

Party Registrations and Primary Results Show Democratic Momentum in New Jersey

For immediate release: with chart

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Galloway, N.J. - A surge in Democratic Party registration drove huge vote totals in the July 7 primary elections and has made Democrats the largest voting bloc in New Jersey, eclipsing unaffiliated voters, according to an analysis by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

More Democratic than Republican votes were cast in every congressional district primary in the state, including voting for the 4th District seat long held by veteran Republican Rep. Chris Smith, according to official state election results.

Total Democratic votes for president were higher than in 2016, when Bernie Sanders still competed for convention delegates against Hillary Clinton. Republican President Donald Trump received fewer votes this year than in 2016 (404,000 to 448,000).

“Primary participation overall was high, but we saw consistent increases in Democratic numbers over 2018, even when incumbents were unopposed. And 2018 was considered a Democratic year,” said John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center. “Voting in the recent congressional races was also higher than in 2016, another presidential primary year.”

Results in 2020 New Jersey congressional primaries included the following.

- In the 3rd Congressional District, Democratic incumbent Andy Kim ran unopposed. But the 79,000 votes he received was 20,000 more than the total cast in the hotly contested Republican primary between David Richter and Kate Gibbs.
- In the 1st District, incumbent Democrat Donald Norcross ran unopposed, but the 94,000 votes he received was more than double the total Democratic votes cast in 2018, when Norcross faced two primary opponents.
- In North Jersey’s 11th District, both parties fielded primary contests with five candidates in each in 2018. This year, Democratic incumbent Mike Sherrill and Republican Rosemary Becchi both ran unopposed. The Republican vote increased from 41,000 in 2018 to 47,000 this year. On the Democratic side, the total went from 45,600 in a crowded 2018 primary to 80,000 for Sherrill with no competition.
- In the 7th District, with a seat formerly held by Republican Leonard Lance, GOP state Sen. Tom Kean and two other Republicans received a combined 39,000 votes. Democratic incumbent Tom Malinowski, with no primary challenge, received 80,000 votes.

According to New Jersey Division of Elections records, overall voter registration in New Jersey on Aug. 1 was 6.2 million people. That was nearly 365,000 more than on Aug. 1, 2018, a 6% increase. The total represents 600,000 more registered voters than four years ago, an 11%

increase. New Jersey’s population has increased by only 1% during that time, Census Bureau records show.

The new registrations, combined with thousands of unaffiliated or independent voters declaring for a party, has largely benefited the state’s Democrats. Since Aug.1, 2019, the number of independents has declined by 64,000 – including a drop of 40,000 in July for the primaries. Both major parties and third parties have seen increased registrations, but Democrats have outpaced Republicans by a 2-to-1 margin.

In the past year, Democratic Party registration went up by 152,600 voters, while the Republicans gained 68,000 voters. Democrats have a voter registration advantage over the GOP of 1.05 million voters.

“There is a lot of interest in this year’s election on all sides, and things can change in the next 11 weeks. But right now, the momentum favors the Democrats,” Froomjian said.

In May, independents were still the largest voting bloc in the state, but barely. By Aug. 1, Democrats represented 39% of the electorate compared to 37% independents and 22% Republicans.

The trend, first reported by New Jersey Globe, is evident at the congressional district level. In the 2nd District in South Jersey, where Democrat Amy Kennedy is challenging Democrat-turned-Republican Rep. Jeff Van Drew, independents still make up the largest bloc at 37% of the electorate. But their numbers declined by 11,000 in the past year. Democrats, with 33% of all voters, picked up more independents and new registrants than did Republicans (29% of electorate) and increased their registration advantage over the GOP to 20,600 voters.

In District 3, the same trend has played out, with Democrats increasing their advantage to 16,000 voters. Both districts are traditionally considered GOP-leaning, with Republicans voting more reliably than Democrats. Both South Jersey districts are expected to be competitive.

“For decades, independent voters comprised the biggest piece of the voter pie in New Jersey. One month ago, that tradition was upended,” Froomjian said. “In the era of Donald Trump, more and more voters are declaring their partisan feelings, one way or the other.”

New Jersey	Independ	Dems	Reps	Other	Total	Dem to Rep advantage
Aug 2020	2,299,474	2,443,640	1,390,854	78,648	6,212,616	1,052,786
Aug 2019	2,363,874	2,291,008	1,322,586	64,979	6,042,447	968,422
Change 2019-20	-64,400	152,632	68,268	13,669	170,169	84,364
% change 2019-20	-3%	7%	5%	21%	3%	9%

Additional information on district voter breakdown is on the [Hughes Center website](#)

About the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy (www.stockton.edu/hughescenter) at Stockton University serves as a catalyst for research, analysis and innovative policy solutions on the economic, social and cultural issues facing New Jersey, and promotes the civic life of New Jersey through engagement, education and research. The center is named for the late William J. Hughes,

whose distinguished career includes service in the U.S. House of Representatives, Ambassador to Panama and as a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Stockton. The Hughes Center can be found on [YouTube](#), and can be followed on Facebook [@StocktonHughesCenter](#), Twitter [@hughescenter](#) and Instagram [@ stockton_hughes_center](#).

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