

## Short coattails: Christie wins big, GOP doesn't

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Nov. 13

thedailyjournal.com



*Christie's landslide victory was the only good news for state Republicans on Election Day. / Asbury Park Press photo/DOUG HOOD*

**AT A GLANCE: TURNOUT**• Voter turnout in Tuesday's New Jersey gubernatorial election came in at 37 percent, the lowest in a governor's election since at least 1920.•

**Cumberland County** reported turnout of 36.33 percent.• **A little more than 2 million people** cast votes out of 5.5 million eligible voters.

**TRENTON** — Chris Christie's election coattails weren't long enough to allow him to discard the infamous veto pen he's used to block or rewrite dozens of bills from Democrats over the past four years.

The Republican governor's landslide victory this week for a second four-year term was the only good news for state Republicans on Election Day. Democrats held their majorities in the Senate and Assembly, mostly pummeling the GOP in the races for 120 state Legislature seats also on the ballot.

Christie said he "campaign hard" for down-ballot party candidates but said outside spending by Democratic groups and a gerrymandered legislative map that protects incumbents could not be overcome.

"It was not an unexpected result," the governor said.

Political analysts said if Republicans assumed a big Christie victory over Democrat Barbara Buono would mean legislative seat pickups, the strategy was a train wreck.

But the analysts said the overall result doesn't necessarily hurt Christie as he sculpts a national image as a bipartisan leader.

"There has been this undercurrent that Christie was not going to be brokenhearted if the Republicans didn't win control of the Legislature, because his narrative has been that he's not afraid to compromise and work on both sides of the aisle," said Carl Golden of Richard Stockton College's Hughes Center for Public Policy. "With Democrats in control of both houses, he certainly continues to have the opportunity to bolster that record."

The Republicans failed to make any gains in the Senate — as Democrats maintained a 24-to-16 advantage. Brigid Callahan Harrison, a professor of political science and law at Montclair State University, said, "The fact that (Christie) did not in any real and meaningful

way try to take control of the state Senate tells me this is really about the election of one man.

“If he had started raising money and campaigned with some of those guys,” she said, “he probably could have won four of those seats. But that hasn’t been his M.O. It’s really been about the re-election of Chris Christie.”

Christie, at a news conference the day after the election, said he and party officials would analyze the results.

Stephen Sweeney, the Senate president, unsurprisingly said he was “thrilled with what happened” in the lower-ballot positions.

“It means that the state is a Democrat state,” said Sweeney, a Democrat who represents residents of Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties. “We won all of our seats in a tidal wave. The Republicans didn’t win this year, so they’ve got to be thinking, ‘Oh my God, what’s next?’ Because I can tell you, there are places where we can pick up, and over the next decade we will pick up seats.”