

# US HOUSE AND SENATE ELECTIONS PREVIEW

The Battle For Control  
Of Congress

As of Thursday, October 22, driven by huge increases in both voting by mail and early voting in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 35% of the number of voters who cast ballots in 2016 have already voted in 2020. While we can't say for certain what that means for either presidential candidate's prospects, we do know that interest in the 2020 election is polling at an all-time high and it appears that reactions, both negative and positive, to President Trump's term in office is what is sparking that interest. Congressional Republicans, particularly Senate Republicans standing for re-election, who had hoped to "localize" their races haven't been able to get out of the shadow cast by the President and 2020 is turning into a very "nationalized" race. The GOP, if polling is to be believed, is back on its heels as it enters into the final stretch in targeted Senate and House races. But as they say, a week is a lifetime in politics, and we've got just a little over a lifetime and a half left before Nov 3. In this piece, we look at the "undercard" of key competitive Senate and House races across the country as whether we end up with one party control of both Congress and the White House or a continuation of divided government will be critical to the chances of success for the legislative agenda of whoever is our President.

## 2020 House Overview

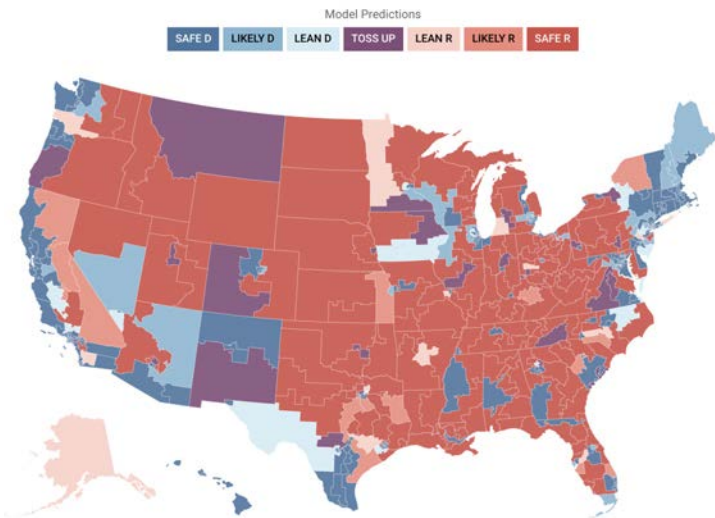
Currently, it appears that the House elections will produce either a status quo outcome or modest gains of anywhere between 5 and 10 additional seats for Democrats. According to FiveThirtyEight's deluxe House forecast, which incorporates polls, fundamentals and expert ratings from *The Cook Political Report*, *Inside Elections* and *Sabato's Crystal Ball*, as of October 15 House Democrats have a 96 percent chance of retaining control of the House and they are now projected to control 238 seats, a net gain of 5 seats from their current total and a 3-seat gain from 2018.

Democrats must defend 30 seats in districts won by President Trump in 2016 (as opposed to only 6 Republicans who sit in districts that Hillary Clinton carried). Yet because of the comparative strength of Vice President Biden's candidacy

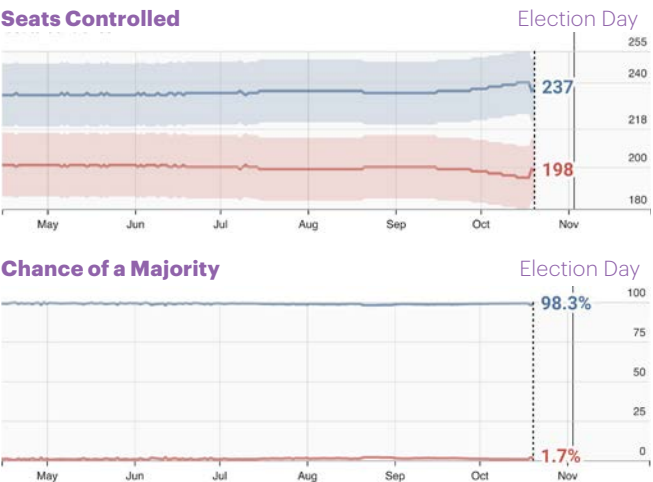
and declining support for President Trump, Democrats are on offense once again this year as 28 of the 50 House seats that FiveThirtyEight considers most likely to flip are held by Republicans. However, it is also important to note that FiveThirtyEight estimates that only 8 of these 50 House seats have more than a 50 percent chance of flipping parties, only 16 seats currently have more than a 40 percent chance of changing parties, and only 28 seats have more than a 30 percent chance of flipping parties.

