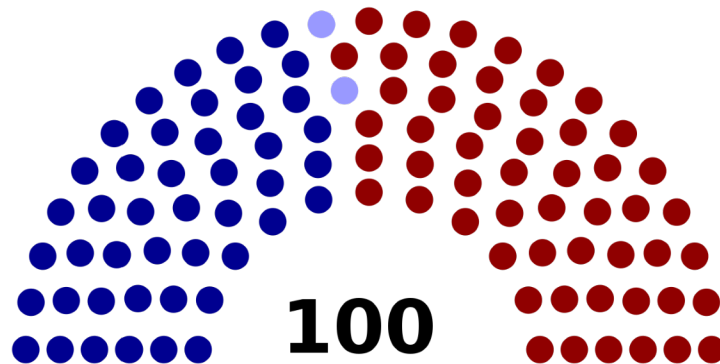# Down Ballot 2020:

Flip the Senate

Because the Senate will be key to enabling or checking

what the President can and cannot do

regardless of who wins the White House

01 November 2020

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to give readers some realistic expectations about the outcomes of Tuesday's Senate elections.

Executive Summary

- *There is reason to be **cautiously** optimistic the Democrats will flip the Senate this week:*

    - Nate Silver's 538 ***raised Dems' chances*** of flipping the Senate from 73% to 77% in the past week;
    - The Economist ***raised the Dems' chances*** of flipping the Senate from 74% to 83% in the past week;
    - Cook Political Report calls Democrats a clear favorite to take control of Senate;
    - Alan Abramowitz, at UVA Center for Politics, favors Dems to win Senate; and
    - Almost all betting sites give the Democrats the odds for winning the Senate.

- Despite all that, some of the key the races have gotten noticeably more competitive in the past week or so.

- Again, there is reason to be optimistic, but it's not a given.

Pundit Forecasts

Table 1, below, is an aggregation of various pundit forecasts for the Senate races. The leftmost three are qualitative forecasts, the rightmost two are quantitative forecasts.

	Cook	Sabato	Gonzales	538	Economist
AK	Lean	Lean	Lean	24%	28%
AZ	Lean	Lean	Tilt	80%	87%
CO	Lean	Likely	Lean	84%	95%
GA-R	Toss Up	Toss Up	Toss Up	42%	61%
GA-Sp	Toss Up	Toss Up	Tilt	63%	62%
IA	Toss Up	Lean	Toss Up	51%	53%
KS	Lean	Lean	Tilt	23%	23%
ME	Toss Up	Lean	Tilt	59%	72%
MI	Lean	Lean	Lean	82%	97%
MT	Toss Up	Lean	Toss Up	34%	35%
NC	Toss Up	Toss Up	Tilt	64%	73%
SC	Toss Up	Lean	Tilt	23%	38%
TX	Lean	Likely	Lean	14%	20%

Table 1: Pundit Forecasts as of 01 November

Note: Michigan (MI) is already blue. This shows the chances of staying blue.

Changes in Quantitative Pundit Forecasts

	538			Economist		
	Last Week	This Week	Change	Last Week	This Week	Change
AK	20%	24%	+4	26%	28%	+2
AZ	78%	80%	+2	86%	87%	+1
CO	83%	84%	+1	94%	95%	+1
GA-R	29%	42%	+13	49%	61%	+12
GA-Sp	54%	63%	+9	48%	62%	+14
IA	56%	51%	-5	62%	53%	-9
KS	25%	23%	-2	26%	23%	-3
ME	63%	59%	-4	77%	72%	-5
MI	79%	82%	+3	93%	97%	+4
MT	32%	34%	+2	32%	35%	+3
NC	63%	64%	+1	77%	73%	-4
SC	23%	23%	--	40%	38%	-2
TX	13%	14%	+1	26%	20%	-6

Table 2: Changes in Quantitative Forecasts

Commentary on Changes to Pundit Forecasts

Alaska

- This race could be one of the real surprises.
- Alaska is notoriously difficult to poll due to the sparse population and vast distances.
- The most recent polls give Dan Sullivan (R) a slight edge.
- Quantitative forecasts have increased their odds, however. This may be due to a minor scandal that has broken out around Sullivan and his connections with an extraction company.
- Al Gross (I) is a native born Alaskan (Sullivan is not), and is running as an Independent. This may give him a slight qualitative edge as being a native Alaskan apparently carries some weight, and Alaskans pride themselves on being independent.

Arizona

- Along with Colorado, Arizona is probably the best bet for a flip.
- Mark Kelly (D) has held a consistent lead over incumbent Marth McSally (R) for months, and most of the polls are outside the margins of error.
- Joe Biden is leading Donald Trump by approximately 3%.
- At the state legislature level, Democrats seem to be on the verge of flipping at least one of the chambers.
- During a recent Trump rally in Arizona, Trump basically pushed McSally off the stage.
- There have been many anecdotal articles in recent months about the blue-ing of Arizona.

Colorado

- Probably the safest bet for a flip.
- John Hickenlooper (D) has held a consistent large lead over incumbent Cory Gardner (R) in dozens of polls this year.
- Joe Biden is leading Donald Trump by approximately 14%.
- Colorado is pretty solidly blue.

