

Control of the Senate will have a big impact on post-2020 policy in many areas, notably including the environment (and climate policy in particular). Right now, as best as I can tell, the Republicans still have a small edge, but that edge may be eroding.

To get a sense of the state of play in the battle for the Senate, I looked at two well-respected forecasters, Cook Political and Larry Sabato. Democrats need a net gain of three seats if Biden wins (because his Veep would cast the tie-breaking vote); otherwise they need a net gain of four.

To be more specific, the GOP has a fairly good chance of flipping Alabama, while Democrats have an equal chance in Michigan. Beyond that, the Democrats' best shots appear to Colorado and Arizona, which one forecaster listed as toss-ups and the other as "Lean Democrat." They agreed that two states are toss-ups (Maine, and North Carolina). There were two Republican states that one rated as leaning Democratic and the other ranked as a toss-up (Arizona and North Carolina). The next good possibilities for the Democrats are two states that are rated as "leans Republican," the open seat in Georgia and the Montana seat. If the GOP flips Alabama but Biden wins, the Democrats would need the two states that lean a bit their way and both toss-ups.

In short, if the GOP flips the Alabama seat held by Doug Jones (D), the Democrats would need to win both GOP seats that are now leaning just a little their way, plus either one or two of the toss-up states. Looking back at February when I [posted](#) about the Senate races, it seems that the GOP has firmed up its chances in Alabama a little (especially by failing to nominate Roy Moore again), whereas some other states have shifted incrementally toward the Democrats.

Why does the Senate matter so much?

#1. Appointments. Biden would face a tough time getting confirmations of judges and cabinet officers if McConnell is calling the shots in the Senate. If the Democrats win the Senate but lose the White House, they can block Trump's judicial nominations and perhaps force him to compromise on cabinet appointments.

#2. Legislation. Biden needs a majority to pass legislation, either in cases where the filibuster doesn't currently apply or if the filibuster is abolished. No matter who controls the Senate, neither party will have enough votes to break a filibuster.

Will things end up as close as the forecasters say? I'd say probably not, due to the way elections have been nationalized. If Biden gets a solid win, close Senate races are more

likely to go his way. If Trump wins, flipping the Senate gets really tough for the Democrats. But if Biden were to just squeak by, control of the Senate is going to be a close call, with the GOP a bit ahead on the odds.

Individual Senate candidates, their ability to raise money, and how well they run their campaigns will matter. But in the end, the most important factors may be crises we are confronting with the coronavirus, the economy, and the current public protests. They will undoubtedly have a major influence on the presidential election, which will spill over into the state races.