In North Carolina, as a result of court-ordered redistricting, Democrats will pick up two seats (NC-02 and NC-06) where the incumbent Republicans are retiring, and in Michigan, Republicans are expected to win the seat in MI-03 being vacated by Libertarian and former Republican Congressman Justin Amash. Democrats are favored to win open seats in TX-23 where Republican Congressman Will Hurd is retiring and in NY-02 where veteran Republican Peter King is retiring.

### House Seats By State



Via Decision Desk HQ



Via Decision Desk HQ



In CA-25, where Republican Congressman Mike Garcia won a special election to fill the remaining term of Congresswoman Katie Hill who resigned her seat, due to the strength of anticipated Democratic turnout in the state, Democrat Christy Smith is estimated to have a 56 percent chance of turning the tables in the rematch and defeating Congressman Garcia.

Based on the FiveThreeEight ratings, only two incumbent Democrats are estimated to have less than a 50 percent chance of winning. In MN-07, veteran House Agriculture Committee Chairman Collin Peterson is said to have only a 26 percent chance of winning and is in serious risk of losing his bid for re-election, while in OK-5, freshman member Kendra Horn is said to have a 49 percent chance of re-election. Freshman Congressmen Joe Cunningham in SC-01 (54 percent) and TJ Cox in CA-21 (52 percent) are the only other Democrats with less than a 62 percent chance of winning.

So where are the potential opportunities for Democrats to pick up additional Republican seats? There are four open seats being vacated by Republicans where the Democratic candidate has more than a 40 percent chance of winning: IN-05 (48 percent), CO-3 (46 percent), GA-07 (45 percent) and VA-05 (45 percent). Moreover, Democratic candidates have a 43 percent chance of defeating former Democrat-turned-Republican Jeff Van Drew in NJ-02 and a 41 percent chance of defeating Republican Scott Perry in PA-10.

Additional opportunities for both Republicans and Democrats can be found in seats with between a 30 and 40 percent chance of flipping. Of the 12 seats estimated to have between a 30 and 40 percent chance of flipping, 6 are held by freshman Democrats (GA-06, NY 22, CA-48, NM-02, UT-04 and NY-11), 4 are held by Republicans (NE-02, NY-24, OH-01 and IL-13) and 2 are open seats—1 held by retiring Republican Congressman Kenny Marchant (TX-24) and 1 held by retiring Democratic Congressman Dave Loebsack.

The remaining 22 seats on the FiveThirtyEight list of the top 50 seats most likely to flip are estimated to have a 20 to 30 percent chance of flipping. Included in this group are 4 open seats resulting from Republican retirements (TX-22, MT-AL, NC-11 and FL-15), 8 Republican seats (AZ-06, MI-06, TX-21, AK-AL, MN-01, NC-08, AR-02 and MO-02) and 10 Democratic seats (TX-07, NJ-07, CA-39, FL-26, NV-04, IA-03, VA-07, WI-03, OR-04 and TX-32). While it is possible that several of these seats could be at risk if there is a real wave election for either party, absent such a wave, virtually all of the seats in this category are considered likely to continue to be represented by the party that currently holds the seat.