Georgia Regular

- This has the potential to be a big upset.
- Jon Ossoff (D) *slammed* incumbent David Perdue (R) in the most recent debate, and it went viral, causing Perdue to cancel the final debate. The exchange is worth watching:

  https://www.nbcnews.com/video/ossoff-blames-sen-perdue-for-insider-trading-amid-coronavirus-pandemic-94914629603

- Ossoff has been leading Perdue in most recent polls, and in those few polls where Perdue leads the margins have been very small.
- Joe Biden is currently leading Trump by almost 2%.
- The Georgia Special election is energizing the black vote in Georgia, and early turnout has been record-breaking.

Georgia Special

- This, too, has the potential to be a big upset.
- The Reverend Raphael Warnock (D) currently occupies the position formerly held by Martin Luther King at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. He is well-known and highly-regarded.
- But this is a special election, and there are over 20 candidates running, including seven other Democrats.
- Polls show Warnock well ahead of all other candidates, but not quite reaching the 50% mark (which is necessary to avoid a January runoff).
- If Matt Lieberman (D) and Ed Tarver (D) were to drop out and throw themselves behind Warnock, this seat could flip on Tuesday.

Iowa

- This race has become very competitive…a true tossup.
- Several weeks ago, Joni Ernst (R) made a huge gaff at a debate when she did not know the breakeven price of soybeans. Theresa Greenfield (D) knew the price of a bushel of corn to the penny. This went viral and boosted Greenfield's numbers. The video is worth watching (link on next page):

- Two of the three most recent polls, however, have Ernst up by an average of three points.
- The most recent poll (today) has Greenfield back in the lead by 3%.
- Also, in the past few days Donald Trump regained the lead over Joe Biden by about 2%.
- After Ernst's debate debacle, there have been no particular news stories that warrant any changes in attitudes.
- In several studies, Iowa is among the most evenly distributed states in terms of partisanship, and perhaps that is what is being reflected in the polls and forecasts.
-

Kansas

- Barbara Bollier (D), bless her heart, is taking good GOP money away from other Senate races and forcing the GOP to defend this seat, which they should not have to do.
- Although it is quite possible there will be an upset here, it is unlikely. The fact that the GOP is having to defend this seat, though, speaks volumes about the mood of the country.

Maine

- The changes in quantitative pundit forecasts for this race are curious.
- All polls continue to show Sarah Gideon (D) ahead of incumbent Susan Collins (R).
- The vagaries of Maine's ranked choice voting continue to favor Gideon.
- There have been no news stories that would indicate such changes are warranted.
- Joe Biden continues to hold a solid 14% lead over Donald Trump.
- Maine is one of two states (Nebraska being the other) that splits its electoral votes. District ME-2 (rural, inland Maine) tends to be Republican, and often there are polls on just that district. Although none appear recently, that could be a factor in lowering Gideon's odds.
- In any case, this race still favors Dems, only slightly less so than before.

Michigan

- This is already a Democratic seat, but the incumbent, Gary Peters, was showing weakness for a while.
- All polls continue to show Peters leading his GOP challenger, John James, a fair number by double digits.
- Barring some completely unexpected upset, this seat should remain blue.

Montana

- This is another true tossup.
- Governor Steve Bullock (D) and incumbent Steve Daines (R) remain within one or two points of one another in polls.
- There have been no significant news stories to sway the race either way.
- Although Montana is solid red at the Presidential level, it has a history of sending moderate Senators to Washington.
- Donald Trump is only leading Joe Biden by 5%. This is a huge difference from the 24% by which he beat Hilary Clinton in 2016.
- Governor Steve Bullock is a well-known, well-liked, moderate guy, and this race could easily go to him.

North Carolina

- This is a tight race, but overall slightly in favor of Democrats.
- Almost all polls show Cal Cunningham (D) leading incumbent Thom Tillis (R), some very significantly. But Tillis has a few that favor him (most, albeit, only slightly).
- Joe Biden is currently leading Donald Trump by about 2.5%.
- North Carolina is often compared to Virginia of a few years ago: formerly red…then purplish…now blue. North Carolina is seen as being in the purplish stage with more young tech people moving to Charlotte and the Raleigh-Durham area, and more northern retirees moving to the Ashville vicinity.
- No matter the outcome, we will always wonder if Cal Cunningham's sexual indiscretions pulled his numbers down.

South Carolina

- This could be one of those complete upsets.
- Jaime Harrison (D) has polled almost even with incumbent Senator Lindsey Graham (R) in almost all polls.
- That said, South Carolina has had an historic 44% - 45% ceiling on Democratic votes. One thing that makes this race exciting is that Harrison has cracked that ceiling and reached 47% - 48% on multiple occasions.
- Harrison broke all records by raising over $100 million in Q3.
- A third-party conservative ringer could make a difference.
- Again, a long shot, but definitely within the realm of possibility.

Texas

- M.J. Hegar (D), like Barbara Bollier in Kansas, is taking good GOP money away from other Senate races and forcing the GOP to defend this seat, which on one level they should not have to do.
- Texas is supposedly undergoing rapid demographic changes, and many think the state legislature could turn blue this year.
- Incumbent John Cronyn (R) was very recently revealed to have lied about getting a degree from Oxford University. Will this matter? Who knows.
- Although it is quite possible there will be an upset here, it is unlikely. As with Kansas, though, the fact that the GOP is having to defend this seat speaks volumes about the mood of the country.

Closing Thoughts

We can only keep our fingers crossed at this point. The odds are with us, and we have a strong tailwind. Let's hope that we wake up one day this week to find that Mitch McConnell will not be the Senate Majority leader when the 117th Congress convenes on 03 January, 2021.