Des Dorsey

FRIDAY WRAP · OCTOBER 16, 2026
18 DAYS TO ELECTION DAY
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THE 2026 MIDTERMS

State of the Races

Eighteen days out, the picture is nearly unchanged from last week. The model still projects Democrats to win the House comfortably and favors them for the Senate. In Georgia, Senator Ossoff remains a strong favorite and the governor's race is still a coin flip. The week's polling moved individual races in both directions but left the headline numbers within a tenth of a point or a seat of where they were.

U.S. HOUSE

257 D

98.9% chance Democrats win the majority (218)

−1 seat since last Friday

U.S. SENATE

58 D

94.1% chance Democrats win control (51)

no change · **+0.1 pts**

GOVERNORS

29 D

projected Democratic governors after 2026

GEORGIA · U.S. SENATE

Ossoff 97.4%

chance Ossoff wins a second term

no change since last Friday

GEORGIA · GOVERNOR

Bottoms 51.0%

chance Bottoms wins · polls R+2.2

+0.1 pts since last Friday

GEORGIA · LEGISLATURE

House 95 · Senate 27

Democratic control: House 80.4%, Senate 28.5%

−0.6 pts House · **−0.5 pts** Senate

THIS WEEK

- **Headline numbers held.** The House projection slipped from 258 to 257 Democratic seats, with a 98.9% chance of a majority. The Senate held at 58 seats, with a 94.1% chance of Democratic control. The national environment estimate eased from 11.9 to 11.8 points as the likely-voter generic ballot average moved from Democrats +8.6 to +8.4: Fox News's newest poll fell to Democrats +6 (a 7.5-point swing toward Democrats from 2024), and RMG Research's rose to Democrats +11 (a 12.5-point swing).
- **Georgia.** A new Trafalgar poll with Ossoff ahead by 8 (a 10.2-point swing toward Democrats) put his average at 8.3 points; his chance is 97.4%. InsiderAdvantage, polling for James Magazine Online, has Jackson ahead by 2 for governor, essentially no swing from 2024. That makes six pollsters, all with Jackson narrowly ahead, and Bottoms's chance is 51.0%. In-person early voting opened October 13, with 552,100 ballots cast in the first three days.
- **Senate.** Montana moved from Safe to Likely Republican (4% to 15%) after two campaign-linked polls: one for the independent, Bodnar, had him ahead by 2, and one from the Republican's pollster had Alme ahead by 15, swings of 22 and 5 points toward Bodnar from President Trump's 20-point win. South Dakota rose from 71% to 82% on a poll for a Democratic House campaign showing Bengs ahead by 9, a 38-point swing that the tracker discounts for its sponsor. Arkansas fell from 39% to 23% after a Hendrix College poll had Cotton ahead by 9, still a 22.5-point swing toward Democrats. Iowa slipped from 80% to 77%.
- **Money.** Third-quarter reports show the Democratic Senate nominees on the main tracking table raised $243.8 million to the Republicans' $47.8 million. Outside and party money still runs the other way: in the 13 most targeted Senate races, Republicans and their allies lead $840 million to $412 million. In House races, party and allied spending is now roughly level, at $271 million Republican and $268 million Democratic.
- **House.** Outside money has now reached 20 of the 34 long-shot seats the tracker watches, the level it set in advance for leaving the model's upper range alone. New district polls include Luria ahead by 3 in Virginia's 2nd (a 3.3-point swing toward Democrats) and Johnson ahead by 2 in Minnesota's 1st (a 14-point swing). District polls are recorded but never enter the model.
- **Governors.** The projection rose from 28 to 29 Democratic governors, a one-seat move inside the model's run-to-run noise. South Dakota moved from Safe to Lean Republican on its first poll, Rhoden ahead by 7 in a state President Trump carried by 29, from a Democratic House campaign. Arizona moved from Safe to Likely Democratic (95% to 93%) as newer polls narrowed Governor Hobbs's average lead to 9.2 points.

Changes are measured from last Friday evening, October 9. Chances are the model's probabilities. A 20% chance comes true one time in five, so treat none of these numbers as a certainty.