# FiveThirtyEight's Top 50 House Races

Incumbent

Challenger

Incumbent

Challenger

Incumbent

Challenger



Don Young

AK



Alyse Galvin



Tipton (OPEN)  
Lauren Boeert

CO-3



Diane Mitsch Bush



Cindy Axne

IA-3



David Young



French Hill

AR-2



Joyce Elliott



Spano (OPEN)  
Scott Franklin

FL-15



Alan Cohn



Rodney Davis

IL-13



Betsey Dirksen  
Londrigan



David Schweikert

AZ-6



Hiral Tipirneni



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell

FL-26



Carlos Gimenez



Brooks (OPEN)  
Victoria Spartz

IN-5



Christina Hale



T.J. Cox

CA-21



David Valadao



Lucy McBath

GA-6



Karen Handel



Peter Meijer

MI-3



Hillary Scholten



Mike Garcia

CA-25



Christy Smith



Rich McCormick

GA-7



Caroline Bourdeaux



Elissa Slotkin

MI-8



Paul Junge



Gil Cisenros

CA-39



Young Kim



Abby Finkenauer

IA-1



Ashley Hinson



Jim Hagedorn

MN-1



Dan Feehan



Harley Rouda

CA-48



Michelle Steel



Loeb sack (OPEN)  
Rita Hart

IA-2



Mariannette  
Miller-Meeks



Collin Peterson

MN-7



Michelle Fischbach

**Incumbent**

**Challenger**

**Incumbent**

**Challenger**

**Incumbent**

**Challenger**



Ann Wagner

MO-2



Martin Schulte



Xochitl Torres Small

NM-3



Yvette Herrell



Kendra Horn

OK-5



Stephanie Bice



Gianforte (OPEN)  
Matt Rosendale

MT



Kathleen Williams



Steven Horsford

NV-4



Jim Marchant



Peter DeFazio

OR-4



Alek Skarlatos



Meadows (Open)  
Madison Cawthorn

NC-11



Moe Davis



Max Rose

NY-11



Nicole Malliotakis



Brian Fitzpatrick

PA-1



Christina Finello



Richard Hudson

NC-8



Pat Timmons-Goodson



Andrew Garbarino

NY-2



Jackie Gordon



Scott Perry

PA-10



Eugene DePasquale



Don Bacon

NE-2



Kara Eastmen



Anthony Brindisi

NY-22



Claudia Tenney



Joe Cunningham

SC-1



Nancy Mace



Jeff Van Drew

NJ-2



Amy Kennedy



John Katko

NY-24



Dana Baller



Chip Roy

TX-21



Wendy Davis



Tom Malinowski

NJ-7



Tom Kean



Steve Chabot

OH-1



Kate Schroder



Olson (OPEN)  
Troy Nehls

TX-22



Sri Preston Kulkarni



**Incumbent**

**Challenger**

**Incumbent**

**Challenger**

**Incumbent**

**Challenger**



TX-23



Hurd (OPEN)  
Tony Gonzales

Gina Ortiz Jones



UT-4



Ben McAdams

Burgess Owens



VA-7



Abigail Spanberger

Nicholas Freitas



TX-24



Merchant (OPEN)  
Beth Van Duyne

Candace Valenzuela



VA-2



Elaine Luria

Scott Taylor



WI-3



Ron Kind

Derrick Van Orden



TX-7



Lizzie Fletcher

Wesley Hunt



VA-5



Riggleman (OPEN)  
Bob Good

Cameron Webb



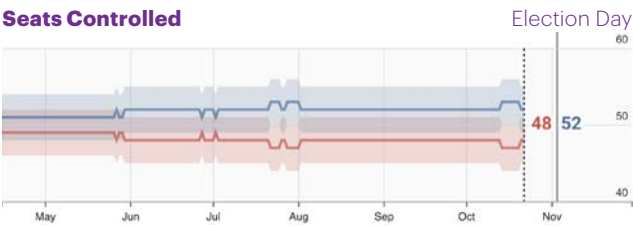
# 2020 Senate Overview

Thirty-five Senate seats are up for election this November. As of today, ten seats are solidly Democratic and ten seats are solidly Republican. So that means that fifteen seats are currently considered competitive.

With two Independents who vote with the Democrats, if former Vice President Biden is elected President, Democrats will need a net pick-up of three seats to gain control of the Senate, as Vice President Harris, as the President of the Senate, would have the power to break 50-50 tie votes. If President Trump is re-elected, Democrats would need a net pick-up of four seats to gain control of the Senate.

The prognosticators believe that Republicans have only two potentially viable opportunities to pick up Democratic seats: Alabama, where Republican Tommy Tuberville is favored over Democratic incumbent Doug Jones; and Michigan, where Republican John James, while not favored, is in a competitive race with Democratic incumbent Gary Peters.

