

## In New York Suburbs, Democrats Flip Two County Executive Seats

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In Nassau County, Laura Curran, a county legislator and former journalist, declared victory just before midnight over Jack Martins. Vincent Tullo for The New York Times

Democrats in Westchester and Nassau Counties secured victories on Tuesday in bitterly contested races for county executive, contests that were seen by some as suburban referendums on the presidency of Donald J. Trump.

In Westchester, where registered Democrats outnumber Republicans by a two-to-one margin, George Latimer, a progressive Democratic state senator, ousted the two-term Republican incumbent, Rob Astorino; Mr. Latimer led 57 percent to 43 percent with 75 percent of precincts reporting.

Mr. Astorino, who won statewide recognition after [an unsuccessful challenge](#) to Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in 2014, conceded just before midnight. “So the ballots have been counted and it looks like we came up short,” he said. “And that’s O.K. We are blessed to live in a democracy and we respect the will of the voters.”

In Nassau County, where registered Democrats have only a minor advantage over Republicans, Laura Curran, a county legislator and former journalist, declared victory just before midnight over Jack Martins, a former state senator whose negative depiction of Ms. Curran as a friend of the gang MS-13 may have rankled some voters.

Indeed, both campaigns had turned [sharply negative](#) in recent weeks, with barbed personal attacks eclipsing any substantive discussion of issues like soaring property taxes, transportation or education.





Mr. Martins, a former state senator, depicted Ms. Curran as a friend of the MS-13 gang, which may have rankled some voters. Johnny Milano for The New York Times

Mr. Martins had not yet conceded; with 99.6 percent of precincts counted, he trailed Ms. Curran, 51 percent to 48 percent.

In Westchester and Nassau, which have among the highest property taxes in the country, a newly energized electorate, with Democratic activists in particular, emerged as a force through postcard-writing campaigns and living-room fund-raisers. But it was the scene in Washington, not White Plains or Westbury, that seemed to drive voters to the polls.

Many Democrats said they decided to get involved at the local level as the [best strategy](#) of resisting the Trump presidency. That movement helped overcome decades of history: In each county, only two Democrats have held the office of county executive since the 1930s.

"Tonight, Nassau County voted to end the culture of corruption and give our county the fresh start it so desperately deserves," Ms. Curran said in her victory speech.

Apart from the issues or attacks, political consultants had predicted that the decisive factor in this year's election would be turnout. Historically, Republicans have done a better job of nudging the party faithful to the polls in an "off" election year, one without a race for governor or the presidency. But this time proved different, as a deluge of mailings and local news coverage made it all but impossible for residents to ignore the contests for county executive.



Rob Astorino, who was seeking his third term as Westchester county executive, conceded shortly before midnight at the Crowne Plaza in White Plains, N.Y. Karsten Moran for The New York Times

In some respects, [Ms. Curran](#) ran as an underdog in Nassau, because of her lack of name recognition in politics, having held just the county

legislative seat. By contrast, [Mr. Martins](#) served as the mayor of the Village of Mineola for eight years before becoming a state senator.

Still, Mr. Martins faced stiff headwinds resulting from forces within his own party — both from the contentious record of Mr. Trump and the scandal engulfing the current county executive, Edward P. Mangano, a Republican who decided not to run for re-election after his [indictment](#) on corruption charges.

Ultimately, the campaign in Nassau, while touching on gang violence and runaway property taxes, centered on ethics.

Mr. Mangano was not the only one charged in what prosecutors described as a bribery and kickback scheme. Mr. Mangano's wife, Linda, was also indicted, along with the supervisor of the Town of Oyster Bay, John Venditto. Republicans were shaken by the charges, which followed the corruption conviction last year of the former State Senate majority leader, Dean G. Skelos, also of Nassau. (In September, a federal appeals [panel overturned](#) Mr. Skelos's conviction.)

As a result, Mr. Martins had painted himself as something of an anti-corruption crusader during the campaign, calling for Mr. Mangano's resignation and outlining out a new code of ethics for the county. "You need to pay more than lip service to restoring public confidence in government," Mr. Martins, a 50-year-old father of four, had asserted before the election.



*George Latimer, a progressive Democratic state senator, had faulted Mr. Astorino's handling of the county budget, accusing him of fiscal gimmickry. Jonah Markowitz for The New York Times*

Ms. Curran, 49, a former reporter for The Daily News and The New York Post, had sought to depict Mr. Martins as hailing from a corrupt Republican establishment. She pointed out that he attended a fund-raiser hosted by Mr. Skelos — after his indictment — for the Senate Republican Campaign Committee. And she had her own ethics plan.

Westchester County has dodged the corruption investigations that in recent years have dominated politics on Long Island. But the two candidates for Westchester County executive managed to suggest scandals in each other's camp.

Initially, the race centered on discussion of property taxes, job growth and fiscal stewardship.

Mr. Astorino, 50, touted his creation of 44,000 jobs in the private sector and his reduction in the county tax levy during his eight years in office. Mr. Latimer, 63, faulted Mr. Astorino's handling of the county budget, accusing him of fiscal gimmickry. He also attacked Mr. Astorino's positions on social issues, from immigration policies to his decision to allow a gun show at the county's exhibition center.

But as the election drew closer, the attacks grew personal. Mr. Astorino's television ads against Mr. Latimer were supplemented by those of a PAC that reaped \$1 million from the conservative hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer and his daughter Rebekah.

Mr. Astorino made hay of the unpaid property taxes by Mr. Latimer's wife, who is in a dispute with a relative over a house in Rye. Records show more than \$40,000 in unpaid property taxes on the house. Mr. Latimer himself became the object of derision, with revelations about unpaid parking tickets that led to the loss of his car registration.

For his part, Mr. Latimer exploited the federal corruption trial of Norman Seabrook, the former president of New York City's correction officers' union. In the trial, a witness testified that he had helped Mr. Astorino pay for a Rolex watch valued between \$7,000 and \$10,000. Mr.

Astorino disputed the testimony, but Mr. Latimer's campaign aired advertisements that talked of "cash, bribes, even a \$10,000 watch from a convicted felon."

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