Georgia

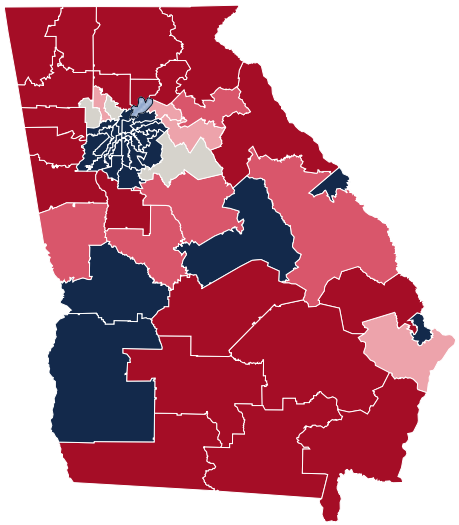
Georgia votes on a U.S. Senate seat, an open governorship, every statewide office, all 14 U.S. House seats, and both chambers of the General Assembly. The two top races continue to go in different directions. Senator Jon Ossoff leads Representative Mike Collins by 8.3 points on average, a 10.5-point swing toward Democrats from President Trump's 2.2-point win in Georgia in 2024. His money advantage is large but narrowing as he spends: at the end of September he had $26.3 million in his campaign account against $1.1 million for Collins, after spending about $49.5 million in the quarter, much of it on television bought at the lower rate candidates pay. Counting outside and party money as well, Democrats lead about two to one.

The governor's race is the closest major race in the state. All six pollsters in the average have Rick Jackson ahead of Keisha Lance Bottoms, by 1 to 3 points, for an average of Jackson +2.2. That is no swing at all from 2024, while Ossoff runs about 10 points ahead of the same baseline. The model still gives Bottoms 51.0% because it blends the polls with a national environment that favors Democrats.

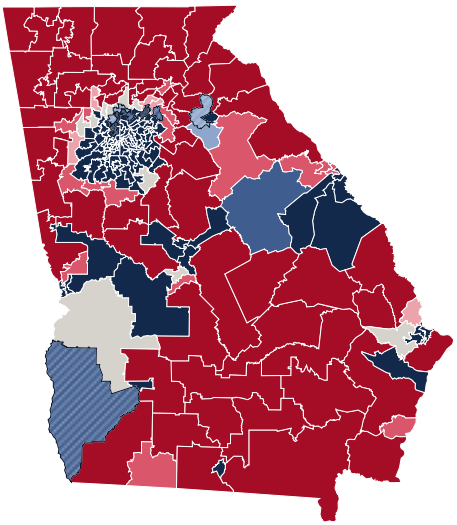
Down the ballot, Democrats need 10 more seats to control the state House and 6 more to control the state Senate. The model puts the House within reach and the Senate a longer shot. Last November, Democrats won both Public Service Commission races by about 26 points, but only about 1.56 million Georgians voted; a midterm electorate will be two to three times larger. In-person early voting reached 552,100 ballots in its first three days, but the only same-day comparison available is 2024, a presidential year, so no conclusion can be drawn yet.

RACE	MATCHUP	RATING	CHANCE (D)	POLLING AND NOTES
U.S. Senate	Ossoff (D, incumbent) v. Collins (R)	Safe D	97.4%	Ossoff +8.3; swing of 10.5 toward Democrats since 2024
Governor (open)	Bottoms (D) v. Jackson (R)	Toss-up	51.0%	Jackson +2.2 across six pollsters; no swing since 2024
Lieutenant Governor (open)	McLaurin (D) v. Dolezal (R)	Not rated	n/a	No public poll
Secretary of State (open)	Reynolds (D) v. Fleming (R)	Not rated	n/a	No public poll
Attorney General (open)	Miller (D) v. Strickland (R)	Not rated	n/a	No public poll
State House (180 seats)	Democrats hold 81; 91 for control	Likely D	80.4%	Median 95 Democratic seats (range 88 to 104)
State Senate (56 seats)	Democrats hold 23; 29 for control	Lean R	28.5%	Median 27 Democratic seats (range 24 to 31)

GEORGIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY



State Senate, 56 districts. Median 27; 29 for control. 1 seats rated to change party.



