May</th>
<th>Entire county</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Atlantic</td>
<td>Corbin City, Estell Manor, Weymouth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Cumberland</td>
<td>Bridgeton, Commercial, Downe, Fairfield, Lawrence, Maurice River, Millville, Vineland</td>
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**STATEWIDE RESULTS**

- **2021 governor**  
  Ciattarelli 59.0% / Murphy 40.3%
- **2020 president**  
  Trump 51.3% / Biden 47.6%

**PAST DISTRICT RESULTS**  
**UNDER OLD LINES**

- **2021 Senate**  
  *Testa 64.6% / Garcia Balicki 35.4%
- **2021 Assembly**  
  *Simonsen 31.6%, *McClellan 31.3% / Capizola 18.5%, Hankerson 17.9% / Others 0.8%
- **2019 Senate**  
  Testa 53.4% / *Andrzejczak 46.6%
- **2019 Assembly**  
  Simonsen 27.1%, McClellan 26.1% / *Land 23.6%, *Milam 23.1%

**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS**  
No primaries on either side

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

- **Senate**  
  None
- **Assembly**  
  None

**DEMographics**  
**AS OF 2020 CENSUS**  
59.4% White / 13.9% Black / 24.8% Hispanic / 1.6% Asian

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**REDISTRICTING CHANGES**

- **Partisan Shift due to Redistricting:** D+2.5

**2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ciattarelli</th>
<th>Murphy</th>
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**2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-1**

- Ciattarelli 59.0%
- Murphy 40.3%
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IT IS THE ETERNAL BLESSING and curse of Atlantic County to be politically competitive. With the exception of a brief period in the 1990s, the Atlantic-based 2nd legislative district has hosted hotly contested races nearly every cycle since New Jersey’s modern legislative district system was adopted in 1973.

This year is no different, but it’s clear that one party has the edge. The district’s trio of Republican incumbents, all of whom were first elected in 2021, have quickly established themselves as forces to be reckoned with, and a lot of things would have to go right for Democrats to win.

That 2021 race was one of the most closely-watched races in the state. Thanks to Atlantic County’s inveterate ticket splitting, the district had long been represented by a split legislative delegation, and both parties were willing to expend boatloads of money and effort holding onto their own seats and flipping the others.

The district’s Senate seat was open, thanks to the retirement and eventual resignation of State Sen. Chris Brown (R-Ventnor), a strong vote-getter, to take a job in Gov. Phil Murphy’s administration. Filling his spot on the Republican side was former Assemblyman Vince Polistina (R-Egg Harbor Township) – Polistina was technically chosen as the district’s new incumbent senator after Brown resigned, but he wasn’t seated until after the election – while Democrats ran popular four-term Assemblyman Vince Mazzeo (D-Northfield).

For the Assembly, Republicans chose one well-known name, former Atlantic City Mayor Don Guardian, and one newer one, former Deputy Attorney General Claire Swift. They went up against Assemblyman John Armato (D-Buena) and Atlantic County Commissioner Caren Fitzpatrick (D-Linwood), who was chosen as Mazzeo’s prospective successor.

Democrats outspent Republicans by a considerable amount, and the conventional wisdom was that the Democratic team probably had the edge. But amid Jack Ciattarelli’s unexpectedly fantastic showing across South Jersey, all three Republicans ended up winning, running up the score in the Atlantic City suburbs while keeping their losses to a minimum in the city itself.

It was the first time that the 2nd district had elected a single-party slate of three legislators since 2003. And with Guardian’s victory, it also marked the first time ever that an openly gay Republican served in the legislature.

But in keeping with Atlantic County’s independent-mindedness, the new 2nd district legislators have hardly been hardcore partisan Republicans in Trenton. All three voted for the Democratic-led state budget in both 2022 and 2023, earning them the ire of some conservatives but cementing them as legislators whom legislative Democrats can trust and work with. Polistina enjoys a closer relationship with Murphy’s former chief of staff, George Helmy, than many Democratic senators.

Of course, a few votes here and there for Democratic priorities was never going to be enough to stop the South Jersey Democratic operation from targeting Republicans for defeat this year.

Fitzpatrick, who is one of just two Atlantic Democrats to hold countywide office, is the party’s standard-bearer for Senate this time around. She started out the cycle running for Assembly once again, but was switched into the Senate race after the initial placeholder candidate, Pleasantville Councilman Victor Carmona, dropped out over the summer. Democrats tried to recruit other options, including Mazzeo and outgoing Stockton University President Harvey Kesselman, before settling on Fitzpatrick.

Fitzpatrick’s spot on the Assembly ticket was filled by Lisa Bender, a marine scientist who lost a race for local office last year. Bender is running alongside Alphonso Harrell, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran-turned-kindergarten teacher who would be the 2nd district’s first-ever legislator of color if elected.

South Jersey Democrats are interested enough in the district that they’re spending money in support of Team Fitzpatrick – including possibly sending out mailers backing a Libertarian Senate candidate, Shawn Peck. (Angered by the mailers, which haven’t been conclusively tied to Democrats, Peck dropped out of the race, but his name will remain on the ballot and may still splinter some voters away from Polistina.)
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: VINC POLISTINA, CLAIRE SWIFT, DON GUARDIAN
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: CAREN FITZPATRICK, LISA BENDER, ALPHONSO HARRELL
But Polistina and his running mates have been the stronger fundraisers overall, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to maintain the goodwill they’ve built up during their two years in the legislature. Democratic legislative leaders, most of whom come from Central or North Jersey, have no real issue with Polistina, Swift, and Guardian and aren’t using their own resources to help South Jersey Democrats take them out.

2nd district Democrats also have to contend with the rough demographics of Atlantic County’s electorate in an off-off-year. Majority-minority Atlantic City and Pleasantville are the keys to a Democratic victory, but with no top-of-the-ticket race to pull voters out to the polls, they’re liable to get drowned out by more Republican areas like Egg Harbor Township.

And, like elsewhere in the state, the policy issues at hand probably give Republicans a further boost. Immigration has unexpectedly become a top issue following President Joe Biden’s unpopular proposal to potentially house asylum seekers in Atlantic City International Airport; debates over offshore wind, while more of a focus further up the Shore, aren’t doing Democrats any favors, either.

It would be a major display of power if the South Jersey Democratic machine can take all of those built-in disadvantages and still manage to flip some or all of the 2nd district’s seats. Those writing Democratic boss George Norcross’s political obituaries would have to think twice if Democrats regain ground in places like Atlantic County.

But that will be exceedingly hard to do; in a district that has essentially always been competitive, none of the typical indicators are pointing Democrats’ way this year. Polistina, Swift, and Guardian, just two years into the job, are looking tough to beat.

### MUNICIPALITIES

| Atlantic | Absecon, Atlantic City, Brigantine, Egg Harbor Township, Galloway, Hamilton, Linwood, Longport, Margate City, Northfield, Pleasantville, Port Republic, Somers Point, Ventnor City |

### STATEWIDE RESULTS

| 2021 governor  | Ciattarelli 53.0% / Murphy 46.4% |
| 2020 president | Biden 55.2% / Trump 43.6% |

### PAST DISTRICT RESULTS

(UNDER OLD LINES)

| 2021 Senate     | *Polistina 51.9% / Mazzeo 48.1% |
| 2021 Assembly   | Swift 26.8%, Guardian 26.7% / *Armato 23.7%, Fitzpatrick 22.9% |
| 2019 Assembly   | *Mazzeo 26.7%, *Armato 25.2% / Risley 24.0%, Guenther 24.0% |

### 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS

No primaries on either side

### THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

| Senate | Shawn Peck (Libertarian) - unofficially withdrew |
| Assembly | None |

### DEMOGRAPHICS

(AS OF 2020 CENSUS)

51.3% White / 19.2% Black / 19.5% Hispanic / 10.2% Asian
LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT what the New Jersey Globe's 2021 Voter's Guide had to say about the 3rd legislative district and Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-West Deptford), shall we?

"Most Republicans seem to think that Sweeney's hold on the district won't be broken until the man himself retires or runs for governor. If and when that happens, the 3rd district may well become a marquee race. For now, Democrats remain in the driver's seat."

It turns out Republicans didn't need Sweeney to retire to get into the driver's seat. They just needed to run a truck driver.

By now, the story of the 2021 3rd district race has been thoroughly entered into political legend. An unknown truck driver from Logan Township named Ed Durr spends virtually no money, is written off by just about everyone – and ends up unseating the second-most powerful man in New Jersey state politics.

And it's not just Sweeney who goes down, either. His two running mates, Assemblymen John Burzichelli (D-Paulsboro) and Adam Taliaferro (D-Woolwich), also lose their seats to out-of-the-blue challengers: Bethanne McCarthy Patrick, an EMT from Mannington.

The results were a massive shock to everyone involved, including the candidates themselves. Despite being located in a conservative-leaning corner of South Jersey, the 3rd district had shown absolutely no indication of wanting to ditch its Democratic legislators in previous cycles; just four years earlier, Sweeney had crushed a well-funded challenger 59%-41%.

Sweeney saw the 2021 race as so uncompetitive that he spent most of his time and money on winning other races around South Jersey – and on making trips to North Jersey laying the groundwork for a 2025 gubernatorial run – rather than focusing on his own re-election.

But with Jack Ciattarelli romping through South Jersey at the top of the ballot, that turned out to be a poor decision. Sweeney's defeat was one of several Democratic losses that shifted the balance of power in the Democratic legislative caucus firmly away from the South – and, of course, cleared the way for State Sen. Nick Scutari (D-Linden) to become the new Senate President.

On January 11, 2022, Sweeney and his seatmates officially left office and were replaced by Durr, Sawyer, and McCarthy Patrick, of whom only McCarthy Patrick, a former school board member, had ever held elected office. The two years since then have been a learning curve for the three politicians – and not always a smooth one.

Before being elected to office, Durr had written and shared a number of offensive social media posts related to abortion, Muslim immigration, and more. Although Durr apologized for the sentiments expressed in some of the posts, they ended up being a pretty good forecast of his attitude as a legislator: deeply conservative and quite blunt about it.

That set him on a collision course with Sawyer, who was interested in becoming a more traditional swing-district legislator and working with Democrats where possible. Durr, she felt, may have become a conservative hero for toppling Sweeney and speaking his mind, but he was an impediment to properly representing the 3rd district.

Sawyer schemed for months behind-the-scenes on how to oust Durr, and in February, she teamed up with Salem County Commissioner Mickey Ostrum (R-Pilesgrove), Durr’s primary challenger. But Ostrum flamed out quickly; he lost the county party endorsement in each of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland Counties, and abandoned his campaign just over a month after launching it.

Put in a tough spot, Sawyer spent a few weeks ruminating until, a few days before the filing deadline, she launched an off-the-line campaign of her own against Durr. She would run alongside Joe Collins, the nephew of former Assembly Speaker Jack Collins, against Durr and his new running mate, Hopewell Township Committeeman Tom Tedesco. Sawyer specifically said she wouldn’t target McCarthy Patrick, who was aligned with Durr but retained a better relationship with Sawyer.
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: ED DURR, BETHANNE MCCARTHY PATRICK, TOM TEDESCO
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: JOHN BURZICHELLI, HEATHER SIMMONS, DAVE BAILEY
The race became part of a battle over the heart and soul of the Gloucester GOP, one that grew to include primaries for the 4th legislative district and four county level offices (and that had substantial implications for the 2025 gubernatorial election as well).

In the 4th district and at the county level, the Sawyer-aligned renegade ticket was successful. Sawyer herself, though, fell far short. Durr had far too much support from the conservative grassroots to be taken down, and he won every single municipality in the district; McCarthy Patrick and Tedesco won easily as well.

Where were 3rd district Democrats during all of this? Biding their time. The big question for Democrats at first was whether Sweeney would try again to reclaim his old seat. He ended up passing – he’s far more interested in running for governor in two years – and a new Democratic slate was efficiently formed in his stead: Sweeney’s old running mate Burzichelli for the Senate, Gloucester County Commissioner Heather Simmons (D-Glassboro) and Salem County nonprofit leader Dave Bailey Jr. for the Assembly.

Team Burzichelli did face a Democratic primary challenge, but it was from a set of South Jersey progressives who never gained any traction, and the party-backed slate won easily. That freed them to begin consolidating money and support for the general election while Republicans were still squabbling within their own party.

They’ll need every advantage they can get to flip the 3rd district, which, despite its history of supporting Democrats, is fundamentally a conservative district. The district, which was redrawn to be slightly more Republican, supported Ciattarelli by 16 points in 2021 and Donald Trump by 3 points in 2020; no other competitive district this year is remotely as Republican-leaning.

Luckily for Democrats, Durr, McCarthy Patrick, and Tedesco have not solidified their own support as much as they could have.

Durr’s famously weak fundraising from the 2021 race has improved somewhat since he took office, but he and his Assembly running mates never managed to turn their celebrity status into a robust financial operation. Burzichelli, a 20-year veteran of the legislature who spent a decade chairing the powerful Assembly Appropriations Committee, can approach this year’s race as a quasi-incumbent himself, and has lots of money (and outside assistance from dark-money groups) to do it.

What’s more, while liberal Democratic policies might be out of step with 3rd district voters, Durr’s positions on issues like abortion may not be so popular either. South Jersey Democrats are closing out the campaign with a network and cable TV ad featuring former Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck) talking about her own sexual assault as a teenager 75 years ago and smacking Durr’s position on abortion.

Democrats view Durr as such a potentially toxic figure, in fact, that they’re not only using his statements to attack the man himself; they’re also attacking Republican legislative candidates in other districts with mailers featuring Durr’s quotes.

Its rough 2021 cycle notwithstanding, the South Jersey Democratic organization has long been good at countering partisan trends with strong incumbents and lots of cash. They’ve also got an incredible vote-by-mail operation that is out in full force this year, with thousands of votes – most of them for Democrats – already banked long before Election Day.

And yet in a Republican-leaning district, in what’s shaping up to be a Republican-leaning year, that may not be enough. No one knows whether the South Jersey Democratic machine can get back its mojo, or whether that ship has sailed for good; it’s possible that Burzichelli and his running mates win this year, but it’s also possible that partisanship takes over and they lose in a landslide.

Political observers, including the New Jersey Globe, were dead-wrong to ignore the 3rd district race in 2021. No one’s making that mistake this time.
## MUNICIPALITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Municipalities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cumberland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>Clayton, East Greenwich, Elk, Glassboro, Greenwich, Harrison, Logan, Mantua, National Park, Paulsboro, Pitman, South Harrison, Swedesboro, Wenonah, West Deptford, Westville, Woolwich</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salem</td>
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## STATEWIDE RESULTS

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<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Governor</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Murphy</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Trump</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Biden</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

## PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)

### 2021 Senate
- Durr 51.7% / *Sweeney 48.3%

### 2021 Assembly
- Sawyer 26.2%, McCarthy Patrick 26.1% / *Burzichelli 24.0%, *Taliaferro 23.6%

### 2019 Assembly
- *Burzichelli 27.9%, *Taliaferro 27.1% / Sawyer 23.1%, Durr 21.9%

## 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS

### R Senate
- *Durr 65.2% / Sawyer 34.8%

### R Assembly
- Tedesco 38.6%, *McCarthy Patrick 38.6% / Collins 22.8%

### D Senate
- Burzichelli 73.8% / De Santis 26.2%

### D Assembly
- Simmons 37.8%, Bailey 34.8% / Fitzpatrick 13.8%, Youngblood 13.6%

## THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)

- 73.3% White / 13.9% Black / 8.4% Hispanic / 3.1% Asian

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WHEN NEW JERSEY’S new legislative map was unveiled in February 2022, most competitive districts had been merely tinkered with: shift one town here, make incumbents a few hundred votes safer there. Not so in the 4th district, once a strongly Democratic district that was reworked into the single top battleground of 2023.

Why would Democrats on the redistricting commission agree to a map that turned one of their own seats into a district that Jack Ciattarelli would have carried handily? Because they were all from Central and North Jersey and saw no downside in causing the political fortunes of South Jersey Democrats to sink further. (The one South Jersey Democrat originally on the panel, ex-Senate President Steve Sweeney, was removed by Democratic leader LeRoy Jones)

Their clever map-drawing has led to an open-seat race that – not to be melodramatic – is nothing less than a battle for the continued relevance of the South Jersey Democratic organization. If Democrats can hold onto the 4th district, that would be a significant rampart against the gains Republicans have made in recent cycles; if they lose it, their stature in the legislature will shrink to its lowest point in decades.

Befitting the new district lines, Democrats are starting with an almost entirely clean slate. State Sen. Fred Madden (D-Washington) and Assemblywoman Gabriela Mosquera (D-Gloucester Township), two of the legislature’s most moderate (and pro-life) Democrats, are both retiring this year, and Assemblyman Paul Moriarty (D-Washington) is stepping up as the new leader of the 4th district ticket.

Moriarty, the chairman of the Assembly Consumer Affairs Committee, isn’t beloved within the South Jersey Democratic organization, but he was calculated to be the strongest possible candidate, so that didn’t really matter. For his running mates, party leadership picked Monroe Township school board member Cody Miller and Gloucester Township Councilman Dan Hutchison, a onetime GOP congressional candidate who switched parties long ago.

As is custom among South Jersey Democrats, once the party had chosen its preferred candidates, it was over. (Democrats didn’t even unveil their slate until seven days before the filing deadline.) Things weren’t quite so simple on the Republican side.

Initially, the assumption was that Republicans in Gloucester County, which makes up a majority of the district’s GOP votes, would get first dibs in the creation of a legislative ticket. Their presumptive ticket was unveiled in February: Gloucester County Commissioner Nick DeSilvio (R-Monroe) for Senate, union journeyman Denise Gonzalez and 24-year-old teacher and church leader Michael Clark for Assembly.

But Atlantic Republicans were seething; they had wanted former Buena Councilman Matt Walker, a top member of the Operating Engineers Local 825, to be on the ticket, but Gloucester Republicans had said no. That seemingly minor dispute led to the creation of an entirely new ticket led by former Washington Township Councilman Christopher Del Borrello, with Mantua teacher Amanda Esposito and Walker, who if elected would be one of two Black Republicans in the legislature, running for Assembly.

The battle lines were drawn. Gloucester Republicans went for DeSilvio, Atlantic went for Del Borrello, and Camden flip-flopped, at first supporting DeSilvio but switching to Del Borrello at the last moment. Del Borrello was also aligned with Assemblywoman Beth Sawyer (R-Woolwich) and the off-the-line county-level slate in Gloucester County, which in a stroke of luck got Column A on primary ballots, the best balloting position.

The race, which had begun as a geographical battle between rival county parties, quickly became a mudslinging, deeply personal brawl. Del Borrello went after DeSilvio for his past anti-Muslim and anti-abortion social media posts; DeSilvio, meanwhile, dredged up old attacks against Del Borrello over the unsavory nature of the business that had been run by his half-brother.

There were also clear ideological implications that emerged, with DeSilvio running as the true-believer conservative and Del Borrello as the more right-of-center, electable option. In one memorable moment at 4th district debate, Del Borrello said he’d support restrictions on abortion after the 15th week, while DeSilvio said he’d ban them as early as four weeks – a more radical stance than, say, Ron DeSantis.

That sort of ideological purity might
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: PAUL MORIARTY, DAN HUTCHISON, CODY MILLER
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: CHRIS DEL BORRELLO, MATT WALKER, AMANDA ESPOSITO

REDISTRICTING CHANGES

2021 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN LD-4
CIATTARELLI 52.4%
MURPHY 46.9%

PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING: R+7.9
normally boost candidates in a Republican primary, but DeSilvio lacked the money to get his message out, and the geography of the matchup also proved tough. In the end, Del Borrello smoked DeSilvio 62%-38%, and Walker and Esposito similarly crushed Gonzalez, Clark, and a fifth unaffiliated candidate named John Keating.

And now we’re here. The biggest toss-up in New Jersey politics this year.

More is at stake than just the seats themselves. A victory by Del Borrello, who now lives in Gloucester Township in Camden County, would give Republicans sway over every single Camden County gubernatorial nominee via the unwritten rule of senatorial courtesy, which gives senators veto power on nominees from their home districts and counties.

After losing several other South Jersey districts in recent years, Camden County is the only county over which Democrats retain total senatorial courtesy powers (aside from three small towns in the 8th district), allowing South Jersey Democratic boss George Norcross to put almost anyone he wants into the state judiciary from the county with relatively minimal dealmaking. Senator Del Borrello would upend all of that and more.

Recognizing those high stakes, South Jersey Democrats have played hard and fairly dirty to hold onto the seat. Back in the primary, they sent out mailers attacking Del Borrello, in an apparent effort to weaken the candidate they believed to be a stronger general election contender.

For the general election, they’ve gone a step further, seemingly recruiting two conservative candidates to get their names on the ballot and snatch votes away from the Republican slate. South Jersey Democrats will of course never admit to supporting Giuseppe Costanzo and Maureen Dukes-Penrose of the “Conservatives South Jersey” slate, but the daughter of a top local Democratic leader was the one who circulated their petitions to get onto the ballot.

A shadowy new group called Jersey Freedom is also getting involved, sending out mailers and running TV ads boosting Costanzo. The group hasn’t yet reported receiving any donations, making it impossible to track where the money is coming from; Republicans have asked the state judiciary to step in, but that seems unlikely to happen before Election Day.

And as usual, 4th district Democrats have plenty of cash, both raised by the candidates themselves and thrown down by affiliated South Jersey political committees. (As with other South Jersey districts, the PACs associated with Democratic legislative leadership aren’t getting involved.)

But Republicans have a potent outside weapon, too: Walker’s friends at the Operating Engineers Local 825, which alongside the state Republican Party is running a PAC sending huge amounts of money to aid 4th district Republicans. The PAC has spent more than $1.5 million on the race.

Redistricting really was the trump card for Republicans in the 4th district. What had previously been a district that Gov. Phil Murphy won by two points is now one that Jack Ciattarelli would have carried by nearly seven points, thanks to the loss of a few key Democratic towns like Lindenwold. Even if this year isn’t as strong for Republicans as 2021 was, that kind of margin gives them some leeway.

But in 2022, Democratic congressional candidates collectively won the district by eight points, greater even than Joe Biden’s 2020 margin. Democrats were heavily aided last year by their extremely robust vote-by-mail operation, something that will no doubt be key to a potential victory this year as well.

Which of those two outcomes will this year’s race look more like? Will South Jersey Democrats’ vaunted turnout operation push their ticket over the top in a year when no other races are drawing voters to the ballot? Or will Republican momentum continue, sweeping up the 4th district just as it did the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 8th districts in years past?

We’ll have to wait until Election Day to find out – that’s the cheesiest, most clichéd quote in politics, and it’s also entirely accurate. Lots of different political winds are blowing through the 4th district this year. We’ll find out soon which are strongest.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Atlantic</th>
<th>Buena, Buena Vista</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Chesilhurst, Gloucester Township, Waterford, Winslow</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gloucester</td>
<td>Franklin Township, Monroe, Newfield, Washington Township</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Ciattarelli 52.4% / Murphy 46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 52.8% / Trump 45.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Madden 54.4% / Pakradooni 45.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Moriarty 26.5%, *Mosquera 25.8% / Kline 23.5%, Gonzalez 23.3% / Others 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Moriarty 29.9%, *Mosquera 29.4% / Dilks 21.0%, Pakradooni 19.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td>R Senate</td>
<td>Del Borrello 61.6% / DeSilvio 38.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R Assembly</td>
<td>Esposito 30.3%, Walker 29.8% / Clark 17.8%, Gonzalez 17.1% / Keating 5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>Giuseppe Costanzo (Conservatives South Jersey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>Maureen Dukes-Penrose (Conservatives South Jersey)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td>66.6% White / 19.8% Black / 8.8% Hispanic / 4.3% Asian</td>
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AT ITS HEIGHT, the empire of George Norcross extended across the entirety of South Jersey, from the suburbs of Burlington County to the shore towns of Cape May County. But its core was always in Camden, the city which Norcross has adopted as his hometown – both figuratively and, until his move to Florida, literally.

And Camden shows no signs of bucking Norcross anytime soon. State Sen. Nilsa Cruz-Perez (D-Barrington) and Assemblymen Bill Spearman (D-Camden) and Bill Moen (D-Bellmawr) are all set to easily win re-election this year in the 5th legislative district, which includes the city of Camden as well as 15 other towns in Camden and Gloucester Counties.

Cruz-Perez, who in 1995 became the first Latina to ever serve in the legislature, ascended to the State Senate in 2014 after Norcross’ brother Donald was elected to Congress. Moen and Spearman are both newer additions: Spearman was appointed in 2018 to replace Assemblyman Arthur Barclay (D-Camden), who was arrested on charges of assaulting his girlfriend, while Moen won a 2019 race to succeed retiring Assemblywoman Patricia Egan Jones (D-Barrington).

This year, Cruz-Perez, who chairs the Senate Economic Growth Committee, faces a rematch against Clyde Cook, a former Democratic member of the Woodlynne Borough Council who ran for the same seat in 2021. Moen and Spearman, the chairman of the Assembly Law and Public Safety Committee, will go up against Audubon Board of Education member Joe Miller and childcare worker Yalinda Pagan.

(Ex-Assemblyman Barclay will be on the ballot this year, too. Despite his troubled past and current criminal charges – just this year, he ran over a woman while driving with a revoked license – he was given the Democratic county line for a seat on the Camden City Council.)

Perhaps the most notable thing about this year’s contest is that it will take place under new lines that transform the 5th district into a majority-minority seat by adding Pennsauken and removing some whiter suburbs. It appears to be the first majority-minority legislative district ever created in South Jersey.

Those changes took what was already a fairly Democratic district and made it dramatically bluer, further guaranteeing that Cruz-Perez, Spearman, and Moen – all loyal Norcross backers – will get another term in the legislature.

That loyalty was visibly broadcast earlier this year, when Cruz-Perez got caught in the middle of a battle between Norcross and Senate President Nick Scutari (D-Linden) over the Elections Transparency Act, a major campaign finance bill that Scutari championed.

Norcross was angry at Scutari over an unrelated campaign spending dispute, and so he told his legislative delegation to withdraw their support for the bill. But while Cruz-Perez abstained on the bill when it came up in committee, she and the rest of the South Jersey Democratic delegation ended up voting for it on the floor, since it was clear that their votes alone would not be enough to prevent it from passing.

