

I know, I know. It seems very early to start thinking about the 2020 elections! But I follow my late mother's philosophy that it's never too soon to start worrying.

Why do the 2020 Senate elections matter? Let's start with the Senate. Suppose the President in 2021 is a Republican, maybe named Donald J. We've learned from the past two years that even a slight Senate majority enables a lot of actions, including Supreme Court appointments. But we also learned from the previous two years that a Senate majority can also block many presidential actions, including a Supreme Court appointment like Judge Garland. The other, more immediate reason to think about the 2020 races, is that incumbents facing dicey elections may vote differently than usual in the new two years.

So, how do things look for 2020. There's good news for the Democrats - they face a better Senate map than they did this time around. But that's partly because the 2018 Senate map was one of the worst for any party in decades. There are a large number of Republicans up for reelection, and a much smaller number of Democrats. Unfortunately, most of those Republicans appear to be in very safe seats. And the Democrats have at least one vulnerable incumbent of their own to worry about.

[Cook Political](#) identifies four seats where the state's partisan lean might create a horserace, but one is pretty unlikely one involves a vulnerable Democrat. To gain control, the Democrats will probably need to expand the battleground somehow. Here are the states listed by Cook:

Alabama. Doug Jones (D) is the incumbent. He beat Roy Moore in 2017, but he can't count on an equally weak opponent next time - how many candidates have been thrown out of shopping malls for stalking teenage girls? Jones has been a vocal supporter of the environment.

Colorado. Cory Gardner (R) is the incumbent. His LCV score is 10%, not the worst of any Republican but still pretty bad. Gardner squeaked out a victory over Democrat Mark Udall last time around, winning by only two points. So this should be a very competitive election.

Maine Susan Collins (R) is the incumbent. She's the most environment-friendly member of her party in the Senate but still well below anyone the Democratic side of the aisle, judging by scores from the League of Conservation Voters. She won her last race by an overwhelming margin, however, so she's probably not at much risk.

North Carolina. Thom Tillis (R) is the incumbent. He has an LCV score of 7%, meaning he only votes for the environmental side of a measure about one time in fifteen. He won in 2014 by less than 2%. But he was running against an incumbent then, and he's now the incumbent, so he's probably not quite as vulnerable as he might appear from the raw numbers. Still, this is a seat the Democrats have a good shot at.

The Senate map will undoubtedly shift by the time 2020 rolls around. There are a number of Republican Senators who are over seventy and facing reelection in 2020; some of them may choose to retire. And Larry Sabato, a respected publisher, [lists](#) Iowa and Georgia as "lean Republican," and one of those may turn out to be in play.

In the end, the presidential election will do a lot to shape outcomes in the Senate races. But in the meantime, it will be worth keeping an eye on Tillis, Collins, and Gardner to see if they move closer into Trump's embrace to nail down the base or toward the center to appeal to swing voters in the general election. On the other hand, Doug Jones may feel himself pulled in Trump's direction, hoping to replicate Joe Manchin's strategy in 2018.

The House. At present, at least, it doesn't look likely that the House will be seriously in play. Sabato [says](#) that the House has seldom changed hands in presidential election years in modern times, and only when in the wake of a sweeping presidential victory. Given President Trump's approval ratings, such a Republican victory does not seem likely, however the presidential race turns out. Moreover, the Democrats won House seats in only a handful of districts where Trump ran strongly in 2016. They did win a lot of seats in districts he carried narrowly, but there's no reason to think he can carry them with sufficiently large margins to flip them back to the Republicans. Control of the House is particularly important if the Republicans maintain control of the Senate and the White House, as a counterweight by the Democrats, or if the Democrats were to win the Senate and the White House, to open the door to new legislation.. Either way, the environmental stakes are substantial.

By the way, don't worry that I'm going to start blogging about the presidential race yet. It is starting to look like just about every Democratic office-holder in the country is thinking about running. It's too early to even know who's going to be a serious candidate, let alone what the political terrain will be like in a couple of years.