

NY Governor Hochul Beats Zeldin in Tough Race Dominated by Crime

- She becomes the first woman elected governor in New York
- Zeldin gained momentum as race became more competitive



Kathy Hochul *Photographer: Anthony Behar/Sipa/Bloomberg*

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Democrat Kathy Hochul became New York's first elected female governor on Tuesday, ABC and NBC said, fending off a challenge from Republican Lee Zeldin in a competitive race that was dominated in recent weeks by issues of crime and the economy.

Hochul was leading against Zeldin with 54% of the vote to Zeldin's 46%, with 79% of the votes counted by Associated Press as of 11:52 p.m.

A number of counties have yet to report poll results, and Zeldin hasn't conceded. But Hochul delivered a victory speech shortly before midnight, where she pledged to protect reproductive rights, make the state a more affordable place to live and make streets and subways safe.

"You made me the first woman ever elected as Governor in New York," she said to a packed crowd at Capitale, a trendy Lower East Side venue in Manhattan. "But I'm not here to make history. I'm here to make a difference."

The win will give Hochul, who took office in 2021 after Andrew Cuomo's resignation, a full term to make her mark.

"She's not here because of some man's mishap," said Na'ilah Amaru, a Democratic strategist. "She's here in this space after Jan. 1 because she has electoral support to be there."

For months, Hochul, 64, was considered to have a lock on the race in a state that hasn't had a Republican governor in 16 years and overwhelmingly voted for President Joe Biden in the last presidential election. Democrats make up about half of New York's 12 million active voters, and Zeldin, a Long Island congressman, is an anti-abortion Donald Trump loyalist who voted against certifying the 2020 election.

But polls dramatically narrowed in the final weeks of the governor's race as Hochul faced continuous attacks by Zeldin, 42, who campaigned feverishly across the state and gained unexpected momentum by raising alarms about crime and inflation.

Campaign Pivot

As polls tightened in October, Hochul had to quickly expand her messaging to emphasize her public safety record and move beyond reliable Democratic issues like reproductive rights and gun control. She took out TV ads that centered on fighting crime and announced an initiative to deploy hundreds of additional police officers to the state-run New York City subway system.

She also ramped up her presence on the campaign trail. At recent events, prominent Democrats from Hillary Clinton to Vice President Kamala Harris -- and even President Joe Biden -- appeared alongside Hochul and made the case against Zeldin.

Even as Hochul adapted her messaging, her attacks on Zeldin as an extremist allied with Trump resonated with some voters.

Zeldin's "political agenda does not support me as a minority person," said Rose Green, 65, a Black nurse in Brooklyn, who came to Hochul's campaign party on Tuesday night and said the governor wasn't to blame for high inflation or crime. "She is doing her best."

Hochul must now deliver on promises that dominated the governor's race, including addressing the perception and reality of increased crime, reinvigorating New York's economy as labor and housing costs rise, building more affordable housing, and ushering in a congestion-pricing proposal in New York City intended to help fund the struggling transit system.

With a recession on the horizon, she will also have to guide the state through more economic turmoil, and balance the state budget amid an expected slowdown in tax revenue.

Zeldin, who was among the Congress members who voted to overturn the 2020 presidential election results in some states, had not made a public appearance at his own Manhattan election party and hadn't conceded as of Tuesday night.

Asked at a late October debate if he would respect the results should he lose, he said that while losing wasn't an option, hypothetically he would. Zeldin's campaign didn't respond to requests for comment.

(Updates with Hochul's victory speech in third paragraph.)