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Competitive US Senate Races 2026: Ratings, Polls and Paths to Control, as of 9 October 2026

Four weeks before the 3 November 2026 election, Democrats need a net four seats for a Senate majority. Forecasters have moved steadily their way: Cook rates seven races Toss Up and sees a 2–6 seat Democratic gain, though polling leads are mostly thin.

9 min read · 11 sources

2026 | Senate | election forecast | midterms | polling | race ratings

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The 2026 Senate fight has moved from a Republican-friendly map at the start of the year to one where Democrats have a plausible, but narrow, route to a majority. Republicans hold 53 seats to Democrats' 47 (including two independents), and Democrats need a net gain of four seats in the 3 November election to take control in January 2027[1][5]. This document is a snapshot as of 9 October 2026; ratings and polls move weekly, and several sources disagree with each other on individual races (noted below).

+4	7	2–6	63–66%
Net seats Democrats need for 51	Cook Toss Up races (6 R-held, 1 D-held)	Cook's projected Democratic gain range	Prediction-market odds of Democratic Senate (23 Sep)

Majority math

Thirty-five seats are on the ballot: the regular Class II seats plus special elections in Florida and Ohio. Republicans defend 22 or 23 of them, depending on how the South Carolina seat and the specials are counted (sources differ by one: 270toWin and Sabato say 23; the Congress Countdown tally says 22 R-defended and 13 D-defended)[5][7]. Another 65 seats are not up: 34 Democratic-aligned and 31 Republican[4][7]. So Democrats must hold everything they are defending and flip four Republican seats. A 50–50 Senate would be decided by Vice President JD Vance, so a Democratic majority needs 51[7].

Only three defenders sit in states that voted for the other party's presidential nominee in 2024: Michigan (Peters' open seat, Trump +1.4), Georgia (Ossoff, Trump +2.2) and Maine (Collins, Harris +7.0)[7]. That is why the map looks like a small number of races, as The Guardian put it: "the battle for the Senate is being fought across a very small map"[3].

Cook Political Report tally (6 October)

RATING	SEATS	RACES
Solid D	9	CO, DE, IL, MA, NJ, NM, OR, RI, VA
Likely D	3	GA, MN, NC
Lean D	1	NH
Toss Up	7	AK, IA, KS, ME, MI, OH, TX
Lean R	0	—
Likely R	2	NE, SC
Solid R	13	AL, AR, FL, ID, KY, LA, MS, MT, OK, SD, TN, WV, WY

Source: Cook Political Report ratings page[1]. Note that Cook lists Florida as Solid R, while one ranking site describes it as Likely R[9], and RealClearPolitics rates it Leans Republican[6].

Cook's Senate editor Jessica Taylor said Republicans keep a financial edge in nearly every competitive state, but "President Donald Trump is a drag across the board even in deep red states due to rising fuel prices and the persistent high cost of living"[2]. Cook now projects a Democratic pickup of **two to six seats**[2].

How the map moved in 2026

At the start of the year Republicans looked well placed, with many seats Solid for them and several Democratic-held seats at Toss Up. The Guardian attributes the shift to Trump's falling approval, the Iran war and rising gas prices[3]. An aggregator shows Democrats ahead on the generic ballot by 7.4 points (49.3% to 41.9%) and Trump approval at 37%[8]; that is a secondary compilation, not a primary poll.

11 Jul **Sen. Lindsey Graham dies**
South Carolina becomes a special-election contest; Darline Graham appointed and later wins the GOP nomination

25 Jul **Maine Democrats nominate Troy Jackson**
After Graham Platner withdrew, per a ranking site's summary

11 Aug **Minnesota primaries**
Peggy Flanagan (D) and Michele Tafoya (R) nominated

20 Aug **Cook moves Texas and Iowa to Toss Up**
Both from Lean R

3 Sep **Inside Elections shifts**
Ohio to Toss-up; Alaska to Tilt R

22 Sep **Sabato moves Michigan to Leans D**
Iowa to Toss-up; Kansas to Leans R; Inside Elections moves Maine to Toss-up

23 Sep **Cook moves Georgia to Likely D**
Kansas and South Carolina also shifted toward Democrats

6 Oct **Cook: Kansas to Toss Up, NH to Lean D, NC to Likely D**
Sabato also moves Alaska to Leans D and South Carolina to Likely R

