

# The Star-Ledger

## Turnout for N.J. governor's race may be one of the lowest in a century

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A historically low share of New Jerseyans appear to have cast ballots in the neck-and-neck governor's race between Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy and Republican challenger Jack Ciattarelli, following decades of decreasing turnout.

As of Wednesday afternoon, fewer than 37% of eligible voters had been tallied, according to The Associated Press' ongoing count. That percentage may increase since about 2% of precincts have yet to be included and an unknown number of mail-in ballots may trickle in over the coming days.

"In the urban core areas, turnout dropped, and dropped pretty dramatically," said Dan Cassino, a political science professor and pollster at Fairleigh Dickinson University. "Republicans were energized, they turned out to vote. Democrats weren't that energized."

Many of the ballots still being counted, however, come from Democratic-leaning areas, which could boost Murphy's totals.

Participation in the state's gubernatorial elections has generally declined over the last century. When Murphy was first elected four years ago, only 39% of eligible voters weighed in, then an all-time low.

At the same time, the number of voters has increased.

More than 6.5 million people had registered as of Monday, an increase of more than 872,000 compared to the last gubernatorial election, in 2017, according to the secretary of state's office.

Yet the number of people actually showing up to the polls has held relatively steady in recent years.

By Wednesday afternoon, about 2.4 million votes had been counted — only slightly more than the nearly 2.2 million cast four years ago

The main difference between this year's election and 2017 came from conservatives, said Lindsey Cormack, assistant professor of political science at the Stevens Institute of Technology.

"Republicans outperformed," Cormack said.

The last GOP nominee, Kim Guadagno, pulled in less than 900,000 total votes, state data shows. Ciattarelli's already secured hundreds of thousands more, according to The Associated Press.

U.S. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., said he was struck by how few voters of color appeared to cast ballots.

“I know having run in New Jersey a lifetime, that those numbers didn’t come out in the way that one would expect,” Menendez told reporters at the Capitol. “So you have to ask the question, why?”

Almost 150 precincts statewide have not yet reported results and not all county tallies included early voting or vote-by-mail numbers.

Furthermore, ballots mailed on Election Day will still be counted as long as they’re received by Nov. 8, meaning final numbers remain a ways off.

*NJ Advance Media staff writers Brent Johnson and Jonathan D. Salant contributed to this report.*