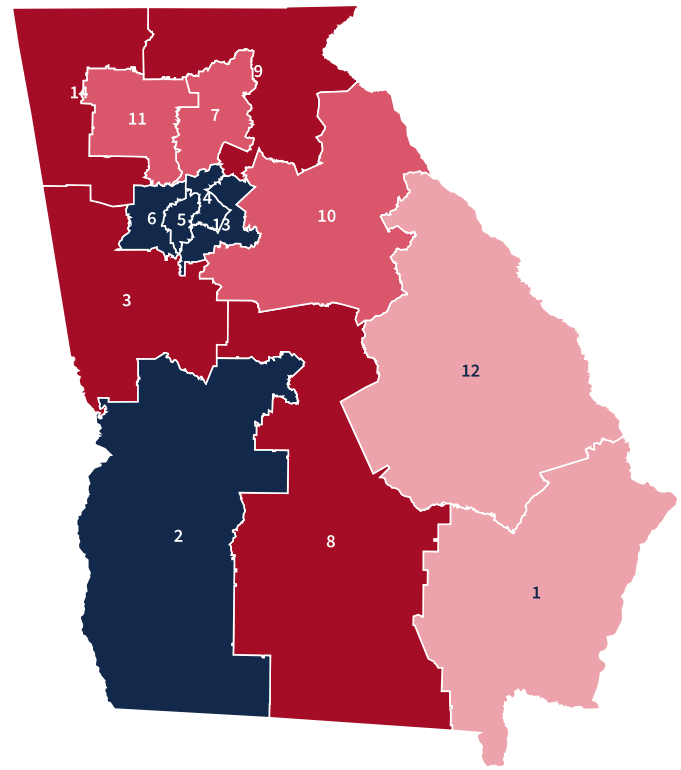
State House, 180 districts. Median 95; 91 for control. 8 seats rated to change party.

Safe D · Likely D · Lean D · Toss-up · Lean R · Likely R · Safe R · Hatched: rated Lean or stronger to change party

Georgia's U.S. House seats

Democrats hold 5 of Georgia's 14 U.S. House seats. Georgia did not redraw its map this cycle, so the 2024 results below are on current lines. The model's median is 6 Democratic seats (80% range 5 to 8), with a 69% chance that Democrats gain at least one seat and a 36% chance they gain two or more. All five Democratic seats are Safe, including the open 13th. No single Republican seat is favored to flip, but five of them sit between 13% and 38%, and the same national swing moves all of them together, so in most simulations at least one falls.

The best Democratic opportunities are two Lean Republican seats: the 12th, held by Rick Allen (Trump +14), at 38%, and the open 1st on the coast (Trump +16), at 37%. Next come the open 10th (Trump +21, 20%), the open 11th (Trump +23, 15%), and Rich McCormick's 7th (Trump +22, 13%). In last November's low-turnout Public Service Commission races, the Democrat carried the 1st, 10th, and 12th and came within 1.5 points in the 7th and 11th. Three Democratic candidates have now released their own polls showing close races in deep-red seats: Chris Harden ahead by 2 in the open 11th, Maura Keller behind Brian Jack by 5 in the 3rd, and, new this week, Kozycki ahead of McCormick by 2 in the 7th, swings of 24 to 25 points from 2024. Polls paid for by a candidate are discounted 3 to 4 points, and the tracker records district polls but never enters them in the model.



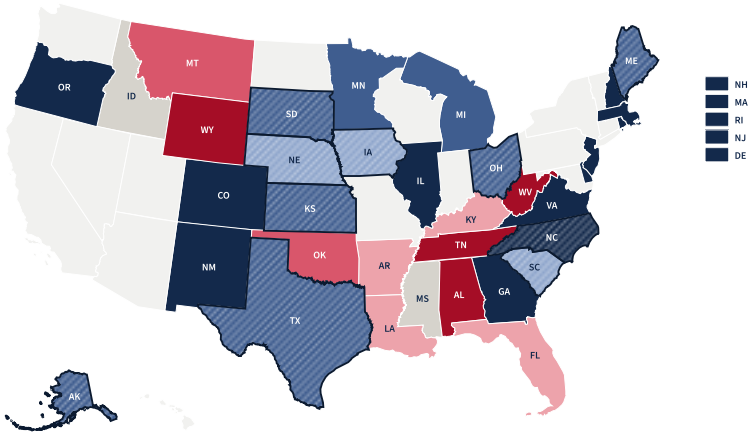
DISTRICT	HELD	2024	RATING	CHANCE (D)
GA-01	R open	R+16	Lean R	37%
GA-02	D	D+8	Safe D	>99%
GA-03	R	R+30	Safe R	3%
GA-04	D	D+52	Safe D	>99%
GA-05	D	D+72	Safe D	>99%
GA-06	D	D+50	Safe D	>99%
GA-07	R	R+22	Likely R	13%
GA-08	R	R+31	Safe R	2%
GA-09	R	R+34	Safe R	1%
GA-10	R open	R+21	Likely R	20%
GA-11	R open	R+23	Likely R	15%
GA-12	R	R+14	Lean R	38%
GA-13	D open	D+42	Safe D	>99%
GA-14	R	R+37	Safe R	<1%