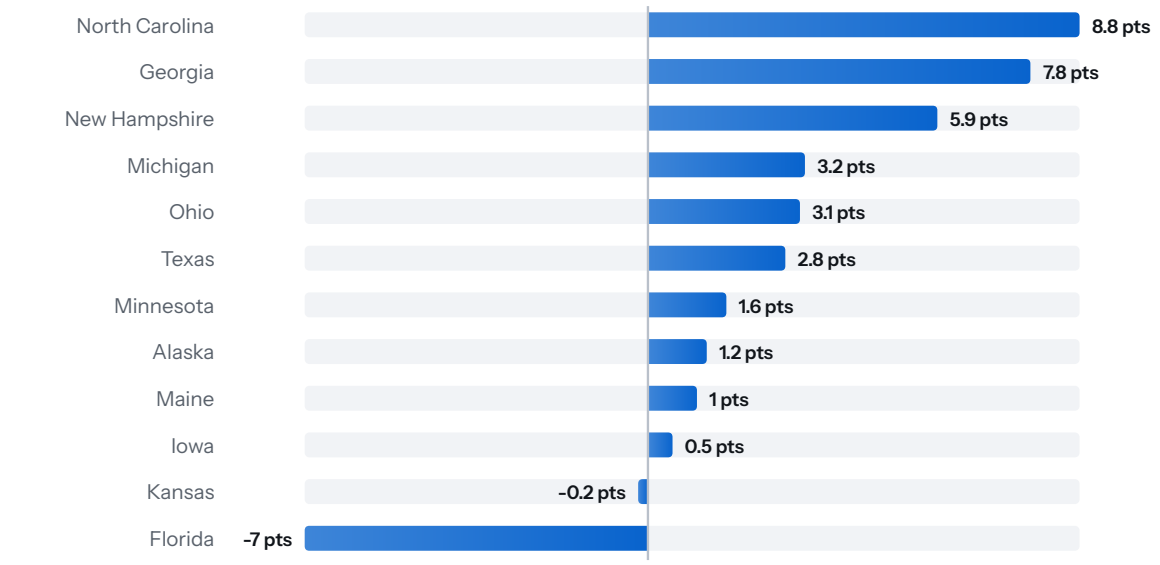
Dates for the August and September moves come from a secondary ranking site and Newsweek; the 6 October moves come from Cook, Mediaite and 270toWin[1][2][4][9][10]. The Guardian summarises Cook's moves since January 2026 as: Georgia and North Carolina Tossup to Likely Democratic; Alaska and Ohio Lean Republican to Tossup; Iowa and Texas Likely Republican to Tossup[3]. The ranking site gives slightly different intermediate steps, which probably reflects two-step moves.

Prediction markets followed. As of 23 September, Democrats had a **63% chance on Kalshi and 66% on Polymarket** of winning the Senate. A month earlier Republicans were at 53% on Kalshi, and at the start of the year they had been 68% and 66% favourites to hold the chamber[10]. Markets measure trader sentiment, not outcomes. 270toWin's consensus of seven forecasters, as of 2 October, shows 48 Democratic-aligned, 47 Republican and 5 toss-up seats[5].

Polling snapshot

RealClearPolitics averages for twelve races, as compiled by Election Central on 9 October, show Democratic candidates leading ten of them[6]. These are averages of a few polls, many within the margin of error.

Democratic lead in RCP polling averages (negative = Republican lead)



Source: RealClearPolitics averages via Election Central, 9 Oct 2026. Kansas: Marshall +0.2; Florida: Moody +7.0.

STATE	DEMOCRAT	REPUBLICAN	RCP AVERAGE	RCP RATING
Alaska	Mary Peltola	Dan Sullivan	Peltola +1.2	Toss Up
Florida (special)	Angie Nixon	Ashley Moody	Moody +7.0	Leans R
Georgia	Jon Ossoff	Mike Collins	Ossoff +7.8	Leans D
Iowa	Josh Turek	Ashley Hinson	Turek +0.5	Toss Up
Kansas	Adam Hamilton	Roger Marshall	Marshall +0.2	Toss Up
Maine	Troy Jackson	Susan Collins	Jackson +1.0	Toss Up
Michigan	Abdul El-Sayed	Mike Rogers	El-Sayed +3.2	Toss Up
Minnesota	Peggy Flanagan	Michele Tafoya	Flanagan +1.6	Toss Up
New Hampshire	Chris Pappas	John E. Sununu	Pappas +5.9	Leans D
North Carolina	Roy Cooper	Michael Whatley	Cooper +8.8	Likely D
Ohio (special)	Sherrod Brown	Jon Husted	Brown +3.1	Toss Up
Texas	James Talarico	Ken Paxton	Talarico +2.8	Toss Up

