



# Election Update

November 9, 2022

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## 2022 Election Results

Rumors of Democrats' untimely demise in the 2022 midterm elections was greatly exaggerated, to paraphrase Mark Twain. The high-profile contest between former Governor Paul LePage (R) and incumbent Governor Janet Mills (D) was expected to be a tight race given the anticipated red wave, but as the returns came in on Election Day, it appeared that Governor Mills was coasting to a strong win with a margin of nearly 14%. This strong margin also appeared to lift legislative Democrats who held on to both the Maine House and Senate, continuing their trifecta of Democratic control in Maine.

In a presidential year, Democrats are often buoyed by high voter turnout in Maine, which typically lags in a gubernatorial off-year. Not so in 2022. For reasons we are still analyzing, turnout was much higher than expected, and this clearly helped propel both Governor Mills and Democrats in the Maine House and Senate.

President Biden's low approval ratings, a generic ballot favoring Republicans, and a majority of Americans saying the country is on the wrong track should have resulted in a bad day for Democrats in local and federal elections. Clearly, this did not happen.

While Maine Republicans stayed the course with national messages blaming Democrats for inflation and focusing on social issues from transgender rights to critical race theory, Democrats held their ground. LePage criticized Mills' issuance of \$850 one-time checks intended to stave off the impacts of inflation, campaigning instead for giving the money to oil dealers to subsidize heating oil costs. LePage also pursued a parents' bill of rights, hoping to ban books on sexuality and racism from school libraries. On abortion, LePage appeared to change his prior views by suggesting he would not support limiting Maine's protections for abortion access. Ultimately, the messaging did not work, and the end result was a landslide victory for Governor Mills.

## THE DETAILS

There were no statewide referenda on Maine's ballot this election, so the focus was solely on the candidates for office. Every seat in Maine's entire 186-member Legislature was up for grabs. The topline news is that Democratic Governor Janet Mills won reelection, Democrats held their majority in the Maine Senate, and just barely retained control in the Maine House.

### Governor

Incumbent Governor Janet Mills (D) defeated former Governor Paul LePage by a wide margin of 56% to 42%. While LePage improved upon prior Republican totals in some rural towns, Governor Mills outpaced her 2018 numbers by a significant amount throughout the more

progressive communities of southern Maine. She also won all of Maine's largest cities, including Portland, South Portland, Scarborough, Biddeford, Sanford, Lewiston, Auburn, Brunswick, Waterville, Augusta, and Bangor.

LePage focused his campaign on economic issues, highlighting inflation and rising costs for heating oil and other essentials. He maintained that he could get the state's economy back on track. Mills took issue with the premise that Maine's economy is off-track, touting her record over the past four years, including balancing state budgets and leading the state's COVID-19 recovery. In the end, it wasn't close, and Mills cruised to reelection.

### **U.S. Congressional District #1**

Incumbent Democratic Congresswoman Chellie Pingree defeated Republican Ed Thelander by a margin of 63% - 37%. Congresswoman Pingree, a member of the House Committee on Appropriations, will serve her 8<sup>th</sup> term in the House of Representatives. The geographically smaller of the state's two congressional districts, the 1st District covers the southern coastal area of the state. It includes all of Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Sagadahoc, and York counties and part of Kennebec County. Portland, Brunswick, Biddeford, and Sanford are located within the district. Registered voters in the 1st District skew heavily Democratic.

### **U.S. Congressional District #2**

Going into Election Day, polls showed a tight race in Maine's 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District for the U.S. House between incumbent Congressman Jared Golden (D) and former Congressman Bruce Poliquin (R). Golden is seeking a third term in Congress. Poliquin held the seat prior to Golden but lost to him in 2018. Currently, Golden has 49%, Poliquin has 44%, and Independent candidate Tiffany Bond has 7%. Given that no candidate has earned 50% of the vote, Maine's ranked choice voting will be used to determine the winner. Based on polling, it appears that most Bond voters likely ranked Golden second, and therefore Golden will likely win on the second ballot. We should know the official result later this week or early next, but for those of you betting on the outcome, we think your money is safe with Golden.

In a district that Donald Trump won in 2016 and 2020, Poliquin tried to paint Golden as being in lockstep with Biden and Pelosi. However, it did not appear that these punches landed, in part because Golden has a voting record considered the most independent of any member of Congress.

