

A Changing Political Landscape and Primary Wins Shape Long Island Congressional Races

By Wendy Diller

Thanks to redistricting and changing national political dynamics, New York State has multiple competitive races for Congress, including key races for “open” seats on Long Island. Each victory will be crucial to retaining Democratic control of the US House of Representatives. The United States Supreme Court decisions on abortion and gun control could energize independents and infrequent Democratic voters, in a scenario that until recently looked bleak for Democrats on Long Island.

You will learn more about Three Parks Democrats’ plans to support Long Island Democratic candidates this fall at the upcoming September 14 meeting. Meanwhile, below are some updated insights on Long Island congressional races:

What's new: The landscape has changed, and for an expert take on Long Island politics we turned to Lawrence Levy, executive dean of the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University and the university's Vice President for Economic Development and Professional Studies. The following is based on his comments.

CD1: This area covers the far eastern parts of Suffolk County, including the Hamptons and much of Brookhaven. It was a 0.2%+ for Biden in 2020. The seat is open, thanks to Lee Zeldin's bid as the Republican candidate for New York State Governor. Bridget Fleming, a Suffolk County legislator and former prosecutor and Southampton Town Councilwoman, is the Democratic candidate against Republican Nick LaLota, who has served in a number of local Republican positions and is currently chief of staff to the Suffolk County Legislature. Levy believes it will be an uphill battle for Democrats, due to Lee Zeldin's popularity among the district's energized Trump

base, who are likely to go to the polls in force.

CD2: This district stretches across the southern parts of Suffolk and Nassau counties. It went for Trump 1.6+ in 2020. Andrew Garbarino is the first-time Republican incumbent and is considered to be comparatively moderate in that he has not supported Trump. He will face Democrat Jackie Gordon, an Army veteran and former high school guidance counselor, who has served on the Babylon Town Council. Gordon, who ran unsuccessfully against Garbarino in 2020, is an underdog in this race, but considered to be a very skilled campaigner who resonates well with voters. She may have a shot at winning, especially if the hard-right Republicans are not enthusiastic about Garbarino, points out Levy.

CD3: This area covers the entire North Shore of Nassau County and dips into northeastern Queens. It went for Biden 8.1+ in 2020. Robert Zimmerman, a former Congressional aide who runs a marketing and communications firm and is a well-connected local

and national Democratic donor, is the Democratic candidate, running for public office for the first time. His opponent is George Santos, an investment banker. Both Zimmerman and Santos are openly gay, a first for the district. The district was considered to be “safe” Democratic until President Biden’s ratings collapsed, and the question here is whether gun control and abortion will energize enough Democrats and independents to get to the polls, says Levy.

CD4: This area covers the South Shore of Nassau County. It went for Biden 14.6%+ in 2020 and has been considered “safely” Democratic, but Democrats face headwinds here. Both Laura Gillen, the Democratic candidate, and her opponent, Republican Anthony D’Esposito, have served as Town of Hempstead Supervisors. Gillen, a moderate “pro-choice” Democrat, could appeal to independents and even Republican women who are upset about abortion but not likely to back a candidate based on a single issue, says Levy. She has shown her ability to win a public office in an area that is controlled

locally by Republicans. Given personality clashes and intramural infighting among local Democrats, it may be hard to arouse infrequent voters in this district to go to the polls.

Some points to remember, says Levy: abortion, guns and democracy/Trump will arouse the Democratic base, but bail reform and inflation are still powerful issues that play well in local elections and show up in polls as important. Long Island is NOT Manhattan and has a lot of swing voters and independents. Moreover, local politics on Long Island are complicated and affect turnout for national elections.