



TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Lindsay Owens, Groundwork Action; Geoff Garin and Abigail Davenport, Hart Research Associates
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RE: New Jersey exit poll results find Trump and affordability dominate

Overview

Hart Research Associates conducted a [survey](#) of 602 New Jersey voters from November 1 - 5, 2025 for Groundwork Action to gauge public opinion of the candidates for New Jersey governor, their approaches to addressing affordability, and other factors that determined voters' support in the election.

In this memorandum, we outline why Democratic Governor-Elect Mikie Sherrill's decisive victory was driven largely by voters' opposition to President Trump's economic agenda and her approach to tackling the public's long-standing concerns about affordability.

Across the country, voters in off-year elections showed up in overwhelming numbers and **elected candidates who are willing to stand up to President Trump and fight for affordability.**

Trump's role in this election season was inescapable, especially his economic agenda and failure to address the cost-of-living crisis.

As seen in several major new polls from the eve of the election, voters' approval of President Trump's handling of the economy has plummeted to record lows: [CNN](#) finds Trump's net approval underwater by 26 points and [The Economist](#) finds that his handling of inflation/prices is his worst issue with voters, with net approval at -33 points.

Additionally, opposition to Trump and soaring costs, highlighted by health care price hikes at the center of the government shutdown, played a major role in Sherrill's decisive victory.

- Sherrill voters were driven more by their opposition to Trump's agenda — 57% said opposing Trump was their top issue — than Ciattarelli voters were driven by his support for Trump, which was the top issue for just 34% of his voters.
- The three most important issues to Sherrill voters were (could choose more than one):
 - Opposing President Trump's agenda (57%)
 - Prices and the cost of living (45%)
 - Health care (43%)

- Top reasons Sherrill voters cited for their vote:
 - 40% said "because I think she will stand up to President Trump"
 - 20% said "because she is focused on reducing the cost of living"
 - 16% said "because she is a mother who understands the concerns of working families"
 - 9% said "because of her career spent in national service, including time spent overseas"
 - 8% said "because she has a reputation as a moderate"

During a government shutdown fight focused on rising health insurance premiums, health care boosted the favorability of the Democratic Party among New Jersey voters.

- 45% of New Jersey voters said that Democrats' position on health care during the government shutdown made them feel more favorable toward the Democratic Party (19% said no difference and only 33% said less favorable).
- By a 26-point margin, New Jersey voters said Democrats have the better approach to making quality health care affordable.
- This echoes other recent [polling](#) by Groundwork Collaborative, finding that 51% of voters support Democrats in Congress negotiating to reverse the health care price hikes, even if it means the government shutdown continues.

Sherrill proves individual candidates can use an affordability agenda to run ahead of the party. Sherrill won on an affordability platform and ran ahead of the Democratic Party brand on affordability and the economy.

Sherrill outperformed the Democratic Party by 4 points on lowering the cost of living and 7 points on handling the economy, and enjoyed strong advantages over her Republican opponent on every individual affordability issue tested, including:

- Making quality health care affordable (+23 net support)
- Making housing affordable (+17)
- Lowering the cost of living (+9)
- Lowering utility rates and electricity costs (+9), and
- Handling the economy (+7).

Sherrill's specific proposals to lower costs made voters more likely to support her:

- 55% (+18 on net) of voters overall said her utility costs proposal made them more likely to support her.

- Among voters who don't consistently vote for Democrats, but did vote for Sherrill, 85% said her utility cost proposals, like declaring a state of emergency and freezing utility rates, made them more likely to vote for her.
- 57% (+23 on net) said her child care costs proposal made them more likely to support her.

New Jersey voters are more concerned about undue corporate influence on government, see red tape as secondary.

- By a 41-point margin, 64% of voters say the bigger problem with government is that it "lets big corporations get away with breaking too many rules," while only 23% said the bigger problem is that "government today is too anti-business."
- Similarly, 52% say the bigger problem with government today is that "government prioritizes the interests of billionaires, big corporations, and lobbyists instead of fighting for the interests of average Americans," while only 40% say it's because "government moves too slowly and makes things overly complicated and inefficient, with too much red tape, rules, and regulation."