The brief saga served as a microcosm of Norcross’ dilemma in this year’s elections. Incumbent legislators like Cruz-Perez will easily win re-election, and they’ll remain firmly in Norcross’ camp – but unless South Jersey Democrats can make significant gains outside of solidly Democratic territory, that camp won’t be big enough to command the influence it once did.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Camden</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Audubon, Barrington, Bellmawr, Brooklawn, Camden, Collingswood, Gloucester City, Haddon Heights, Merchantville, Mount Ephraim, Pennsauken, Runnemede, Woodlynne</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gloucester</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Deptford, Woodbury, Woodbury Heights</td>
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<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Murphy 63.2% / Ciattarelli 35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 67.8% / Trump 30.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Cruz-Perez 57.7% / Cook 42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Moen 28.7%, *Spearman 28.4% / DiMatteo 21.7%, Sepsey 21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Spearman 34.0%, Moen 32.8% / Kush 16.8%, Ehret 16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td>No primaries on either side</td>
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<tr>
<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>Mohammad Kabir (Rights Tranquility Peace)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.3% White / 24.7% Black / 27.7% Hispanic / 4.7% Asian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REDISTRICTING CHANGES**

**2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-5**

**MURPHY** 63.2%

**CIATTARELLI** 35.9%

PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING: D+14.2
FOR DECADES, THE COMPLEMENT to the Camden-based 5th district has been the Cherry Hill-based 6th district next door. And right now, the 6th district is where quite a bit of the South Jersey Democratic organization’s formal power lies.

With Steve Sweeney’s unexpected loss in 2021, Assembly Majority Leader Louis Greenwald (D-Voorhees) became the highest-ranking South Jerseyan in the legislature. His position as second-in-command of the Assembly gives him a bully pulpit – when Democrats need someone to respond to Republican broadsides on the Assembly floor, Greenwald’s often their guy – and the ability to go on personal legislative missions like regulating the use of AI in campaigns.

Greenwald’s two 6th district seatmates, State Sen. James Beach (D-Voorhees) and Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt (D-Cherry Hill), both have their own fiefdoms as chairs of notable committees: Beach leads the Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism & Historic Preservation Committee, and Lampitt the Assembly Education Committee.

This session, both of those committees were at the forefront of hot-button debates. Beach got first pass at the many election reform bills that have passed in the last two years, including the controversial Elections Transparency Act, while Lampitt was thrust into the spotlight whenever sex education-related bills came before her committee.

All three are assured of another term in a district that hasn’t elected a Republican since the 1990s. Cherry Hill may be whiter and wealthier than Camden, but it’s still a core part of the South Jersey Democratic coalition, and the 6th district regularly supports Democrats by 25 points or more. The district is also New Jersey’s vote-by-mail mecca, typically casting more mail-in ballots than anywhere else in the state – most of them for Democrats.

In fact, for a little while, Republicans didn’t have a Senate candidate in the district at all this year. Democrats got Lynn Lofland, a teacher and frequent local candidate, knocked off the primary ballot after she filed with the minimum 100 signatures, but Lofland got enough write-in primary votes to appear on the general election ballot.

Lofland then withdrew anyways, and was substituted on the ballot by Mark Doogan. Doogan’s Assembly running mates are Danielle Berry and Brian McRory, who is also a late replacement candidate.

Assuming they win re-election, all three 6th district legislators will continue long careers in elected politics. Lampitt was first elected in 2005 to succeed Assemblywoman Mary Previte (D-Haddonfield); Beach’s legislative tenure is shorter, joining the Senate in 2009 after incumbent John Adler (D-Cherry Hill) was elected to Congress, but he had previously served in county office for two decades.

Finally, there’s Greenwald, who despite being “only” 56 is already in his 14th Assembly term. Greenwald arrived in the Assembly in 1996 after beating then-Assemblyman, now-Supreme Court Justice Lee Solomon (R-Haddonfield) – back in the days when the 6th district was actually competitive – and hasn’t looked back since.
### MUNICIPALITIES
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burlington</td>
<td>Maple Shade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden</td>
<td>Audubon Park, Berlin Borough, Berlin Township, Cherry Hill, Clementon, Gibbsboro, Haddon Township, Haddonfield, Hi-Nella, Laurel Springs, Lawnside, Lindenwold, Magnolia, Oaklyn, Pine Hill, Somerdale, Stratford, Tavistock, Voorhees</td>
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### STATEWIDE RESULTS
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position 1</th>
<th>Position 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Murphy 62.0%</td>
<td>Ciattarelli 37.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Biden 65.6%</td>
<td>Trump 33.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)

#### 2021 Senate
*Beach 64.9% / Foley 35.1%

#### 2021 Assembly
*Greenwald 33.1%, *Lampitt 32.5% / Farmer 17.4%, Super 17.1%

#### 2019 Assembly
*Greenwald 34.8%, *Lampitt 33.9% / Plucinski 15.8%, Papeika 15.5%

### 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS
No primaries on either side

### THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES
- **Senate**: None
- **Assembly**: None

### DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)
63.3% White / 14.9% Black / 10.9% Hispanic / 10.4% Asian

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**REDISTRICTING CHANGES**

**2021 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN LD-6**

**MURPHY** 62.0%

**CIATTARELLI** 37.2%

**PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING:** R+4.3
THE SEPTEMBER NEWS that U.S. Senator Bob Menendez was indicted on federal bribery charges hit New Jersey politics like an atomic bomb, reshaping political alliances and upending campaign plans across the state – nowhere more so than the 7th legislative district.

That’s a bit counterintuitive, since the Burlington County-based district has little to do with Menendez himself. But within a day of the indictment, Rep. Andy Kim (D-Moorestown) announced he would challenge the senator in a Democratic primary, and his three likeliest successors happen to be the 7th district’s three legislators.

One of those three, Assemblywoman Carol Murphy (D-Mount Laurel), has already launched a campaign for the 3rd congressional district. Elected to the Assembly in 2017 after serving as a legislative staffer for years, Murphy has close ties to the South Jersey Democratic organization and is part of the Assembly Democratic leadership team.

It’s looking probable that Murphy will be joined in the 3rd district primary by Assemblyman Herb Conaway (D-Delran), a 26-year veteran of the legislature.

Conaway, the chairman of the powerful Assembly Health Committee, has said he won’t make a decision until after the legislative elections, but he sounds likely to go for it.

Finally, there’s State Sen. Troy Singleton (D-Delran). A former Assembly staffer (he was one of the stars of the Democratic softball team) who then served as an assemblyman and rose to the Senate in 2017, the 50-year-old Senate Community and Urban Affairs Committee chairman is a rising star in the Senate and would be at the top of every shortlist for Kim’s seat – except that he, unlike Murphy and Conaway, might decide he’d rather not run after all.

Amazingly, Conaway and Singleton both flipped the seats they currently hold from Republicans. Conaway and Assemblyman Jack Conners (D-Pennsauken) narrowly won two Republican-held Assembly seats in 1997; Singleton, who was Conners’ successor in the Assembly, replaced the irreplaceable State Sen. Diane Allen (R-Moorestown) when she retired in 2017.

But despite its competitive past, the 7th district is far from the legislative playing field this year. The district includes Burlington County’s most Democratic towns, including the core of the county’s Black community, and all three incumbents are set to win re-election easily.

The real drama is what comes after. Once Singleton, Conaway, and Murphy have safely secured new terms, the race for the 3rd district will truly begin.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Burlington</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beverly, Bordentown City, Bordentown Township, Burlington City, Burlington Township, Cinnaminson, Delanco, Delran, Edgewater Park, Fieldsboro, Florence, Moorestown, Mount Laurel, Palmyra, Riverside, Riverton, Willingboro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| STATEWIDE RESULTS | 2021 governor | Murphy 59.9% / Ciattarelli 39.5% |
|-------------------|----------------|
| 2020 president    | Biden 65.1% / Trump 33.6% |

| PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES) | 2021 Senate | *Singleton 62.3% / Arnold 37.7% |
|----------------------------------------|-------------|
| 2021 Assembly                          | *Conaway 31.0%, *Murphy 30.6% / Dillon 19.4%, Jesuele 19.1% |
| 2019 Assembly                          | *Murphy 37.7%, *Conaway 37.5% / Miller 22.7% / Others 2.2% |

| 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS | No primaries on either side |

| THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES | Senate | None |
|-------------------------|--------|
| Assembly                | None   |

| DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS) | 57.2% White / 25.6% Black / 8.5% Hispanic / 7.6% Asian |

---

**REDISTRICTING CHANGES**

2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-7

- Murphy 59.9%
- Ciattarelli 39.5%

**DEMOCRATIC PARTY:**
- Beverly
- Cinnaminson
- Fieldsboro
- Florence
- Mount Laurel

**REPUBLICAN PARTY:**
- Willingboro

**PARTISAN Shift due to redistricting:**
- NONE

**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS:**
- No primaries on either side

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES:**
- Senate: None
- Assembly: None
AFTER A ROLLICKING 2021 CYCLE, the 8th legislative district’s days in the spotlight may be over for now.

Two years ago, South Jersey Democrats were willing to spend gobs of money defending State Sen. Dawn Addiego (D-Evesham), a former Republican who had defected to their caucus. But this year, in a redrawn district – and with a Democratic Senate candidate they don’t even like – their focus has shifted elsewhere.

Addiego’s surprising party switch in 2019 had been the product of a deal that both sides believed to be a win-win. South Jersey Democrats would get to expand their Senate caucus and shore up Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-West Deptford); Addiego, in turn, would get more influence in the legislature, and would align with the direction that her Democratic-trending Burlington County seat was headed anyways.

Eager to protect someone who had chosen to come over to their side of the aisle, South Jersey Democrats spent astonishing sums on Addiego’s 2021 re-election campaign. The two parties spent a combined $8.5 million on the race, making it the third-most expensive legislative campaign in New Jersey history.

But Addiego’s party switch ended up being a bad bet. The suburban 8th district may be growing more Democratic, but 2021 was a rough year to be a New Jersey Democrat just about anywhere, and Addiego lost 51%-49% to Assemblywoman Jean Stanfield (R-Westampton), who had only served one term in the Assembly after nearly two decades as county sheriff.

Addiego’s Assembly running mates fared similarly; they lost to Hammonton Councilman Mike Torrissi Jr. and Medford zoning board member Brandon Umba, the Republican choices to replace Stanfield and retiring Assemblyman Ryan Peters (R-Hainesport). Despite briefly losing control of the Senate seat thanks to Addiego, Republicans haven’t actually lost an election in the 8th district since 1973.

Stanfield, as it turns out, wasn’t in it for the long haul. Having completed her mission to defeat Addiego, she announced earlier this year that she wouldn’t seek re-election, likely marking the end of a more than 25-year career in public office.

A suitable replacement soon emerged: former Burlington County Freeholder Latham Tiver (R-Southampton), who lost his countywide seat in 2019 but remains heavily involved in the politically influential International Union of Operating Engineers Local 825.

Tiver had been Burlington Republicans’ first choice for an Assembly seat in 2021 and had agreed to run, but then changed his mind after Sweeney pushed his union to get him out of the race. This year, he quickly teamed up with Umba and Torrissi, who have had relatively peaceful first terms in the legislature (other than a cancer scare for Torrissi that he has thankfully beaten back).

In March, South Jersey Democrats announced their chosen ticket: Evesham Councilwoman Heather Cooper for the Senate, Chesterfield Democratic municipal chair Andrea Katz and Hammonton Education Association president Anthony Angelozzi for the Assembly. It was always unclear, however, whether Cooper was going to remain on the ticket, especially with Democrats clumsily pushing for former Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Ron Jaworski (a registered Republican and apparent fan of Donald Trump) to run for Senate instead.

And indeed, Cooper dropped out of the race in August, citing health concerns – but what happened next was far from what South Jersey Democrats had in mind. They tried to get Burlington Democrats to nominate Mount Holly school board member Janet DiFolco, but county committeemembers balked at DiFolco’s recent Republican party affiliation and chose former Pemberton Councilwoman Gaye Burton instead.

In the wake of her convention victory, Burton has very much not been embraced by South Jersey Democrats, leading to an uncomfortably disjointed ticket. Burton is running solo with relatively little money, while Katz and Angelozzi are running separately with the financial backing of the South Jersey Democratic operation; the two Assembly candidates have lawn signs and social media accounts that make no mention of Burton, and vice versa.

Needless to say, it’s hard to run a successful campaign in New Jersey when different parts of a party slate are publicly at odds with one another. The
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: LATHAM TIVER, MICHAEL TORRISSI, BRANDON UMBA
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: GAYE BURTON, ANTHONY ANGELOZZI, ANDREA KATZ
difficulties on the Democratic side have only aided Republicans, who have run a disciplined campaign from the beginning and are hitting the same issues that have been working elsewhere: lowering taxes, empowering parents in schools, and so on.

Republicans were also given a boost by redistricting, which took out Democratic-leaning parts of Camden County from the 8th district and put in a few deep-red Burlington and Atlantic towns in their place. It’s still a district that voted for Joe Biden in 2020, but Jack Ciattarelli won it by nine points in 2021, a tough margin for any Democrat to overcome.

That hasn’t stopped South Jersey Democrats from trying to flip the district. They’ve spent substantial resources backing Katz and Angelozzi, and have dominated vote-by-mail ballots like everywhere else in South Jersey.

In fact, Democrats have tried hard enough that they’ve strained relationships within the building trades unions. Tiver is a top Local 825 guy and has benefited from hundreds of thousands of dollars in spending from their independent expenditure committee, but the broader State Building & Construction Trades Council spent money in the spring working to get Democratic voters in the 8th district to sign up for mail-in ballots, much to Local 825’s dismay.

But regardless of Democratic efforts, it’s hard to see how, after so much was invested into a bluer version of the same district in 2019 and 2021, this year suddenly becomes the year when Democrats break through. While the 8th district was once New Jersey’s top legislative district, it’s taken a backseat this time around.

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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 51.6% / Trump 47.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
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<td>Stanfield 51.1% / *Addiego 48.9%</td>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
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<td>2019 Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td>71.6% White / 12.0% Black / 9.8% Hispanic / 5.9% Asian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
We know what it takes to win in difficult situations.

Mercury.

Michael Soliman
Partner

Modia "Mo" Butler
Partner

Melanie Aguilar  Ivy Charmatz  Kevin Drennan  Conor Fennessy  Vince Galko  
Eric Hagarty  Maggie Leuzarder  Andrea Mead  Juan Melli  Randy Minniear  
Kassandra Ospina  Simon Pereira  Jade Stepney  Karen Testa  Isabella Tyszka  LaVar Young

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OCEAN COUNTY’S LEGISLATIVE delegation may be on the ballot this year, but the far more important contest happened last June, when George Gilmore retook the chairmanship of the Ocean GOP and upended county politics.

Gilmore, of course, previously served as county GOP chairman from 1996 to 2019, making himself one of the most powerful county party leaders anywhere in the state. His reign came to an abrupt end, however, when he was convicted on federal tax charges; he resigned his chairmanship in April 2019, and his chosen successor lost the party vote to replace him.

But the conviction proved to be merely a speedbump, not a roadblock. After being pardoned by former President Donald Trump in 2021, Gilmore began rebuilding his political operation, an effort that culminated in his dramatic 13-vote upset victory in the 2022 county chair race. After four years in the wilderness, Gilmore was suddenly once again one of the most important Republicans in New Jersey.

Control over the county party did not necessarily equal devoted support from Ocean County’s elected Republicans, however. Every single member of the county’s legislative delegation had supported Gilmore’s rival, Sheriff Michael Mastronardy, in the chair election; not all of those legislators are committed Gilmore foes, but Gilmore was lacking for true legislative allies.

He got a chance to change that when 9th district State Sen. Chris Connors (R-Lacey) announced at the beginning of this year that he wouldn’t seek re-election. Connors, a conservative but mild-mannered Republican, was first elected to the Assembly in 1989 and ascended to the Senate in 2007 upon the retirement of his father, State Sen. Leonard Connors (R-Surf City). (A Connors has represented the 9th district since 1981, when redistricting gave Ocean County a second legislative district.)

Within days of Connors’ announcement, Berkeley Mayor Carmen Amato arose as the prohibitive favorite to succeed him. Amato has led Berkeley, the district’s second-largest town, for more than ten years – and, importantly, has long been a close Gilmore ally.

Amato’s dominant entry into the Senate race shifted attention to the 9th district’s two Assembly seats, where Assemblyman Brian Rumpf (R-Little Egg Harbor) and Assemblywoman DiAnne Gove (R-Long Beach) were both seeking re-election after more than a decade in the legislature each. Sensing the possibility for an upset under the Ocean GOP’s new leadership, no fewer than six local politicians launched campaigns to unseat them.

The challenger who emerged from the pack was Stafford Mayor Greg Myhre, another Gilmore ally, creating a three-way contest with Rumpf and Gove. Ultimately, it was Rumpf and Myhre who were victorious, winning the Ocean GOP convention vote 96-67-56; Gove decided a week later that she would retire rather than run off-the-line.

The end result is a clear victory for Gilmore, who will soon have two confidants in Trenton. It also means that Ocean County will send zero women to Trenton come 2024; Gove was the only Ocean County woman to serve in the legislature throughout her entire 14-year tenure.

Democrats have fielded a full slate of candidates, but they have no shot at winning the 9th district, which covers the deep-red southern third of Ocean County. Little Egg Harbor Democratic municipal chair Gabriel Franco is the Democratic candidate for Senate, while teachers Joseph Atura and Sarah Collins are running for the Assembly.

The real contest in the 9th district was decided many months ago, when Ocean Republicans met at the Clarion Hotel in Toms River for their annual convention. That convention spelled the end of a career for DiAnne Gove – and the potential beginning of a renaissance for George Gilmore.
CARMEN AMATO

BRIAN RUMPF

GREG MYHRE
**MUNICIPALITIES**

| Ocean | Barnegat, Barnegat Light, Beach Haven, Beachwood, Berkeley, Eagleswood, Harvey Cedars, Lacey, Lakehurst, Little Egg Harbor, Long Beach, Manchester, Ocean Township, Ocean Gate, Pine Beach, Ship Bottom, Stafford, Surf City, Tuckerton |

**STATEWIDE RESULTS**

| 2021 governor | Ciattarelli 67.9% / Murphy 31.4% |
| 2020 president | Trump 61.9% / Biden 36.8% |

**PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)**

| 2021 Senate | *Connors 69.4% / Wright 29.8% / Others 0.8% |
| 2021 Assembly | *Rumpf 35.1%, *Gove 34.5% / Jackson 15.3%, Henninger Holland 15.1% |
| 2019 Assembly | *Rumpf 34.5%, *Gove 33.8% / Collins 16.4%, Lewis 15.3% |

**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS**

No primaries on either side

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

| Senate | None |
| Assembly | Barry Bendar (Green) |

**DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)**

84.6% White / 3.7% Black / 8.2% Hispanic / 2.2% Asian
COMMUNICATIONS WORKERS OF AMERICA, AFL-CIO
NEW JERSEY

DENNIS TRAINOR
CWA DISTRICT 1 VICE PRESIDENT

FRAN EHRET
CWA NJ AREA DIRECTOR
If the 9th district is Ocean GOP chair George Gilmore’s 2023 success story, then the 10th district is his missed opportunity.

Toms River, the eighth-largest town in the state and the lynchpin of the 10th district, is the beating heart of Ocean GOP infighting. Gilmore himself lives there, as do many of his top rivals: Toms River Mayor Mo Hill, Assemblyman Greg McGuckin (R-Toms River), and Sheriff Michael Mastronardy, whom Gilmore beat in the 2022 party chair race.

Back in 2021, Gilmore made an effort to unseat McGuckin and fellow Assemblyman John Catalano (R-Brick), recruiting a pair of challengers to run off-the-line. But without any formal levers of command at his disposal, Gilmore wasn’t able to overcome the party organization’s strength, and McGuckin and Catalano won by a healthy margin.

Gilmore wasn’t willing to give up on the 10th district’s Assembly seats, however, and this year presented a more promising opportunity to win them.

As the newly reinstated party chairman, Gilmore was in a far better position to influence the county GOP than he had been in 2021. There was also an open seat for the taking; after four years in the Assembly, Catalano will soon surpass 30 years in the legislature.

The vote at the March county convention proceeded in two parts: Ocean Republicans first had to vote on which of two rival Toms River GOP clubs to certify – the results of which determined who would get a vote at the convention itself – and then vote on which two of the four Assembly candidates would get the county line.

And in something of an upset, McGuckin and Kanitra prevailed on both fronts. The McGuckin-aligned Toms River club narrowly beat out the Gilmore-aligned club, which then cleared the way for McGuckin and Kanitra to win the line for both Assembly seats. The final tally was 63 convention votes for McGuckin, 50 for Kanitra, 35 for Scaturro, and 25 for Lamb.

Faced with long odds going up against the official Ocean GOP endorsement, Scaturro and Lamb decided against off-the-line campaigns, allowing McGuckin and Kanitra to win the primary unopposed.

The district’s Senate race, meanwhile, was a total snooze. State Sen. Jim Holzapfel (R-Toms River), who keeps a low profile in the legislature, isn’t a Gilmore acolyte, but there was little appetite to challenge him this year. Having first won an Assembly seat in 1993, the 78-year-old Holzapfel will soon surpass 30 years in the legislature.

The Democratic ticket this November includes a pair of local party officials: Toms River Democratic municipal chair Jeff Horn and Ocean County Democratic vice chair Emma Mammano, who are running for the Senate and Assembly, respectively. Retired state worker John LaMacchia completes the ticket as the party’s other Assembly candidate.

Republicans are dominant in the 10th district, as they are in every Ocean County district, and Holzapfel, McGuckin, and Kanitra will all win easily come November 7.

McGuckin will likely still have to watch out for primary threats in the years to come. Hill, the Toms River mayor and Gilmore foe, was defeated in the Republican primary this year by Councilman Dan Rodrick, meaning that McGuckin will soon lose a key ally (and perhaps a job; McGuckin’s role as township attorney is in jeopardy with Hill out of office).

For now, though, McGuckin will get another two years as an assemblyman. This past session, he notched an important policy victory when his long-languishing bill to expand corruption statutes to non-incumbent political candidates passed the legislature; though the bill itself got stuck in limbo after a conditional veto from Gov. Phil Murphy, the state Supreme Court went on to affirm that candidates can, in fact, be charged with bribery.

10TH DISTRICT

SENATE: JIM HOLZAPFEL (R-INC) VS. JEFF HORN (D)
ASSEMBLY: GREG MCGUCKIN (R-INC), PAUL KANITRA (R) VS. JOHN LAMACCHIA (D), EMMA MAMMANO (D)

Senate + Assembly Rating: Solid Republican
JIM HOLZAPFEL

GREG MCGUCKIN

PAUL KANITRA
As for Kanitra, he may chart a new path in the legislature as a more bombastic Ocean County politician. The county’s legislative delegation is in general a mellow bunch, but Kanitra has honed his media skills as a Shore mayor vociferously opposing offshore wind development and summer pop-up parties, and he’ll now get to bring those same skills to the Assembly floor.

Considering Holzapfel’s age and New Jersey’s long tradition of running mate fratricide, more change might be coming to the 10th district relatively soon. McGuckin and Kanitra – and Rodrick, if he prevails in the mayor’s race – could all be eying a Senate seat that only one of them can win.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Monmouth</th>
<th>Brielle, Manasquan, Sea Girt, Spring Lake, Spring Lake Heights</th>
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<td>Ocean</td>
<td>Bay Head, Brick, Island Heights, Lavallette, Mantoloking, Point Pleasant, Point Pleasant Beach, Seaside Heights, Seaside Park, South Toms River, Toms River</td>
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<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Ciattarelli 68.1% / Murphy 31.1%</td>
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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Trump 60.1% / Biden 38.4%</td>
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<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Holzapfel 69.0% / Mammano 31.0%</td>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*McGuckin 34.6%, *Catalano 34.4% / Quilter 15.6%, Kono 15.5%</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<td>Assembly</td>
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<td>80.6% White / 4.1% Black / 10.8% Hispanic / 3.2% Asian</td>
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</table>
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CEO

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FROM THE VERY BEGINNING of the 2023 cycle – before the new map was drawn and before any candidates had officially launched campaigns – it was clear that the 11th district in Monmouth County was going to host one of the top races of the year.

That’s because in 2021, 11th district voters elected a Democratic state senator and a pair of Republican assemblywomen, making it the only district in the state to vote for a split legislative delegation. In other words, each party went into this year with 11th district incumbents to defend. And neither side is going down without a fight.

It’s a make-or-break campaign for State Sen. Vin Gopal (D-Long Branch), a rising star in a fight for his political life.

Gopal got his start in politics as a teenager and first ran for office in 2011 at the age of 26, when he lost a race for a newly redrawn seat in the Assembly. That turned out to be the first step of a larger plan. A year later, Gopal became chairman of the Monmouth County Democrats; in 2015, he orchestrated the takeover of the 11th district’s two Assembly seats; and in 2017, Gopal ran for the Senate himself, unseating State Sen. Jennifer Beck (R-Red Bank) in one of the cycle’s most closely watched races.

Gopal was still only 32 at the time, making him the youngest member of the Senate – a distinction he still holds today (although Britnee Timberlake is soon to overtake him). He was also the first member of New Jersey’s burgeoning South Asian community to win a seat in the upper chamber.

Just four years into his legislative tenure, Gopal was made chairman of the prominent Senate Education Committee, and the senator could continue progressing through the ranks of state government from there. There’s also a congressional seat that has Gopal’s name all over it if Rep. Frank Pallone (D-Long Branch) ever decides to retire.

But in 2021, a close call nearly derailed all of that. With most attention and campaign money directed further south, Jack Ciattarelli unexpectedly carried the usually Democratic-leaning 11th district, and Gopal only defeated a relatively unknown challenger named Lori Annetta 52%-48%.

Gopal’s running mates, Assemblyman Eric Houghtaling (D-Neptune) and Assemblywoman Joann Downey (D-Freehold), didn’t fare so well. The two incumbents, both elected in 2015 as part of Gopal’s takeover plan, lost to Colts Neck fitness instructor Marilyn Piperno and Shrewsbury Councilwoman Kim Eulner by exceedingly narrow margins; Eulner only got 347 more votes than Downey. A Green Party candidate who received 1,152 votes turned out to be a spoiler.

Since then, the bipartisan trio elected in 2021 has hit the legislature running; Piperno and Eulner have voted as relatively (but not overwhelmingly) moderate Republicans, while Gopal has kept up his frenetic legislative pace and sponsored successful bills restoring funding to local school districts, codifying abortion access, and more. But the real focus over the last two years has been on this year’s election.

