

## Sandy's impact lingers on Election Day

By Amy Rowe / News Editor | Posted: Tuesday, November 6, 2012 12:00 am

For those around the state who were displaced after Hurricane Sandy hit last week, voting today might be the last thing on their minds.

Though Gov. Chris Christie is trying to make it easier for everyone to vote through email and fax ballots and at their county clerk's office, changed voter locations and a shift in priorities might discourage some from getting to the polls.

"I think it would be foolish to think [Election Day] is not going to be affected in some way, shape or form," said Elizabeth Matto, director of the Youth Participation Program at the Eagleton Institute of Politics. "Especially given the fact that we've had polling locations change in the last minute."

But only two polling places have changed for students voting on campus. The Rutgers Labor Education Center is no longer functioning because of a power outage, so students on Cook and Douglass campuses who were set to vote there can now go to the Woodrow Wilson Elementary School on 133 Tunison Road in North Brunswick.

Students on Livingston campus who planned to vote at the Livingston Recreation Center will now vote in the Livingston Student Center, also because of a lack of power.

"It's a shame because that was going to be our new polling place," said James Vokral, Middlesex County Board of Elections administrator. "Most of the polls across Middlesex County are going to be where they were."

While no one can tell exactly how Sandy will affect voter turnout, some expect people from more isolated and damaged areas could be absent from the polls.

"There are clearly people who probably would've been planning to vote but now have more important things to worry about like staying warm or keeping a roof above their heads," said David Redlawsk, director of the Eagleton Center for Public Interest Polling.

He said less people showing up to vote for the presidential election would probably not affect the outcome in states like New Jersey and New York because they are projected blue states.

"Local elections do have a good possibility of being affected," he said. "A lot of those elections aren't won or lost by very many votes."

David Greenberg, professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, said historically when turnout has been depressed because of weather, Democrats are usually the ones who suffer.

"Poor racial minorities and people with less means are more negatively affected by storms and disasters," he said.

But the hurricane itself could have some effect on the outcome of the presidential election, Greenberg said.

“It’s pretty clear that [President Barack] Obama has improved his numbers in the past week, we don’t know for sure if this is because of the storm,” he said.

Although Christie has said he will still vote for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, his vocal support for Obama’s reaction to the hurricane on the ground in New Jersey might reach certain voters.

“[His] comments and attitude seem to suggest Obama’s performance during the storm has helped him in some measure,” Greenberg said. “It’s safe to say he helped himself just a little bit with his handling of the storm.”

The media’s diverted attention to the hurricane so close to Election Day may also impact the Romney campaign in terms of last minute efforts, he said.

“A lot of the time candidates are running around the country in the last few days. They think they’re scrounging up last minute votes,” Greenberg said. “But it’s more, ‘I have to do it because if I don’t, I could be making a foolish mistake.’”

The storm has also hindered on-campus voter awareness initiatives for the Rutgers University Student Assembly and RU Voting.

“Where Sandy has really hurt us is that last crucial week of Get Out The Vote where we could have made so many more phone calls, knocked on so many more doors, and had so many more conversations with Rutgers students,” said John Connelly, RUSA president.

Members of RUSA knocked on doors and got the word out about poll locations around campus last night, Connelly said.

RU Voting also had some late efforts in play around campus, Matto said.

“Sometimes it’s these very last-minute contacts that will make the difference,” she said. “We’re doing everything we can to make contacts with students individually or contact students via email or text.”

Matto encourages students to not let any recent changes affect their decision to vote.

“They deserve a seat at the table and need to be a part of the political process,” she said. “Make use of the information that we’re putting out there and the University is putting out there, and don’t let it keep you from the polls.”

For voter information, including where to vote around campus or in New Brunswick, visit [ruvoting.rutgers.edu](http://ruvoting.rutgers.edu).