## Seats Controlled



## Chance of a Majority

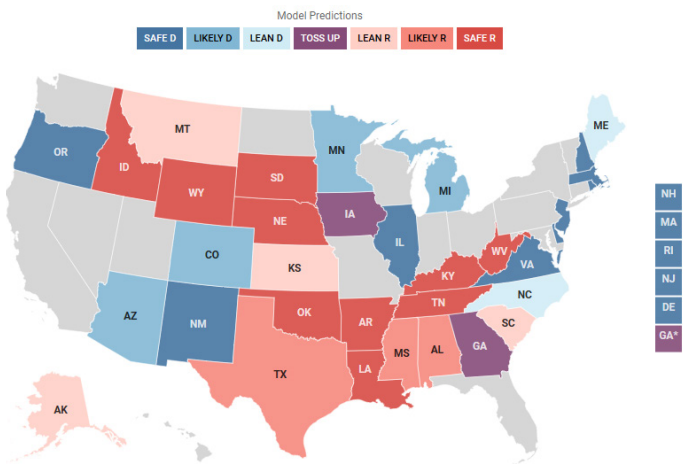


Via Decision Desk HQ

Where are the Democratic opportunities? The political handicappers see a total of 13 Democratic opportunities for pick-ups, including 12 races that involve sitting Republican senators and an open seat in Kansas, where Republican incumbent Pat Roberts is retiring. Based upon the ratings from the political website FiveThirtyEight, Democratic candidates are currently favored over Republican incumbents in 5 races (Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Maine and North Carolina), while Republican incumbents are favored in 8 races: Alaska, Kansas, Kentucky, Montana, South Carolina, Texas and Georgia, where incumbents David Perdue and Kelly Loeffler are defending their seats. (Some observers believe that the race in Mississippi, where former Agriculture Secretary and Democratic Congressman Mike Espy is challenging Republican incumbent Cindy Hyde-Smith also could become competitive, but this race is not discussed below.)

## Senate Seats By State

The map below shows the win probability (from blue to red, with purple being toss ups) in each state that has a Senate election. If a state has a regular and a special election, then the special election will be represented as a square on the right side with a '\*' symbol.



Via Decision Desk HQ

If the election results match the predicted outcomes above, Democrats would have a net pick-up of 4 seats, enough to give them control of the Senate regardless of which candidate is elected President. So let's do a deeper dive into these 15 competitive races, listed alphabetically:

## Alabama

Incumbent

Challenger



Jones (D)



Tuberville (R)

Lightly polled race with Auburn University's 10/3 having Tuberville up 12 points

## Chance of winning



Via Decision Desk HQ

This race is a rare bright spot for Senate Republicans in an otherwise very challenging year. Senator Doug Jones, the lone Democratic senator from the Deep South, is running hard in an uphill battle against Republican Tommy Tuberville, a former Auburn University football coach. Jones narrowly won a December 2017 special election over the very flawed and scandal-plagued candidate Judge Roy Moore to replace former Senator Jeff Sessions, who left to become US Attorney General, but Jones now faces much tougher odds against Tuberville, who with President Trump's endorsement, easily defeated Sessions in a July runoff.

Senator Jones is possibly best-known for successfully prosecuting the four white supremacists responsible for bombing a church and killing four girls in Birmingham, AL, in 1963. While Jones has raised far more money this cycle than Tuberville (\$14.3 million to \$3.4 million) and has far more cash on hand (\$8.7 million to \$551,000), President Trump is expected to win Alabama easily and this is a very Republican state, so Senator Jones has been receiving far less support from outside groups than he did in the 2017 special election.

Crimson Tide vs. War Eagle? This race poses the interesting question whether Bama fans will be willing to vote for the former coach of cross-state rival Auburn. Similarly, the recent diagnosis of Alabama coach Nick Saban as having COVID-19 also could weaken the enthusiasm of Alabama voters for Republican candidates. *The Cook Political Report* and *Inside Elections* rate the race as "leans Republican" while *Sabato's Crystal Ball* at the University of Virginia Center for Politics rates it "likely Republican."

## Alaska

Incumbent

Challenger



**Sullivan (R)**



**Gross (D)**

New York Times/Siena poll from 10/14 had Sullivan up 8, unchanged from July polling showing Sullivan also up 8



*The Cook Political Report* rates this race, in which Republican Senator Dan Sullivan is being challenged by Independent Al Gross, as "leans Republican" and Alaska is a Republican-leaning state. That said, while little polling is available, there is reason to believe that this race could be competitive. First, Alaska is not as Republican as it might first appear. Democrats won this seat in 2008 before losing it in 2014. Moreover, Alaskans have a soft spot for independents and write-in candidates. In 2010, Alaskans re-elected Senator Lisa Murkowski who was running as a write-in candidate against the official Republican Party nominee, Joe Miller. Additionally, Gross's strong fundraising, the millions being pumped into his campaign by Democratic-aligned super PACs, and the close, if limited, poll numbers in the state are a recent surprise that could end up catching Senator Sullivan flat-footed.

Finally, it appears that Senator Sullivan may have been hurt by campaign donations that he received from people involved in an unpopular project to build a gold and copper mine known as the Pebble Mine near Bristol Bay. Last month, secret recordings were released in which Pebble Mine executives implied that Sullivan would support the project (or at least not publicly oppose it) once his re-election contest is over. After those recordings emerged, Sullivan issued a statement emphatically opposing the project but Gross continues to attack him on the issue.