For Republicans, the big question was who was going to take on Gopal. Neither assemblywoman wanted to do it, and a few other big names like Monmouth County Clerk Christine Hanlon and County Commissioner Tom Arnone (R-Neptune City) took a pass, forcing the Monmouth GOP to land on Steve Dnistrian, a public relations executive with a lot of communications expertise but without much political experience.

On the Democratic side, five candidates originally stepped up to challenge Piperno and Eulner, among them Houghtaling. With Gopal’s tacit support, Monmouth Democrats decided on Ocean Township Councilwoman Margie Donlon and former Municipal Court Judge Luanne Peterpaul, each of whom would make some history: Donlon as the first female physician in the legislature, Peterpaul as the state’s first openly lesbian legislator.

The battlefield was thus set, and neither side faced a primary challenge. The eight months since then have been a steadily intensifying campaign revolving around a few key issues – and a lot of money.

It’s impossible to get any further without bringing up the whales. Last winter, an unusual number of dead whales started washing up on the Jersey Shore; the cause of the mass deaths was never conclusively determined, but Republicans quickly latched onto them as evidence that the state’s new offshore wind industry was damaging marine ecosystems, and demanded that wind farm construction (spearheaded by Gov. Phil Murphy) stop immediately.
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: VIN GOPAL, MARGIE DONLON, LUANNE PETERPAUL
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: STEVE DNISTRIAN, MARILYN PIPERNO, KIM EULNER
If there was anywhere in the state that the whales would have an impact, it’d be in the 11th district, which includes iconic Shore towns like Asbury Park and Long Branch. Gopal is nervous enough about it that when a bill directing tax incentives towards wind energy giant Ørsted came up earlier this year, he was the lone Democratic senator to vote against it.

Just this week, Ørsted announced they’re pulling out of New Jersey entirely; it’s hard to gauge how that will affect the race in the 11th district.

School funding, parental involvement in education, and property taxes have also come up repeatedly, much like in other competitive districts in the state.

The problem for 11th district Republicans is that while they might have latched onto potential winning issues, they don’t have the resources to get their messages out. Gopal and his running mates have spent upwards of $3 million, beating out their Republican opponents by a factor of six to one; Democratic legislative leadership PACs have dumped further millions on top of that, likely making the 11th district 2023’s most expensive contest.

The district was also minorly tweaked in redistricting to shed deep-red West Long Branch and add competitive Bradley Beach and Fair Haven. It’s a shift of only a few thousand people, but a potentially decisive one; under the new lines, Downey and maybe even Houghtaling might have held on in 2021.

(like in the 2nd and 4th district races, Gopal could additionally benefit from another name on the ballot: NJ Patriot Party candidate Karen Zaletel, a perennial candidate who could conceivably siphon off a few conservative votes from Dnistrian.)

Those factors probably make a Gopal victory a bit more likely than a Dnistrian victory, and if Gopal is winning, that gives his Assembly running mates a solid shot of turning Piperno and Eulner into one-term wonders. But none of that is remotely guaranteed, and the outcome could be another two years of a split delegation; Democrats and Republicans are in agreement that the 11th district race remains extremely competitive.

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earlier this year, the 12th district – a sprawling, solidly Republican district that spans four different counties – was all anyone in New Jersey politics could talk about.

The district’s senator, Sam Thompson, has served in the legislature for more than 25 years, and has been a staunch Republican for nearly that entire time. Government spending? Thompson wants to bring it down. Abortion? Thompson thinks it should be significantly restricted. Donald Trump? Thompson supported him in both 2016 and 2020.

But at the beginning of this year, local Republicans in the 12th district began murmuring about whether Thompson, at age 88, should really be seeking another four-year term in the Senate. Although Thompson has shown few signs of age-related issues, Republican leaders began quietly marshaling support for 64-year-old Old Bridge Mayor Owen Henry, in the hopes that Thompson would peaceably step aside.

Instead, Thompson shocked them – and the entire New Jersey political world – by declaring that he’d dump the GOP and seek re-election as a Democrat. The party switch, as Thompson readily admitted, had little to do with ideology, and Thompson said he’d remain a “moderate conservative.” But he felt betrayed by the Republican Party, and he chose to betray them back.

Much of the chatter focused on whether Thompson had any shot of winning re-election. The answer, realistically, was no: the 12th district, which supported Jack Ciattarelli by 27 percentage points in the 2021 governor’s race, was simply too Republican for Thompson to win, even with his 25 years of incumbency.

Thompson eventually came to that conclusion, too. Two weeks after announcing his party switch, he decided to drop his re-election bid after all, and Democrats chose Brandon Rose, a retired State Parole Board law enforcement official, to take on Henry instead.

One thing that Thompson’s party switch did accomplish, however briefly, is that it gave Democrats unfettered senatorial courtesy over gubernatorial nominees from Middlesex County this year. Even when he was a Republican, though, Thompson was rarely much of an impediment for the governor’s nominees; it remains to be seen whether Henry will be as amenable.

With all the drama in the Senate race, the district’s two Assembly seats have all but disappeared from view.

One of them is represented by Assemblyman Alex Sauickie (R-Jackson), a relative newcomer and former Jackson councilman first elected at an August 2022 special election convention to replace the late Assemblyman Ron Dancer (R-Plumsted).

At that convention, Sauickie faced two other Ocean County politicians, Plumsted Councilman Dominick Cuozzo and former Jackson Councilman Scott Martin. The extremely conservative Cuozzo had Ocean GOP chairman George Gilmore’s endorsement, but Sauickie dominated among rank-and-file county committeemembers and won 69% of the convention vote.

Clifton and Sauickie actually faced what could have been a semi-serious primary challenge this year from Old Bridge Board of Education President Salvatore Giordano. But while the 23-year-old Giordano had the right background for a strong Assembly candidate, he didn’t campaign like one, and ended up getting just 12% of the vote.
In the general election, the two assemblymen face financial advisor and Navy veteran Raya Arbiol and state government worker Paul Sarti. Both Democrats have lost races for the district before, and they’ll do so again this year.

As for Thompson, after his brief stint as the center of attention earlier this year, he’s largely faded into the background as a non-controversial Democrat who causes little fuss and votes with his new party on major bills. It’s not how anyone would have expected Thompson’s long political story to end.
AFTER SEVERAL CYCLES IN A ROW

with major changes to the 13th legislative district delegation, the Monmouth County district’s three capable legislators seem to have settled into a solid groove.

Leading the ticket is State Sen. Declan O’Scanlon (R-Little Silver), a former assemblyman who got a promotion to the Senate in 2017, when State Sen. Joe Kyrillos (R-Middletown) decided to retire after 30 years in Trenton. The Republican Senate primary was almost a showdown between O’Scanlon and Assemblywoman Amy Handlin (R-Middletown), but Handlin stepped aside at the last minute and ran for re-election to the Assembly instead.

Since arriving in the Senate, O’Scanlon has carved out a prominent niche as Senate Republican Budget Officer, making him the top Senate Republican for all things related to the state budget. The role is a good fit for O’Scanlon, one of the few Trenton lawmakers who can both understand complicated legislation and explain it in a few quotable quips to passing journalists. He’s viewed as a potential gubernatorial candidate someday.

Following her abandoned Senate run, Handlin gave up on the legislature entirely in 2019, opening the way for then-Monmouth County Freeholder Gerry Scharfenberger (R-Middletown) to join the legislature.

Scharfenberger, a former Middletown mayor, had only been elected to the board of freeholders a year earlier, but he still faced no opposition at the county convention for Handlin’s Assembly seat. He’s generally aligned himself with the conservative wing of the Assembly Republican caucus.

Assemblywoman Vicky Flynn (R-Holmdel) is the newest addition to the delegation, first winning her seat in 2021. That year, the Monmouth GOP organization broke with Assemblywoman Serena DiMaso (R-Holmdel) and awarded its county line to Flynn, then the Holmdel Board of Education president, for her Assembly seat; DiMaso fought it out to the primary but lost 36%-27%.

With less than two years of legislating under her belt, Flynn’s state political career is still in its early days – but her spots on two major committees, Judiciary and Financial Institutions & Insurance, bode well for her. She’ll probably make the short list for lieutenant governor in 2025.

The Democrats running against them this year are communications professional Lucille Lo Sapio for the Senate and tuba player Paul Eschelbach and trial attorney Danielle Mastropiero for the Assembly. Eschelbach was a last-minute replacement nominee, waging a coordinated write-in effort in the June primary after original Democratic candidate Koby Biran was quietly kicked off the ballot for paperwork issues.

With its base in unswervingly Republican Middletown, the 13th district is guaranteed to remain in the GOP column. Among other things, that means that Gov. Phil Murphy, a Middletown resident, will continue to be represented by some of Trenton’s most vocal Republicans.
DECLAN O’SCANLON

VICKY FLYNN

GERRY SCHARFENBERGER
NJ Globe VOTERS GUIDE
2023

MUNICIPALITIES
Monmouth
Aberdeen, Atlantic Highlands, Hazlet, Highlands, Holmdel, Keansburg, Keyport, Little Silver, Marlboro, Middletown, Monmouth Beach, Oceanport, Rumson, Sea Bright, Union Beach, West Long Branch

STATEWIDE RESULTS
2021 governor Ciattarelli 60.9% / Murphy 38.3%
2020 president Trump 52.7% / Biden 46.0%

PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)
2021 Senate *O'Scanlon 61.4% / Solomeno 38.6%
2021 Assembly *Scharfenberger 30.8%, Flynn 30.5% / Friedman 19.4%, Howard 19.4%
2019 Assembly Scharfenberger 29.8%, *DiMaso 29.2% / Singer 20.6%, Friedman 20.5%

2023 PRIMARY RESULTS
No primaries on either side

THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES
Senate None
Assembly John Morrison (Libertarian)

DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)
77.3% White / 3.9% Black / 8.9% Hispanic / 8.8% Asian

REDISTRICTING CHANGES

2021 GOVERNORIAL ELECTION IN LD-13
CIATTARELLI 60.9%
MURPHY 38.3%

D
0-0%
10-15%
20-25%
30-40%
40+

R
UNCHANGED
REMOVED FROM LD-13
ADDED TO LD-13
MARSHAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING
R+0.8

NJ GLOBE VOTERS GUIDE 2023
52
For Republicans this year, getting to 20 votes in the Senate and 40 in the Assembly is hard, but the path is fairly straightforward. Hold everything they currently control, flip the highly competitive 4th and 11th districts, and stage upsets in the Democratic-leaning 16th and 38th districts: boom, a tied chamber.

Getting an actual majority is another matter. Finding that 21st Senate seat or 41st Assembly seat would require Republicans to make inroads in some seriously blue territory – territory like the 14th district, once a highly competitive district in the suburbs of Trenton that is now only on the very edge of the legislative playing field.

The district’s senator, State Sen. Linda Greenstein (D-Plainsboro), remembers the district’s more competitive days well. Greenstein was elected to the Assembly in 1999 and the Senate in 2010; in both cases, she defeated Republican incumbents in closely watched races. The chairwoman of the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee and a tireless full-time campaigner and legislator, she’s won both of her last two campaigns by double digits.

Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-Hamilton) is also a relic of that earlier, more competitive era. A top leader in the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers and, fittingly, the chairman of the Assembly Telecommunications and Utilities Committee, DeAngelo has held his seat since flipping it from Republicans in 2007.

With the retirements of State Sen. Fred Madden (D-Washington) and Assemblymembers Gabriela Mosquera (D-Gloucester), Joe Egan (D-New Brunswick), and Thomas Giblin (D-Montclair) this year, DeAngelo could be one of just two pro-life Democrats remaining in Trenton in 2024, alongside Assemblyman Gary Schaer (D-Passaic).

DeAngelo was able to patch things up a few days later at the Middlesex Democratic convention. He finished a convincing first place, with McCoy beating out Carabelli by four votes for the second spot; facing intense pressure from local Democrats, Carabelli dropped out of the race a few days later, solidifying the new Greenstein-DeAngelo-McCoy ticket.

If 14th district Republicans have any hope of making inroads in the 14th district, it will probably be by beating McCoy, who unlike her running mates has virtually no built-in name recognition or political base.

One Republican Assembly candidate, attorney Adam Elias, is up with a TV ad excoriating McCoy for saying on a Zoom that she wanted to push aside white state employees in favor of people of color. McCoy says that Elias is twisting her words, but there are some lingering questions over the circumstances of McCoy’s departure from the Labor Department.

Elias, who won 45% of the vote against Greenstein two years ago, is running alongside former appointed Hightstown Councilwoman Skye Gilmartin for the Assembly on a ticket led by Senate nominee Patricia Johnson, a retired nurse. (Another Republican, 2019 and 2021 nominee Bina Shah, wanted to run for the assembly as well, but her off-the-line campaign got crushed in the primary by Elias and Gilmartin.)
Other than the race for the second Assembly seat that essentially boils down to McCoy versus Elias, though, Republicans aren’t treating the district like it’s something worth investing in, and Democrats retain a huge financial edge.

The 14th district is a prime example of Republicans failing to snag a top-tier recruit for the Senate. Johnson’s only political experience is running for the Assembly in the deep-blue 15th district in 2021 and losing in a landslide. If she were to score an upset this year, she would owe her victory to radio personality Bill Spadea, a likely 2025 candidate for governor and her most prominent backer.

But even if Republicans had gotten a more seasoned challenger to take on Greenstein, the 14th district would still be a tough lift, because it’s simply a very Democratic district at this point.

For Republicans to win, they’d need to not only win Hamilton and Monroe Townships – two light-blue towns that make up nearly three-quarters of the district – but win them by enough to overcome huge Democratic margins out of smaller Plainsboro and East Windsor.

That’s an extremely challenging task, and no Republican in the last decade has managed it; Gov. Phil Murphy won the district by nearly 10 points in 2021.

And with that, Republican dreams of a majority begin to fade away. The GOP could still have a good night on November 7; in fact, it may be more likely than not that they do. But until they can start seriously playing in places like the 14th district, a red New Jersey will likely remain out of reach.
### Municipalities
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mercer</th>
<th>East Windsor, Hamilton, Hightstown, Robbinsville</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middlesex</td>
<td>Cranbury, Jamesburg, Monroe, Plainsboro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Statewide Results
- **2021 governor**  
  - Murphy 54.3% / Ciattarelli 44.9%
- **2020 president**  
  - Biden 58.6% / Trump 40.2%

### Past District Results (Under Old Lines)
- **2021 Senate**  
  - *Greenstein 55.2% / Elias 44.8%
- **2021 Assembly**  
  - *DeAngelo 28.3%, *Benson 27.8% / Pachuta 21.7%, Shah 21.1% / Others 1.1%
- **2019 Assembly**  
  - *DeAngelo 30.4%, *Benson 29.6% / Calabrese 20.1%, Shah 18.3% / Others 1.5%

### 2023 Primary Results
- **R Assembly**  
  - Elias 46.2%, Gilmartin 45.7% / Shah 8.2%

### Third-Party Candidates
- **Senate**  
  - None
- **Assembly**  
  - None

### Demographics (As of 2020 Census)
- 53.8% White / 10.3% Black / 15.6% Hispanic / 20.0% Asian

### Redistricting Changes

![Redistricting Map](image)

2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-14
- **Murphy 54.3%**
- **Ciattarelli 44.9%**

- D+1.3

Partisan shift due to redistricting.
WHENEVER NEW JERSEY’S legislators make the trek into Trenton on session days, they’re venturing into the heart of 15th district, where three Democratic stalwarts – State Sen. Shirley Turner (D-Lawrence), Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson (D-Trenton), and Assemblyman Anthony Verrelli (D-Hopewell) – are all set to easily win re-election this year.

Turner is by far the longest-serving of the three. She was first elected to the Senate in 1997, defeating incumbent State Sen. Dick LaRossa (R-Ewing) after spending four years in the Assembly; in those days, the suburbs of Trenton were Republican enough to create competitive general elections in the 15th district, though that’s very much a thing of the past now.

At age 82, Turner is set to become the oldest member of the legislature next year, but she’s still showing the same idiosyncratic spark that has defined her time in office. Just this session, she made waves once for calling for the end of the county line system, and then again for nearly sinking a major wind energy tax credit bill by holding her vote out until the last second.

Reynolds-Jackson, a former Trenton councilwoman and the capital city’s lone hometown representative, joined the ticket after a February 2018 special election convention to replace now-State Treasurer Elizabeth Maher Muoio. (The second-place finisher at that convention was Verrelli.)

Speculations of potential higher offices for Reynolds-Jackson abound. She would be the easy frontrunner for State Senate in 2027 should Turner retire, and – more enticingly – could make the leap up to Congress if Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-Ewing) ever calls it quits.

Verrelli, a former Mercer County Freeholder and carpenter’s union official, got a second chance at the legislature just a few months after his first bid fell short. Following Assemblyman Reed Gusciora’s election as mayor of Trenton, Verrelli narrowly won a July 2018 convention against former Senate Democratic executive director Jeffrey Laurenti.

Of the 15th district’s three legislators, Verrelli is the most low-key. But he has an important perch as the chairman of the Assembly State and Local Government Committee – the proving ground for most of the legislature’s election reforms, dozens of which churned through the Assembly this session.

Running against Turner this year is Republican Roger Locandro, a former mayor of Delaware Township in Hunterdon County. (Because of how neighboring legislative districts are drawn, the 15th district is forced to include seven Hunterdon towns, many of them Republican-leaning, that have little to do with the district’s core in overwhelmingly Democratic Trenton and its immediate suburbs.)

On the Assembly side, Republicans only have one candidate on the ballot, Stockton student Michel Hurtado – though for die-hard local Republicans desperate to vote for a full ticket, independent-turned-Republican Pedro Reyes is waging a write-in bid as well.
LEFT TO RIGHT: SHIRLEY TURNER, VERLINA REYNOLDS-JACKSON, ANTHONY VERRELLI
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<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Hunterdon</th>
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<td>2021 governor</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2020 president</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
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<td>*Turner 72.2% / Gaul 27.8%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Verrelli 40.7%, *Reynolds-Jackson 40.3% / Johnson 16.8% / Others 2.2%</td>
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<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td>38.7% White / 26.4% Black / 22.9% Hispanic / 12.4% Asian</td>
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**THE NEW JERSEY FIREFIGHTERS MUTUAL BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION**

**REPRESENTING OVER 5000 CAREER FIREFIGHTERS, EMT'S, AND DISPATCHERS ACROSS THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY. WE ARE A POWERFUL VOICE ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHTS OF OUR MEMBERS AND THE SAFETY OF ALL FIRST RESPONDERS IN NEW JERSEY.**

*Our actions and decisions today will shape the way we will be living in the future.*

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Wayne Wolk

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NJ FMBA 1447 Campbell Street, Rahway, NJ 07065 - 732-499-9250 - info@njfmba.org - www.njfmba.org
THE YEAR IS 2011. Democrats on the Legislative Apportionment Commission are looking for clever ways to expand the legislative map. They see the 16th district, a Republican district anchored in Somerset County, and have a clever idea: what if deep-blue Princeton and South Brunswick were added to the district, making it far more competitive?

Twelve years later, their plan has thoroughly succeeded. Democrats, who had never won a single legislative race in the 16th district prior to 2015, now control all three of its seats. But their hold on the district is not firm, and Republicans are mounting a serious campaign to wrest back what was once their heartland.

The first Democrat to break through the 16th district’s red wall was Andrew Zwicker (D-South Brunswick), a physicist at the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory. After a longshot congressional campaign in 2014 that put his name on the radar, Zwicker ran for the Assembly in 2015 and just barely squeaked in, unseating Assemblywoman Donna Simon (R-Readington) by all of 78 votes.

Two years later, 16th district Democrats got the chance to add to their ranks when Assemblyman Jack Ciattarelli (R-Hillsborough) departed to embark on his first gubernatorial campaign. Roy Freiman, a Hillsborough Democrat, was elected in his place.

The final domino fell in 2021, when State Sen. Kip Bateman (R-Branchburg) retired, allowing Zwicker to move up to the Senate and former Montgomery Mayor Sadaf Jaffer to take his spot in the Assembly. The race that year was a competitive one, but all three Democrats still won by decent margins after slow vote counts made the races appear artificially close for a few days.

Unusually for swing-district representatives, Zwicker and Jaffer could both be counted among the most liberal members of their chambers. Zwicker has made progressive election reforms a centerpiece of his time in the Senate, while Jaffer waged a lonely fight against this year’s StayNJ property tax plan for seniors, saying that its benefits would be regressive.

Jaffer’s time in the legislature won’t last much longer, though. She’s calling it quits for personal reasons after just one term; the successor chosen by 16th district Democrats is Mitchelle Drulis, a first-time candidate who previously worked as district director to former Rep. Tom Malinowski (D-Ringoes) and as chief of staff to longtime Assembly Labor Committee Chair Joe Egan (D-New Brunswick).

But Drulis won’t make it to the Assembly without a real fight from Republicans. They’re running Clinton Town Councilman Ross Traphagen and Princeton accountant Grace Zhang as their nominees in what’s become a very competitive race.

For the Senate, former U.S. Rep. Michael Pappas (R-Branchburg) is making another try after losing to Zwicker 53%-47% in 2021. It wasn’t Pappas’s first loss to a Princeton physicist; his two-year tenure in Congress came to an end in 1998 when he lost in an upset to Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory assistant director Rush Holt.

The story of the 16th district campaign is similar to other races around the state. Democrats have the clear fundraising edge and are hitting Republicans hard on abortion, particularly the anti-abortion votes Pappas took back in the 1990s; Republicans have far less funding, but are hoping that their focus on property taxes and education will close the gap. (Lost in the media blitz is the fact that Traphagen identifies as pro-choice.)

Ten years after the new legislative map made the 16th district winnable for Democrats, this cycle’s redistricting process shifted the district back towards Republicans a notch. Not by that much – it still voted for Phil Murphy by five points and Joe Biden by a whopping 21 – but enough that Democrats have slightly less of a cushion than before.

16th Democrats can counter that with a huge flood of money: millions of Democratic dollars have been spent in the district, both through the campaign accounts of Zwicker, Freiman, and Drulis and through the PACs affiliated with Senate President Nick Scutari (D-Linden) and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-Woodbridge). Republicans have only spent a few hundred thousand dollars to counter them.

Still, it’s looking very plausible that one Republican, more likely Traphagen, could snatch the open Assembly seat away from Drulis. On a good night for the GOP, it’s possible that Freiman, the
chairman of the Assembly Agriculture and Food Security Committee, could lose; on an even better night, Zwicker might fall to Pappas as well, though the presence of Libertarian Richard Byrne on the Senate ballot complicates things.

Any loss would mark a huge setback for Democrats, who have spent so many years building up the 16th district into a redoubt of their new suburban, highly educated base. Democrats are still the favorites to hold onto their seats, but amid Republican optimism about their chances this year, it’s clear that the 16th district is under real threat.

ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: ANDREW ZWICKER, ROY FREIMAN, MITCHELLE DRULIS
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHAEL PAPPAS, ROSS TRAPHAGEN, GRACE ZHANG
### Municipalities

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<tr>
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<td>South Brunswick</td>
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<td>Somerset</td>
<td>Branchburg, Hillsborough, Millstone, Montgomery, Rocky Hill</td>
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### Statewide Results

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<th>2021 governor</th>
<th>Murphy 52.1% / Ciattarelli 47.1%</th>
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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 59.6% / Trump 38.8%</td>
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### Past District Results (Under Old Lines)

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<tr>
<th>2021 Senate</th>
<th>Zwicker 53.3% / Pappas 46.7%</th>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Freiman 26.7%, Jaffer 25.7% / Panico 24.0%, Lukac 23.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Zwicker 28.1%, *Freiman 26.9% / Caliguire 22.6%, Madrid 22.4%</td>
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### 2023 Primary Results

No primaries on either side.

### Third-Party Candidates

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Richard Byrne (Libertarian)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
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</table>

### Demographics (as of 2020 Census)

58.9% White / 5.6% Black / 8.8% Hispanic / 25.8% Asian
NJEA and its members are proud advocates for educators, students, and the nation’s BEST public schools.

Pictured above:
Seam M. Spiller, President (center)
Steve Beatty, Vice President (right)
Petal Robertson, Secretary-Treasurer (left)
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U.S. SENATE

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WITH A NEW DISTRICT MAP and a huge number of legislators retiring, this year presented a major opportunity for turnover and demographic change in the New Jersey Legislature. But despite all the changes happening across the state, they haven’t reached New Jersey’s most ostentatiously unrepresentative legislative delegation.

The 17th legislative district, based in New Brunswick and its nearby suburbs, is near-evenly divided among white, Black, Hispanic, and Asian residents, making it one of the most diverse legislative districts not just in New Jersey but in the entire country. And it will continue to send three white men to the statehouse next year.

That comes despite the fact that party leaders were given a golden opportunity this year to address their demographic problems when 85-year-old Assemblyman Joe Egan (D-New Brunswick) decided at the last minute to retire. The district’s Democratic county committeemembers gathered over the summer to fill Egan’s seat – and promptly chose his son, New Brunswick Councilman Kevin Egan.

The elder Egan’s abrupt retirement, announced in July after he’d already won the Democratic primary unopposed, brings to an end a long political career. Joe Egan, an International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers stalwart, was elected to the New Brunswick City Council in 1981 and to the State Assembly in 2001. (In 2010, after holding both his council and legislative offices for a few years, he passed on his council seat to Kevin.) Since 2008, he’s been the chairman of the Assembly Labor Committee, making him the current Assembly’s longest-serving committee chairman.

After his unexpected retirement decision, Joe quickly made sure that Kevin would face an easy path to succeed him. Middlesex and Somerset Democrats went along, and Kevin was uncontested at the party convention.

Having now been bequeathed his father’s seat twice, it remains to be seen how Kevin will vote in the statehouse. Joe was known as one of the legislature’s more conservative Democrats, notably voting against the Freedom of Reproductive Choice Act in 2022; Kevin calls himself “100% pro-choice,” a sign that he’ll be more of a mainstream Democrat.

Joining Kevin on the LD17 Democratic ticket are State Sen. Bob Smith (D-Piscataway) and Assemblyman Joe Danielsen (D-Franklin).

Smith was first elected to the Assembly way back in 1985, narrowly defeating party-switching Assemblywoman Angela Perun (R-Plainfield). He moved up to the Senate in 2002, succeeding former Senate President John Lynch (D-New Brunswick), and currently chairs the Senate Energy and Environment Committee, making him one of the legislature’s top authorities on environmental issues.