Source: [6]. RCP also rates Nebraska (Ricketts vs independent Dan Osborn) a Toss Up but publishes no average [6]. Taking each polling leader as the winner, Democrats would flip six seats (AK, IA, ME, NC, OH, TX), reaching 53 [6]. The source itself stresses this is a snapshot, not a forecast.

Democratic pickup targets

The six Republican-held seats where Democrats currently lead the polling averages are the heart of the majority question. They need four of them while losing nothing.

North Carolina (open, Tillis retiring)

Former Gov. Roy Cooper (D) vs former RNC chair Michael Whatley (R). This is the Democrats' best pickup chance: Cook moved it from Lean to **Likely Democrat on 6 October** [2], and the RCP average is Cooper **+8.8** [6]. A late-June NYT/Siena poll had Cooper up 50–43, per a secondary source [9]. Trump carried the state by 3.2 points in 2024 [7]. A telling signal: the Senate Leadership Fund super PAC paused a **$30 million** ad campaign for Whatley and shifted to a seven-figure buy in Kansas [2].

Ohio (special)

Former Sen. Sherrod Brown (D) vs appointed Sen. Jon Husted (R) in a state Trump won by 11.2 points [7]. Rated Toss Up by Cook and Sabato, and by Inside Elections since 3 September [9]. RCP: Brown **+3.1** [6].

Maine

Sen. Susan Collins (R), seeking a sixth term, vs Troy Jackson (D), who was nominated on 25 July after Graham Platner withdrew [9]. Harris won Maine by 7 points [7]. Cook and Sabato rate it Toss Up, and Inside Elections joined them on 22 September, moving it from Tilt Republican [9]. RCP: Jackson **+1.0** [6]. Collins has historically outrun her party, so a one-point polling deficit is the kind of margin where incumbent strength could matter.

Alaska

Mary Peltola (D) vs Sen. Dan Sullivan (R), under ranked-choice voting with four candidates on the ballot [6]. Trump won by about 13 points [7]. Cook rates it Toss Up. On 6 October Sabato went further, moving it from Toss-up to **Leans Democratic** [4]. Inside Elections was at Tilt Republican as of 3 September [9]. Polymarket asks showed Peltola at 74¢ [5]. RCP: Peltola +1.2 [6].

Texas (open)

State Rep. James Talarico (D) vs Attorney General Ken Paxton (R), who has Trump's endorsement [3]. No Democrat has won a Texas Senate race since 1988; Trump won the state 56–42 in 2024 [3]. Cook moved it to Toss Up on 20 August and Sabato followed on 26 August; Inside Elections was still at Lean Republican in the sources read [9]. RealClearPolitics averages differ by publisher: Talarico 48.4%–45.3% (The Guardian, 7 October) [3] and +2.8 (Election Central, 9 October) [6].

Iowa (open, Ernst's seat)

Rep. Ashley Hinson (R) vs state Rep. Josh Turek (D). Trump carried Iowa by 13.2 points [7], and no Democrat has won a Senate seat there since 2008 [3]. Cook rates it Toss Up (since 20 August),

Sabato since 22 September; Inside Elections remains at Tilt Republican[9]. RCP: Turek **+0.5**, 46.2%–45.2%[3][6]. This is the thinnest Democratic lead of the six.

Democratic defences

Democrats cannot reach 51 if they lose any of these, so the margin for error is nil.