### **Maine State Senate**

While some precinct results are still outstanding, it looks like the Maine Senate will remain in Democratic control by a margin of 22 to 13 seats, the same margin Democrats have held for the past two years. In one of the night's most closely watched races, Senate President Troy Jackson (D-Aroostook) held on after a fierce race with House member Sue Bernard (R-Aroostook). Jackson's win was decisive, and he even won his opponent's hometown of Caribou, a Republican stronghold that went for LePage and Poliquin in this election. The other members of Democratic Senate leadership also won re-election – Majority Leader Eloise Vitelli of Arrowsic and Matthea Daughtry of Brunswick.

Along the way, the Democrats picked up an additional Senate seat in central Maine, where David LaFountain (D-Kennebec), a former Waterville and Winslow fire chief, narrowly beat Rep. Mike

Perkins (R-Kennebec), in an open Republican seat. Democrats also defended Senate seats in Lincoln County, where Cameron Reny (D-Lincoln) defeated Abden Simmons (R-Lincoln); in part of Kennebec county, where Craig Hickman (D-Kennebec) appears to have won his reelection bid against outgoing Rep. Jeff Hanley (R-Kennebec); and in the Windham area, where in perhaps the biggest upset of the night, Timothy Nangle (D-Cumberland) defeated former Sen. Gary Plummer (R-Cumberland). As we go to press, we note that the margin of victory was slim in Sen. Hickman's race, and it remains to be seen whether Rep. Hanley will request a recount there.

On the Republican side, Minority Leader Jeff Timberlake (R-Androscoggin) and Assistant Leader Matt Pouliot (R-Kennebec) both cruised to reelection. The only seat picked up by Republicans appears to be in Auburn, where former Sen. Eric Brakey (R-Androscoggin) defeated former House member Betty-Ann Sheats (D-Androscoggin) by less than 1%. But this one pick-up was not enough to make up for the strength of Democratic turnout across many parts of the state.

Outside spending appears to have had an influence in Maine legislative races. Outside groups spent \$4.7 million to boost Democratic candidates with nearly \$780,000 of that dedicated to Jackson's race alone. That total was nearly three times more than the \$1.7 million spent by Republican groups across both chambers.

### **Maine State House of Representatives**

Results are still being tallied for some Maine House races, but its certain that Democrats will maintain a majority in that chamber as well, and it appears the margin will be virtually the same as the previous session. At this time, Democrats have secured 82 out of 151 seats, with two left-leaning Independent members winning seats, as well. Republicans stand at 67 members in the House.

While the numbers remain virtually the same overall, some seats flipped from one party to another. In Wells, former Rep. Dan Hobbs (D-Wells) bested incumbent Rep. Tim Roche (R-Wells). Former Rep. Mike Lajoie (D-Lewiston) beat freshman Rep. Jon Connor (R-Lewiston), who had been the first Republican to hold a Lewiston House seat in years.

Republicans also picked up several democratic House seats, including a symbolically important one based in the St. John Valley and occupied on-and-off for five decades by former House Speaker John Martin (D-Eagle Lake). Austin Theriault (R-Fort Kent) beat Dana Marie Appleby (D-St. John Plantation) to win that seat. Also in Aroostook County, incumbent Rep. David McCrea (D-Fort Fairfield) lost to Republican challenger Mark Babin (R-Fort Fairfield). The open Washington county seat held in recent years by Democrat Robert Alley flipped to Republican, with Tiffany Strout (R-Harrington) beating Roland Rogers (D-Jonesport).

We continue to monitor final results where more rural Democratic districts also appear to be moving into Republican control, including the district previously held by Representative Richard Evans (D-Dover-Foxcroft) and an open seat vacated by former Rep. Mark Bryant (D-Windham).

### **Conclusion**

Rather than a demise in Maine, Democrats staged a surprise, winning both legislative chambers and the governorship. Instead of divided government, we can expect business in Augusta to look fairly similar to what we have observed for the past four years.

Our quick read is that, with tight margins in the House, Governor Mills will continue to hold disproportionate power. Little will pass that does not have buy-in or at least tacit acceptance from the Mills' Administration. The tight margin in the Maine House prevents any notion of left-leaning veto overrides.

Mills is a true moderate, so expect an effort to continue bipartisan budgets, expansion of renewable power, a focus on helping those adversely impacted by PFAS, and perhaps some movement on progressive goals like paid family medical leave, expansion of behavioral health and substance use services, and election reform. Governor Mills has thus far been steadfastly opposed to raising taxes, and we will see whether that position holds in her second term.