Safe D · Likely D · Lean D · Toss-up · Lean R · Likely R · Safe R · Hatched: rated Lean or stronger to change party

The Senate

Democrats hold 47 seats and need 51 for control; a 50-50 Senate stays Republican because the vice president breaks ties. The model's median is 58 Democratic seats, with a range of 52 to 63. It rates ten Republican-held seats Lean Democratic or better, from North Carolina (99%) through Ohio, Alaska, Texas, Maine, South Dakota, Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa to South Carolina (63%). Idaho and Mississippi are toss-ups at 48%. Every Democratic-held seat is rated Likely or Safe.

Texas drew the most polling: two of seven new polls had the Republican, Paxton, ahead, but the Democrat, Talarico, still leads the average by 2.4 points, a 16-point swing from 2024. Republicans lead outside and party money about two to one, but Democratic candidates raised about five times as much as Republican candidates last quarter, and candidates buy television at the lowest rates.



Safe D · Likely D · Lean D · Toss-up · Lean R · Likely R · Safe R

Hatched: rated Lean or stronger to change party. Light gray: no race in 2026

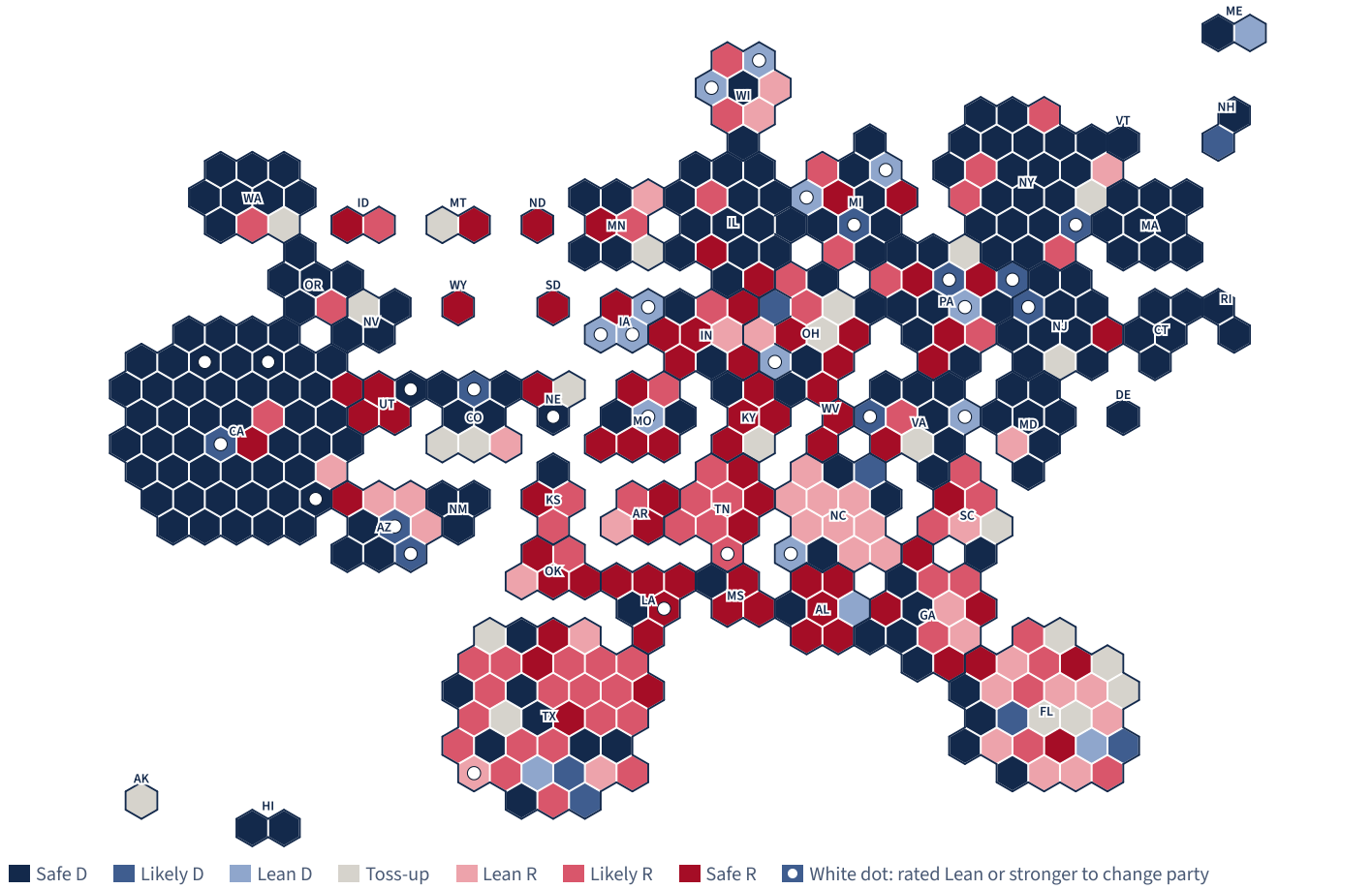
RACE	HELD	RATING	POLLING AVERAGE	WEEK	CHANCE (D)	WEEK (PTS)
North Carolina	R	Safe D flip	D+10.0	+0.5	99%	no change
Georgia (Ossoff)	D	Safe D	D+8.3	+0.2	97%	no change
New Hampshire (open)	D	Safe D	D+6.8	no change	96%	no change
Ohio (special)	R	Likely D flip	D+4.1	+0.2	90%	no change
Minnesota (open)	D	Likely D	D+3.6	+0.4	89%	+1
Michigan (open)	D	Likely D	D+3.2	−0.2	88%	−1
Alaska	R	Likely D flip	D+2.5	no change	85%	−1
Texas	R	Likely D flip	D+2.4	−0.3	85%	−2
Maine	R	Likely D flip	D+2.1	+0.1	84%	no change
South Dakota	R	Likely D flip	D+1.5	+2.5	82%	+11
Kansas	R	Likely D flip	D+1.2	−0.2	81%	−1
Nebraska	R	Lean D flip	D+0.5	no change	78%	no change
Iowa (open)	R	Lean D flip	D+0.4	−0.6	77%	−3
South Carolina	R	Lean D flip	R+2.4	no change	63%	−1
Idaho	R	Toss-up	R+5.0	no change	48%	−1
Mississippi	R	Toss-up	R+5.0	+1.0	48%	+5
Florida (special)	R	Lean R	R+6.9	+0.2	37%	+1
Louisiana	R	Lean R	R+7.5	no change	34%	no change
Kentucky	R	Lean R	R+9.0	no change	26%	no change
Arkansas	R	Lean R	R+9.8	−3.1	23%	−16
Montana (open)	R	Likely R	R+11.8	+5.2	15%	+11

