

We're now one year from Election Day. Because of polarization, environmental policy is closely tied to political party. The outcome of the election will shape environmental policy. If the Republicans maintain control of Congress, Trump will be relatively unchecked. Democratic control of the House or the Senate would prevent further rollbacks from Congress and would put the brakes on some of Trump's anti-environmental efforts.

My observations are based on two well-established political websites, Cook and Sabato. Given all that's happening, the situation will surely shift in the next year, but here's what things look like right now.

Will the Democrats Take the Senate?

The "out-party" typically does well in off-year elections, but the Senate map is tough for the Democrats. Republicans currently hold 53 seats and the Vice-Presidency, so Democrats need to hold all of their current seats and pick up four more for control. Holding all current Democratic seats isn't a given. Sabato and Cook both rate Michigan and Georgia as toss-ups at this point.

Picking up four new seats wouldn't be easy. The best two shots are North Carolina and Maine (now considered toss-ups.). Ohio is next, rated by lean Republican by Cook and Sabato. After that, you're into states that are rated "likely Republican": Iowa and Texas. Democrats would have to carry one of those, and will need some strong tailwinds to do so.

However, even without flipping control, closing the gap in the Senate could still make a big difference. For instance, if the Democrats win North Carolina, Maine, and Ohio, then the Senate would be tied. Vance's tie-breaking vote would give the Republicans control. But Lisa Murkowski would then be an essential vote for Republicans, and she's a maverick who could play a role like Manchin did for Democrats under Biden.

Will the Democrats Win the House?

Gerrymandering will make a big difference next November, since Republicans are trying to eliminate competitive seats in their states and Democrats are retaliating in their own states. Cook sees 17 and Sabato sees 18 toss-up House races. In Cook's count, Democrats need to keep all their own toss-up seats and pick up 6 GOP seats to win control, Republicans only need to win only 2 toss-up races. Sabato sees 13

toss-ups, but fewer Democratic seats that category. This results in more of a level playing field, with Democrats needing to win 7 of the 12 toss-up races in seats currently held by Republicans, while Republicans only need 5. Either way, Republicans have at least a slight edge.

This edge is a tribute to the success of Republican gerrymandering in eliminating competitive districts. (I'm simplifying things - there are also a bunch of "Lean" districts, and wins in those districts would provide a cushion for either party in the toss-up races.) If Prop 50 passes in California, which is now expected, that would make the prospects more balanced between the parties.

The Democrats have two big advantages going into the race. The first is the long history of out-party success in off-year elections. The second is that turnout in those elections is lower than in presidential elections, and Democrats now have strong support from the affluent, educated voters who have the highest turnout. Trump won with the support of people who don't usually vote but turned out for him. It may be hard to duplicate that when he's not on the ballot.

Candidate quality will make a difference in these close races. But the biggest factor will be the nation's political mood. Will Trump be seen as successful (even if some supporters don't like him that much)? Or will there be a huge backlash? That may turn on the state of the economy as much as anything. The Democrats are likely to pick up House seats, but will they pick up enough of them to matter?

What About the Statehouses?

Governors are important players in state climate policy. Sabato and Cook agree that the races in Arizona, Michigan, and Wisconsin are toss-ups; New Jersey leans or is likely Democratic, and both Kansas and Iowa lean Republican. Cook thinks Georgia and Nevada are toss-ups; Sabato thinks they lean Republican. They also disagree about Maine: Cook thinks it's likely Democratic but Sabato thinks it only leans that way.

I suspect that the outcomes will be driven partly by candidate quality and partly by whether there's a national wave (although governor's races seem slightly less nationalized than House race or Senate races).

Obviously, it's early days. The Democrats will need to get some luster back on their brand and see some tarnishing of Trump's if they're to prevail. Otherwise, it will be

more of the same in Congress until 2028.