## Arizona

Incumbent

Challenger



**McSally (R)**



**Kelly (D)**

The Real Clear Politics Average for polling in October has Kelly up 8.4



This race is probably the most likely Democratic pick-up opportunity. If Democrats fail to win this seat, it is highly unlikely that they will gain control of the Senate. Former astronaut Mark Kelly, the spouse of former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, has been running substantially ahead of



incumbent Republican Senator Martha McSally for many months. Vice President Biden has a small, but growing lead over President Trump in Arizona, and, as Senator McSally's debates with Kelly have shown, she has found it very difficult to separate herself from the President in a state where the President's popularity has materially declined since 2016. A Reuters/Ipsos poll taken October 7-14 has Kelly ahead of McSally by a margin of 52 to 41 percent (an uptick from the prior Reuters/Ipsos poll, which had Kelly ahead 51 to 41 percent). Of those polled, 10 percent indicated that they had already voted.

## Colorado

Incumbent

Challenger



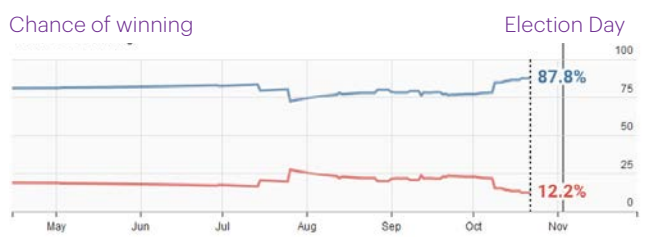
Gardner (R)



Hickenlooper (D)

Two polls from early October, U of Colorado/YouGov and KUSA/SurveyUSA, have Hickenlooper up 8 and 9 points on Gardner

Chance of winning



Via Decision Desk HQ

Former Democratic Governor John Hickenlooper faces first-term Republican Senator Cory Gardner, one of the most vulnerable incumbents facing re-election. Given Colorado's progressive views on such issues as abortion and COVID-19 relief, Governor Hickenlooper is seen as being more closely aligned on the issues with the voters than Senator Gardner. However because of Hickenlooper's somewhat quirky personality, Gardner is seen as being the person voters would prefer to have a beer with. Yet despite his personal popularity, Senator Gardner is the underdog in this race, in large part because of his allegiance to President Trump, who remains unpopular in the state.

A Democratic pick-up in this state is crucial to Democratic efforts to gain control of the Senate. Once again, while there are numerous routes flipping the Senate, it is very difficult to see how the Democrats do so should they not win Colorado.

However, recent polling has encouraging signs for the Democrats. A Morning Consult poll released on October 14 showed that Hickenlooper held a 10-point advantage against Gardner, 50 to 40 percent, according to the survey conducted Oct. 2-11. Just a month ago, before Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death, a Morning Consult poll found the race at a statistical tie with Hickenlooper at 46 percent and Gardner at 44 percent. Democratic insiders, including the executive director of the DSCC, are very confident that the Former Governor will win this race.

## Georgia (1)

Incumbent

Challenger



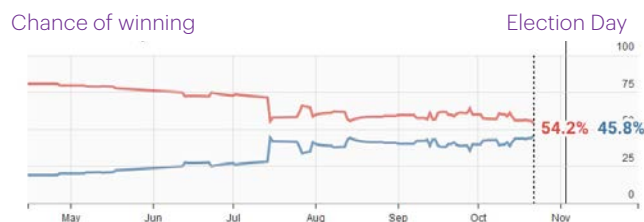
Perdue (R)



Ossoff (D)

The Real Clear Politics Average of polls from 9/27 to 10/19 has Perdue up 0.9. If neither candidate breaks 50% a run off is scheduled for 1/5/21

Chance of winning



Via Decision Desk HQ

Georgia is in the rare position of having both of its US Senate seats up for grabs this year, after Senator Johnny Isakson retired unexpectedly due to health concerns. Republican Governor Brian Kemp appointed Kelly Loeffler to serve as senator until the state could hold a new election, which will happen this November. The two senate races present special challenges to all parties as the candidate with the most votes needs to attract at least 50 percent of the total vote cast to avoid a runoff.

Senator Perdue is being challenged by Democrat Jon Ossoff as well as a lesser known Libertarian candidate. According to recent polling, both Perdue and Ossoff are polling in the mid-40% with the Libertarian polling at 3-4%. It is unlikely that either Perdue or Ossoff will get over 50% of the vote on November 3rd which will push the top two vote getters into a general election runoff set for January 5, 2021.

