



NEWS RELEASE

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Independent Spending Drives Up Cost of 2021 Gubernatorial Election

A record spike in independent spending pushed the cost of the 2021 gubernatorial election to \$90.7 million, the second costliest on record when inflation is taken into account, according to the latest reports filed with the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

“While the 2021 election cost the most ever in nominal dollars, it still ranks second compared to the 2005 election. What may be most significant is that independent spending reached \$41.7 million, or nearly 46 percent of total spending,” said Jeff Brindle, ELEC’s Executive Director.

“The amount of independent spending this year is an increase of 69 percent compared to the previous high of \$24.5 million,” he said. “At this rate, independent groups soon could be out-spending candidates on New Jersey’s gubernatorial elections.”

Table 1
Total Spending on Gubernatorial Election
(Includes Pre-Primary, Primary and General)

| YEAR | CANDIDATES | INDEPENDENT | TOTAL COST AT THE TIME | INFLATION ADJUSTED |
|------|--------------|--------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| 2005 | \$87,724,988 | \$ 407,748 | \$88,132,736 | \$124,815,900 |
| 2021 | \$48,957,465 | \$41,709,084 | \$90,666,548 | \$ 90,666,548 |
| 2009 | \$56,099,909 | \$14,080,168 | \$70,180,077 | \$ 90,478,739 |
| 2017 | \$54,588,644 | \$24,504,152 | \$79,092,796 | \$ 89,246,889 |
| 2001 | \$41,233,708 | \$ 6,783,119 | \$48,016,827 | \$ 75,003,481 |
| 1981 | \$19,493,157 | \$ 14,600 | \$19,507,757 | \$ 59,357,877 |
| 1989 | \$25,978,338 | \$ 287,000 | \$26,265,338 | \$ 58,586,319 |
| 2013 | \$26,821,334 | \$21,350,619 | \$48,171,953 | \$ 57,194,385 |
| 1997 | \$25,793,621 | | \$25,793,621 | \$ 44,450,043 |
| 1993 | \$22,868,517 | \$ 326,000 | \$23,194,517 | \$ 44,396,874 |

“We have been predicting for more than a decade that independent special interest groups that spend separately from candidates or parties have become a major force in New Jersey elections. The trend in gubernatorial elections offers perhaps the best evidence yet,” he said.

Democratic Governor Phil Murphy, who won reelection, spent \$16.4 million directly on his general election campaign while former Republican Assemblyman and GOP gubernatorial candidate Jack Ciattarelli laid out \$15.8 million.

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Table 2
Latest General Election Campaign Finance Activity**

| CANDIDATE | PARTY | RAISED | SPENT | CASH-ON-HAND |
|---|-------------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Murphy, Phil | Democrat | \$16,747,434 | \$16,393,069 | \$354,365 |
| Ciattarelli, Jack | Republican | \$16,361,174 | \$15,828,691 | \$532,483 |
| Mele, Gregg* | Libertarian | \$ 6,000 | NA | NA |
| Hoffman, Madelyn* | Green | \$ 1,874 | NA | NA |
| Kuniansky, Joanne* | Socialist Workers Party | NA | NA | NA |
| TOTAL - CANDIDATES | | \$33,116,482 | \$32,221,761 | \$886,848 |
| Independent Spending - General | | | \$28,296,379 | |
| TOTAL - GENERAL | | | \$60,518,139 | |
| Pre-Primary/ Primary | | | | |
| Candidates- Primary | | | \$16,735,704 | |
| Independent Spending- Primary | | | \$13,412,705 | |
| TOTAL - PRE-PRIMARY, PRIMARY AND GENERAL | | | \$90,666,548 | |

*Does not expect to spend more than \$5,800.

**Through November 19 for candidates

Candidate spending was relatively even, mostly because the two major party candidates each qualified for \$10.5 million in public funds available for the general election.