- **Georgia.** Sen. Jon Ossoff vs Rep. Mike Collins. Cook moved it to Likely Democrat on 23 September[9]. Polls: YouGov 51–41 (15–18 September), Quantus Insights 49–45, AARP 52–43 in July[10]. RCP: Ossoff **+7.8**[6]. A Republican win would be "surprising," Newsweek said[10]. Inside Elections stays more cautious at Tilt Democratic[9].
- **Michigan (open, Peters retiring).** Abdul El-Sayed (D), a progressive endorsed by Harris and Bernie Sanders, vs former Rep. Mike Rogers (R)[3]. Cook and Inside Elections say Toss Up; Sabato moved to Leans Democratic on 22 September while noting El-Sayed may underperform a generic Democrat[9]. RCP: El-Sayed **+3.2** (48.1%–44.9%)[3]. The two held a debate on 8 October[6]. A Glengariff poll found 49.2% support and 40.2% opposition for a Medicare-for-All-style system, so his signature policy is not a clear liability[3]. No Republican has won a Michigan Senate seat since 1994[3].
- **Minnesota (open).** Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan beat Rep. Angie Craig 59.0%–39.4% in the primary; Michele Tafoya won the GOP nod[9]. Cook rates it Likely D[1], although RCP calls it a Toss Up with Flanagan +1.6[6]. That gap between rater and polling average is worth watching.
- **New Hampshire (open, Shaheen retiring).** Rep. Chris Pappas vs former Sen. John E. Sununu. The most volatile rating: Cook moved it from Lean D to Toss Up on 15 September, then back to **Lean D on 6 October**[2][9]. An August UNH poll had Sununu ahead 45–43[9], but RCP now shows Pappas **+5.9**[6].

Reach races

These are not required for Democrats' base path but would signal a wave and give a buffer.

- **Kansas.** Sen. Roger Marshall (R) vs pastor Adam Hamilton (D). Cook moved it from Lean R to **Toss Up on 6 October** in a state that voted Trump +16 and has not elected a Democratic senator in 94 years[2]. Emerson (15–16 September) had Hamilton 45–43; co/efficient had Marshall 49–44[10]. RCP: Marshall +0.2[6]. Two former GOP governors have endorsed Hamilton, and a New York Times report that Marshall allegedly sued over 700 patients over unpaid bills is a campaign issue[2][10].
- **South Carolina (special).** Sen. Lindsey Graham died on 11 July; Darline Graham was appointed and won the GOP nomination with Trump's endorsement, facing Democrat Annie Andrews[10]. Polls conflict: an Andrews-sponsored Impact Research poll had a 41–41 tie, while InsiderAdvantage had Graham up 45–43[10]. Cook rates it Likely R; Sabato returned it from Safe to Likely R on 6 October[1][4].

- **Nebraska.** Sen. Pete Ricketts (R) vs independent Dan Osborn, who lost to Deb Fischer by 6.7 points in 2024. Cook and other raters say Likely R, while RCP calls it a Toss Up[6][9]. How Osborn would caucus if he won is something the sources I read do not settle.
- **Florida (special).** Sen. Ashley Moody (R) vs Angie Nixon (D); Moody leads by 7.0 in RCP[6].

Caveats and disagreements

- **Raters differ.** Inside Elections has been more conservative than Cook on Alaska, Iowa and Texas; Sabato on Michigan and Alaska is more Democratic-leaning than Cook[4][9].
- **Stale sources.** One ranking site (updated 28 September) still lists North Carolina at Lean D and Kansas at Lean R, both since superseded by Cook's 6 October moves[2][9]. Use Cook's page and Sabato's for the latest.
- **Seat counts.** Sources disagree on whether Republicans defend 22 or 23 seats[5][7].
- **Poll quality.** Several leads are under 2 points. Internal party polls (such as the Andrews campaign's) are sponsored and should be discounted. Newsweek's piece was produced with an AI assistant, so the underlying poll numbers are worth checking against the pollsters[10].
- **Nomination detail.** Maine's Democratic nominating contest details (Platner's withdrawal) come from a single secondary source[9].

Bottom line

Democrats' path is real but requires near-perfection: hold Georgia, Michigan, Minnesota and New Hampshire, and win four of North Carolina, Ohio, Maine, Alaska, Texas and Iowa, with Kansas as a buffer. North Carolina is the closest to done. The rest are polling inside roughly three points, and Cook's own range of two to six gains brackets the four needed. Expect further rating moves before 3 November, and treat any single poll with caution.

▼ Terms used in this document (5)

- **Ranked-choice voting** — A system where voters rank candidates, used in Alaska and Maine.
- **RCP** — RealClearPolitics, a polling aggregator whose averages are cited above.
- **Special election** — A vote to fill a seat vacated mid-term, here in Florida, Ohio and South Carolina.
- **Tilt / Lean / Likely / Solid** — Increasingly confident ratings of which party is favoured; Solid means not competitive.
- **Toss Up** — Forecaster rating meaning either party has a good chance of winning.

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