

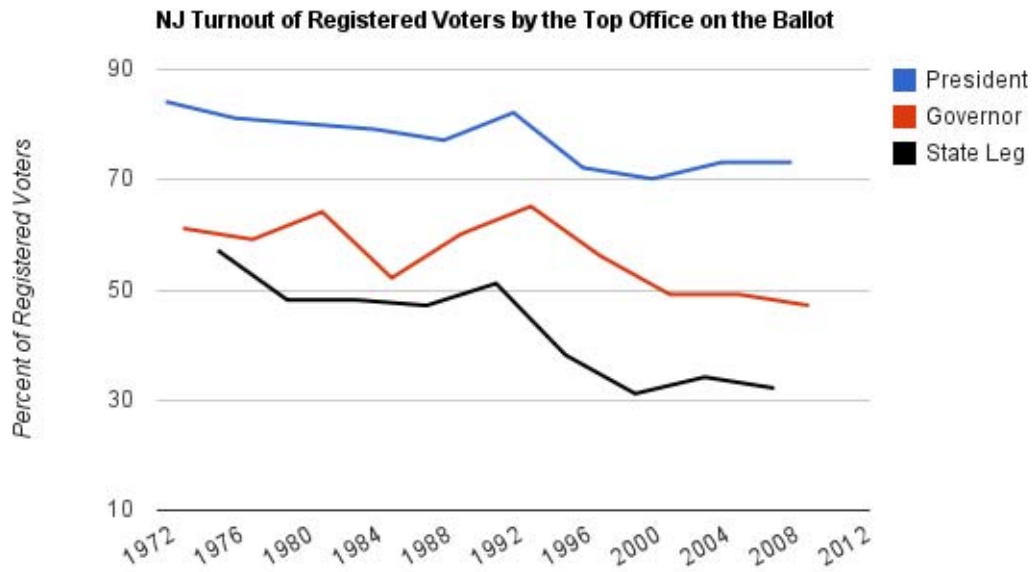
## **Voter Turnout in New Jersey Legislative Elections**

New Jersey is one of only seven states that do not hold their state elections during the even-numbered-year federal election cycle. By keeping state elections separate from national elections, New Jersey voters can concentrate on state rather than national issues when going to the polls, insulating our state elections from national-level politics. The downside to this is that many citizens do not pay much attention to state politics and are less motivated to vote when federal offices, such as the presidency, senate or congressional seats, are not on the ballot. This typically results in many fewer people participating in state elections. For instance, New Jersey gubernatorial elections typically produce only about 75% of the turnout that presidential elections experience, meaning that one out of every four citizens who vote for the federal executive do not do so for the state executive in the following year.

Similarly, even fewer voters turn out when no executive office is on the ballot. During state legislative midterm years in New Jersey, when the governor is not on the ballot, voter turnout typically plummets to its lowest levels. Since 1972, turnout in legislative elections has averaged about 75% of that of the preceding gubernatorial election, meaning again that one out of every four people who cast a vote for governor do not do so for the state legislature just two years later. In comparison to turnout for presidential elections, state legislative election turnout seems particularly bleak, drawing just over half the number of voters to the polls as presidential campaigns.

The rather dismal participation rates for legislative elections has another worrisome feature – it appears to be getting worse. Since 1972, there have been 10 midterm elections. During the first five elections, spanning 1972 through 1991, turnout for the legislative midterms averaged about 85% of the turnout seen in the preceding gubernatorial election and almost 64% of the preceding presidential election. Since 1992, however, state legislative election turnout has plummeted in comparison. The five legislative midterm elections since 1992 have compelled only 62% of the number of voters from the previous gubernatorial election to return to the polls, and a shocking 45% of presidential voters. Over the last two midterm legislative elections, fewer than one-third of registered voters have cast ballots for the state legislature.

What can we expect during the November 2011 legislative elections? Given that only about 4 of 120 state legislative races – combining both the senate and assembly races – are currently considered to be competitive, there is little reason to expect voter turnout to surge this year. It is likely that this year fewer than one-third of registered New Jersey voters will cast a ballot – awarding control of the state legislature to the party that garners just half of those votes cast – or around 15% of those eligible statewide.



**Comparative turnout of Presidential, Gubernatorial and State Legislative Elections in New Jersey (1972-2011)**

		Gubernatorial Turnout		State Legislative Turnout	
Total % of Gubernatorial Turnout	Pre-1992	-	-	74.9%	85.0%
	Post-1992		-		62.1%
Total % of Presidential Turnout	Pre-1992	72.8%	73.8%	55.0%	62.6%
	Post-1992		71.7%		45.5%