The model blends each race's polls with the national environment, which is why South Carolina rates Lean Democratic with Republicans ahead by 2.4 points. Osborn, Bodnar, and Achilles are independents, counted with Democrats. Week: change since October 9.

The House

Democrats need 218 seats. The model's median is 257, with a range of 233 to 293, and a 98.9% chance of a majority. The projection rests on a national environment of about 12 points in Democrats' favor. That figure blends three things: the likely-voter generic ballot average (Democrats +8.4), special elections this cycle (+14), and primary turnout (+13).

Two cautions apply. Party and allied spending in House races is now roughly level, and the main Republican House super PAC reported $155.3 million in cash at the end of September. And district polls often run behind the model: this week's three Albuquerque Journal polls of New Mexico's districts sit 11 to 15 points below its medians. Some run close: a University of Houston poll has the Republican ahead by only 6 in Texas's 9th, a seat President Trump carried by 20, within a point of the model. District polls are a check, never an input.



Safe D · Likely D · Lean D · Toss-up · Lean R · Likely R · Safe R · White dot: rated Lean or stronger to change party

205	17	16	23	37	60	77

Seats by rating, left to right Safe D to Safe R. Each hexagon is one district on 2026 lines, grouped by state; positions inside a state are approximate.

THE 23 CLOSEST SEATS (40% TO 60%)

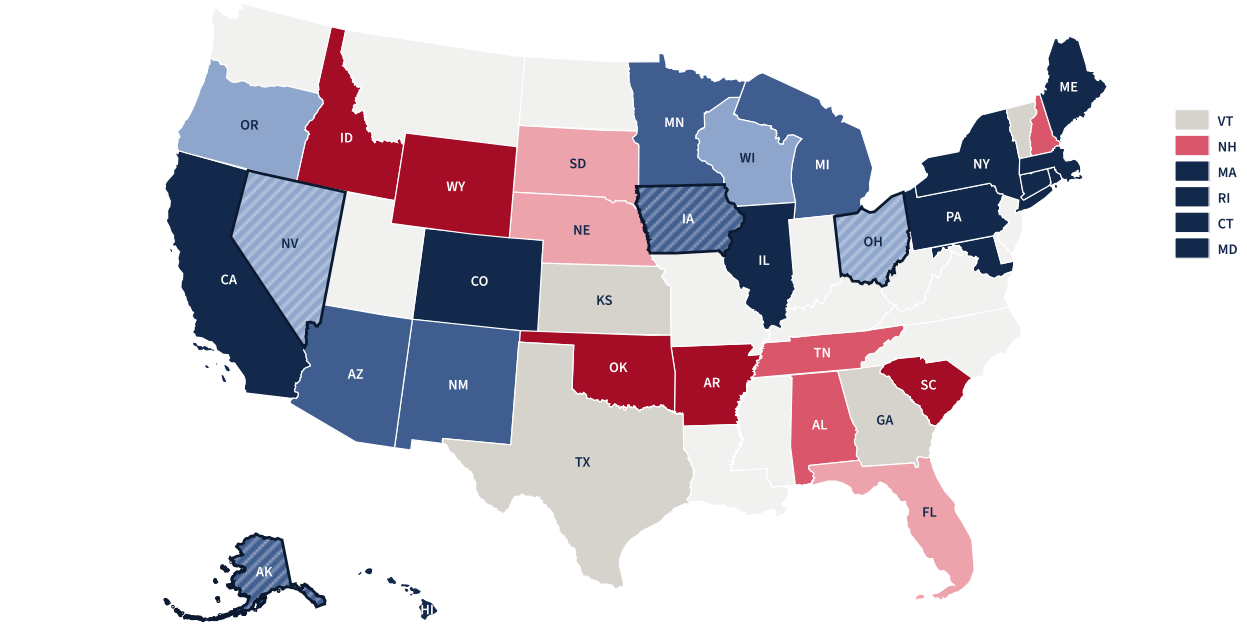
DISTRICT	HELD	2024	CHANCE (D)	WEEK (PTS)
FL-09	D	R+18	59%	−0.4
TX-32	D	R+18	59%	−0.4
CO-05	R	R+9	59%	−0.4
PA-08	R	R+9	59%	−0.4
CO-03	R	R+10	55%	−0.4
NY-01	R	R+10	55%	−0.4
OH-15	R	R+10	55%	−0.4
MT-01	R open	R+12	53%	−0.4
OH-07	R	R+11	50%	−0.4
WA-05	R	R+11	50%	−0.4
SC-01	R open	R+13	49%	−0.4
FL-04	R	R+12	46%	−0.4
FL-07	R	R+12	46%	−0.4
MN-01	R	R+12	46%	−0.4
VA-05	R	R+12	46%	−0.4
FL-16	R open	R+14	45%	−0.4
NV-02	R open	R+14	45%	−0.4
AK-AL	R	R+13	42%	−0.3
FL-13	R	R+13	42%	−0.3
NE-01	R	R+13	42%	−0.3
NJ-02	R	R+13	42%	−0.3
KY-06	R open	R+15	41%	−0.3
TX-23	R open	R+15	41%	−0.3

Week = change in the chance since October 9, in points. The model's wider set of competitive seats (20% to 80%) holds 76 districts.

Governors nationwide

Thirty-six states elect governors this year. The model projects 29 Democratic governors after the election, within a range of 25 to 32, up from 24 today. It rates four Republican-held governorships Lean Democratic or better: Iowa (90%), Alaska (89%), Ohio (79.8%), and Nevada (62%), where the polls are even. Vermont, Georgia, and Texas are toss-ups, as is Democratic-held Kansas, where the Republican leads the polling by 3.9 points. Nebraska narrowed this week: a poll for the Democratic candidate's campaign had Governor Pillen ahead by just 1, a 19.5-point swing from 2024, and the race is Lean Republican at 38%.