Danielsen, meanwhile, won the district’s de facto Somerset County seat at a 2014 special election convention to replace former Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula (D-Franklin), who had been nominated to the state Board of Public Utilities. Then the chairman of the local Democrats in Franklin Township, Danielsen faced only minor opposition at that convention and hasn’t been challenged since.

Ironically, it’s Republicans who have the diverse 17th district ticket this year. Their Senate candidate is William Mikita, a personal injury attorney; his Assembly running mates are financial advisor Susan Hucko and IT professional Dhimant Patel.

But while the GOP’s slate may look more like the voters it’s running to represent, that won’t matter in a district that typically supports Democrats by 40 points or more. (Even when neighboring districts fell to Republicans in the 1991 anti-Jim Florio wave election, the 17th remained blue.) The Democratic team of Smith, Danielsen, and Egan will win once again this year – only this time it will be Kevin, not Joe.
BOB SMITH

JOE DANIELSON

KEVIN EGAN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Middlesex</th>
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<td>Somerset</td>
<td>Franklin, South Bound Brook</td>
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<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
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<td>Murphy 68.9% / Ciattarelli 30.1%</td>
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<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Smith 69.1% / Abate 30.9%</td>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Egan 34.8%, *Danielsen 34.2% / Barrier 15.7%, Gabra 15.3%</td>
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<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Egan 36.5%, *Danielsen 36.3% / Badovinac 13.6%, Concepcion Powell 13.6%</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>26.0% White / 21.7% Black / 27.3% Hispanic / 25.6% Asian</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
AROUND ONE IN EVERY TEN New Jerseyans is Asian American, but there has never been a New Jersey legislative district with an Asian American plurality or majority.

It’s not that making one is impossible; during last year’s redistricting process, the original GOP draft map created a new district in Central Jersey that would have been 39% Asian and 33% white. But the eventual deal map agreed to by the bipartisan redistricting commission dropped that proposal, leaving the 18th district – 42% white, 37% Asian – as the most Asian American district in the state.

Barnes, though, left midway through his first Senate term to become a Superior Court judge, and Diegnan was the easy choice to succeed him at a 2016 special election convention. Diegnan, now seeking his third full Senate term, is the chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee; he defeated minor challenger Christopher Binetti 89%-11% in this year’s primary.

Diegnan’s elevation prompted another special election convention, one which was won by now-Assemblyman Robert Karabinchak (D-Edison), a former Edison councilman who defeated a number of other local officeholders to preserve Edison’s representation in the legislature. Karabinchak chairs the Assembly Special Committee on Infrastructure and Natural Resources, a new committee created in 2020.

Finally, there’s Assemblyman Sterley Stanley (D-East Brunswick), who, like his two ticketmates, first arrived in the legislature via a special convention. After Assemblywoman Nancy Pinkin (D-East Brunswick) was elected as Middlesex County Clerk in 2020, Stanley won an early 2021 convention to succeed her against Edison Councilman Joseph Coyle.

Somewhat incredibly, Stanley, who was born in India, is the first and still only Asian American legislator in state history to hail from Middlesex County.

Opposing them in this year’s elections are Republican Senate candidate Neal Shah and Assembly candidates Teresa Hutchison and Joseph Wolak. Shah is a marketing executive at Verizon; Hutchison is a professional photographer and the wife of former South River Councilman Jim Hutchison; and Wolak is actually a current elected official, holding a council seat in Diegnan’s politically competitive hometown of South Plainfield.

Back in 2013, when Buono left to run for governor, the 18th district was among the most competitive seats in the state, and Barnes only defeated Democratic-turned-Republican East Brunswick Mayor David Stahl by a 52%-48% margin. But those days are over, and Diegnan, Karabinchak, and Stanley are all safe for another term.
MUNICIPALITIES | Middlesex | East Brunswick, Edison, Highland Park, Metuchen, Milltown, South Plainfield, South River

STATEWIDE RESULTS | 2021 governor | Murphy 56.7% / Ciattarelli 42.2%
 | 2020 president | Biden 60.3% / Trump 38.3%

PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES) | 2021 Senate | *Diegnan 60.6% / Patel 39.4%
 | 2021 Assembly | *Karabinchak 29.3%, *Stanley 28.5% / Mott 20.8%, Fam 20.2% / Others 1.2%
 | 2019 Assembly | *Pinkin 30.8%, *Karabinchak 29.7% / Bengivenga 20.2%, Brown 19.2%

2023 PRIMARY RESULTS | D Senate | *Diegnan 89.0% / Binetti 11.0%
 | Senate | None
 | Assembly | None

DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS) | 42.1% White / 8.5% Black / 12.3% Hispanic / 36.5% Asian
DISCUSSIONS OF NEW JERSEY’S powerful party machines typically focus on a few key counties and power brokers: George Norcross’ stranglehold on South Jersey Democrats, George Gilmore’s Republican fiefdom in Ocean County, the Hudson Democratic operation run by a rotating parade of local mayors.

But in terms of sheer legislative impact, arguably no county party is more far-reaching than the Middlesex Democrats, and no chairman more influential than Kevin McCabe. The Middlesex Democratic legislative delegation includes five assemblymembers and a whopping six state senators – seven if you count State Sen. Joe Cryan (D-Union), who hails from Union County but has deep ties to Middlesex.

That number is near-certain to drop when party-switching State Sen. Sam Thompson (D-Old Bridge) departs from his solidly Republican seat after this year’s elections. But it’s still a huge legislative footprint, one that gives McCabe and other Middlesex Democratic leaders a tremendous amount of power.

The chief testament of that power, of course, is Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin (D-Woodbridge), who is now in his sixth year atop the Assembly and could continue leading the chamber for years to come. If Democrats retain their majority this year, Coughlin will become the longest-serving Speaker in state history.

Coughlin didn’t always have especially lofty political ambitions. He served a couple of terms on the city council in his hometown of Perth Amboy in the late 1980s and 1990s, and became a municipal court judge in Edison in 2005.

But in 2009, a strange confluence of factors put him on a path towards legislative greatness. That year, Assemblyman and longtime political boss Joseph Vas (D-Perth Amboy) was felled by a corruption scandal, and the Democratic nominee to succeed him, South Amboy Mayor John O’Leary, dropped out less than three months before Election Day; Coughlin was chosen to fill the vacancy on the Democratic ticket, and won the seat that November.

Seven years later, after a relatively low-profile tenure in the Assembly that included chairing the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee, Coughlin was thrust further into the limelight. Central and South Jersey Democrats decided they wanted more influence in the Assembly and formed an alliance to take down two-term Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-Secaucus) – and Coughlin was their guy.

Their rebellion worked. In May 2017, fully seven months before the election for Speaker was set to take place, Coughlin released a list of supporters that included a majority of Assembly Democrats. Prieto prolonged the fight for a few months more, but eventually relented, and Coughlin became the Assembly’s 171st speaker on January 9, 2018.

The nearly six years since then have been a remarkably tranquil time in the Assembly Democratic caucus. Coughlin’s two immediate predecessors both had their time as Speaker cut short by maneuverings beyond their control, but Coughlin has maintained steady support with no real murmuring of a potential ouster; he also has had a generally positive relationship with the governor’s office, something that wasn’t always true in the Senate.

This session, Coughlin pushed through several major legislative packages, including two substantial property tax relief programs – the StayNJ program for seniors and the ANCHOR program for everyone – as well as a raft of election reforms that have already begun making the state’s election processes more efficient and transparent.

But not everything this session has been smooth sailing for the Speaker. Assembly Republicans, emboldened by their good showing in the 2021 elections, have grown increasingly rambunctious; angered by the legislature’s vaccine requirements, some Republicans used procedural rules and floor speeches to make a routine legislative session in December 2021 last ten-and-a-half hours.

If Republicans can win yet more seats this year, the job of Speaker will undoubtedly become more strenuous, and Coughlin’s margin of error on close votes will be that much tighter. (And, of course, if Republicans can somehow take back the majority, then Coughlin’s career as Speaker will simply be over.)

Coughlin’s own 19th legislative district is marginally competitive on paper,
having voted for Gov. Phil Murphy by a modest 53%-46% margin in 2021. But no one realistically expects Coughlin or his seatmates, State Sen. Joe Vitale (D-Woodbridge) and Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez (D-Perth Amboy), to be under much threat.

Vitale is the longest-serving member of the district’s delegation, elected in 1997 after State Sen. Jim McGreevey (D-Woodbridge) left for his first unsuccessful gubernatorial bid. The district had previously been highly competitive, but Vitale’s 20-point victory over former Assemblyman Stephen Mikulak (R-Woodbridge) solidified it from then on as a reliably Democratic seat.

(Vitale’s first run for office came in 1976, at age 22, when he unsuccessfully ran for delegate to the Democratic National Convention on a slate pledged to Morris Udall. And few remember that after Frank Pelzman died suddenly in 2006, Vitale spent four months as the interim mayor of Woodbridge.)

Vitale has long been the chairman of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, one of the upper chamber’s most wide-ranging committees. He lost the chairmanship briefly after backing the wrong horse in the 2009 leadership fight between Richard Codey and Steve Sweeney, but was reinstalled in 2011 after making amends with Sweeney.

In this year’s Democratic primary, Vitale faced unknown challenger Michelle Burwell; he won 86%-14%.

Lopez is the delegation’s relative newbie, having won her first Assembly term in 2017 to succeed Assemblyman John Wisniewski (D-Sayreville), who waged a quixotic campaign for governor that year. Her victory re-established the 19th district’s Hispanic representation, something that had been missing for years despite including the major Hispanic hub of Perth Amboy; she’s now the chair of the Assembly Housing Committee.

Also hailing from Perth Amboy is this year’s GOP Senate nominee, former Perth Amboy school board member Maria Garcia. Her Assembly running mates are regulatory manager Marilyn Colon and chemical engineer Sam Raval, who ran off-the-line for Middlesex County Commissioner last year and lost in the primary.

In a parallel universe where the Democratic incumbents and the Middlesex County Democratic organization are less formidable and where their Republican challengers are running a better-funded, more serious campaign, the 19th district could be a real race. Here in this universe, though, the Assembly Speaker and his ticketmates probably don’t have much to worry about.
**MUNICIPALITIES**

| Middlesex | Carteret, Perth Amboy, Sayreville, South Amboy, Woodbridge |

**STATEWIDE RESULTS**

| 2021 governor | Murphy 53.4% / Ciattarelli 45.6% |
| 2020 president | Biden 59.0% / Trump 39.9% |

**PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)**

| 2021 Senate | *Vitale 59.9% / Pisar 40.1% |
| 2021 Assembly | *Coughlin 29.1%, *Lopez 28.6% / Gallo 21.2%, Banko 21.0% |
| 2019 Assembly | *Coughlin 33.6%, *Lopez 32.1% / Genova 16.8%, Onuoha 16.2% / Others 1.3% |

**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS**

| D Senate | *Vitale 85.9% / Burwell 14.1% |

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

| Senate | None |
| Assembly | David Diez (Libertarian) |

**DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)**

32.8% White / 13.5% Black / 36.8% Hispanic / 18.6% Asian
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OTHER THAN ANOTHER ineffective primary challenge masterminded by former Assemblyman Jamel Holley (D-Roselle), it’s been a quiet year in the 20th legislative district, and all three incumbent Democrats – State Sen. Joe Cryan (D-Union Township), Assemblywoman Annette Quijano (D-Elizabeth), and Assemblyman Reginald Atkins (D-Roselle) – will be re-elected with ease.

Cryan has had a complex political journey. The son of John Cryan, a popular Essex County politician, the younger Cryan successfully turned his adopted hometown of Union Township from a swing town into a Democratic stronghold as the township’s Democratic municipal chairman; served as Democratic state chairman from 2006 to 2010; and spent 15 years in the Assembly, including two years as Assembly Majority Leader, before departing to become Union County Sheriff in 2015.

It wasn’t long before Cryan returned to the legislature; in 2017, State Sen. Raymond Lesniak (D-Elizabeth) left to run a doomed gubernatorial campaign, and Cryan took his place. Now the chairman of the Senate Military and Veterans’ Affairs Committee, Cryan is among the more liberal members of the Senate, and notched big victories this session when the governor signed two of his bills on gun control and temp workers’ rights.

Quijano, who served as an assistant counsel to Gov. Jon Corzine, joined Cryan in 2008; she won a special election convention to succeed disgraced Assemblyman Neil Cohen (D-Roselle), becoming the first and still only Hispanic legislator to represent majority-Hispanic Elizabeth. Quijano had a rough spell during this past legislative session, sitting out voting sessions and committee hearings for more than a year with no explanation, but is now back in action.

Atkins, meanwhile, was elected in 2021 to succeed Holley, who was facing the prospect of losing party support and chose to run against Cryan for the Senate instead. Holley recruited a slate of challengers for Assembly and county commissioner, but he discovered that his popularity didn’t extend far beyond the borders of Roselle, and his whole team lost to the Union Democrat-backed slate in a landslide.

This year, Holley set his sights lower and aimed to retake the mayor’s office in Roselle, which he had previously held from 2012 until 2015. Like the last time around, Holley recruited a full team of off-the-line challengers to run with him, including three candidates for legislature – not with the intention of actually beating Cryan or his running mates, but simply to beef up his mayoral slate.

Holley ended up losing the mayor’s race by a narrow margin, 51%-48%, to incumbent Donald Shaw. His running mates did far worse, with Cryan defeating school board member Angela Alvey-Wimbush 74%-26%, though Alvey-Wimbush nearly won Roselle in the process.

Even that loss doesn’t look like it will be the end for Holley, who managed to secure a spot as the vice chair of the Roselle Democratic Party. He’s also taking on a prominent role in the independent presidential campaign of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who – like Holley himself – is a top anti-vaccine spokesperson.

But it’s hard to see Holley causing much stress among 20th district Democrats anymore, now that they’ve clobbered him and his allies twice in a row.

For the general election, two Republicans have filed to run in the 20th district: small businessman (and frequent local candidate) Carmen Bucco for the Senate, Ramon Hernandez for the Assembly. The district is one of a few around the state where Republicans were unable to recruit a full slate.

Republicans could run the second coming of Ronald Reagan, though, and they’d still lose the majority-minority 20th district in a landslide. Cryan, Quijano, and Atkins are as safe as can be.
JOE CRYAN

REGINALD ATKINS

ANNETTE QUIJANO
<table>
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<td>2020 president</td>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Quijano 50.8%, Atkins 49.2%</td>
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<td>*Quijano 40.9%, *Holley 38.7% / Donnelly 10.6%, Hanna 9.8%</td>
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<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td>D Senate</td>
<td>*Cryan 73.9% / Alvey-Wimbush 26.1%</td>
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<td>D Assembly</td>
<td>*Quijano 39.1%, *Atkins 37.4% / Thelot 11.8%, Mitchell 11.7%</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<td>Assembly</td>
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<td>19.1% White / 27.4% Black / 49.0% Hispanic / 5.2% Asian</td>
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![Map showing redistricting changes](image1.png)

![Map showing 2021 gubernatorial election results](image2.png)
SOMEDAY, THE STARS WILL finally align and Democrats will flip the 21st legislative district. The district is simply too suburban, well-educated, and Democratic-leaning in federal races for that not to eventually happen.

But this year likely won’t be that year. Democrats and Republicans alike agree that State Sen. Jon Bramnick (R-Westfield), Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-Summit), and Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis (R-New Providence) are well-established in the district and are very unlikely to lose to a slate of unheralded Democratic challengers.

One of the main bulwarks against Democratic inroads in the 21st district is Bramnick, now in his 21st year in the legislature. Bramnick served for nearly two decades in the Assembly, including a long stint as Assembly Minority Leader, before moving up to the Senate in 2021 when Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield) left to successfully run for Congress.

Unlike some long-serving incumbents, Bramnick has used that entire time to establish himself as a force of nature in his district. A deeply moderate Republican who is more than willing to lambaste Donald Trump – and the funniest lawyer in New Jersey (that’s a real title, earned after winning a competition) – Bramnick has managed to become quite popular among the high-information voters of suburban Union and Somerset Counties.

It’s possible that Bramnick will try to convert that profile into a gubernatorial campaign in 2025, though the moderation that makes him so well-liked among 21st district voters may be a tougher sell for a statewide GOP primary electorate.

Muñoz has built up a moderate legislative record of her own since arriving in the Assembly in 2009 under sad circumstances; her husband, Assemblyman Eric Muñoz (R-Summit), had unexpectedly died at 61. In 2021, it briefly looked as though Muñoz was going to become Assembly Minority Leader, but she got outmaneuvered by Assemblyman John DiMaio (R-Hackettstown).

When Bramnick departed the Assembly, his seat was filled by Matsikoudis, a former member of the New Providence Borough Council who beat out several competitors at a 2021 Union GOP convention. She, like her running mates, has cultivated a profile as a reasonable Republican that Democrats have found tough to attack.

It’s not that the 21st district has never been competitive. Bramnick and Muñoz faced an unexpected close call in 2017 and were subsequently targeted heavily by Democrats two years later; for a little while in 2019, it looked like Bramnick and especially Muñoz were toast.

But they prevailed both times anyways, and proceeded to win by a more comfortable margin in 2021. Now, in a modestly more Republican district (thanks to redistricting), Bramnick, Muñoz, and Matsikoudis aren’t acting all that worried.

Democrats have chosen a set of local officeholders and party leaders as their slate this year. For Senate, they’re running former interim Bernardsville Councilman Matt Marino; for the Assembly, it’s Springfield Councilman Chris Weber and Bernards Democratic municipal chair Elizabeth Graner. Graner previously ran for the Assembly in 2021 and came in third place.

That’s not a bad slate, but some of the bigger names whom Democrats might have wanted to recruit very consciously steered clear of the race. There’s no outside Democratic money flowing into the district, nor are the Democratic candidates themselves raising much of anything to overcome the many advantages that the Republican incumbents have.

In future cycles – perhaps as early as 2025 – all bets are off. Under different circumstances, maybe with a Republican in the White House or if Democrats have a big lead in that year’s gubernatorial election, the 21st district could easily become one of the top races in the state.

Muñoz and Matsikoudis will also have to forge their own way in two years without Bramnick accompanying them on the ballot; 2025 would be the first time in her career that Muñoz is on the ballot without Bramnick (unless he somehow maneuvers himself into becoming the GOP gubernatorial nominee).

In any event, those discussions are still two years away at a minimum. Barring a staggering realignment of New Jersey’s moderate suburban voters this year, the 21st district will remain in the Republican column.
JON BRAMNICK

Michele Matsikoudis

Nancy Muñoz
### MUNICIPALITIES

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<th>Middlesex</th>
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<td>Bernards, Bernardsville, Far Hills, Green Brook, Peapack and Gladstone, Warren Township, Watchung</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union</td>
<td>Berkeley Heights, Garwood, Mountainside, New Providence, Springfield, Summit, Westfield</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### STATEWIDE RESULTS

- **2021 governor**: Ciattarelli 49.8% / Murphy 49.5%
- **2020 president**: Biden 58.0% / Trump 40.6%

### PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)

- **2021 Senate**: Bramnick 53.6% / Signorello 46.4%
- **2021 Assembly**: *Muñoz 27.0%, Matsikoudis 26.3% / Graner 23.6%, Mehrotra 23.1%
- **2019 Assembly**: *Bramnick 26.0%, *Muñoz 25.4% / Mandelblatt 23.6%, Gunderman 23.0% / Others 2.0%

### 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS

No primaries on either side

### THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

- **Senate**: None
- **Assembly**: None

### DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)

68.6% White / 4.3% Black / 11.3% Hispanic / 14.5% Asian
SENATE PRESIDENT NICK SCUTARI (D-Linden) has come a long way since the last time he appeared in the pages of a New Jersey Globe Voter’s Guide.

Leading up to the 2021 elections, Scutari was merely an influential senator among many. But on November 3, 2021, then-Senate President Steve Sweeney (D-West Deptford) lost to an unknown Republican truck driver, and Scutari was suddenly thrust into the second-most powerful office in state government. It was the culmination of a long, steady political ascent. Scutari got his start in politics in 1994 when he was elected to the Linden Board of Education; he made the leap up to the Union County Board of Freeholders in 1996 and became the board’s chairman in 1999, the youngest chairman in county history.

In 2003, Scutari got the unexpected chance to move further up the ladder when State Sen. Joseph Suliga (D-Linden) withdrew after an unfortunate incident in an Atlantic City casino. Scutari won that first race with 55% of the vote, and was immediately assigned to the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, which reviews all gubernatorial nominees; he rose to the committee’s chairmanship in 2010 after Sweeney’s ascension to the Senate Presidency reshuffled Senate leadership.

Two Democratic senators, longtime maverick State Sens. Nia Gill (D-Montclair) and Ron Rice (D-Newark), didn’t go along, but their rebellion was a lonely one. Every other Democrat in the Senate – including now-Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz (D-Newark), the Senate President Pro Tempore at the time – consented to a Senate President Scutari, and he easily won the official chamber vote in January 2022.

The nearly two years since have been a time of transformation in many ways for Scutari and his Senate Democratic caucus. Scutari, and his Senate Democratic caucus, have largely tacked towards the center this session, focusing on broadly popular issues like property tax relief. It’s not exactly a surprise coming from Scutari, who may be more liberal than Sweeney but has always been a moderate himself.

But progressive Democrats who hoped that the defeat of Sweeney would herald the demise of moderate politics have surely been disappointed. Scutari and his Senate Democratic caucus, spooked by the wake up call of the 2021 election, have largely tucked towards the center this session, focusing on broadly popular issues like property tax relief. It’s not exactly a surprise coming from Scutari, who may be more liberal than Sweeney but has always been a moderate himself.

Scutari has also gotten the chance to push through many of his own priorities, such as raising campaign finance limits via the Election Transparency Act and reshaping the state’s auto insurance regulations. Marijuana legalization, a longtime goal for Scutari, had already been mostly accomplished by the time he became Senate President, but he’s gone farther and begun discussions about legalizing magic mushrooms as well.

Now, Scutari faces his first electoral test: defending his caucus against an energized Republican Party that hopes to whittle down or even flip Scutari’s substantial majority. He doesn’t want to become the first Democrat in 33 years to preside over the loss of the Senate, and he doesn’t want to return to Trenton in January as the minority leader or have to hash out a power-sharing agreement in a 20-20 Senate.

His own seat is not remotely in play. In a district that includes the solidly Democratic towns of Linden, Rahway, and Plainfield, Scutari’s contest against Republican attorney William Michelson – a repeat of their 2021 matchup – is not competitive.
Equally safe for re-election are Scutari’s Assembly running mates, who balance out the ticket geographically and generally keep a lower profile.

Hailing from Rahway is Assemblyman James Kennedy, no relation to the famous Kennedy family. A former longtime Rahway mayor, Kennedy won his Assembly seat in 2015 upon Assemblywoman Linda Stender (D-Fanwood)’s retirement; since 2021, Kennedy has been the chairman of the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee.

And coming from Plainfield is Assemblywoman Linda Carter, no relation to Wonder Woman. Carter, a former Union County freeholder and Plainfield councilwoman, won a 2018 special election convention to succeed Green, the late assemblyman Scutari replaced as county chair.

Kennedy and Carter face former Garwood Mayor Patricia Quattrocchi and Linden GOP chair Lisa Fabrizio. Quattrocchi and her husband John have collectively run for higher office 10 separate times and have yet to succeed once.

But while the 22nd district itself may not be competitive, the stakes this November are still high for Scutari. His ability to run the Senate smoothly depends on having a solid Democratic majority, and every seat that Republicans flip puts another dent in that majority.

Then again, Scutari probably doesn’t want Democrats to flip many seats either, since most competitive Republican-held seats are in South Jersey. If South Jersey Democratic boss George Norcross, who is not on good terms with Scutari, can expand his shrunken Senate caucus, that might spell more trouble for Scutari down the line than a larger Republican minority would.

In other words, it’s a tough tightrope for Scutari to walk. The 2021 elections thrust Scutari into a position of unexpected and immense power; this year, he’ll find out just how sturdy that power is.
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<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Murphy 61.1% / Ciattarelli 38.0%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 67.1% / Trump 31.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Scutari 61.5% / Michelson 38.5%</td>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Carter 31.3%, *Kennedy 30.6% / Sypher 19.2%, Herberg 18.9%</td>
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<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Carter 40.4%, *Kennedy 39.1% / Quattrocchi 20.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
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<td>38.2% White / 23.8% Black / 32.9% Hispanic / 5.5% Asian</td>
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</table>

"We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate."

-Thomas Jefferson
THE 23RD DISTRICT, covering an oddly shaped swath of territory in Warren, Hunterdon, and Somerset Counties, isn’t New Jersey’s most Republican legislative district, but it has a habit of electing some of the state’s most conservative members of the legislature.

That’s far from an insult; the 23rd district’s voters, as well as the district’s three incumbent legislators, would certainly take it as a compliment.

At the top of the ticket is State Sen. Doug Steinhardt (R-Lopatcong), an old hand in state GOP circles but a brand new one in the legislature. Steinhardt, a former state GOP chairman and briefly a candidate for governor in 2021, was elected unopposed at a special convention last year to succeed State Sen. Michael Doherty (R-Oxford), who had grown tired of Trenton and became Warren County Surrogate instead.

Doherty had long been the Senate’s most unwaveringly conservative member, pushing back against the Democratic majority even when virtually everyone else in his caucus had acquiesced. That was especially true on the Senate Judiciary Committee, where Doherty’s status as the ranking member gave him the ability to decry Gov. Phil Murphy’s liberal nominees.

While Steinhardt is a more jovial legislator than Doherty, he’s got serious conservative bona fides as well. Steinhardt has already secured a seat on the important Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, and is making an early push alongside Assemblyman Alex Sauickie (R-Jackson) to clamp down on foreign ownership of farmland.

The most influential Republican from the 23rd district, though, is further down on the ticket: Assembly Minority Leader John DiMaio (R-Hackettstown), the leader of his caucus since the start of 2022.

After the 2021 elections, Assembly Republicans were in need of a new leader, thanks to then-Minority Leader Jon Bramnick (R-Westfield)’s election to the State Senate. The initial choice was Bramnick’s own running mate, Assemblywoman Nancy Muñoz (R-Summit), a fellow moderate Republican from a swing district; as part of a larger deal, DiMaio would become Muñoz’s #2.

But soon after the deal was made, Muñoz’s insufficiently conservative stances on issues like abortion caused her pledged support to unravel, and DiMaio got back into the leadership fight. In a head-to-head vote among the GOP conference’s 34 members, DiMaio won 19 votes to Muñoz’s 15.

