



NEWS RELEASE

Respond to:
P.O. Box 185
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0185

(609) 292-8700 or Toll Free Within NJ 1-888-313-ELEC (3532)

CONTACT: JOSEPH DONOHUE
DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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White Paper 29- Low-key Legislative Election in 2019 Foreshadowed Bigger Shakeup in 2021

The 2019 legislative election ended up costing less than half the record \$71 million of the 2017 election but unleashed a political tremor that wasn't fully felt until 2021, according to a new report by the New Jersey Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC).

White Paper 29: "Legislative Election 2019- Shakeup in the 1st" found that the 2019 legislative election ended up costing \$30.9 million, including \$21.6 million spent by candidates and \$9.3 million by independent special interest groups. It was the least costly legislative election since the \$18.6 million campaign of 2009.

"Politically, the 2019 election featured a welcome win for Republicans, who seized back the state Senate and two Assembly seats in the First Legislative District," said Joseph Donohue, ELEC's Deputy Director and author of the report. "However, overall spending was a dud compared to the epic legislative campaign of 2017, which was the priciest legislative campaign in state history."

"Despite the lack of heavy spending, 2019 in retrospect was a turning point. It marked the first time since 2009 that Republicans had added legislative seats. It also turned out to be the first wave of a political shift that struck even harder in the recent 2021 election, when Republicans won another Senate seat and added six more Assembly seats," he said.

The most notable campaign finance milestone in 2019 occurred when NJ United, a 501c4 social welfare group, spent \$1.4 million on the election- the most ever by such a group.

"While this group disclosed its donors voluntarily (though not until after the election), most do not," Donohue said. "If more such "dark money" groups get involved in New Jersey elections and refuse to be as open about their donors as NJ United, it will become much harder if not impossible to determine what special interests are trying to influence elections and why they may be giving."

The white paper repeated ELEC's long-standing recommendation that the Legislature require independent special interest groups- also called outside or dark money groups- to disclose their contributions and expenses just like candidates, parties and traditional political action committees have been doing for decades. The white paper can be obtained at <https://www.elec.nj.gov/aboutelec/whitepapers.htm>.