## Georgia (2)

Incumbent



Loeffler (R)

Challenger



Collins (R)

Challenger



Warnock (D)

Challenger



Lieberman (D)

The Real Clear Politics Average has Warnock at 33%, Loeffler at 23%, Collins at 21% and Liebman at 5.9%. This race is bound for a run off on 1/5/21

Chance of winning

Election Day



\*\*\*Contemplates Party NOT Candidate Election Day win\*\*\*

Via Decision Desk HQ

Senator Kelly Loeffler faces 20 candidates, albeit most of them not serious contenders, in the November race to serve for the remainder of Senator Isakson's term. If no candidate wins 50 percent of the vote, the two candidates with the most votes will face off on January 5, 2021. Current polling indicates that Reverend Raphael Warnock, the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church (Martin Luther King's church in Atlanta), is going to be one of the two candidates in the December runoff as he currently leads the race with about 41% of the vote, unless he can eke out 50 percent of the vote. Senator Loeffler, for her part, faces a very stiff challenge from Republican Congressman Doug Collins for the other seat in the runoff and recent polling has them basically deadlocked. If the battle for control of the Senate is not determined by the outcome of the November elections, the January runoff in Georgia will attract enormous interest and attention.

## Iowa

Incumbent



Ernst (R)

Challenger



Greenfield (D)

The Real Clear Politics Average has Greenfield up 1.8% on Ernst

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

Another key potential pick-up for Democrats, Republican Senator Joni Ernst is in a very close race with Democrat Theresa Greenfield. Though President Trump flipped Iowa to the Republican column in 2016, the President's support has declined, leaving him in a virtual tie with Vice President Biden in average state polling data. Ernst, who is serving her first term in the Senate, has been a close Trump ally. Both of Iowa's senators are Republican, but Ernst replaced a Democrat, Senator Tom Harkin, who had served Iowa in the Senate for 30 years before retiring in 2014.

A toss-up according to *The Cook Political Report*, this race is the closest of the Democratic pick-up opportunities in which Democrats are currently favored. FiveThirtyEight's Senate Forecast gives Greenfield a 53 percent chance of winning, with a 49 to 48.4 percent lead in the polling, and indicates that Greenfield's chances have been improving for the last two weeks. A recent *Des Moines Register* Iowa Poll showed Greenfield leading Ernst by 3 percentage points.

## Kansas

Incumbent

Challenger



**Marshall (R)**

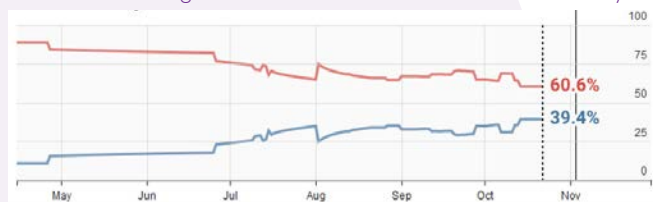


**Bollier (D)**

Public polls are scarce in this race with the last one available having Marshall up 2 on Bollier

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

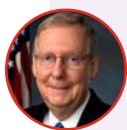
While it is easier to flip an open seat than to defeat an incumbent, Democrats have had some recent electoral success and President Trump's popularity has declined in the state. That said, Democrats still face a real uphill climb here as Kansas remains a very red state. Moreover, in Congressman Roger Marshall, Republicans have a candidate who defeated Kris Kobach in the primary and who is not tied to the unpopular policies of former Republican Governor Sam Brownback or to the declining popularity of President Trump.

While Democrats have recruited a candidate in State Senator Barbara Bollier, a physician and former Republican whose profile is well-suited to the state and who leads narrowly in some recent polls, FiveThirtyEight's Senate forecast says that Marshall leads Bollier 51 to 45.9 percent and that he has a 74 percent chance of winning the race. If Bollier wins this race, Senator Chuck Schumer should start measuring the drapes in the majority leader's office as Democrats will be having an exceptionally good night.

## Kentucky

Incumbent

Challenger



**McConnell (R)**



**McGrath (D)**

A Mason-Dixon poll from mid October has McConnell up 9 on McGrath

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

For a slew of reasons, there are few candidates Democrats would like to defeat more than Mitch McConnell. However, with only one debate and a weak Democratic candidate in Amy McGrath, who was unable to win her bid for Kentucky's 6th CD seat in Lexington in 2018 despite having raised large sums of money from outside the district, the prospects for Democratic success in this Senate race have been slim from the outset. FiveThirtyEight says that McConnell has a 96 percent chance of winning re-election and projects that he will win the popular vote by a margin of 56 to 41.4 percent, or 14.6 percent.