That put DiMaio, who’s been in the Assembly since 2009, at the head of a large, increasingly emboldened Assembly Republican caucus. Although DiMaio has good relations with the legislature’s Democratic leaders – he was once a Democrat himself, back in his early days as mayor of Hackettstown – there’s no question that the GOP conference under his leadership is the most forceful opposition party New Jersey has seen in some time.

Now, DiMaio is aiming for an even bigger prize: Assembly Speaker. He’s not likely to get it, but even a gain of a few seats, which is much more attainable, would put him in a position to hold serious sway over what can and cannot pass through the Assembly.

Serving alongside DiMaio in the 23rd district is a fellow conservative of opposite temperament: Assemblyman Erik Peterson (R-Franklin), the legislature’s most consistent Doctor No.

Peterson and DiMaio were elected within nine months of each other; DiMaio succeeded Assemblywoman Marica Karrow (R-Raritan) after she was elevated to the Senate in February 2009, while Peterson took Doherty’s place when Doherty defeated Karrow in the Senate primary later that same year.

But while DiMaio has found his way as a coalition builder in the Republican caucus, Peterson has staked out his claim on the caucus’s rightmost wing. A frequent sight in the Assembly chambers, even on largely uncontroversial bills, is the vote roll call board lit up with dozens of green “yes” votes and one lone red “no” vote: Peterson’s.

Last year, Peterson took his politics to the national stage, running for Congress in the competitive 7th district. His off-the-line campaign ended in a milquetoast 3rd-place finish – now-Rep. Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield) came in first – and prompted some rumblings over whether Peterson would get party support for another Assembly term.
But those rumblings eventually receded and Peterson was given a clear path through the primary. Next month, he and DiMaio will face Democrats Guy Citron and Tyler Powell; Powell took the spot of Margaret Weinberger, who dropped out after the primary.

On the Senate side, Democrats are running Denise King, a frequent candidate for office in the 23rd district and in her hometown of Bedminster. In order to reach the general election at all, King had to win a rather entertaining primary against Roger Bacon, a perennial “Democratic” candidate whose main policy position is his support for Donald Trump; King won 93%-7%.

That will be King’s only victory this year, though. The 23rd district, despite including a few blue hubs like Somerville and Bound Brook, is solid red overall, having backed Trump by five points in 2020 and Jack Ciattarelli by 20 points in 2021. Steinhardt, DiMaio, and Peterson are all set to win by Ciattarelli’s margin or higher this year.
# MUNICIPALITIES

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<tr>
<th>Hunterdon</th>
<th>Alexandria, Bethlehem, Bloomsbury, Califon, Franklin Township, Glen Gardner, Hampton Borough, Holland, Lebanon Township, Milford, Tewksbury, Union Township</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somerset</td>
<td>Bedminster, Bound Brook, Bridgewater, Manville, Raritan Borough, Somerville</td>
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# STATEWIDE RESULTS

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<th>Election</th>
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<th>Murphy</th>
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<td>39.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>President</td>
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<td>Biden 46.5%</td>
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# PAST DISTRICT RESULTS

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<th>King 39.1%</th>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>*DiMaio 30.7%</td>
<td>*Peterson 29.9% / Kaufman 19.9%, LaBelle 19.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>*DiMaio 30.2%</td>
<td>*Peterson 30.1% / King 20.0%, Trofimov 19.8%</td>
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# 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>King 93.2% / Bacon 6.8%</th>
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# THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# DEMOGRAPHICS

(as of 2020 Census)

- 69.4% White
- 6.0% Black
- 14.2% Hispanic
- 9.2% Asian

---

**3rd Party Candidates**

**Senate**: None

**Assembly**: None

---

**Demographics**

69.4% White / 6.0% Black / 14.2% Hispanic / 9.2% Asian
SUSSEX COUNTY REPUBLICANS have had an eventful year.

The party, one of the few in the state without a county line, has always been one of New Jersey’s more colorful organizations. But this year brought about three open legislative seats in the Sussex-based 24th legislative district, a county commissioner primary, a race for Sussex GOP chair, and a lot of bad blood that may last for a while to come.

The first domino to fall was Assemblyman Parker Space (R-Wantage), who announced in March 2022 that he wouldn’t run again after five full terms in the Assembly. In November 2022, he was joined by fellow Assemblyman Hal Wirths (R-Hardyston), a three-term assemblyman, former state cabinet official, and the ranking Republican on the Assembly Budget Committee.

That set off a wide-open race for their two Assembly seats, but the biggest development was still yet to come. In January of this year, Senate Minority Leader Steve Oroho (R-Franklin) said that he, too, wouldn’t seek re-election, a huge shock both in Trenton and back home in Sussex County.

Oroho’s announcement brought to an abrupt end a more than two-decade-long political career. Elected to the Senate in 2007, Oroho had been chosen to lead the Senate GOP conference in late 2021, and he quickly grew to command towering respect both inside and outside his party. Few anticipated that the 65-year-old senator would retire so soon after becoming the highest-ranking Republican in state government.

But retire he did, and the contest to succeed him began that same day. A few hours after Oroho’s announcement, Space leapt back into the fray, now as a Senate contender; two weeks later, former Bogota Mayor Steve Lonegan, who had been running for the Assembly, joined the race as well.

On the Assembly side, meanwhile, candidates sorted themselves into two main slates. One, running alongside Space, included Sussex County Commissioner Dawn Fantasia (R-Franklin) and Chester Township Mayor Mike Inganamort; the other, unaffiliated with any Senate candidate, consisted of Lafayette Board of Education President Josh Aikens and Warren County Commissioner Jason Sarnoski (R-Independence).

For a few weeks, the Senate primary was the liveliest in the state. Lonegan, a hero in some conservative circles after his several (unsuccessful) statewide campaigns, called Space a do-nothing legislator and a “caricature thought up by leftists”; Space shot back that Lonegan is a former anti-Trumper who hadn’t ever won an election outside of Bogota, a Bergen County borough nowhere near the 24th district.

(Somewhat incongruously, Space solidified himself as the more staid, establishment-minded choice in the race. That would come as a surprise to anyone following New Jersey politics just a few years ago, when Space was best known for his Confederate flag tattoo and his denigrating comments towards his female opponents.)

And then, just a month after it began, the Senate primary was over. Lonegan, having failed to secure much party support, abruptly declared one Friday that his campaign was over, and that was that. Space essentially became the senator-elect that day.

The Assembly race, though, continued on unabated. Space’s running mates, Fantasia and Inganamort, picked up major supporters – they got endorsements from Oroho, Wirths, and the Morris GOP – while Aikens and Sarnoski pitched themselves as the race’s true anti-establishment conservatives. (Warren Republicans, who make up a small fraction of the district, backed Sarnoski and Aikens.)

Attacks flew from all sides: on Fantasia’s erstwhile support of the gas tax, on Aikens’ 2008 vote for Barack Obama (back when Aikens was 24), on Inganamort’s supposedly liberal-minded consulting company. The barrel-scrapingest of them all came when a blog run by Bill Winkler, a controversial GOP consultant in the area, attacked Fantasia over her ex-husband, a convicted sex offender.

Ultimately, it was Fantasia and Inganamort who narrowly came out on top; Fantasia got 27% of the vote, Inganamort 25%, Aikens 22%, and Sarnoski 21%, while minor candidate Rob Kovic picked up the remaining 5%. The primary was the closest in the state by a substantial margin.

Now the winners face general election voters, though as usual in Sussex County, that’s something of an afterthought.
Democrats are running a husband-and-wife team of former Planned Parenthood executive Edmund Khanoo for Senate and school accounting official Alicia Sharma for Assembly, making the district the only one in the state not to feature a full three-member Democratic ticket. (A third Democratic candidate, Veronica Fernandez, dropped out after losing party support due to her previous attacks on top statewide Democrats, and is instead running as an independent.)

Just because Democrats don’t stand a chance of flipping the 24th district, however, doesn’t mean that the drama in Sussex County is over. In a county GOP chair election held two weeks after the primary, Sussex Republicans elected Joseph Labarbera, who was affiliated with the Winkler wing of the party, instead of a candidate backed by Oroho, Space, and Fantasia.

It’s still far too early to say whether Labarbera’s victory will mean anything for future 24th district contests. For now, Space, Fantasia, and Inganamort will get to take office in a few months and begin finding their voices in the legislature; their re-election campaigns can wait.

LEFT TO RIGHT: PARKER SPACE, DAWN FANTASIA, MIKE INGANAMORT
Municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morris</td>
<td>Chester Borough, Chester Township, Mount Olive, Netcong, Roxbury, Washington Township</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sussex</td>
<td>Entire county</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
<td>Allamuchy, Independence</td>
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Statewide Results

- 2021 governor: Ciattarelli 64.5% / Murphy 34.5%
- 2020 president: Trump 56.1% / Biden 42.1%

Past District Results (Under Old Lines)

- 2021 Senate: *Oroho 69.4% / Cook 30.6%
- 2021 Assembly: *Space 35.6%, *Wirths 32.7% / Cook 16.3%, Fadden 15.5%
- 2019 Assembly: *Space 34.6%, *Wirths 33.1% / Lykins 17.0%, Smith 15.4%

2023 Primary Results

- R Assembly: Fantasia 26.6%, Inganamort 25.0% / Aikens 22.3%, Sarnoski 21.1% / Kovic 5.0%

Third-Party Candidates

- Senate: None
- Assembly: Veronica Fernandez (End the Corruption!)

Demographics (As of 2020 Census)

- 78.8% White / 4.0% Black / 10.9% Hispanic / 4.8% Asian
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IT WASN’T NEARLY AS WIDELY discussed as the changes in South Jersey or Essex and Hudson Counties, but Morris County – a Republican bastion turned Trump-skeptical swing county – got a major revamp on New Jersey’s new legislative map.

None of the changes put multiple incumbents in the same district, nor did they significantly shift the partisanship of any district in the county, so it’s easy to see why they got overlooked. Still, hundreds of thousands of Morris County voters will have new legislators come January thanks to the whims of 11 people sitting in a room last February.

Case in point: the 25th district, which covers much of central Morris County, including Morristown itself. 46% of the new district’s population was in a different district under the old map; the district also has a brand-new legislator, Assemblyman Christian Barranco (R-Jefferson), whose hometown was shifted from the neighboring 26th district.

Like the earlier iteration of the 25th district, the newly drawn district could be quite competitive, at least on paper. Its 19 towns collectively supported Joe Biden by six percentage points in the 2020 presidential election, then swung to back Jack Ciattarelli by nearly nine points in the 2021 gubernatorial race.

In his own district, Bucco has proven he has serious electoral skills. A former assemblyman, Bucco succeeded his late father, State Sen. Anthony R. Bucco (R-Boonton), in October 2019, which thanks to the state’s awkward election schedules meant that he had to run in a special election in November 2020 – on the same ballot as Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

Democrats, sensing a golden opportunity, ran hard against Bucco and tried to tie him to Trump’s toxic brand. But 25th district voters proved capable of distinguishing between the now-former president and their local legislative Republicans, and Bucco beat Rupande Mehta 54%-46%; in so doing, he became the top vote-getter in the history of the state’s modern legislative system with 67,142 votes.

On that same 2020 ballot was Assemblywoman Aura Dunn (R-Mendham), a former congressional aide and Sesame Street lobbyist who had been chosen to fill Bucco’s vacant Assembly seat back in 2019. Dunn faced an even tougher race than Bucco against Democrat Darcy Draeger, yet she, too, pulled off a 52%-48% win. Both she and Bucco were then easily re-elected to full terms in 2021.

The third member of the ticket, Barranco, had a very different path to the legislature. A former Pompton Lakes councilman, he ran for the 26th district in 2021 and shockingly beat incumbent Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce (R-Parsippany) at the Morris GOP convention; DeCroce ran for renomination anyways, but Barranco narrowly beat her.

Just a couple months after Barranco took office, the legislative redistricting commission threw him a curveball, adopting a map that shifted him into the 25th district while Assemblyman Brian Bergen (R-Denville) was moved in the opposite direction. After initially winning a safe seat, Barranco now has to find his footing in a more competitive district that’s almost entirely new to him.

That could theoretically give Democrats an opening. Incumbency and name recognition matters less and less in the modern political era, but if this year turns out to be a very good one for New Jersey Democrats, Barranco’s shallow political roots could be pivotal.
The Democratic Assembly nominees trying to take advantage of that are magazine editor Diane Salvatore and family physician Jon Torres, who nearly won a local council race last year. Christine Clarke, the Jefferson Township Democratic municipal chair who ran for the 26th district in both 2019 and 2021, is the party’s Senate nominee.

The problem is that state Democrats simply don’t see the race as worthy of investment, and haven’t spent a dime to aid the badly outgunned Democratic ticket. Just like in 2021, most attention is on Central and South Jersey; the prevailing wisdom about the 25th district is that if Democrats couldn’t win it in 2020, there’s no reason to believe they’d be able to now, especially since the new map made it a notch more Republican.

Bucco, Dunn, and Barranco could all have bright political futures ahead of them; Dunn has already been floated for higher office several times, while Barranco, a union electrician, is currently the state’s only Hispanic Republican legislator. In order to attain those bright futures, they’ll have to keep winning in what could become an increasingly tough district – but for now, they’re probably fine.

LEFT TO RIGHT: ANTHONY M. BUCCO, CHRISTIAN BARRANCO, AURA DUNN
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Morris</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Biden 52.4% / Trump 46.0%</td>
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<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Bucco 57.5% / Grayzel 42.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Dunn 28.2%, *Bergen 27.8% / Barnett 22.3%, Veres 21.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020 Senate special</td>
<td>*Bucco 54.0% / Mehta 46.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020 Assembly special</td>
<td>*Dunn 52.5% / Draeger 47.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Bucco 27.0%, Bergen 25.7% / Bhimani 24.0%, Draeger 23.3%</td>
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| 2023 PRIMARY RESULTS | No primaries on either side |

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<th>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</th>
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<td>Senate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
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| DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS) | 66.7% White / 4.8% Black / 20.7% Hispanic / 7.0% Asian |

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**2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-25**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CIATTARELLI</th>
<th>53.9%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MURPHY</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
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**PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING: R+1.5**

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**2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-25**

- **0-10%**: Light blue
- **10-20%**: Dark blue
- **20-30%**: Red
- **30-40%**: Dark red
- **>40%**: Black

---

**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS**

- No primaries on either side

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

- **Senate**: None
- **Assembly**: None

**DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)**

- 66.7% White
- 4.8% Black
- 20.7% Hispanic
- 7.0% Asian
26TH DISTRICT

SENATE: JOE PENNACCHIO (R-INC) VS. JOAN WAKS (D)

ASSEMBLY: BRIAN BERGEN (R-INC), JAY WEBBER (R-INC) VS. WALTER MIELARCZYK (D), JOHN VON ACHE (D)

SENATE + ASSEMBLY RATING: SOLID REPUBLICAN

LOTs OF NEW JERSEY political fights can get nasty. Relatively few of them, though, feature spoofed NRA endorsement cards, attacks over drag queen story hour, and suggestions from a candidate that their opponent needs anti-psychosis medication.

Then again, what else could have been expected from a contest between State Sen. Joe Pennacchio (R-Montville) and Morris County Commissioner Tom Mastrangelo (R-Montville)?

Like other districts in the area, the 26th district was massively reshaped by redistricting this year, with only four towns staying constant between the old version of the district and the new. The new district had three devoted incumbents – Pennacchio, Assemblyman Jay Webber (R-Morris Plains), and Assemblyman Brian Bergen (R-Denville) – but all three were new to a majority of the district’s voters.

That presented a fantastic opportunity for Mastrangelo, a pugnacious elected official with a habit of running off-the-line. In 2022, Mastrangelo had lost party support for his re-election as county commissioner, but ran against the county party anyways and won; he was emboldened enough by that victory that he immediately turned around and announced a challenge against Pennacchio.

He wasn’t the only Morris Republican on the outs with the party establishment. Former Assemblywoman BettyLou DeCroce (R-Parsippany), who lost renomination in 2021 after being unexpectedly booted from the county line by now-Assemblyman Christian Barranco (R-Jefferson), announced her Assembly comeback campaign in the summer of 2022.

After losing the Morris GOP convention in landslides, Mastrangelo and DeCroce teamed up with one another and added a new challenger to their ticket: Assembly candidate Robert Peluso, a former Parsippany councilman. That set them on a collision course with Pennacchio, Webber, and Bergen, who had no intention of getting caught asleep at the wheel.

The resulting campaign was a brutal one, with both sides accusing one another of being absentee legislators, fake conservatives, and all sorts of other insults. By all accounts, polling showed the race in a dead heat, with Bergen – who had been redistricted from another district and had to introduce himself to thousands of new voters – in particular trouble.

And yet, in the end, Team Mastrangelo proved to be a lot of sound and not a lot of fury. Pennacchio won 60%-40%, and his running mates did even better, with Webber and Bergen getting a combined 65% of the vote against DeCroce and Peluso.

For Pennacchio, that means another four years of what has already been a lengthy career in politics, one that started with a 1994 GOP primary challenge from the right against popular five-term Rep. Dean Gallo (R-Parsippany). Pennacchio lost badly; Gallo later quit the race and died of cancer two days before the general election.

After a stint on the Morris County Board of Freeholders, Pennacchio was elected to the Assembly in 2001 and moved up to the Senate in 2007 after State Sen. Robert Martin (R-Morris Plains) chose to retire. Whatever Mastrangelo may have claimed during his campaign, Pennacchio has been one of the most resolutely conservative members of the Senate throughout his tenure.

Webber, too, has had a long and multifaceted political career. A devoted social conservative and a father of eight, he was elected to succeed Pennacchio in the Assembly in 2007, and rose to higher prominence in 2018 with his (ultimately doomed) congressional campaign against now-Rep. Mikie Sherrill (D-Montclair). He’s one of four former state party chairs in the New Jersey Legislature.

By far the newest of the bunch is Bergen, a former Denville councilman and U.S. Army combat helicopter pilot who was elected to the neighboring 25th district in 2019 after Assemblyman Michael Patrick Carroll (R-Morris Township) retired. The 44-year-old Bergen is perhaps the single most active Republican on the Assembly floor, consistently rising to oppose liberal bills and chide Democrats for their lack of transparency.

On the Democratic side, Joan Waks, who narrowly lost two races for the 34th legislative district in the 1990s, is making her return as a candidate for State Senate. Her Assembly running mates are Parsippany Planning Board chair John Von Achen and 26-year-old mechanical engineer Walter Mielarczyk.

But with the primary behind them, all three Republican incumbents are safe for the cycle; the 26th district, despite being based in Democratic-trending Morris County, is still far too red for Democrats to have a chance. The election cycle in the 26th district began with a bang, and now it’s ending with a whimper.
**Municipalities**

| Morris | Boonton Town, Denville, East Hanover, Florham Park, Hanover, Lincoln Park, Montville, Morris Plains, Mountain Lakes, Parsippany-Troy Hills, Pequannock, Riverdale |
| Passaic | Bloomingdale, Pompton Lakes, Ringwood, Wanaque |

**Statewide Results**

- 2021 governor: Ciattarelli 56.9% / Murphy 42.5%
- 2020 president: Trump 49.9% / Biden 48.7%

**Past District Results**

(under old lines)

- 2021 Senate: *Pennacchio 58.9% / Clarke 41.1%
- 2021 Assembly: *Webber 30.0%, Barranco 29.3% / Fadden 20.4%, Brown Blaeuer 20.3%
- 2019 Assembly: *DeCroce 28.4%, *Webber 28.1% / Clarke 21.8%, Fortgang 21.7%

**2023 Primary Results**

- R Senate: *Pennacchio 59.6% / Mastrangelo 40.4%
- R Assembly: *Webber 34.3%, *Bergen 31.0% / DeCroce 17.4%, Peluso 17.3%

**Third-Party Candidates**

- Senate: None
- Assembly: None

**Demographics**

(as of 2020 Census)

- 67.4% White / 3.6% Black / 10.1% Hispanic / 17.9% Asian
FOR A DISTRICT THAT is utterly uncompetitive in general elections, the 27th district has seen an astonishing amount of action this year.

It all started, as many things in this year’s elections did, with the new district map. At the direction of Essex Democratic chair LeRoy Jones and Essex Republican chair Al Barlas, who co-parented the legislative redistricting committee, Essex County was torn apart and put back together in a wholly different arrangement.

The resulting 27th district is a Frankensteinean creation, combining original 27th district towns like West Orange and Livingston with Montclair and Clifton, which had been in the 34th district. It double-bunked two incumbent senators, State Sen. Nia Gill (D-Montclair) and former Gov. Richard Codey (D-Roseland), and completely reshuffled the Assembly delegation.

There was, in theory, a method to the madness. Gill has never been particularly popular among party leaders, so setting her up to lose to Codey was no accident; on the Assembly side, Assemblyman Tom Giblin (D-Montclair) was subbed in for Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-South Orange), who got a free path to re-election in the neighboring 28th district instead.

Problems first arose when, just a few days before the filing deadline, Giblin – a nine-term assemblyman, former Democratic state chairman, and longtime leader in the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 68 – decided not to run for re-election. The Giblin family has been part of the Essex County political fabric since the 1950s and 1960s, when Tom’s father, John Giblin, was a freeholder and state senator; the younger Giblin first ran for Assembly all the way back in 1973, though he didn’t actually win a seat in the legislature until 2005.

The natural choice to succeed Giblin might have been Essex County Commissioner Brendan Gill (D-Montclair) – no relation to Nia Gill – but party leaders weren’t thrilled with the idea of running an all-Irish-male ticket in the majority-minority district. Gill’s own household presented the solution: Alixon Collazos-Gill, a government relations consultant and former congressional aide who happened to be the commissioner’s wife.

The candidate switch happened quickly. Giblin made his final decision on a Saturday morning, LeRoy Jones called a municipal chairs meeting a few hours later, and Collazos-Gill was the only candidate considered.

Democrats’ newly rejiggered 27th district slate then proceeded onto the primary, where three opponents awaited them. Codey defeated Nia Gill 58%-42%, a better performance for Gill than was expected, while Collazos-Gill and Assemblyman John McKeon (D-West Orange) easily blew past former Montclair school board member Eve Robinson (Gill’s sole running mate) and former Assemblyman Craig Stanley, whose comeback bid in a district he never represented went nowhere.

That could have been that. Then Codey decided to blow it all up.

In August, after a record-smashing 50 days before the filing deadline, Giblin – a nine-term assemblyman, former Democratic state chairman, and longtime leader in the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 68 – decided not to run for re-election. The Giblin family has been part of the Essex County political fabric since the 1950s and 1960s, when Tom’s father, John Giblin, announced that this term would, in fact, be his last. Hardly one to ever back down from a challenge, and still far from the legislature’s oldest member at 76, Codey simply decided he was done. He wanted to go out on top.

Suddenly, Essex and Passaic Democrats had to schedule a special election convention in the middle of the summer, when many of their committeemembers were on vacation, to fill a hugely important Senate seat. McKeon and Brendan Gill immediately emerged as the leading candidates, and the convention looked like it would feature a showdown between the two.

Each man had robust bases of support: McKeon in the towns he had represented for years, particularly West Orange; Gill in his hometown of Montclair and in Passaic County’s Clifton, where had longstanding relationships thanks to his days as an aide to Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-Paterson). Unfortunately for Gill, though, a full 40% of county committee seats in Clifton were vacant, seriously harming his chances of winning a convention.

That’s when things started getting weird. Gill, seeing little path forward to the Senate, decided to drop down and run for McKeon’s Assembly seat instead. But since sending a husband-and-wife duo to the Assembly wasn’t seen as viable, nor was Montclair getting both seats, that meant Collazos-Gill had to drop her own bid.

Had Gill not subbed in for his wife, McKeon’s seat likely would have gone to Livingston Councilman Shawn Klein, a physician and former mayor viewed as a rising star in the West Essex area. But with Collazos-Gill out of the race, Essex
Democrats wanted to maintain the ticket’s Latina representation and chose first-term Livingston Councilwoman Rosy Bagolie, who is Jewish and was born in the Dominican Republic, as their preferred replacement.

Then, the day of the party convention, the Gill household did another switcheroo: Brendan was back out of the race, and Alixon was back in. Just a few hours later, Essex and Passaic Democrats officially ratified the ticket of McKeon for Senate, Collazos-Gill and Bagolie for Assembly; McKeon was uncontested while Bagolie beat Stanley, the former assemblyman, with 60% of the vote.

A year that started with a presumptive 27th district ticket of Codey, McKeon, and Giblin ended with a brand-new ticket of McKeon, Collazos-Gill, and Bagolie – a combination of politicians that genuinely no one would have predicted.

In case that wasn’t enough chaos, the GOP also had its own difficulties in assembling a 27th district slate.

Republicans’ initial ticket failed to turn in petitions on time to get onto the primary ballot; a slightly reshuffled slate then got enough write-in votes to make it to the general election, only for one of the Assembly candidates, Jonathan Sym, to drop out after he moved out of state. The ticket is now Montclair GOP chair (and conservative political strategist) Michael Byrne for Senate and fashion designer Irene DeVita and former Passaic County Freeholder Michael Mecca (R-Clifton) for Assembly, with Mecca being the replacement candidate for Sym.

The GOP’s maneuverings were considerably lower-stakes, though, since no district that includes West Orange and Montclair is going to elect a Republican legislator anytime soon. McKeon, Collazos-Gill, and Bagolie will all win in a landslide.

It will be the culmination of a longtime dream for the 65-year-old McKeon, the Prince Charles of the legislature who, much like Charles himself, now gets the chance to be King. McKeon has built up a solid liberal profile for himself as the chairman of the influential Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee and as a leading gun control advocate, a profile he’ll now get to take to the more august upper chamber.

As for Bagolie and Collazos-Gill, they’re locked into Assembly seats that could continue re-electing them for decades to come. Their path to the legislature may have been hectic, but that could ultimately be nothing but a footnote in the long political careers ahead of them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Essex</th>
<th>Livingston, Millburn, Montclair, Roseland, West Orange</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passaic</td>
<td>Clifton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Murphy 68.0% / Ciattarelli 31.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 70.5% / Trump 28.5%</td>
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<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Codey 64.9% / Kraemer 35.1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*McKeon 31.6%, *Jasey 30.9% / Ryan 18.9%, Sym 18.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*McKeon 33.0%, *Jasey 32.0% / Dailey 17.6%, Tucci 17.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>D Senate</td>
<td>*Codey 57.5% / *Gill 42.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Assembly</td>
<td>*McKeon 39.1%, Collazos-Gill 36.6% / Robinson 18.3% / Stanley 6.1%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>48.8% White / 15.0% Black / 22.2% Hispanic / 14.5% Asian</td>
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</table>
IN ALL OF NEW JERSEY history, there have only been two times when a legislative district has been represented by a delegation of three women. This year, thanks to the 28th district, that number has increased to three.

