

# The Battle for the Senate, 2018: Key Races to Watch

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Control of the U.S. House and Senate are at stake this November 6, 2018, in the mid-term elections. In the Senate, 35 of the 100 seats are up for election (26 Democratic and 9 Republican seats). Overall, the Republican Party currently holds 51 seats, and Democrats hold 47 seats—plus two held by independents who frequently vote with Democrats, for a total of 49. In the House, all 435 seats are up for election. There are also 36 gubernatorial races across the country.

No one political issue has dominated the races, but the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare) and its protections for people with pre-existing conditions, immigration reform, trade policies, and the tax law are issues that recur in races across the country.

Donald Trump's future legislative initiatives hinge on control of the Senate. Other important legislative issues include immigration reform, gun control, and environmental protection. The Senate also has the power to veto judicial appointments. Democratic control of either the House or Senate could also result in rigorous investigations of the Trump administration.

While midterm elections never garner the national attention inspired by presidential elections, there is much that students can learn about the distinct responsibilities of the House and Senate by examining the midterm elections. One way to get students involved is to have them monitor different races and report back to the class for a discussion of issues most on voters' minds and an exploration of why control of one or both houses of Congress matters.

**Arizona:** Martha McSally (R) vs. Kyrsten Sinema (D)  
Republican Rep. Martha McSally and Democratic Rep. Kyrsten Sinema are competing to fill the seat of Jeff Flake (R), who is retiring. Immigration and healthcare are two key issues in this race. McSally, a former female combat pilot, supports President Trump's immigration and border security policies. She also wants to see the Affordable Care Act repealed. Kyrsten Sinema, who has worked in support of veterans' healthcare, wants to fix Obamacare, not repeal it. Sinema, a supporter of the DREAM Act, is in favor of common-sense immigration reform. This tight race had moved, in early October, from toss-up to leaning Democratic.

**Florida:** Bill Nelson (D) vs. Rick Scott (R)  
Money is a key theme in this Florida race, with Republican Governor Rick Scott using his personal wealth to outspend incumbent Sen. Bill Nelson 4-1. Scott wants to dismantle the Affordable Care Act and is opposed to Medicaid expansion. Democrat Bill Nelson supports Obamacare and wants to protect Medicare and Medicaid. At press time, this race had changed from toss-up to leaning Democratic.

**Indiana:** Joe Donnelly (D) vs. Mike Braun (R)  
In this state that President Trump won by 19 percentage points, incumbent Sen. Joe Donnelly has emphasized his independence from the Democratic Party. He supports building a border

wall. He also supports the Affordable Care Act's protections for people with preexisting conditions. Republican state legislator Mike Braun has touted his relationship with President Trump, emphasized his business background, and says he has a strong record of creating jobs. At press time, this race had shifted from toss-up to leaning Democratic.

**Missouri:** Claire McCaskill (D) vs. Josh Hawley (R)  
Incumbent Sen. Claire McCaskill is running on her support for the Affordable Care Act's protections for people with preexisting conditions and her fight against the opioid crisis. Republican State Attorney General Josh Hawley, who has highlighted his support for President Trump and his background as a constitutional lawyer, joined a federal lawsuit that would strike down protections for people with preexisting conditions. In early October, this race had inched into the "leans" Democratic column.

**Montana:** Jon Tester (D) vs. Matthew Rosendale (R)  
Incumbent Jon Tester is another Democrat fighting for reelection in a state that President Trump won by a large margin (20 percentage points). Tester has highlighted his work in support of veterans' rights, access to healthcare, and protecting Social Security, Medicaid, and Medicare. Republican Matthew Rosendale, a state auditor, has highlighted his support for President Trump. He's also pledged his support for veterans, and has expressed

support for Social Security and Medicare, but has vowed to continue the fight to repeal Obamacare. At press time, this race was leaning Democratic.

**Nevada:** Dean Heller (R) vs. Jacky Rosen (D)

In this state that Hillary Clinton won in 2016, Republican Dean Heller is fighting to be reelected. He has focused his campaign on aiding veterans and has highlighted his role in crafting the recent tax law. Democratic Rep. Jacky Rosen opposed the tax law. She supports Obamacare's protections for people with preexisting conditions, and has worked to improve veterans' programs. This race remained a toss-up at press time.