Based on current polling data, a McGrath victory would certainly be the biggest upset of the night and one of the biggest upsets in political history. Democratic supporters will have to content themselves with having forced McConnell to raise and spend very large sums of money on his own re-election, sums that in other circumstances could have been directed to other races. McConnell's only concern on election night would appear to be whether he will continue as the majority leader or whether Republicans will be relegated to the Senate minority.



## Maine

Incumbent

Challenger



Collins (R)



Gideon (D)

The Real Clear Politics Average has Gideon up 4.2%

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

While long-time Republican Senator Susan Collins is seen as a moderate among Senate Republicans, she is a prime target of Senate Democrats who say that they can only count on her vote for Democratic priorities when her vote doesn't make a difference, as will be the case in the coming confirmation vote for Judge Amy Coney Barrett to become a Supreme Court Justice. Because Collins is seen as too moderate for many Trump Republicans to get excited about and not nearly progressive enough to attract Democratic support, Maine House Speaker Sara Gideon has led Senator Susan Collins in all polling since mid-September, and her lead appears to be expanding.

Since September 10 when, according to FiveThirtyEight's Senate forecast, her chances of re-election peaked at 60 percent, Senator Collins' prospects have steadily declined to a current level of 37 percent and Speaker Gideon is projected to have a 3 percent popular vote margin over her of 51.5 to 48.5 percent. The most recent polling available gives Gideon about a 7 percent lead over Collins.

## Michigan

Incumbent

Challenger



Peters (D)

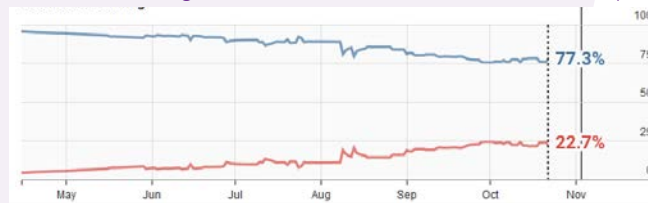


James (R)

The Real Clear Politics Average has Peters up 4.7%

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

At the start of this cycle, Republicans believed that their candidate, John James, had an excellent chance of defeating Democratic incumbent Gary Peters, even though James had previously lost a Senate race to incumbent Senator Debbie Stabenow. Republicans believed that if their candidate could defeat Peters (and take down Alabama Senator Doug Jones), that would provide the pathway to maintaining their Senate majority. No more, however. Recent polling indicates that Vice President Biden is likely to win Michigan pretty easily and it is difficult to imagine that a large enough universe of Biden-James ticket-splitters exists to allow James to succeed in the face of such a headwind.

Senator Peters recently disclosed a family secret about the difficulties his first wife had obtaining a medically necessary abortion, which put a favorable spotlight from progressives and the media on the somewhat obscure Senator, a spotlight to which he is not accustomed. FiveThirtyEight's Senate forecast gives him a 79 percent of being re-elected and it projects a popular vote margin of 51.9 to 45.4 percent, or 6.5 percent.

## Montana

Incumbent

Challenger



**Daines (R)**



**Bullock (D)**

PPP and Emerson polling are the most recent and have vastly different numbers. PPP has it tied and Emerson has Daines up 9

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

While Republican incumbent Senator Steve Daines has voted nearly in lockstep with President Trump, he hasn't had any major controversies in this reliably Republican state over the past four years. That said, the Senator faces a popular opponent in former two-term Governor, Attorney General and presidential candidate Steve Bullock, who has won statewide office three times. This probably accounts for *The Cook Political Report* rating this race as a "toss-up."

While Montana is a Republican state that will vote for President Trump again this year, even if more narrowly than last time, the state re-elected Democratic Senator Jon Tester in 2018 and has had a Democratic governor since 2005. Thus, it overstates the case to say that Montana is allergic to Democrats and this state, along with South Carolina, may present the best opportunities for Democrats to spring an upset. FiveThirtyEight's Senate forecast says that Republican Senator Steve Daines has a 68 percent chance of winning re-election and projects him to win the popular vote by 51.7 to 48.3 percent, or 3.4 percent. That said, if Democrats have a particularly good night, this state and possibly South Carolina, among others, are definitely worth watching.

