

Mayor-elect in Edison isn't surprised Christie won in Democratic stronghold

By Brent Johnson/For The Star-Ledger
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EDISON -- Though Edison has been a Democratic stronghold for decades, Antonia Ricigliano heard a constant message from residents as she worked the campaign trail this year.

A number of people told me, 'I will vote for you, but I will not vote for Jon Corzine,'" recalled Ricigliano, a Democrat who was elected Edison's mayor Tuesday.



David Gard/ New Jersey Local News Service.

Edison Councilwoman Antonia Ricigliano after she defeated Mayor Jun Choi for the Democratic mayoral nomination.

Ricigliano's victory was expected in the state's fifth-largest towns, where residents haven't picked a Republican mayor for 50 years.

But the two-term councilwoman won despite a surprise in the governor's race: Republican Chris Christie garnered nearly a thousand more votes than Corzine in Edison, en route to his upset victory over the incumbent Democrat.

Registered Democrats outnumber Republicans 25,500 to 6,000 in Edison, a sprawling suburb of 100,000 residents. Corzine even made an appearance in the town last week at a rally for Ricigliano.

But residents there may have followed Tuesday's statewide trend: voting for Christie to dump Corzine, the man blamed for the state's rising taxes.

A lot of people in Edison worry about property taxes, and they didn't see movement under Corzine," Ingrid Reed, a political analyst for the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, said today. "Maybe they thought change would be a good thing."

Not completely.

Bolstered by Christie, many Republicans crept into office across the state, including Middlesex County. Middlesex Borough, another traditionally Democratic town, elected a Republican mayor and shifted control of the town council to the GOP. Republicans also regained control in South Plainfield and took seats on the councils in South Brunswick and East Brunswick.

Republicans in Edison believed this was their best shot in years to break through the Democratic grip in Edison. The local Democratic party has been split for the last few years, culminating in a bruising primary battle in which Ricigliano upset incumbent Mayor Jun Choi for the party's mayoral nomination. And the GOP's candidate, town planning board chairman Dennis Pipala, was a long-time independent with ties to Choi, hoping to convert disenfranchised Democrats.

But Ricigliano beat Pipala 12,186 to 8,000, according to unofficial vote tallies, and also led her slate of three council candidates to victory.

Why didn't Christie's momentum translate into more votes for Pipala?

"I'm asking that question also," Pipala, 66, said today. "That was baffling to me."

Reed speculates that Ricigliano's momentum from a primary win over an incumbent was probably too big to break.