

Poll turnout to break close race for governor

By Mary Diduch

Associate News Editor

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If the latest polls are any indication, there is no way to confidently foresee the next governor of the state of New Jersey.

“Anyone who tells you that they know who’s going to win [today] has a message from another universe, because no one can really predict this,” said Ruth Mandel, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics. “This is so close from everything that we can tell that it’s really impossible to predict this.”

Mandel said the determining factor of today’s election would be which candidate brings out the voters.

Gov. Jon S. Corzine and Republican challenger Chris Christie are tied at 42 percent. Independent candidate Chris Daggett holds 10 percent of the vote, according to pollster.com, a Web site that displays the most recent trends poll results taken in an election.

From the start of the campaigns last summer, Christie maintained a double-digit lead ahead of Corzine in the polls, she said. In the final days before the vote, different polls have shown different winners by different percentages.

A highlight of this election is the strong effort put forth by Daggett.

Mandel said he ran a good campaign, but New Jersey is unlikely to elect an Independent governor. There is no Independent movement or grassroots organization in the state but Daggett could affect the outcome in another way.

“The conventional wisdom is that he’s pulling more from Chris Christie, and that’s why you don’t see the Corzine campaign attacking him,” Mandel said.

University President Richard L. McCormick has also been a huge advocate of getting out the vote, as the school relies heavily on the state, she said.

Alex Holodak, Rutgers Democrats president, said his group has been working on and off campus to bring voters to the polls.

“A lot of our members will be working [today], going door-to-door [and] making sure people are voting,” said Holodak, a School of Arts and Sciences senior.

They have been utilizing the new vote by mail process, which is easier for students, he said.

“I think it’s easier for a lot of students who live on-campus and are registered in their hometown,” Holodak said.

Mandel said after the election, it would be interesting to see how the mail-in ballots affected the outcome.

“[The Office of the Secretary of State] has been working hard to get the word out about the election to encourage students to register,” she said.

Alex Cohen, chairman of the Christie Coalition for the University, said the student Republicans on campus

have been canvassing, phone banking, talking with different student organizations and working with the state party to spread Christie's message.

"It's been a lot of work," said Cohen, a School of Arts and Sciences junior.

Corzine has promised to end corruption, improve the economy and provide accountability for the government, but New Jersey has not seen any of that, Cohen said. Christie would bring the state into a new era of politics.

He said it has been difficult to unify young Republicans on a largely liberal campus like the University.

"The Democrats are certainly not as apathetic as the young Republicans," Cohen said.

On campus, Holodak said he thinks University students favor Corzine more despite there not being any national election to generate more interest.

School of Arts and Sciences sophomore Brandon Li said he is not going to vote because this election has not garnered a lot of national attention, unlike last year's presidential race.

"[The gubernatorial election] has not generated enough publicity in the source where I get my information," Li said.

Holodak said the campaign's use of bringing big names to the state, such as President Barack Obama and former President Bill Clinton, helped Corzine in a rough campaign filled with mudslinging.

"Personally I hate negative campaigning," Holodak said. "I think it's a waste."

But it will continue to happen on both sides of the political divide, as the polls show it is effective, he said.

"I think negative campaigning turns us all off, and the paradox is we all hate it but it does its job," Mandel said.

Despite the intensely negative campaigning between the two major parties, the election saw major distinguishing characteristics.

One was Corzine's struggle as challenger Christie put up a strong fight.

"No matter who wins, this has been a very formidable fight for an incumbent governor," said Mandel, as incumbency is typically an advantage for politicians.

But in this election, entering the race as an unpopular governor in a difficult economic and political climate did not help Corzine, she said.

This election also saw the historic first ever lieutenant governor's race.

Mandel said voters cannot choose the lieutenant governor separate from the governor, but Democratic Sen.

Loretta Weinberg and Republican Kim Guadagno come from different backgrounds and have different views.

During the campaign, their role was to support their respective gubernatorial candidate, but after the election the new role is unclear.

"I hope [Weinberg and Guadagno] look forward to being in this unique position of creating the mold for a new statewide office," Mandel said. "It's a historic moment."