The Newark-based district will also be the first ever to be represented by a team of entirely Black women: State Sen. Renee Burgess (D-Irvington), Assemblywoman Cleopatra Tucker (D-Newark), and Essex County Deputy Clerk Garnet Hall, the nominee for an open Assembly seat. They’re set to be part of an Essex County legislative cohort that is the most diverse county delegation New Jersey has ever seen.

Burgess first arrived in the Senate late last year, under rather sad circumstances. State Sen. Ronald Rice (D-Newark) – an iconic, iconoclastic legislator and the longest-serving Black senator in state history – had to retire due to health issues after four decades in elected office; he died earlier this year.

Upon Rice’s retirement, Burgess, then the Irvington Council President, quickly amassed support from county committeemembers to be his successor. Newark leaders weren’t thrilled at the idea of relinquishing a Senate seat to Irvington and threatened to challenge Burgess at the August 2022 special election convention, but their threats fizzled and Burgess won uncontested.

It was a public display of Essex County Democratic chair LeRoy Jones’s influence, and his alliance with Irvington Mayor Tony Vauss. Jones even managed to convince Gov. Phil Murphy to endorse Burgess before the vote.

If Newark Mayor Ras Baraka had tried to contest the convention, he’d probably have done so with Tucker, who’s in her 8th term in the Assembly and was interested in a promotion to the Senate.

Tucker first got to the Assembly in 2008, unseating two Democratic incumbents to win the seat that her late husband Donald Kofi Tucker (D-Newark) previously held – and once won posthumously. She’s now the chairwoman of the Assembly Military and Veterans’ Affairs Committee; at 80, she’ll soon be the oldest member of the Assembly, putting her on the retirement watchlist for 2025.

As for the second Assembly seat, it was set to go to Assemblywoman Mila Jasey (D-South Orange), who was moved into the 28th district in exchange for now-former Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-Nutley). But Jasey, facing the prospect of running in and representing a district that was largely unfamiliar to her, decided to retire instead. (Redistricting had meant a seismic shift in constituencies for Jasey, who had spent nearly sixteen years representing suburban towns like Millburn and Livingston.)

That cleared the way for Essex Democrats to choose a new nominee, and they quickly settled on Hall, a Maplewood native who had never run for elected office before.

McGehee was able to make it a real race in Maplewood and South Orange, two diverse suburbs with well-educated voter populations. He got almost no support in Newark or Irvington, though, which let Hall and Tucker win the primary by a solid 41%-40%-19% margin.

As for the general election, Republicans are virtually a non-entity in 28th district, which is overwhelmingly Black and Democratic, so it’s impressive that the Essex GOP found candidates to run at all.

Republicans are running Joy Freeman and Willie Jetti for the Assembly, but are missing a Senate candidate after a petition challenge kicked their original nominee off the ballot. Jetti and Freeman, who lost a 2022 special election for Senate against Burgess, would be lucky to get 10% of the vote total.
LEFT TO RIGHT: RENEE BURGESS, CLEOPATRA TUCKER, GARNET HALL
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<th><strong>MUNICIPALITIES</strong></th>
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<td>Union</td>
<td>Hillside</td>
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<th>Murphy 91.4% / Ciattarelli 8.0%</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 91.8% / Trump 7.5%</td>
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<th><strong>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>(UNDER OLD LINES)</strong></th>
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<td></td>
<td>2021 Senate</td>
<td>*Rice 77.9% / Contella 22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Caputo 39.2%, *Tucker 39.1% / Headen 10.8%, D’Angelo 10.8%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Caputo 41.4%, *Tucker 40.8% / Freeman 8.4%, Pires 7.7% / Others 1.6%</td>
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<th><strong>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</strong></th>
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<th><strong>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</strong></th>
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<tr>
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<td>Assembly</td>
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| **DEMOGRAPHICS**<br>**(AS OF 2020 CENSUS)** | 13.2% White / 71.7% Black / 13.0% Hispanic / 2.8% Asian |

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EVERY LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT that includes part of Essex or Hudson Counties is getting at least one new legislator this year, and in some cases three – except for the 29th district.

There, the trio of Senate Majority Leader Teresa Ruiz (D-Newark), Assemblywoman Eliana Pintor Marin (D-Newark), and Assemblywoman Shanique Speight (D-Newark) will continue their reign as one of the most high-powered delegations in the state.

When Ruiz was first elected to the Senate in 2007, she was the first Latina to ever serve in the upper chamber; now, 16 years later, she’s the second-in-command of the Senate and the highest-ranking Latina in state legislative history. In a body typically dominated by more moderate politicians, she’s a beacon of liberalism, pushing for legislation in recent years that would dramatically expand abortion access and free school lunches.

With the ongoing collapse of U.S. Senator Bob Menendez’s political fortunes, Ruiz is also a possible candidate for higher office next year, either for Menendez’s Senate seat or for the congressional seat held by his son, Rep. Rob Menendez (D-Jersey City).

Pintor Marin isn’t as flashy, but she has arguably the second-most powerful job in the Assembly: chair of the Assembly Budget Committee. She is most certainly the most powerful woman in the lower house.

First elected in 2013 as the representative from Newark’s historic Portuguese American community, Pintor Marin took the Budget chair slot in 2018 after previous chair Gary Schaer (D-Passaic) backed the wrong horse in the 2017 race for Assembly Speaker. Still only 42, Pintor Marin is a rising star who could rise still further if Ruiz were to depart from the Senate.

Speight got to the Assembly in 2018, succeeding appointed Assemblywoman Blonnie Watson (D-Newark), and now chairs the Assembly Homeland Security and State Preparedness Committee. A former aide to Ruiz, Speight made headlines in 2012 when her appointment to the Newark City Council by then-Mayor Cory Booker prompted a literal brawl; her tenure in the Assembly has been less dramatic.

The plurality-Hispanic 29th district is one of the most Democratic in the state, backing Gov. Phil Murphy two years ago by 67 points, so there’s not much to see in the general election. Republicans are running a ticket of Maritza Mathews for Senate and Noble Milton and Orlando Mendez for Assembly; Mendez is on his eighth campaign in Essex County and will soon be handed his eighth loss.

LEFT TO RIGHT: TERESA RUIZ, ELIANA PINTOR MARIN, SHANIQUE SPEIGHT
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<td>Hudson</td>
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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 80.6% / Trump 18.7%</td>
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<th>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</th>
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<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Pintor Marin 49.1%, *Speight 48.3% / Others 2.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Pintor Marin 40.9%, *Speight 39.4% / Anello 7.7%, Veras 7.0% / Others 5.1%</td>
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<th>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</th>
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<td>Assembly</td>
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</table>

**Redistricting Changes**

- 2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-29
  - Murphy 83.4%
  - Ciattarelli 16.0%

- Partisan shift due to redistricting: D+10.1
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NO LEGISLATIVE RACE this year is as tough to predict as the 30th district, where a lone Orthodox Jewish Democrat is working to fight against partisan gravity and flip a deep-red Assembly seat.

The 30th district is based in Lakewood, possibly the most politically unusual town in all of New Jersey. The town’s overwhelmingly Orthodox Jewish voters are extremely conservative, supporting Donald Trump by 65 points in the 2020 presidential election – but they’re also quite deferential to Orthodox leadership, to such an extent that two of the five members of the township committee (including the mayor) are Orthodox-backed Democrats.

Enter Rabbi Avi Schnall. Until recently the New Jersey director of Agudath Israel of America, Schnall is the chosen representative of Orthodox Jewish leaders who have decided that their interests would be served by electing a member of the majority Democratic caucus in the Assembly.

That means it’s a two-month sprint to the general election, with a lot of ground for Schnall to cover. In order to win, he’ll have to unify Lakewood’s disparate Orthodox leaders behind him; make sure their support trickles down to voters who might otherwise be inclined to back a conservative Republican like Thomson; and initiate a massive turnout operation to activate the township’s usually sluggish electorate.

Schnall has the hugely important endorsement of the Lakewood Vaad, the township’s top echelon of Orthodox leadership, but it remains to be seen just how far those endorsements go these days. In 2021, Gov. Phil Murphy had the backing of the Vaad, but Jack Ciattarelli did his own thing and won the town by 23 points.

Further complicating things is the fact that while a majority of the district’s population lives in Lakewood, well over half of the district’s votes come from neighboring towns like Howell and Wall. In the 2017 gubernatorial election, Murphy narrowly won Lakewood, but lost the district overall by 17 points thanks to the other six towns.

In order to win, Schnall will have to both run up huge margins in Lakewood and keep his losses to a minimum in the rest of the district. Those two goals could work against one another; if Schnall isn’t careful, his Orthodox-focused campaign in Lakewood could backfire in other parts of the district, which tend to be skeptical of (and sometimes downright hostile to) Orthodox development and politicians.

It’s a race unlike any other in New Jersey. The New Jersey Globe’s rating of Toss-Up is less of a statement of fact and more of a concession that nobody, including the candidates themselves, really knows how this will shake out.

The results in the 30th district’s other two seats, though, are not in doubt. Orthodox leadership is sticking with State Sen. Bob Singer (R-Lakewood) and Assemblyman Sean Kean (R-Wall), and Democrats have no interest in trying to take them out. If they wanted to move against Kean, they’d have left Harrison, a proven Lakewood vote-getter, in the race.

Singer, who is not Orthodox Jewish himself but has long had close ties to that community, was first elected to the legislature in 1985 and will become the Senate’s longest-serving member in January, when State Sen./former Gov. Richard Codey (D-Roseland) retires. Singer is also one of the legislature’s most prominent moderate Republicans, backing Democratic-led bills like the state budget and winning not-insignificant sway for Lakewood in return.
Kean, too, was once a state senator, but he was shunted down to the lower chamber after the 2011 redistricting cycle shook up Monmouth County. He’s now been waiting 12 years for Singer to retire and let him move back up to the Senate, and it looks like he’ll be waiting at least four years more – assuming Lakewood is even willing to cede its Senate seat.

Democrats are running small businessman Stephen Dobbins for the Senate and retired police detective Sal Frascino for Kean’s Assembly seat. Both have lost races before, Dobbins for the Assembly in 2021 and Frascino for county sheriff in 2022, and both will likely lose again in landslides.

The question is whether Schnall will join them in defeat, dragged down by a party affiliation that’s anathema in parts of Monmouth and Ocean Counties, or rise above thanks to Lakewood’s Orthodox community.

In southern Brooklyn, one of America’s other big Orthodox Jewish hubs, voters have long supported a small cohort of Orthodox Democrats for seats in New York’s state legislature. At least in theory, the gambit that Lakewood Orthodox leaders are trying to pull off this year has historical precedent and could conceivably work.

We’ll find out on November 7 whether the voters of the 30th district go along.
Municipalities
Monmouth: Avon-by-the-Sea, Belmar, Farmingdale, Howell, Lake Como, Wall
Ocean: Lakewood

Statewide Results
2021 governor: Ciattarelli 63.8% / Murphy 35.6%
2020 president: Trump 67.1% / Biden 31.8%

Past District Results (under old lines)
2021 Senate: *Singer 71.2% / Stinger 28.8%
2021 Assembly: *Kean 36.8%, *Thomson 35.5% / Dobbins 14.0%, Filosa 13.7%
2019 Assembly: *Kean 36.3%, *Thomson 33.8% / Farkas 14.4%, Celik 13.8% / Others 1.7%

2023 Primary Results
No primaries on either side

Third-Party Candidates
Senate: None
Assembly: None

Demographics (as of 2020 Census)
81.2% White / 3.6% Black / 11.2% Hispanic / 2.3% Asian
THE STORY OF THE 31ST DISTRICT

This year has, unfortunately, been the story of State Sen. Sandra Cunningham (D-Jersey City)’s decline. Cunningham was admitted to the hospital for cognitive health issues in October of last year; while she hasn’t remained in the hospital permanently, she has not appeared in the statehouse since June 2022.

A legislator in such circumstances might usually be expected to resign, but Cunningham’s case comes with a twist: she has a court-appointed guardian and it’s not clear if she would be deemed competent enough to make major decisions like signing a resignation letter. That has left Cunningham stuck in limbo, and has meant that the residents of the 31st district have lacked an active senator for more than a year.

It’s a regrettable end for a trailblazer in Hudson County politics. The widow of former Jersey City Mayor Glenn Cunningham, Sandra Cunningham was elected to the Senate in 2007 from her husband’s former seat, making her the first woman from Hudson County ever elected to the Senate. (She remains the only one to this day.)

A number of names were cycled through as possible successors to Cunningham, including Jersey City Councilwoman Denise Ridley, Jersey City Council President Joyce Watterman, and Hudson County Commissioners Bill O’Dea and Jerry Walker. The one Hudson Democratic leaders – chief among them Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop – eventually landed on was Assemblywoman Angela McKnight (D-Jersey City).

McKnight is in her fourth term in the Assembly, having won her first term in 2015 after Assemblyman Charles Mainor (D-Jersey City) lost party support, and currently chairs the Assembly Aging and Senior Services Committee. She had not been widely viewed as a top candidate for higher office, but Cunningham’s difficulties opened an unexpected path for her.

Her longevity in the Senate will depend on whether Fulop’s successor as mayor wants to keep her around – and whether McKnight herself can become so popular with voters that she could win a primary even without organization support.

McKnight’s successor in the Assembly is slated to be Barbara McCann Stamato, a first-time candidate for elected office but longtime player in Jersey City circles. Stamato is the Jersey City Democratic municipal chair, the vice chair of the county Democratic Party, and a close Fulop ally. Her storied brother, Gerald McCann, was twice elected mayor of Jersey City.

The 31st district is typically arranged to give two seats to Jersey City and one to Bayonne; the representative from the latter is freshman Assemblyman William Sampson (D-Bayonne), who at 34 is the youngest member of the legislature.

Sampson, a union longshoreman with little background as a politician – or even as a voter – was unexpectedly chosen for the seat in 2021 after Bayonne Mayor Jimmy Davis decided to dump incumbent Assemblyman Nicholas Chiavarotti (D-Bayonne). Sampson’s political career has had a bit of a rough start after he lost his license to work as a port crane operator due to excessive absenteeism, which he blamed on his legislative duties and a conspiracy involving the nearly-defunct Waterfront Commission of New York Harbor.

The newly assembled team of McKnight, Sampson, and McCann Stamato had to overcome an off-the-line primary challenge from Michael Griffin and Shanelle Smith, who were allied with a slate of progressive anti-machine candidates in Hudson County. Neither challenger attracted much attention, and both lost by wide margins.

Even so, they put up a stronger fight than the 31st district Republican ticket, which includes Luis Soto for Senate and Angelique Diaz and Sydney Ferreira for Assembly. Curiously, Ferreira is also the GOP nominee for mayor of Kearny; that will be a tough campaign, but it’s more feasible than a victory in the solidly Democratic 31st district, which has never once elected a Republican in its 50 years of existence.

The one wild card here is how many votes will go to a pair of independent Assembly candidates who have held public office before: Noemi Velazquez, the current vice president of the Jersey City Board of Education, and Mary Jane Desmond, a former Bayonne city councilwoman and school board member.

While McKnight will be Cunningham’s successor in the Senate, it’s still an open question as to who will take Cunningham’s role as Senate President Pro Tempore, the third-ranking position in the Senate and the sixth in the gubernatorial line of succession. Cunningham’s absence has meant that the role has been essentially vacant for more than a year; but now that she’s formally departing, the jockeying for her spot can begin.
LEFT TO RIGHT: ANGELA MCKNIGHT, WILLIAM SAMPSON, BARBARA MCCANN STAMATO

REDISTRICTING CHANGES

UNCHANGED

REMOVED FROM LD-31

ADDED TO LD-31

PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING: R+8.2

2021 GOVERNORIAL ELECTION IN LD-31

MURPHY 69.9%

CIATTARELLI 29.0%
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<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Hudson Bayonne, Jersey City (pt.), Kearny</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td>2021 governor Murphy 69.9% / Ciattarelli 29.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2020 president Biden 72.0% / Trump 27.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td>2021 Senate *Cunningham 75.3% / Schulman 24.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2021 Assembly *McKnight 38.3%, Sampson 36.3% / Javier 12.9%, Vila 12.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2019 Assembly *McKnight 43.3%, *Chiaravalloti 39.3% / Mushnick 8.8%, Palange 8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td>D Senate McKnight 75.1% / Griffin 24.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D Assembly *Sampson 42.6%, McCann Stamato 40.7% / Smith 16.7%</td>
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<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
<td>Senate None</td>
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<td>Assembly Mary Jane Desmond, Noemi Velazquez (Leadership Experience Values)</td>
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<td>DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)</td>
<td>27.5% White / 27.2% Black / 32.6% Hispanic / 13.3% Asian</td>
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ELEC825 is the labor management fund of Operating Engineers Local 825.
LAST YEAR'S REDISTRICTING

process resulted in a lot of different winners and losers across the state. There was arguably no bigger winner, though, than Assemblyman Raj Mukherji (D-Jersey City).

Mukherji, a 39-year-old Marine Corps veteran, attorney, onetime teen entrepreneur, former deputy Jersey City mayor, minor Broadway actor, and universally acknowledged rising star in New Jersey politics, had been constrained in his political options by simple matters of geography. First elected in 2013, Mukherji was firmly loyal to State Sen. Brian Stack (D-Union City), who was showing no signs of departing the Senate anytime soon.

Then the new legislative map came out, and lo and behold, Stack was shifted into a neighboring Hudson County district – suddenly clearing the way for Mukherji to make a leap up to the Senate that had previously seemed impossible.

A day after the map’s release, Mukherji announced a State Senate campaign in the newly created Jersey City and Hoboken-based 32nd district, and he locked down support from state and local Democratic leaders within hours. (Mukherji currently represents the 33rd district, but redistricting switched around the numbers; the new 32nd district is the successor to the old 33rd.)

And that was that. Mukherji, currently the chairman of the Assembly Judiciary Committee, will now get to make his mark on the Senate, where he’ll be one of a handful of millennial members and just the third Asian American senator in state history.

As a loyal Hudson County Democrat who is also a serious legislator and an avowed progressive, Mukherji fills an interesting niche – one that offers him political protection as Jersey City’s Downtown population continues to swell. There’s a reason off-the-line Democrats didn’t bother to run against him this year even as they fiercely challenged several county commissioners from the same gentrifying parts of Jersey City and Hoboken.

The conventional wisdom had been that if, one day, a political deal included a return of the Assembly Speaker post to Hudson County, the job would go to Mukherji. That same speculation might now apply to Mukherji for the job of Senate President.

The race for the 32nd district’s two Assembly seats took a little longer to sort out. The big question was whether Assemblywoman Annette Chaparro (D-Hoboken), Hoboken’s designated legislator, would get support from Hoboken Mayor Ravi Bhalla for another term. Mayors in Hudson County get massive sway over the county’s Assembly delegation, and Chaparro had originally been the choice of former Hoboken Mayor Dawn Zimmer, whom Bhalla succeeded in 2018.

Bhalla ultimately decided that he’d rather put John Allen, his former chief of staff, in the Assembly instead. Chaparro protested the decision but chose not to run for re-election, bowing to Hudson County’s political reality.

As for Mukherji’s empty Assembly seat, Jersey City Mayor Steve Fulop settled on Jessica Ramirez, a Jersey City attorney. Ramirez is a former member of the state Ethics Commission, but had never run for office before and was not widely known prior to her Assembly campaign.

Once the Mukherji-Allen-Ramirez ticket was assembled, things were a breeze from there. The trio got universal party support, didn’t attract any primary challengers, and is set to become one of the state’s youngest and most diverse legislative delegations (the new delegation in the 34th district will be slightly younger).

First, they have to overcome a GOP challenge from Senate candidate Ilyas Mohammed and Assembly candidate Robert Ramos. That won’t be too difficult in a district that backed Gov. Phil Murphy by more than 50 points two years ago.
**MUNICIPALITIES**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hudson</th>
<th>Hoboken, Jersey City (pt.)</th>
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**STATEWIDE RESULTS**

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<tr>
<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Murphy 76.5% / Ciattarelli 22.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 77.9% / Trump 20.7%</td>
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**PAST DISTRICT RESULTS**

(Under Old 33rd District Lines - New LD32 is largely Old LD33)

<table>
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<th>2021 Assembly</th>
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<tr>
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<td>*Stack 85.1% / Khan 14.9%</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Mukherji 42.4%, *Chaparro 42.3% / Lucyk 8.0%, Rohena 7.3%</td>
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**2023 PRIMARY RESULTS**

No primaries on either side

**THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES**

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<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
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**DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)**

40.2% White / 8.0% Black / 20.3% Hispanic / 31.7% Asian
Best Wishes
Senator Vin Gopal
State Sen. Brian Stack (D-Union City) was shifted into another senator’s district on the state’s new legislative map, the New Jersey political world began writing political obituaries – for his opponent.

Stack, who is simultaneously the mayor of Union City, represents a dying breed of local politics in New Jersey. He devotes himself to the mayor’s office in his 68,589-person hometown like few others, giving residents his cell phone number and personally working to solve their day-to-day problems – and in return, the city’s voters regularly turn out for him in massive numbers, even for uncontested elections.

His influence is so great that it’s started to spread to neighboring Hudson County towns, too. Stack was instrumental in getting former U.S. Rep. Albio Sires elected to the West New York mayor’s office earlier this year, and now he’s trying to do the same for former Gov. Jim McGreevey in Jersey City.

Last year, the legislative redistricting commission took a hammer to Hudson County’s map and put Stack and State Sen. Nicholas Sacco (D-North Bergen) in the same heavily Hispanic district. Mathematically, it was a tough draw for Stack, who only represented around 36% of the new 33rd district (which is really the successor to the old 32nd district), while Sacco represented 64% of it.

But Stack, who is 20 years younger than Sacco, quickly worked to box out his fellow senator, and it worked; after several days of behind-the-scenes pressure, Sacco announced that he would retire rather than run against Stack. That marks the end of a 30-year legislative career for Sacco, though he was just re-elected to another four-year term as mayor of North Bergen and remains dominant there.

It was as a teenager in the late 1970s that Stack caught the political bug as a volunteer for William Vincent Musto, a legendary New Jersey political player who served as mayor of Union City and as a state senator. When Musto went on trial for federal racketeering charges, Stack cut school and took a bus to Newark to stand in solidarity with the man who taught him retail politics. (Another one of Musto’s protégés, Bob Menendez, was less loyal.)

Later, Stack lost a school board race before becoming a Hudson County Freeholder and, in 2000, the mayor of Union City. He went to the Assembly in 2003, and wanted to move up to the Senate in 2007; when the Hudson County Democratic Organization backed Assemblyman/West New York Mayor Sal Vega that year instead, Stack ran off the line and won 77% of the vote in what is the most stunning machine loss in Hudson County history.

Now in his 15th year in the Senate, Stack has become the chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, arguably the single most powerful committee in the entire legislature. For that, Stack can thank Ed Durr, whose defeat of Steve Sweeney moved Nick Scutari out of the committee chairmanship and into the Senate Presidency.

Every single gubernatorial nominee, whether it be to the state Supreme Court or to an obscure unpaid state commission, has to get Stack’s approval before they can get a committee vote. This session, three Supreme Court nominees, as well as a new attorney general and a number of other state cabinet officials, have gone through Stack.

The new legislative map also gave Stack the ability to help craft a new 33rd district Assembly ticket – even though the district’s two assemblymembers had no desire to leave.

In one seat, which is typically reserved for West New York, Assemblywoman Angelica Jimenez (D-West New York) became a casualty of a reshuffling of local government. Sires, the former congressman, wanted to run for West New York mayor; the man who already held that job, Gabe Rodriguez, would instead be given party support to run for Assembly.

That left Jimenez, a six-term assemblywoman and the chair of the Assembly Human Services Committee, up a creek without a paddle. Jimenez tried to keep her political career going by running for West New York town commissioner on Commissioner Cosimo Cirillo’s slate, but she and her running mates lost to Sires’s ticket.

The other seat is currently held by Assemblyman Pedro Mejia (D-Secaucus), who was plucked from total obscurity in 2018 to replace former Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto (D-Secaucus).

Mejia made sense as a successor to Prieto, a fellow Latino from Secaucus. Now, with Sacco departing the Senate, Hudson Democrats determined that the seat should go to North Bergen instead. Sacco chose one of his own town commissioners, Julio Marenco, for the job.
Marenco will be interesting to watch. He’s loyal to Sacco, but he’s more conservative than most Democrats; this year he sought and received an endorsement from a conservative parental rights group and appeared at an event featuring independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. In a perfect storm where Democrats and Republicans each capture 40 Assembly seats, Marenco could become hugely important – maybe like David Friedland was 52 years ago.

As is typical in Hudson County legislative races, once party leadership decided on a ticket, it was done. Not only did Stack, Rodriguez, and Marenco dodge a primary challenge, they won’t even face any Republicans in the general election. Their only opponents are two candidates from the Socialist Workers Party, one of whom, Joanne Kuniansky, got 0.2% of the vote in the 2021 gubernatorial election.

But opponents or no, it doesn’t matter to Brian Stack. He’ll get his thousands of devoted Union City voters out to the polls anyways.

LEFT TO RIGHT: BRIAN STACK, JULIO MARENCO, GABE RODRIGUEZ
Municipalities: Guttenberg, North Bergen, Secaucus, Union City, Weehawken, West New York

Statewide Results

- 2021 governor: Murphy 74.8% / Ciattarelli 24.6%
- 2020 president: Biden 68.1% / Trump 31.1%

Past District Results (under old 32nd district lines – new LD33 is largely old LD32)

- 2021 Senate: *Sacco 71.2% / Barbadillo 28.8%
- 2021 Assembly: *Jimenez 35.5%, *Mejia 34.7% / Rodriguez 15.0%, Claudio 14.8%
- 2019 Assembly: *Jimenez 40.5%, *Mejia 39.0% / Carletta 10.3%, Curreli 10.2%

2023 Primary Results

No primaries on either side

Third-Party Candidates

- Senate: Joanne Kuniansky (Socialist Workers)
- Assembly: Lea Sherman (Socialist Workers)

Demographics (as of 2020 Census)

18.4% White / 6.3% Black / 67.6% Hispanic / 10.0% Asian

Redistricting Changes (compared to old LD-32)

2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-33

- Murphy: 74.8%
- Ciattarelli: 24.6%
The final piece of the great Essex County shuffle of 2023 is the 34th district, where a variety of cascading decisions produced an all-new legislative ticket of potential rising stars.