## North Carolina

Incumbent

Challenger



**Tillis (R)**



**Cunningham (D)**

The Real Clear Politics Average has Cunningham up 2.3%

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

A win in this state is important to Democratic prospects of recapturing control of the Senate. Since the beginning of August until today, according to FiveThirtyEight, the chances of Democratic challenger Cal Cunningham defeating incumbent Republican Senator Thom Tillis have fluctuated between 62 and 67 percent, never falling below that number. Today, Cunningham's chance of winning stands at 66 percent with a projected popular vote margin of 50.3 to 47.1 percent, or 3.2 percent.

On October 2, news broke that Cunningham had been sexting a woman who wasn't his wife and with whom he apparently had been having an affair. Shortly before Cunningham acknowledged this activity, Senator Tillis announced that he had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

In normal times, one would think that the disclosure of infidelity and subsequent acknowledgement by Cunningham would be devastating to his election prospects, and Republicans have certainly attempted to capitalize on this issue by running commercials questioning Cunningham's character and his integrity. Yet all available polling suggests that Cunningham's misconduct has had little impact on his election prospects. In fact, his election prospects appear to have improved modestly since the story broke. Perhaps with all the dangers and stress associated with the pandemic, voters have simply decided that they have bigger fish to fry than a candidate with loose morals. Whatever the explanation, Cunningham remains favored to be elected.

## South Carolina

Incumbent

Challenger



Graham (R)

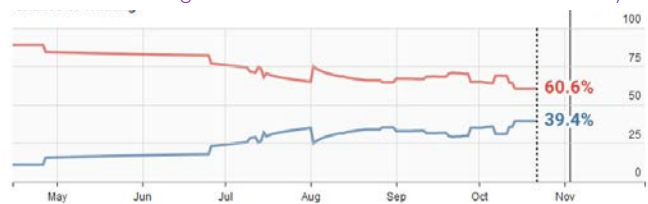


Harrison (D)

Polls in February had Graham up 17 points on a Democratic nominee. The New York Times/Siena poll taken mid October has Graham up 5

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

With tremendous assistance from incumbent Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, whose words have often become massive self-inflicted wounds, Democratic candidate Jaime Harrison has managed to achieve what most thought impossible: nationalizing his Senate race and, in the process, raising sums of money that were heretofore unimaginable. To raise \$57 million in the third quarter alone is simply mind-boggling.

That said, all the money in the world may not be able to overcome political fundamentals. South Carolina remains a Republican state and one that President Trump will comfortably win, even if not by the margin that he achieved in 2016. FiveThirtyEight gives Senator Graham a 77 percent chance of being re-elected and projects a popular vote margin of 51.8 to 48.3 percent, or 3.5 percent. While Harrison touts polls showing the race tied at 48 to 48 percent, a *New York Times* poll released on October 15 shows Graham leading by a margin of 46 to 40 percent.

While Harrison is running an amazing race, the question remains whether there are enough Trump-Harrison voters, when combined with tremendously enhanced African American turnout, to lead Harrison to a victory. Current polling suggests most likely not.

## Texas

Incumbent

Challenger



Cornyn (R)

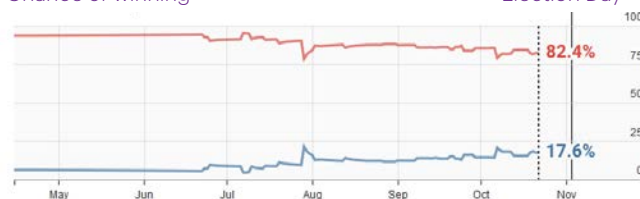


Hegar (D)

The Real Clear Politics Average has Cornyn up 8.3 on Hegar

Chance of winning

Election Day



Via Decision Desk HQ

While Democratic super PACs have started to spend substantial money in support of Democrat M.J. Hegar's race against incumbent Republican Senator John Cornyn, these efforts seem like far too little, far too late. FiveThirtyEight gives Senator Cornyn an 87 percent chance of winning re-election with a projected vote margin of 53 to 44.4 percent, or 8.6 points. This projection has not changed in any material way since August 2020.

If this race proves to be closer than expected, it could be a reflection of demographic changes already occurring in Texas and a harbinger of success down the road for Democratic candidates. However, for now, a Hegar win would be a huge upset, probably the biggest shock of the night unless Amy McGrath were to beat Leader McConnell.



# Contacts



# Contacts

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