Two races cut against their states' usual lean. Vermont's Republican governor, Phil Scott, leads by about 2 points in one of the most Democratic states in the country. And in Pennsylvania, Governor Josh Shapiro leads by more than 22 points in a state President Trump carried.



RACE	HELD BY	RATING	POLLS	2024	CHANCE (D)
Arizona	D (Hobbs)	Likely D	D+9.2	R+5.5	93%
Minnesota	D, open	Likely D	D+8.3	D+4.2	91%
Michigan	D, open	Likely D	D+8.1	R+1.4	91%
Iowa	R, open	Likely D	D+7.6	R+13.2	90%
Alaska	R, open	Likely D	D+7.1	R+13.1	89%
New Mexico	D, open	Likely D	D+6.5	D+6.0	87%
Ohio	R, open	Lean D	D+4.2	R+11.2	80%
Wisconsin	D, open	Lean D	D+4.0	R+0.9	79%
Oregon	D (Kotek)	Lean D	D+0.3	D+14.0	63%
Nevada	R (Lombardo)	Lean D	Even	R+3.1	62%

RACE	HELD BY	RATING	POLLS	2024	CHANCE (D)
Vermont	R (Scott)	Toss-up	R+2.1	D+31.5	51%
Georgia	R, open	Toss-up	R+2.2	R+2.2	51%
Texas	R (Abbott)	Toss-up	R+2.6	R+13.7	49%
Kansas	D, open	Toss-up	R+3.9	R+16.1	42%
Nebraska	R (Pillen)	Lean R	R+4.7	R+20.5	38%
Florida	R, open	Lean R	R+5.2	R+13.1	36%
South Dakota	R (Rhoden)	Lean R	R+7.0	R+29.3	28%
Tennessee	R, open	Likely R	R+9.0	R+29.4	20%
New Hampshire	R (Ayotte)	Likely R	R+10.6	D+2.8	15%
Alabama	R, open	Likely R	R+13.0	R+30.5	9%

Governor chances apply the tracker's Georgia governor model to every state's polling average: the polls, plus half of the national environment's lean, with wide uncertainty. The seven races with no tracked polling (Arkansas, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Wyoming) use the 2024 presidential margin in place of polls. Safe races are left out of the table.

Early voting

Early-vote counts measure volume, not choice: who has voted does not say how they voted, and pace often reflects changes in voting rules or calendars. The tracker compares a state only against the same day in a comparable earlier election, after checking the rules match. Early-vote figures never move a rating or a chance.

Two states clear that check. North Carolina, opening day against opening day, is at 1.25 times its 2022 pace. Virginia is level with 2025, its last statewide election (1.02); a 2023 mail-ballot change rules out 2022. Georgia cast 552,100 ballots in three days of in-person voting, but its only same-day comparison is 2024, a presidential year, so there is no Georgia comparison yet. Texas, Alaska, South Carolina, and New Hampshire, all with close Senate races, are not yet reporting.

STATE	BALLOTS SO FAR	SAME DAY, COMPARISON YEAR	PACE	PACE (RED LINE = SAME PACE; GRAY = NOT YET COMPARABLE)	CAN IT BE COMPARED?
Georgia	552,100	912,914 (2024)	n/a		Not yet: 2024 only
North Carolina	237,539	189,375 (2022)	1.25		Yes: same start day
Virginia	635,329	621,274 (2025)	1.02		Yes: against 2025
Pennsylvania	457,061	499,834 (2022)	0.91		Not yet: checking
Florida	741,122	1,043,953 (2022)	0.71		Not yet: rule change
Tennessee	176,471	157,447 (2022)	1.12		Not yet: new today
Maine	59,542	70,045 (2022)	0.85		No: rule change
Wisconsin	161,023	225,330 (2022)	0.71		No: rule change
Iowa	33,417	20,799 (2022)	1.61		Not yet: checking

Pace = 2026 ballots divided by ballots cast by the same day before the election in the comparison year; 1.00 is the same pace. Georgia, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania through October 15; others as of October 16. Data: ElectIndex; Virginia from VPAP (Virginia Department of Elections).

NOT YET REPORTING: 12 OF 51 (39 REPORTING), AS OF 2026-10-16

AL, AK, AR, LA, MO, NH, NY, OR, SC, TX, WA, WV. Most have not begun early voting or have not yet posted data; reasons are on the tracker.