The newly drawn district is a plurality-Black seat north of Newark that was cobbled together from several existing districts. Importantly, it was drawn without a state senator, with incumbent State Sen. Nia Gill’s hometown of Montclair put into the neighboring 27th district instead.

That left the door wide open for Assemblywoman Britnee Timberlake (D-East Orange), the chair of the Assembly Commerce and Economic Growth Committee and possibly the single most progressive member of the entire legislature. A former Essex County Freeholder, Timberlake was elected in 2017 to succeed the late Lieutenant Gov. Sheila Oliver, with whom Timberlake was close.

Timberlake is also a staunch ally and protege of Essex Democratic chair LeRoy Jones, who led the Democratic side of the redistricting commission that redrew the maps in the first place. Jones’s carefully drawn Essex map has helped him dramatically grow his stature in the legislature; between Timberlake, State Sen. Renee Burgess (D-Irvington), and soon-to-be State Sen. John McKeon (D-West Orange), Jones will soon go from zero close allies in the State Senate to three.

The policy-oriented Timberlake is marked as a rising star and will at the very least be mentioned prominently for higher office down the road, maybe as early as 2025 when the next Democratic candidate for governor is shopping for a running mate. She’s likely to get the chair of a significant committee within her first few years in office.

One of Timberlake’s running mates was set to be Assemblyman Ralph Caputo (D-Nutley), a true veteran of the legislature. Caputo was first elected to the legislature as a Republican in 1967, before the modern 40-district system was even introduced, but he lost renomination four years later. After decades in the political wilderness – and several unsuccessful comeback bids – Caputo was elected to the Essex County Board of Freeholders in 2002 as a Democrat, and he won a seat in the Assembly in 2007.

Caputo was initially intent on running for another term this year, even though he was moved out of his old 28th district and into the 34th (Assemblyman Tom Giblin, in turn, was moved from the 34th to the 27th). But in March, he was instead nominated for a seat on the Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield board of directors; the Senate confirmed him just a few weeks later.

In the short term, Caputo was replaced by Assemblywoman Jackie Yustein (D-Glen Ridge), a party stalwart who was sworn in to represent the 28th district in May and will serve through January 2024. Long-term, however, Caputo’s exit gave Essex Democrats the chance to craft an entirely new 34th district ticket.

The new Assembly candidates they ultimately settled on are Bloomfield Mayor Michael Venezia and Carmen Morales, a Belleville resident and the principal of Newark Tech High School. Timberlake is 37, Venezia is 41, and Morales is 45; together, they’re set to make up the youngest legislative delegation in the state.

There is a full Republican slate running against them: Joseph Belnome for Senate, Clenard Childress and James McGuire for Assembly. Belnome had to run a write-in primary campaign to get onto the ballot at all; Childress, meanwhile, is a perennial candidate who technically lost support from the Essex GOP and had to run in the primary off-the-line (but since he was unopposed, he won anyways).

Like nearly every part of Essex County, the towns in the 34th district are solidly blue, so the Democratic slate is assured of victory.
LEFT TO RIGHT: BRITNEE TIMBERLAKE, CARMEN MORALES, MICHAEL VENEZIA
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<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
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<td>Murphy 72.1% / Ciattarelli 27.3%</td>
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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 75.3% / Trump 23.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Giblin 41.9%, *Timberlake 41.0% / Rana 7.9%, DeVita 7.8% / Others 1.4%</td>
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<td>DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
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<td>AS OF 2020 CENSUS</td>
<td>24.4% White / 43.9% Black / 26.0% Hispanic / 6.9% Asian</td>
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It’s fall in New Jersey and that means you can count on two things.

The leaves change colors and Checkmate Strategies flips blue seats red.

**CHRISS RUSSELL** chris@checkmatewins.com  X@ChrisRussell_NJ
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35TH DISTRICT

SENATE: NELLIE POU (D-INC) VS. CHRISTOPHER FAUSTINO (R)

ASSEMBLY: SHAVONDA SUMTER (D-INC), BENJIE WIMBERLY (D-INC)

ALL IS PEACEFUL THIS YEAR IN THE Paterson-based 35th district, where three longtime Democratic incumbents are all set to be re-elected easily, two of them without any opponents at all.

But beneath the surface, there’s a lot of ambition percolating. Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly (D-Paterson) and Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter (D-North Haledon) are both itching for more prominence – the only question is when they’ll get their chance.

The ticket leader in the 35th district is State Sen. Nellie Pou (D-North Haledon), a boundary-breaker who has become a steady presence in the Senate. Pou first joined the Assembly in 1997 after winning a special election convention to succeed U.S. Rep. Bill Pascrell (D-Paterson), and moved up to the Senate in 2012. She was the first, and remains the only, Hispanic politician to ever represent the 35th district, which is now majority Hispanic.

In the Senate, Pou has risen to chair the Senate Commerce Committee; she also holds the number two spot on the powerful Senate Judiciary Committee, where she often serves as a liberal dissenter from the committee’s generally moderate consensus.

Both Sumter and Wimberly joined the 35th district ticket in the same year, 2011, when Pou ascended to the Senate and Assemblywoman Elease Evans (D-Paterson) chose to retire. Wimberly, a high school football coach, was a Paterson city councilman at the time; Sumter had never run for office before but had been heavily involved in the Paterson political scene.

Wimberly has used the 12 years since then to rise through the ranks of the Assembly, an effort which has culminated in his new role as Speaker Pro Tempore, officially the chamber’s third-in-command.

Sumter, on the other hand, has cemented herself as one of the legislature’s most aggressively progressive voices. That’s landed her on some prominent shortlists – she was vetted by Gov. Phil Murphy for lieutenant governor in both 2017 and 2023 – but her legislative influence is somewhat limited by her uneasy relationship with Assembly leadership, though she does chair the Assembly Community Development and Affairs Committee.

The next big opportunity for both assemblymembers could be coming soon. Pascrell, the Paterson mayor-turned congressman, is planning on seeking another term next year, but at 86, he’s likely nearing the end of his career. If and when Pascrell retires, Sumter and Wimberly would start as the immediate frontrunners to succeed him.

The 35th district Senate seat could also present an opportunity, should Pou decide to retire at some point. (In both cases, Sumter and Wimberly may not be the only interested contenders; Paterson Mayor Andre Sayegh, who easily won a second term last year, would likely be in the mix for higher office as well.)

Whatever the future holds for the 35th district’s ambitious Democrats, though, this year’s election won’t be a particularly important part of the story. Pou faces Republican Christopher Faustino, while Sumter and Wimberly don’t have any opponents whatsoever – although even if they did, there’s no chance they’d lose their deep-blue seats.
LEFT TO RIGHT: NELLIE POU, SHAVONDA SUMTER, BENJIE WIMBERLY

REDISTRICTING CHANGES
(LD-35 was unchanged in redistricting)

UNCHANGED
REMOVED FROM LD-35
ADDED TO LD-35

PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING: NONE

2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-35
MURPHY 67.0%
CIATTARELLI 32.1%
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<td>Haledon, North Haledon, Paterson, Prospect Park</td>
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<td>2021 governor</td>
<td>Murphy 67.0% / Ciattarelli 32.1%</td>
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<td>2020 president</td>
<td>Biden 70.0% / Trump 29.1%</td>
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<td>*Pou 68.6% / Pengitore 31.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021 Assembly</td>
<td>*Wimberly 34.6%, *Sumter 34.5% / Yamisha 15.6%, Majagah 15.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2019 Assembly</td>
<td>*Wimberly 43.5%, *Sumter 43.4% / Mamkej 13.1%</td>
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| DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS) | 23.1% White / 22.3% Black / 51.6% Hispanic / 5.8% Asian |

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The NCI Community Oncology Research Program (NCORP) brings cancer trials and care delivery studies to people in their communities. Now as an NCORP affiliate site, Capital Health can give patients of our Cancer Center access to clinical trials and treatment delivery studies from top institutions around the world, bringing the latest state-of-the-art treatments to patients right here in our communities. It’s the advanced care you deserve close to home.

CapitalHealthCancer.org

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LEADING CLINICAL TRIALS are closer than ever

Capital Health is now an NCORP affiliate site.
THEORETICALLY, IF REPUBLICANS were to win a majority in the legislature this year, the 36th district could be what would clinch it for them. Covering southern Bergen County and the city of Passaic, the district only voted for Gov. Phil Murphy by a little over 6 points in 2021, making it the mathematical 21st seat in a GOP Senate majority.

But few expect the district to be actually close this year.

That’s in part because, in a year of so-so recruiting for both parties, the 36th district represents an all-time whiff for the GOP. One Assembly candidate, electrician Joseph Viso, has a long history of drug charges, firearm misuse, financial difficulties, and – most pungently – spreading fecal matter on the doors of a children’s daycare center; even in New Jersey, that’s a deal-breaker. Viso’s background somehow slipped past Republican party leaders who are meant to be on the lookout for that sort of thing.

The other two Republican nominees, Senate candidate Chris Auriemma and Assembly candidate Craig Auriemma (they’re brothers), aren’t dumpster fires like Viso, but they’re also far from star recruits. Both Auriemmas ran for the 36th district in 2021, as did Viso, and all lost by big margins to the district’s Democratic incumbents even as the GOP did unexpectedly well in other legislative races across the state.

This year is unlikely to be different, especially since they’re facing the same trio of strong incumbents: State Sen. Paul Sarlo (D-Wood-Ridge), Assemblyman Gary Schaer (D-Passaic), and Assemblyman Clinton Calabrese (D-Cliffside Park).

Down in Trenton, Sarlo is something of a big deal, as the 13-year (and counting) chairman of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, which the aggressively moderate senator has elevated into a true fiefdom. And back at home, Sarlo remains the mayor of his hometown of Wood-Ridge, a position he’s held for more than two decades. He has also not rejected speculation that he’ll look at a run for governor in 2025.

Sarlo’s two running mates carry similar geographic strengths. Schaer hails from the city of Passaic, and more specifically Passaic’s Orthodox Jewish community, making him the only Orthodox member of the legislature. Like Sarlo, he’s a dual office-holder, having been a member (currently the president) of the Passaic City Council since 1995 and an assemblyman since 2006.

Schaer may be past the height of his legislative power – failing to support Craig Coughlin for Assembly Speaker in 2017 got him booted from his chairmanship of the Assembly Budget Committee – but he remains very influential in Passaic. And next year, he’ll have a shot at regaining the chairmanship of the Assembly Financial Institutions and Insurance Committee, a panel he chaired in the past.

As for Calabrese, he’s one of the youngest members of the legislature at 37, but his family has a long legacy in Cliffside Park.

When Assemblywoman Marlene Caride (D-Ridgefield) left in 2018 to lead the state’s Department of Banking and Insurance, the Calabrese name – shared by Clinton’s grandfather Gerald, a legendary former mayor who led the borough for 50 years, and Clinton’s father Gerald Jr., the current Democratic municipal chair – was enough to get Clinton, a former school board member, elected without opposition.

(One piece of balance that the district’s delegation is missing, though, is Latino representation; the district is 42% Hispanic but hasn’t had a Hispanic legislator since Caride departed in 2018. If Schaer or one of his ticketmates were to retire at some point, expect that to be a major point of discussion.)

Republicans, looking at their disaster of a ticket, have decided that the 36th district simply isn’t worth investing in and have left it alone. Democrats haven’t done the same. Sarlo, one of the best fundraisers in the state, has spent several hundred thousand dollars this year and still has more than a million left in his bank account.

That’s resulted in a situation in which a theoretically winnable district for Republicans has simply moved off the board. They’d need the stars to align to turn the 36th district into a real race; instead, they got sh*t on a daycare.
PAUL SARLO

CLINTON CALABRESE

GARY SCHAER
MUNICIPALITIES
- Passaic: Passaic City

STATEWIDE RESULTS
- 2021 governor: Murphy 52.9% / Ciattarelli 46.4%
- 2020 president: Biden 56.3% / Trump 42.6%

PAST DISTRICT RESULTS (UNDER OLD LINES)
- 2021 Senate: *Sarlo 56.9% / Auriemma 43.1%
- 2021 Assembly: *Schaer 28.4%，*Calabrese 27.8% / Viso 21.9%，Auriemma 21.9%
- 2019 Assembly: *Schaer 30.8%，*Calabrese 30.5% / Lowe 19.4%，Androwis 19.3%

2023 PRIMARY RESULTS
No primaries on either side

THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES
- Senate: None
- Assembly: None

DEMOGRAPHICS (AS OF 2020 CENSUS)
39.8% White / 6.8% Black / 42.3% Hispanic / 12.0% Asian

REDISTRICTING CHANGES
Partition shift due to redistricting: D+1.2

2021 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN LD-36
- Murphy 52.9%
- Ciattarelli 46.4%
WHILE MANY DISTRICTS ACROSS the state descended into drama this year – featuring incumbent-on-incumbent primaries, backroom maneuverings, and all manner of political tomfoolery – the 37th district has gotten to take a breather. They already did all of that last cycle.

For decades, the 37th district had been represented by Loretta Weinberg (D-Teaneck), a titan of Democratic politics who was elected to the Assembly in 1991, rose to become Bergen County's first female senator in 2005, came within a few percentage points of making history as New Jersey's first lieutenant governor in 2009, and spent a decade as Senate Majority Leader starting in 2012.

Then Weinberg announced that she would retire in 2021, and the bottled-up aspirations of her two longtime running mates, then-Assembly members Gordon Johnson (D-Englewood) and Valerie Vainieri (D-Englewood), burst out into the open. Both wanted a Senate seat that only one of them could have.

Ultimately, it was Johnson, who had always maintained a closer relationship with local Democrats, who emerged successful. (There were a number of twists along the way, including a pair of botched Assembly campaigns from Gordon’s initial running mates and a doomed off-the-line challenge from Vainieri Huttle.)

Johnson’s second pair of running mates, now-Assemblywomen Shama Haider (D-Tenafly) and Ellen Park (D-Englewood Cliffs), were also victorious, becoming two of the first three Asian American women ever elected to the legislature. The 37th district, covering hyper-diverse towns like Hackensack, Teaneck, and Fort Lee, elected one of the most diverse delegations in the state.

Assembly candidate Robert Bedoya, an apparent supporter of QAnon conspiracy theories, faced a petition challenge from his own Senate running mate, Dierdre Paul, and was briefly booted off the ballot before an administrative law judge reconsidered her initial ruling.

Paul and Assembly candidate Katherine Lebovics have steadfastly refused to associate with Bedoya even into the general election. Paul is the kind of candidate who could appeal to swing voters in a competitive district, but as an Englewood resident, she’s become a sort of victim to her own geographical choices.

It’s the second cycle in a row in which 37th district Republicans have had candidate issues; in 2021, GOP Assembly nominee Edward Durfee was the regional leader of the Oath Keepers, an anti-government militia group. When a district is as heavily Democratic as the 37th, it can be a challenge to find three good politicians willing to spend their time running an unwinnable race.

This year, the real issues happened on the Republican side of the aisle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MUNICIPALITIES</th>
<th>Bergen</th>
<th>Bogota, Englewood, Englewood Cliffs, Fort Lee, Hackensack, Leonia, Palisades Park, Ridgefield Park, Teaneck, Tenafly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STATEWIDE RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>2021 governor <strong>Murphy 68.1% / Ciattarelli 31.3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2020 president <strong>Biden 69.6% / Trump 29.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAST DISTRICT RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>2021 Senate <strong>Johnson 67.0% / Koontz 31.5% / Others 1.5%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(UNDER OLD LINES)</td>
<td></td>
<td>2021 Assembly <strong>Park 33.8%, Haider 33.0% / Durfee 16.3%, Patrick 16.0% / Others 0.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2019 Assembly *Johnson 35.9%, *Vainieri Huttle 35.7% / Hendricks 13.9%, Tessaro 13.7% / Others 0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2023 PRIMARY RESULTS</td>
<td></td>
<td>No primaries on either side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THIRD-PARTY CANDIDATES</td>
<td></td>
<td>Senate <strong>None</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assembly <strong>None</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEMOGRAPHICS</td>
<td></td>
<td>(as of 2020 Census) <strong>33.2% White / 16.4% Black / 27.0% Hispanic / 25.0% Asian</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**REDISTRICTING CHANGES**

- **UNCHANGED**
- **REMOVED FROM LD-37**
- **ADDED TO LD-37**

**PARTISAN SHIFT DUE TO REDISTRICTING:** D+2.8

**2021 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN LD-37**

- **MURPHY 68.1%**
- **CIATTARELLI 31.3%**
NO DISTRICT BETTER encapsulates Democrats’ issues this year than the 38th district. They’ve got a team of solid incumbents running for re-election. Republicans failed to entice their top recruits into the race. The basic math in a district that voted for Gov. Phil Murphy by five points clearly favors Democrats.

And yet, both sides agree the race is competitive. It would still be somewhat of a surprise if Democrats lose seats in the 38th district, but the GOP has successfully made it so that it wouldn’t be totally unthinkable.

The leader of the Democratic ticket is State Sen. Joe Lagana (D-Paramus), who at 44 has already had a fairly extensive political career. Lagana was elected to the Paramus Borough Council in 2011, moved up to the Assembly two years later, and won a special election convention for the Senate in 2018 after State Sen. Robert Gordon (D-Fair Lawn) resigned to take a seat on the state Board of Public Utilities.

Lagana’s fellow Assemblyman, Tim Eustace (D-Maywood), had wanted the Senate seat as well, and when he didn’t get party support he decided to resign from the legislature entirely and take a high-paying government job. Bergen Democrats were tasked with choosing both Lagana’s and Eustace’s replacements at once, with the winners being Fair Lawn Mayor Lisa Swain and former Bergenfield Councilman Chris Tully.

That trio has held steady in the five years since then. Swain chairs the Assembly Appropriations Committee, a wide-ranging body that reviews practically every important bill the Assembly passes; Tully leads the smaller Assembly Science, Innovation, and Technology Committee; and Lagana has a seat on the hugely powerful Senate Judiciary Committee.

In 2021, the three Democratic incumbents won by closer-than-expected margins in a race that neither party was watching particularly closely. That prompted Republicans, riding high off their many legislative wins that year, to begin talking up a serious 38th district campaign in 2023.

In Republicans’ dream scenario, Paramus Councilman Robert Kaiser would have launched a 38th district Senate campaign and instantly turned it into a top-tier race. Numerous other GOP local officeholders from across the district were also wooed for legislative campaigns.

Yet none of them made the leap. Instead, the Republican candidate for Senate is Micheline Attieh, a Paramus businesswoman who briefly served as a school board member decades ago. Her Assembly running mates are Glen Rock businessman Barry Wilkes and 2018 Assembly candidate Gail Horton.

All in all, it wasn’t the ticket the GOP was hoping for. There hasn’t been the fundraising boost Republicans were hoping for, either; the district’s Democrats have outraised their Republican counterparts by a margin of around 7 to 1, not to mention the extra millions that Democratic leadership PACs have dumped on top of that.

Democrats have used that fundraising advantage to promote their own work on kitchen-table issues and hammer their opponents on the airwaves, particularly on abortion. The ads should help them consolidate liberal-leaning voters – but they’re also a sign that Democrats are taking the race very seriously.

Wilkes in particular is seen as a potential threat, having run a strong campaign and raised more money than typical GOP candidates. Democrats are a little frightened that he could slip through and unseat one of the assemblymembers, more likely Tully.

It’s far from the first time Republicans have had aspirations of flipping the 38th district. For two decades, Bergen Republicans have been talking about how this year will be the year they break through in the light-blue suburbs of Bergen County, and they’ve certainly come close sometimes; in 2013, Eustace won re-election by just 56 votes in a race that wasn’t called for more than a month after Election Day.

But Republicans haven’t actually won any of the district’s seats since 2001, when Assemblywoman Rose Marie Heck (R-Hasbrouck Heights) narrowly secured her final term. Every time since then, no matter the strength of the ticket they run or the situation at the top of the ballot, they’ve come up short.

The question then has to be, if Republicans couldn’t manage to win in the past, what’s different about this year that would make it possible now? The 38th district has bluer district lines than before, a big Democratic money advantage, and a trio of untested Republican recruits. What if that formula leads to the toppling of Lagana, Swain, and Tully?

It’s possible that the answer is simply that 2023 ends up being a good Republican year, and a rising tide lifts all boats. Republicans are clearly on the offensive in New Jersey as a whole; whether that energy spreads to the 38th district remains to be seen.
ROW ONE LEFT TO RIGHT: JOE LAGANA, LISA SWAIN, CHRIS TULLY
ROW TWO LEFT TO RIGHT: MICHELINE ATTIEH, BARRY WILKES, GAIL HORTON
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Municipalities</strong></th>
<th>Bergen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bergenfield, Fair Lawn, Glen Rock, Hasbrouck Heights, Little Ferry, Lodi, Maywood, Moonachie, New Milford, Oradell, Paramus, River Edge, Rochelle Park, Saddle Brook, South Hackensack, Teterboro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Statewide Results</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021 governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020 president</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Past District Results (Under Old Lines)** |
|----------------|----------------|
| 2021 Senate | *Lagana 52.9% / Garcia 47.1% |
| 2021 Assembly | *Swain 26.5%, *Tully 25.9% / Mastrofilipo 23.9%, Taylor 23.7% |
| 2019 Assembly | *Swain 27.7%, *Tully 27.2% / DiPiazza 22.7%, Kazimir 22.4% |

| **2023 Primary Results** | No primaries on either side |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Third-Party Candidates</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Demographics (As of 2020 Census)** | 53.8% White / 6.1% Black / 22.2% Hispanic / 18.7% Asian |
LIKE OTHER SUBURBAN, Biden-won New Jersey legislative districts, the tony Bergen County-based 39th district may eventually reach a point where voters decide to ditch their GOP legislators. Like those other districts, though, it sure isn’t looking like that will happen this year.

Instead, this election is set to be a milestone for State Sen. Holly Schepisi (R-River Vale). Schepisi’s initial ascent to the Senate in 2021 was riven with chaos, but that’s long behind her, and now she’s set to add a key ally to her legislative ticket.

Then an assemblywoman, Schepisi began the 2021 cycle running against longtime State Sen. Gerald Cardinale (R-Demarest), who was in his 40th year in the Senate. Schepisi had begun to consolidate considerable support for her primary challenge – but the same day that the Passaic GOP voted to back Schepisi, the 86-year-old Cardinale died. That led to a hectic pair of special election conventions in which Schepisi was narrowly elected to the vacant Senate seat against her district-mate, Assemblyman Bob Auth (R-Old Tappan), but then failed to get her ally, Saddle River Councilman John Azzariti, elected to her own Assembly seat. Schepisi tried to oust Auth and brand-new Assemblywoman DeAnne DeFuccio (R-Upper Saddle River) in the Republican primary a few months later, but was unsuccessful.

The result was an unstable ticket of three Republicans who, earlier that same year, had been publicly aiming to defeat one another. It didn’t matter for the general election, though, and all three won easily.

Now running for her first full four-year term, Schepisi is already consolidating power in a major way thanks to the unexpected retirement of DeFuccio, who decided two years into her tenure that the legislature wasn’t for her.

A crowded field initially formed to succeed DeFuccio, including both of Schepisi’s 2021 running mates, Azzariti and Saddle River GOP chair Jon Kurpis, as well as former Freeholder Todd Caliguire and Bergen GOP deputy vice chair Ken Tyburczy. But Tyburczy and Kurpis quickly dropped out, and Azzariti easily defeated Caligure at the Bergen GOP convention before winning the Republican primary unopposed.

The resulting Schepisi-Auth-Azzariti ticket isn’t entirely what Schepisi would have wanted, but it certainly comes closer than her initial slate in 2021.

If they are able to beat Schepisi at some point, it would solve a major headache for Democratic governors, who have to get Schepisi’s approval for any Bergen County nominee thanks to senatorial courtesy. Schepisi flexed that political muscle to block Supreme Court nominee Rachel Wainer Apter for a year and a half, and while she eventually relented on that nomination, she’ll continue to represent a threat to any Bergen nominees going forward.

State Democrats have not been treating the seat like a top priority whatsoever; the three Democratic candidates have raised next to no money and haven’t gotten any help from outside groups.

Democrats previously made real efforts to flip the 39th district in both 2017 and 2019, coming up short both times. Since then, the district has been redrawn to be a bit more Democratic by shedding its western Passaic County towns, and it now would have voted for Joe Biden by six points in 2020.

But that likely won’t be enough to undo decades of downballot Republican DNA in wealthy suburban Bergen County. (In 2021, the district supported Jack Ciattarelli by seven points.) Schepisi has been able to connect with her district’s moderate voters, and Democrats have largely given up on trying to take her out for now.

The 39TH DISTRICT

SENATE: HOLLY SCHEPISI (R-INC) VS. JODI MURPHY (D)
ASSEMBLY: BOB AUTH (R-INC), JOHN AZZARITI (R) VS. DAMON ENGLESE (D), JOHN VITALE (D)

SENATE + ASSEMBLY RATING: LIKELY REPUBLICAN
HOLLY SCHEPISI

BOB AUTH

JOHN AZZARITI
### Municipalities

Bergen


### Statewide Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Ciattarelli 53.2%</td>
<td>Murphy 46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>Biden 52.6%</td>
<td>Trump 46.2%</td>
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### Past District Results (Under Old Lines)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Candidate 1</th>
<th>Candidate 2</th>
<th>Others</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Senate</td>
<td>*Schepisi 57.2%</td>
<td>*Dugan 42.3%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>*Auth 28.3%</td>
<td>*DeFuccio 27.9%</td>
<td>*Iannuzzi 22.3%, *Almeda 21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>*Schepisi 28.2%</td>
<td>*Auth 26.5%</td>
<td>*Birkner 22.9%, *Falotico 22.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2023 Primary Results

No primaries on either side

### Third-Party Candidates

- **Senate**: None
- **Assembly**: None

### Demographics (As of 2020 Census)

- 71.4% White
- 2.6% Black
- 10.0% Hispanic
- 15.4% Asian

### Redistricting Changes

- **MAHWAH**
  - Democratic Shift due to redistricting: D+0.8

### 2021 Gubernatorial Election in LD-39

- **CIATTARELLI**: 53.2%
- **MURPHY**: 46.2%
State Sen. Kristin Corrado (R-Totowa), a former Passaic County Clerk who joined the Senate in 2017 after Kevin O’Toole took the helm at the Port Authority, is among the highest-ranking Republicans in the legislature. With State Sen. Michael Doherty (R-Oxford)’s retirement last year, she claimed the top spot on the Senate Judiciary Committee, giving her an unparalleled perch to speak out on Democratic bills and nominees.