**North Dakota:** Heidi Heitkamp (D) vs. Kevin Cramer (R)

Incumbent Democrat Heidi Heitkamp has tried to highlight her independent streak in this Republican state. She advocates protecting Social Security and Medicare, and safeguarding health-care protections for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Heitkamp opposes President Trump's tariffs. While not being in favor of tariffs, Cramer has framed the issue in terms of supporting President Trump and his policies. Cramer has committed to protecting Social Security and Medicare, but says changes are needed. He also wants to replace Obamacare, and says the recent tax cuts are good for North Dakota. In early October, this race was still considered a toss-up.

**Tennessee:** Marsha Blackburn (R) vs. Phil Bredesen (D)

Incumbent Bob Corker (R) is not running. Republican Rep. Marsha Blackburn highlights her support for Trump in a state that the president won by 26 points. She supported the tax cuts and wants to make them permanent, though she is a critic of Trump's tariffs. She wants to repeal and replace Obamacare. Democrat Phil Bredesen, former governor of Tennessee, wants to limit a president's power to impose tariffs. He's focused on the economy and on his record of creating jobs in Tennessee. He advocates improving Obamacare, not repealing it. At press time, this race

leaned in favor of the Republican candidate.

**Texas:** Ted Cruz (R) vs. Beto O'Rourke (D)

Incumbent Ted Cruz's campaign slogan has been "low taxes, low regulation, low debt." He has highlighted his opposition to stricter gun ownership laws and emphasized a need to secure U.S. borders. Democratic Rep. Beto O'Rourke has progressive positions on abortion, gun violence, and healthcare. He supports responsible gun ownership, and has highlighted his work to advance veterans' care. At press time, Ted Cruz was slightly ahead in this race.

**West Virginia:** Joe Manchin (D) vs. Patrick Morrisey (R)

In this state that Donald Trump won by 42 percentage points, incumbent Democrat Joe Manchin has highlighted his work related to the opioid crisis, his backing for coalminers and veterans, and his support for the Affordable Care Act's protections for people with pre-existing conditions, which his opponent, Republican State Attorney General Patrick Morrisey, has challenged in a federal court case. Manchin, a member of the NRA, has worked with gun control groups to promote gun safety. Morrisey, endorsed by the NRA, has highlighted his success suing the Obama administration over environmental regulations related to coal mining. Morrisey has also highlighted his efforts to fight the opioid crisis, as well as his support for veterans. At press time, Joe Manchin was ahead in the polls.

**Wisconsin:** Tammy Baldwin (D) vs. Leah Vukmir (R)

Incumbent Democrat Tammy Baldwin and her opponent clash on almost every issue "from taxes to spending to abortion." But Baldwin, a supporter of the Affordable Care Act, has mostly focused on healthcare, and in particular protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Republican Leah Vukmir is running on a strong religious, conservative platform. Her website highlights the fact that she is a military mom, anti-abortion, and that she believes our rights "come from God, not man." In early October, this race had shifted in Baldwin's favor. ●

## Resources

Ballotpedia, a digital encyclopedia of American politics and elections, [https://ballotpedia.org/United\\_States\\_Senate\\_elections,\\_2018](https://ballotpedia.org/United_States_Senate_elections,_2018).

The Cook Political Report, an independent, non-partisan newsletter that analyzes elections and campaigns, [www.cookpolitical.com/index.php/ratings/senate-race-ratings](http://www.cookpolitical.com/index.php/ratings/senate-race-ratings)

FiveThirtyEight, a polling aggregation and analysis website, <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2018-midterm-election-forecast/senate/>

PolitiFact Staff, "The 2018 Midterms: Here Are Key Senate Races We're Covering" (August 29th, 2018), [www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/aug/29/2018-midterms-here-are-key-races-were-watching/](http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/article/2018/aug/29/2018-midterms-here-are-key-races-were-watching/).

RealClear Politics, a political news and polling data aggregator, [www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2018/senate/2018\\_elections\\_senate\\_map.html](http://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2018/senate/2018_elections_senate_map.html).

Sabato's Crystal Ball, a nonpartisan political analysis and handicapping newsletter run by the University of Virginia Center for Politics, [http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/2018-senate/?upm\\_export=print](http://crystalball.centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/2018-senate/?upm_export=print).

270toWin, a non-partisan, educational website that covers presidential and congressional elections with interactive maps, [www.270towin.com/2018-senate-election-predictions](http://www.270towin.com/2018-senate-election-predictions).