

CONNECTICUT POLITICS IN 2022:

DEMOCRATIC GAINS IN RESPONSE TO NATIONAL TRENDS

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Connecticut politics in 2022, like politics in some of its fellow New England states, demonstrated a strong reaffirmation of its modern political dominance by the Democratic Party in statewide offices. Despite an active campaign by statewide Republican candidates, the election returns saw the major Democratic candidates run well ahead of their previous margins, even winning in some previous Republican strongholds in Fairfield County. This success was substantially shaped by a broad electoral rejection of the nationally Trump-dominated Republican Party, despite efforts by major state Republican candidates to distance themselves from some national Republican positions.

The Governor's race was a rematch between the 2018 candidates, now incumbent Governor Ned Lamont and GOP nominee Bob Stefanowski. While their 2018 race was close, in 2022 Stefanowski was consistently behind in polls throughout the campaign, and Lamont won reelection by a comfortable margin of 13% of the vote (<https://ctemspublic.pcctg.net/#/home>). Stefanowski's 2018 run gave him name recognition for 2022, but he was hurt by noticeable turnover in his top campaign staff and his inability to sufficiently distinguish himself from the Trump-dominated national Republican ideology (leading to mixed messaging on issues such as reproductive rights). Lamont's success included winning a number of staunchly Republican towns in Fairfield County for the first time, demonstrating the limited appeal of Trump Republicanism in some portions of the state.

Governor Lamont's reelection margin was undoubtedly helpful to other Democratic candidates on the ballot. In a year when there were open contests for 3 of the 4 statewide

constitutional officers (Comptroller, Secretary of the State, and Treasurer), Lamont-inspired election turnout was a boost for the Democratic contenders. While their margins of victory were less than Lamont's in some cases, they all clearly won their contests by sufficient margins, ranging from 7% to 16% (<https://ctemspublic.pcctg.net/#/home>). Democratic candidates as a whole were likely benefitted in particular by Governor Lamont's effective management of the COVID pandemic, and by the shift of the state budget to an increasing surplus rather than a deficit.

In Connecticut's Congressional contests (all 5 U.S. House seats and one Senate seat), Democratic candidates were largely dominant from start to finish. There had been speculation that former State Representative Themis Klarides would be a formidable opponent for incumbent U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal, but she was never able to gain enough political traction within the Republican Party to even secure the nomination, losing the nomination to Trump-endorsed candidate Leora Levy. Levy went to lose to Blumenthal by 15 percentage points in the general election (<https://ctemspublic.pcctg.net/#/home>). Like Stefanowski, it is likely that national issue dynamics (particularly the U.S. Supreme Court's Dobbs decision) hurt Levy's candidacy.

As in other recent elections, Democratic incumbents John Larson, Joe Courtney, Rosa Delauro, and Jim Himes handily won their races in the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th U.S. House districts respectively. Connecticut's 5th U.S. House district, on the other hand, was one of the nation's most competitive House races, drawing large amounts of attention and campaign spending. Incumbent Democratic Rep. Jahana Hayes faced a strong challenge from Republican George Logan, with Hayes ultimately winning by only 2004 votes after vote counting stretched into the day after Election Day (<https://ctemspublic.pcctg.net/#/home>). It was one of the pivotal races

where the projected Republican “red wave” failed to materialize, and as a result Connecticut maintained its all-Democratic U.S. House delegation.

The state House and Senate races provided one of the only comparative “bright” spots for Connecticut Republicans, where they were able to hold Democratic gains to only 1 seat in the state House of Representatives and 1 seat in the State Senate

(<https://www.cbia.com/resources/election-center/election-2022-results-ct-state-house>)(<https://www.cbia.com/resources/election-center/election-2022-results-connecticut-state-senate>).

While Democrats still maintained a strong majority in both chambers, it is clear that Republicans are still competitive in some local districts, giving them a continuing foundation from which to build their statewide political future.

In an era of voter restriction efforts in many states, and the events of January 6, 2021, Connecticut’s clear commitment to expanding (rather than limiting) access to voting was confirmed by the large majority supporting the ballot question on early voting. The ballot measure, which gives the Legislature the power to implement early voting in the state, passed with 59% of support from voters (<https://ctmirror.org/2022/11/09/ct-early-voting-in-person-ballot-question/>). While this might seem to have been predictable on one level, it is noteworthy for Connecticut, which has a closed primary system and has not always embraced expansion of voting opportunities. This is a new political “open door”, and it will be interesting to watch how it impacts turnout and outcomes in future election cycles. Much will depend on how the upcoming session of the Legislature pursues implementation of early voting, with many options for both time frame and voting procedures.

In an overall sense, Connecticut’s 2022 election results were largely an affirmation of the state’s trending Democratic character. Nonetheless, Connecticut Republicans continue to have

significant regional bases of electoral strength, and one would be unwise to call Connecticut a one-party state. The challenge for Connecticut Republicans will be to build locally for the future at a time when many Connecticut voters are skeptical of the national Republican Party agenda.