She also, like State Sens. Holly Schepisi (R-River Vale) in Bergen County and Jon Bramnick (R-Westfield) in Union County, serves as a key check on Democratic power in a deep blue county. Thanks to senatorial courtesy, any nominee from Passaic County or Northwest Essex has to go through Corrado first – something acting Secretary of Education Angelica Allen-McMillan knows all too well.

For most of her tenure, Corrado has curiously had two different former mayors of Wyckoff as her running mates, despite the fact that Wyckoff isn’t particularly big or politically influential.

One of them, Assemblyman Christopher DePhillips (R-Wyckoff), is all set for another term in the Assembly. DePhillips was elected in 2017 to succeed longtime Assemblyman David Russo (R-Ridgewood), and has since become one of Republicans’ go-to guys for tax policy.

The other, Assemblyman Kevin Rooney (R-Wyckoff), wasn’t so lucky. Rooney has served in the Assembly since 2016, but because the Bergen portion of the district was reduced in redistricting, party leaders decided that his seat should go to a candidate from Essex County instead.

Not just any Essex candidate: Essex GOP chair Al Barlas, who not coincidentally was the Republican leader of the redistricting commission that drew the seat in the first place. Barlas wanted Northwest Essex to have a dedicated voice in the legislature, and now it will get one: him. An immigrant from Pakistan, he’s set to become one of the legislature’s two Asian American Republicans.

Barlas is no stranger to Trenton, having worked for State Sen. Declan O’Scanlon (R-Little Silver) and as O’Toole’s longtime chief of staff. He’ll get to hit the ground running with less of a learning curve than other freshman lawmakers.

Democrats are running an all-woman slate against them: Hawthorne school board member Jen Ehrentraut for Senate, special education director Giovanna Irizarry and small business owner Jennifer Marrinan for Assembly.

Given how much the 40th district has trend leftwards since 2016, there could theoretically be a chance for Democrats to stage an upset. Redistricting shifted just enough towns that the district would have supported Joe Biden for president in 2020 (by a little over one percentage point) and Democrats for Congress last year.

But like many other suburban districts, the 40th district remains deeply Republican downballot, with Corrado winning the earlier version of the district in 2021 by 22 points. After some buzz earlier this summer, the Democratic ticket seems to have fizzled; most major unions are supporting their Republican opponents, including one particularly humiliating instance in which the Building and Construction Trades Council rescinded its initial endorsement of Irizarry and Marrinan and switched to the GOP ticket instead.

Democrats have wisely concluded that their money is better spent elsewhere this year, and Corrado, DePhillips, and Barlas should win handily.
### Municipalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bergen</th>
<th>Franklin Lakes, Ridgewood, Wyckoff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essex</td>
<td>Caldwell, Cedar Grove, Essex Fells, Fairfield, North Caldwell, Verona, West Caldwell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passaic</td>
<td>Hawthorne, Little Falls, Totowa, Wayne, Woodland Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Statewide Results

- **2021 governor**: Ciattarelli 55.8% / Murphy 43.7%
- **2020 president**: Biden 50.1% / Trump 48.7%

### Past District Results (Under Old Lines)

- **2021 Senate**: *Corrado 61.0% / Sedon 39.0%
- **2021 Assembly**: *Rooney 30.1%, *DePhillips 29.6% / McNamara 20.3%, Allard 20.0%
- **2019 Assembly**: *Rooney 28.4%, *DePhillips 27.6% / O’Brien 22.1%, Cordonnier 21.8%

### 2023 Primary Results

- No primaries on either side

### Third-Party Candidates

- **Senate**: None
- **Assembly**: None

### Demographics (As of 2020 Census)

- 73.2% White / 3.8% Black / 13.2% Hispanic / 9.4% Asian
ATLANTIC

(CIATTARELLI +11, BIDEN +7)
EXECUTIVE: Dennis Levinson (R-inc) vs. Joyce Pratt (D)
SHERIFF: Eric Scheffler (D-inc) vs. Joe “Tokyo” O’Donoghue (R)
COMMISSIONER AT-LARGE (2 SEATS):
John Risley (R-inc), June Byrnes (R) vs. Kim O’Brien (D), Habib Rehman (D)
COMMISSIONER, 3RD DISTRICT: Andrew Parker (R-inc) vs. Hector Tavarez (D)

ATLANTIC DEMOCRATS HAVE had a rough few cycles, losing a congressional seat (via Jeff Van Drew’s party switch), two Assembly seats, and the county clerk’s office in quick succession. This year, two of their three remaining county offices are up for election – and there’s a strong chance they lose both of those, too.

In the race for county executive, six-term Republican incumbent Dennis Levinson is set to easily win re-election and extend his streak as the longest-serving county executive in New Jersey history. His original Democratic opponent, Peggy Capone, tragically died a few months before Election Day after a long illness; he now faces replacement candidate Joyce Pratt.

The real race to watch this year, though, is the contest for sheriff, where Democratic incumbent Eric Scheffler faces a rematch against Egg Harbor Township Committeeman Joe “Tokyo” O’Donoghue. Scheffler beat O’Donoghue by nine points in 2020, but Democrats are thoroughly nervous about his chances this time around.

Democrats are also defending an open county commissioner seat, with incumbent Commissioner Caren Fitzpatrick (D-Linwood) departing to run for State Senate. Republican incumbent John Risley (R-Egg Harbor Township) and Linwood Councilwoman June Byrnes are clearly favored against the Democratic nominees, Kim O’Brien and Habib Rehman.

Finally, there’s an election in the 3rd commissioner district (Atlantic is one of two counties, the other being Essex, that has both at-large and district-based seats). Republican Commissioner Andrew Parker (R-Egg Harbor Township), who first won his seat in a 2021 rematch election after the county clerk’s office botched his 2020 race, faces former congressional candidate Hector Tavarez in a redrawn district that would have supported Jack Ciattarelli by 13 points in 2021.

The results will depend in part on how State Sen. Vince Polistina (R-Egg Harbor Township) does at the top of the ticket. Polistina and his running mates are considered likely to win – but if Atlantic Democrats do better than expected in the legislative race, that could trickle downballot.

BERGEN

(MURPHY +6, BIDEN +16)
COMMISSIONER AT-LARGE (2 SEATS):
Rafael Marte (D-inc), Joan Voss (D-inc) vs. Agninshalah Collins (R), Mary Jo-Ann Guinchard (R)

REPUBLICANS IN BERGEN COUNTY, New Jersey’s largest county, have control over dozens of the county’s 70 municipalities. But they haven’t been able to translate their strong bench of local officeholders into a serious bid for countywide office in years.

With two county commissioner seats up, this year looks like it will be no exception. Democratic incumbents Joan Voss (D-Fort Lee) and Rafael Marte (D-Bergenfield), who was chosen to fill a vacant seat earlier this year, should easily defeat Republican challengers Agninshalah Collins and Mary Jo-Ann Guinchard, who was once the mayor of Tuxedo Park, New York.
BURLINGTON

(MURPHY +6, BIDEN +20)
CLERK: Joanne Schwartz (D-inc) vs. Deborah Buzby-Cope (R)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS):
Tom Pullion (D-inc), Balvir Singh (D-inc) vs. Alfonso Gambone (R), Larry Vernamonti (R)

BURLINGTON COUNTY WAS one of two counties, the other being Somerset, where Republicans got absolutely slammed in the era of Donald Trump. When Trump took office in 2017, Burlington Republicans controlled every piece of county government; now, six years later, they control absolutely none of it.

They made a real effort last year to claw back some ground, but came up well short, and this year seems like it won’t be much different. Democratic County Clerk Joanne Schwartz faces Bass River Mayor Deborah Buzby-Cope, while Commissioners Tom Pullion (D-Edgewater Park) and Balvir Singh (D-Burlington) – whose wins in 2017 began the county’s Democratic streak – are up-against first-time Republican candidates Alfonso Gambone and Larry Vernamonti.

It’s certainly possible that, on a good night for Republicans, the three Democratic incumbents are held to relatively narrow wins. Actually flipping seats, though, appears to be out of reach for Burlington Republicans in the foreseeable future.

CAMDEN

(MURPHY +24, BIDEN +34)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS):
Louis Cappelli (D-inc), Jonathan Young (D-inc) vs. Jason Fanning (R), Norman Rebel (R)

CAMDEN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS Louis Cappelli (D-Haddon) and Jonathan Young (D-Berlin) vanquished two Democratic opponents in the primary election, and they’ll do so again against their Republican opponents in the general election. It’s just the Camden Democratic way.

CAPE MAY

(CIATTARELLI +26, TRUMP +16)
SHERIFF: Robert Nolan (R-inc) unopposed
SURROGATE: Marie Hayes (R-inc) vs. Beverly McCall (D)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): Will Morey (R-inc), Melanie Collette (R) vs. Patricia O’Connor (D)

CAPE MAY IS ELECTING two new countywide officials this year, although only one of them is a truly new face.

Just a month after getting re-elected last year, Cape May County Surrogate Dean Marcolongo was confirmed as a judge of the Superior Court; County Commissioner Marie Hayes (R-Ocean City) was quickly chosen to replace him and is now running for a full term. Retiring Commissioner Jeff Pierson (R-Upper), meanwhile, is set to be succeeded by local party official Melanie Collette, who will join the small cohort of Black Republicans in New Jersey politics.

The general election is essentially an afterthought for the new Republicans slate of Hayes, Collette, Commissioner Will Morey (R-Wildwood Crest), and Sheriff Robert Nolan. Only two Democrats are even running across the four seats.
CUMBERLAND

(CIATTARELLI +12, BIDEN +6)
SHERIFF: Robert Axtino (D-inc) vs. Michael Donato (R)
SURROGATE: Nick Acevedo (D) vs. Rudolph Luisi (R)
COMMISSIONER (3 SEATS): John Capizola (D-inc), Joeigh Perella (D), La Rae Smith (D) vs. Arthur Marchand (R), James Sauro (R), Sandra Taylor (R)

LAST YEAR, STATE Sen. Michael Testa (R-Vineland), the chairman of the Cumberland GOP, notched a big win when his candidates flipped the board of county commissioners from Democratic control. This year, Testa has the chance to enact a near-total wipeout of Democrats in his home county.

No fewer than five Democratic-held seats are up this year, and three of them have no incumbent running. Sheriff Robert Axtino is aiming for a sixth term; Nick Acevedo is the Democratic nominee for surrogate after incumbent Douglas Rainear chose to step down; and Commissioner John Capizola (D-Vineland), Joeigh Perella, and La Rae Smith are running for three commissioner seats. (Capizola isn’t even much of an incumbent, having been appointed to the board earlier this year.)

As for the Republicans: Michael Donato, who lost the 2020 sheriff race to Axtino, is running again; Rudolph Luisi is trying to flip the surrogate’s office; and former Freeholder James Sauro (R-Vineland), Sandra Taylor, and Arthur Marchand Jr. are the slate for county commissioner. Marchand’s father is former Freeholder Arthur Marchand, once a well-known figure in Cumberland politics.

It’s an all-out battle that, if history is any indication, Democrats are likely to lose. Their strength in the county relies on big margins out of deep-blue Bridgeton and light-blue Vineland – but with low minority turnout in an off-year, and Testa working to fully activate Republican voters, the odds are daunting for a Democratic victory.

That’s what happened in 2021 and 2022, when Democrats lost three commissioner seats and their majority. This time may be even tougher, since there’s no statewide race at the top of the ticket, and the leader of the GOP slate in most of the county is none other than Testa himself.

If Republicans do manage to sweep every office this year, that will leave County Clerk Celeste Riley as the only Democrat left standing. Luckily for her, she’s up next year, when the presidential race may make countywide victories for Cumberland Democrats more feasible.

ESSEX

(MURPHY +49, BIDEN +55)
SURROGATE: Alturrick Kenney (D-inc) vs. Peter Russo (R)
COMMISSIONER AT-LARGE (4 SEATS): Brendan Gill (D-inc), Romaine Graham (D-inc), Patricia Sebold (D-inc), Wayne Richardson (D) vs. Alexandra Campisi (R), Joseph Cifelli (R), Michael Pocelinko (R), Aristotle Popolizio (R)
COMMISSIONER, 1ST DISTRICT: Robert Mercado (D-inc) unopposed
COMMISSIONER, 2ND DISTRICT: A’Dorian Murray-Thomas (D) vs. Khalil Kettles (I)
COMMISSIONER, 3RD DISTRICT: Tyshammie Cooper (D-inc) unopposed
COMMISSIONER, 4TH DISTRICT: Leonard Luciano (D-inc) vs. Adam Kraemer (R)
COMMISSIONER, 5TH DISTRICT: Carlos Pomares (D-inc) vs. Kristen Bloschak (R)

This year is theoretically the big year in Essex County politics, when all nine seats on the county commission are up for election. But county-level races in the heavily Democratic county have been uncompetitive for years, and all nine Democratic commissioner candidates – as well as Surrogate Alturrick Kenney – will win easily. (Three of them don’t even have Republican opponents.)

There are some slight changes going on under the hood. At-large Commissioner Rufus Johnson (D-Newark) is retiring, and 2nd district Commissioner Wayne Richardson (D-Newark) is taking his spot; 28-year-old Newark school board member A’Dorian Murray-Thomas, in turn, will take Richardson’s 2nd district seat.

It’s worth noting that Republican Adam Kraemer, who faces County Commissioner Lenny Luciano (D-West Caldwell) in the 4th district, is making his 13th bid for public office. He’ll lose again, but in a world where sacrificial lambs are heroes of minority parties, Kraemer probably deserves a plaque this year.
The Eastern Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters is part of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America and is made up of over 43,000 highly skilled men and women from 25 Local Unions living and working in Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia.
THE MARQUEE COUNTY race of 2023 is happening in the same place as the marquee race of 2022: Gloucester County, the perennially competitive South Jersey county with some of the most bombastic politics of anywhere in the state.

Back in 2021, amid a broadly horrendous year for South Jersey Democrats, Gloucester Republicans unexpectedly flipped two commissioner seats as well as the sheriff’s office. They tried to replicate their success in 2022, but Democrats toughed it out and held onto two more commissioner seats – and thus their majority.

This year, the majority is on the line once again, with three more Democratic-held commissioner seats up as well as the county surrogate’s office. Like last year, both sides are very much treating it as a top race that could go either way.

On the Democratic side, two incumbents, Commissioner Jim Jefferson (D-Woodbury) and Surrogate Joe Chila, are running for re-election. The other two commissioner spots are filled by Washington Township Mayor Joann Gattinelli and Pitman Councilman Matt Weng.

Republicans are running former Woolwich Mayor Sam Maccarone for surrogate and former Harrison Committeeman Adam Wingate, Franklin Committeewoman Heather Flaim, and East Greenwich Committeeman James Philbin for commissioner.

Notably, all four Republican nominees were not the original choices of GOP leadership; they were instead a victorious off-the-line slate affiliated with State Senate candidates Chris Del Borrello and Beth Sawyer.

Officially, the Gloucester GOP has made nice with the nominees and is pushing for them to win, but there’s still some bad blood behind the scenes. If Republicans win a majority, it’s possible that two GOP commissioners elected in 2021 could forge an alliance with the two remaining Democrats instead of their fellow Republicans. That’s how venomous things are these days.

Ultimately, the countywide races will be downstream of hard-fought legislative races in the 3rd and 4th districts, which together cover most of Gloucester County. Democrats are making a major financial investment and a massive vote-by-mail push in those two races, which could lift their downballot candidates over the top as well.
HUDSON

(MURPHY +48, BIDEN +46)

EXECUTIVE: Craig Guy (D) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 1ST DISTRICT: Kenneth Kopacz (D-inc) vs. Leandro Lachica (R)

COMMISSIONER, 2ND DISTRICT: William O’Dea (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 3RD DISTRICT: Jerry Walker (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 4TH DISTRICT: Yraida Aponte-Lipski (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 5TH DISTRICT: Anthony Romano (D-inc) vs. Joseph Branco (R)

COMMISSIONER, 6TH DISTRICT: Fanny Cedeño (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 7TH DISTRICT: Caridad Rodriguez (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 8TH DISTRICT: Robert Baselice (D-inc) unopposed

COMMISSIONER, 9TH DISTRICT: Albert Cifelli (D-inc) unopposed

HUDSON COUNTY IS PASSING the torch this year, with six-term County Executive Tom DeGise stepping down and his longtime chief of staff Craig Guy rising in his stead. Guy defeated an off-the-line opponent with ease in June and faces no opponents whatsoever in the general election.

Things weren’t quite so smooth for two of Guy’s running mates. Commissioners Yraida Aponte Lipski (D-Jersey City) and Anthony Romano (D-Hoboken), whose districts include parts of gentrifying downtown Jersey City, only narrowly fended off a pair of progressive challengers. But both commissioners still won, and now the full nine-member commissioner slate – all incumbents, though Commissioner Robert Baselice (D-North Bergen) was just appointed earlier this year – will win the general election overwhelmingly. Only two of them, Romano and Commissioner Kenneth Kopacz (D-Bayone), even have Republican opponents.

HUNTERDON

(CIATTARELLI +19, TRUMP +4)

SURROGATE: Heidi Rohrbach (R) vs. Wendy Beyer (D)

COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Shaun Van Doren (R-inc) vs. Daniel Connor (D)

HUNTERDON COUNTY SURROGATE

Susan Hoffman is retiring, with Heidi Rohrbach, the wife of former U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance (R-Clinton), taking her spot. That’s about the only interesting thing happening this year in Hunterdon’s county-level elections; Rohrbach and Commissioner Shaun Van Doren (R-Tewksbury) don’t have to worry about Democratic challengers Wendy Beyer and Daniel Connor in the Republican-leaning county.
MERCER

(MURPHY +31, BIDEN +40)
EXECUTIVE: Dan Benson (D) vs. Lisa Richford (R)
SHERIFF: Jack Kemler (D-inc) vs. Bucky Boccanfuso (R)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): John Cimino (D-inc), Lucylle Walter (D-inc) vs. Joseph Stillwell (R), Neicy Turner (R)

MUCH LIKE IN HUDSON COUNTY, Mercer County is witnessing a major changing of the guard this year, with Assemblyman Dan Benson (D-Hamilton) taking charge of the county executive’s office. Five-term incumbent Brian Hughes initially ran for re-election, but dropped out of the race after Benson annihilated him at the Mercer County Democratic convention. Benson now faces Mercer GOP chair Lisa Richford, who presents little threat in the deep-blue county. Sheriff Jack Kemler and Commissioners John Cimino (D-Hamilton) and Lucylle Walter (D-Ewing) are also up this year.

MIDDLESEX

(MURPHY +12, BIDEN +22)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): Leslie Koppel (D-inc), Charles Tomaro (D-inc) vs. Gary Hagopian (R), Peter Pisar (R)

TWO COMMISSIONER SEATS ARE the only county offices up this year in huge Middlesex County. Democratic incumbents Leslie Koppel (D-Monroe) and Charles Tomaro (D-Edison) easily overcame an off-the-line primary challenge in June, and will now easily defeat Republicans Gary Hagopian and Peter Pisar.

MONMOUTH

(CIATTARELLI +19, TRUMP +3)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): Ross Licitra (R-inc), Erik Anderson (R) vs. Alison De Noia (D), Arthur Schlossbach (D)

IT’S THE END OF A CAREER for 87-year-old Monmouth County Commissioner Lillian Burry (R-Colts Neck), who is retiring this year after local GOP leaders softly pushed her aside. The Republican slate for two commissioner seats instead consists of incumbent Commissioner Ross Licitra (R-Marlboro) and Shrewsbury Borough Mayor Erik Anderson; they should win without any trouble against Democrats Alison De Noia and Arthur Schlossbach, both of whom started out as State Assembly candidates before dropping down to the commissioner race instead.
**MORRIS**

(CIATTARELLI +11, BIDEN +4)

CLERK: Ann Grossi (R-inc) vs. Carrie O’Brien (D)

COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Tayfun Selen (R-inc) vs. Jonathan Sackett (D)

Next year, with a presidential race on the ballot (and, presumably, Donald Trump leading the GOP ticket), Democrats are prepared to make a serious bid for county office in Morris County. The two seats up in this year’s off-year election, though, aren’t seen as competitive, and would likely only be close if Democrats have an unexpectedly great night.

In the race for one commissioner seat, Commissioner Tayfun Selen (R-Chatham) faces Rockaway Township Councilman Jonathan Sackett, who came within a few hundred votes of flipping his town’s mayoral office last year. County Clerk Ann Grossi, meanwhile, will go up against Democrat Carrie O’Brien.

Selen had to get through a competitive primary before he reached the general election in the first place. Paul DeGroot, who defeated Selen in the 2022 GOP primary for the 11th congressional district, ran off-the-line against Selen once again this year, but lost 54%-46%.

**OCEAN**

(CIATTARELLI +36, TRUMP +29)

SURROGATE: Jeffrey Moran (R-inc) vs. Charles Bauer (D)

COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Frank Sadeghi (R) vs. Roxanne Barnes (D)

As Ocean GOP Chairman George Gilmore works to re-consolidate his power, he’ll get a big boost this year on the Board of County Commissioners. Frank Sadeghi, a Toms River businessman and close Gilmore ally, easily won the GOP nomination for the seat held by retiring Commissioner Joseph Vicari (R-Toms River).

Ocean County is the most Republican county in the entire state, so Sadeghi and longtime Surrogate Jeffrey Moran are not under any threat of losing the general election.

**PASSAIC**

(MURPHY +4, BIDEN +17)

CLERK: Danielle Ireland-Imhof (D-inc) vs. Rosemary Pino (R)

COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS): Orlando Cruz (D-inc), Bruce James (D-inc) vs. Kelley Amico (R), Andie Pegel (R)

In presidential years, Passaic County is solidly Democratic, with Hispanic voters in Paterson and the city of Passaic swamping GOP voters from the suburbs. In off-years, though, things can get a little dicier for Passaic Democrats, as demonstrated in 2021 when they unexpectedly lost a county commissioner seat and came close to losing two more.

This year – a true off-off-year with only the state legislature atop the ballot – that could be a risk again.

Democrats are running a ticket of three incumbents: County Clerk Danielle Ireland-Imhof alongside Commissioners Bruce James (D-Clifton) and Orlando Cruz (D-Paterson), who was appointed to the board earlier this year.

On the GOP side, Republicans are running Clifton Councilwoman Rosemary Pino for county clerk, an office they held as recently as 2018; former West Milford Committeewoman Andie Pegel and GOP state committeewoman Kelley Amico make up the Republican slate for commissioner.

It’s a solid ticket on both sides. The real question is, what will voter turnout look like in a year with little to draw infrequent voters to the polls? If Passaic Democrats can’t overcome that core problem, they might be looking at another uncomfortably close race.
SALEM

(CIATTARELLI +29, TRUMP +13)
COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Ed Ramsay (R-inc) vs. Nelson Carney (D)

SALEM COUNTY DEMOCRATS – who controlled county government as recently as 2018 – lost their final remaining commissioner seat last year, and it sure doesn’t look like they’re in the running to get it back now. First-term Commissioner Ed Ramsay (R-Pittsgrove) is clearly favored in his matchup against Democrat Nelson Carney, who’s on his third consecutive bid for county commissioner.

SOMERSET

(MURPHY +4, BIDEN +21)
COMMISSIONER (2 SEATS):
Paul Drake (D-inc), Doug Singletery (D-inc) vs. Daniel Gallic (R), Donald Lemma (R)

SOMERSET HAS UNDERGONE the most dramatic political about-face in recent years of any county in New Jersey. From 1989 until 2018, the county did not elect a single Democrat to what was then the freeholder board – and then a switch flipped, and the county hasn’t supported a Republican for countywide office ever since. The two men who helped complete that transition, Commissioners Paul Drake (D-Hillsborough) and Doug Singletery (D-North Plainfield), are now running for a second term after their 2020 victories cemented an all-Democratic board of commissioners. Their GOP opponents are Peapack and Gladstone Councilman Don Lemma and Warren Township Republican municipal chair Dan Gallic.

Republicans came close to flipping a commissioner seat in the 2021 red wave, and tried once again in 2022. They haven’t given up hope that this year’s low-turnout election could be their chance to break their losing streak, but it’s a tough climb.

SUSSEX

(CIATTARELLI +35, TRUMP +20)
SURROGATE: Gary Chiusano (R-inc) unopposed
COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Jack DeGroot (R) vs. Damaris Lira (D)

SUSSEX COUNTY HOSTED a rather fascinating county commissioner primary this year, in which 24-year-old political novice Jack DeGroot unseated incumbent Commissioner Herb Yardley (R-Stillwater) by a convincing margin. In a county with no organizational line, DeGroot outworked the field and was able to capitalize on Yardley’s connections to controversial local consultant Bill Winkler.

The general election in the deep-red county will feature no such intrigue. DeGroot should overwhelmingly defeat Democratic nominee Damaris Lira, while County Surrogate Gary Chiusano is unopposed for another term.
UNION

(MURPHY +24, BIDEN +36)
SHERIFF: Peter Corvelli (D-inc) vs. Gerardo Napolitano (R)
COMMISSIONER (3 SEATS): Joseph Bodek (D-inc), Lourdes Leon (D-inc), Michele Delisfort (D)
vs. Cathy Jakositz (R), Brian Johdos (R), Carlos Santos (R)

UNION COUNTY DEMOCRATS face minimal opposition this year as they seek to install one new county commissioner and elect another appointed one to a full term. Commissioner Lourdes Leon (D-Elizabeth) is running alongside new Commissioner Joseph Bodek (D-Linden), chosen in December 2022 to replace now-Surrogate Christopher Hudak, and Union Township Committeewoman Michele Delisfort, the Democratic choice to succeed retiring Commissioner Angela Garretson (D-Hillside).

In June, the trio of commissioner nominees beat a set of primary challengers aligned with former Assemblyman Jamel Holley’s Roselle mayoral campaign. They’re now set to handily win the general election, as is Democratic Sheriff Peter Corvelli.

WARREN

(CIATTARELLI +30, TRUMP +16)
COMMISSIONER (1 SEAT): Lori Ciesla (R-inc) vs. Elizabeth Gittens (D)

THERE’S NOTHING TO SEE this year in Warren County. Commissioner Lori Ciesla (R-Lopatcong) is heavily favored to win another term against Elizabeth Gittins.