Murphy enjoyed a much bigger advantage when he first won election in 2017 and outspent the Republican nominee by more than two-to-one.

Candidate spending aside, Brindle said independent spending overwhelmingly supported the governor.

Brindle added: “Of the \$28.3 million in independent spending on the general election, \$23.7 million, or 84 percent, benefited the Democratic candidate while \$4.6 million, or 16 percent, aided the Republican. As I have said for years, independent groups have become very influential in New Jersey elections.”

The biggest independent spender on the Democratic side was Our NJ, a committee set up by the Democratic Governors Association (DGA), which also partially funded it. It expended \$8.7 million. Murphy is the finance chairman of the group.

The biggest independent spender for Ciattarelli was the Republican Governors Association, which sank \$3.8 million into the race.

Table 3
Campaign Finance Activity by Independent Spending
Committees Involving Gubernatorial General Election

| SUPPORTS | GROUP | SPENT |
|-----------------|--|---------------------|
| Murphy | Our NJ | \$ 8,733,268 |
| Murphy | Garden State Forward (NJEA)* | \$ 5,538,434 |
| Ciattarelli | Republican Governors Association | \$ 3,808,013 |
| Murphy | Committee to Build the Economy | \$ 2,938,127 |
| Murphy | Democratic Governors Association** | \$ 2,283,268 |
| Murphy | Working for Working Americans (Carpenters)*** | \$ 1,500,000 |
| Murphy | Carpenters Action Fund*** | \$ 1,000,000 |
| Murphy | Growing Economic Opportunities (Laborers)*** | \$ 900,000 |
| Ciattarelli | Garden State Rescue | \$ 499,273 |
| Murphy | New Direction for New Jersey | \$ 401,037 |
| Ciattarelli | Fix NJ Now | \$ 286,233 |
| Murphy | United HERE TIP State and Local Fund*** | \$ 150,000 |
| Murphy | NJ League of Conservation Voters | \$ 100,000 |
| Murphy | UA Political Action Fund | \$ 75,000 |
| Murphy | Tech for Campaigns | \$ 39,236 |
| Murphy | International Brotherhood of Teamsters | \$ 32,040 |
| Murphy | NEA (National Education Association) Advocacy Fund | \$ 12,450 |
| | Totals | \$28,296,379 |

*Gave \$2.5 million to Our NJ and \$2.5 million to Build the Economy

**Contributed \$1,983,268 to Our NJ and \$300,000 to Turnout Project

***Contributions to Our NJ

The Republican Governors Association outspent the Democratic Governors Association by more than \$1 million.

Both groups spent heavily the final week of the campaign.

Table 4
Spending in New Jersey by Democratic and Republican
Governors Associations During 2021 Election

| | DEMOCRATIC GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION | REPUBLICAN GOVERNORS ASSOCIATION | BOTH ASSOCIATIONS¹ |
|--|---|---|--|
| Independent Spending | | | |
| Direct Independent Spending | | \$3,808,013 | |
| DGA Contribution to Our NJ | \$1,983,268 | | |
| DGA Contribution to Turnout Project | \$ 300,000 | | |
| Total Independent Spending | \$2,283,268 | \$3,808,013 | \$6,091,281 |
| Contributions to Candidates or Parties | | | |
| County Parties | \$ 383,500 | | |
| Democratic State Committee Or Legislative Leadership PACs | \$ 50,000 | | |
| Local candidates | \$ 15,600 | | |
| Total Contributions to Candidates or Parties | \$ 449,100 | | \$ 449,100 |
| Total All Spending | \$2,732,368 | \$3,808,013 | \$6,540,381 |

This analysis is based on 20-day post-election candidate reports due by November 22 that reflect their campaign finance activity through November 19. Independent spending totals are based on any reports filed as recently as November 22.

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¹ Both associations are 527 political organizations. While they cannot make contributions to federal candidates, they can make contributions to state and local candidates along with engaging in independent spending.