EARLY VOTERS BY PARTY REGISTRATION, STATES THAT REGISTER VOTERS BY PARTY

STATE	AS OF	BALLOTS WITH A PARTY ON RECORD	DEMOCRATS	REPUBLICANS	OTHER PARTY OR NONE
Florida	10/16	741,122	316,321 (42.7%)	268,674 (36.3%)	156,127 (21.1%)
Pennsylvania	10/16	457,061	314,014 (68.7%)	104,294 (22.8%)	38,753 (8.5%)
New Jersey	10/16	349,285	231,770 (66.4%)	66,471 (19.0%)	51,044 (14.6%)
Colorado	10/15	290,768	97,577 (33.6%)	70,308 (24.2%)	122,883 (42.3%)
North Carolina	10/16	237,539	111,482 (46.9%)	46,341 (19.5%)	79,716 (33.6%)
Maryland	10/16	183,666	125,461 (68.3%)	30,707 (16.7%)	27,498 (15.0%)
Nebraska	10/16	77,291	34,620 (44.8%)	29,580 (38.3%)	13,091 (16.9%)
New Mexico	10/16	63,269	36,925 (58.4%)	17,011 (26.9%)	9,333 (14.8%)
Maine	10/15	59,542	32,656 (54.8%)	11,020 (18.5%)	15,866 (26.6%)
Iowa	10/16	33,417	18,025 (53.9%)	10,037 (30.0%)	5,355 (16.0%)
Nevada	10/16	31,457	11,872 (37.7%)	10,499 (33.4%)	9,086 (28.9%)
Rhode Island	10/16	21,366	10,306 (48.2%)	1,791 (8.4%)	9,269 (43.4%)
South Dakota	10/09	20,105	6,561 (32.6%)	10,201 (50.7%)	3,343 (16.6%)
Oklahoma	10/16	15,661	7,109 (45.4%)	6,726 (42.9%)	1,826 (11.7%)
Wyoming	10/16	14,959	2,896 (19.4%)	10,977 (73.4%)	1,086 (7.3%)
Kentucky	10/15	14,332	8,950 (62.4%)	5,382 (37.6%)	not published
Kansas	10/16	7,149	3,450 (48.3%)	2,629 (36.8%)	1,070 (15.0%)
Utah	10/15	91	32 (35.2%)	22 (24.2%)	37 (40.7%)

Party registration as each state publishes it (ElectIndex). Registration is not a vote: registered Democrats and Republicans can cross over, and voters with no party split both ways; early voters also differ from Election Day voters. These shares describe who has voted so far, not how a state will vote. States without party registration, or whose files omit the split, are left out rather than estimated.

What could change the picture

The headline rests on one estimate of the national environment. The scenarios below change that one assumption and hold everything else constant. Each is run through the same model.

SCENARIO	U.S. HOUSE	U.S. SENATE	OSSOFF	BOTTOMS	GA HOUSE	GA SENATE
Published model The national environment blends the polls, special elections, and primaries (Democrats by about 12).	257 98.9%	58 94.1%	97.4%	51.0% (Jackson +2.2)	95 80.4%	27 28.5%
Polls only The national environment set to the likely-voter polling average alone (Democrats by 8.4).	242 93.4%	55 79.0%	92.2%	43.5% (Jackson +2.2)	91 56.5%	26 16.1%
Softer national polls The tracker's pre-set fallback if national polling weakens: a blended environment of about Democrats +11, with more uncertainty.	254 97.3%	57 90.0%	95.9%	49.2% (Jackson +2.2)	94 73.8%	27 26.0%
Red seats swing harder Same environment, but Republican-leaning districts move further toward Democrats than Democratic ones do.	273 99.5%	58 94.1%	97.4%	51.0% (Jackson +2.2)	99 89.7%	28 49.2%

House, Senate, and Georgia legislature cells: median Democratic seats, then the chance of Democratic control. Ossoff and Bottoms: chance of winning, with the polling margin for Bottoms.

Even in the polls-only scenario, Democrats remain favored for both chambers of Congress. The race that moves most across the scenarios is Georgia's governor, from about 44% to 51% for Bottoms, followed by the Georgia state Senate, which ranges from a long shot to close to even.

HOW TO READ THIS MEMO

- The model simulates the election 20,000 times. Its inputs are 2024 presidential results in every district and state, incumbency, and an estimate of the national environment. It also allows for a wave larger than any in the historical record.
- Every rating in this memo comes from the model's chance of a Democratic win: Safe 95% or more, Likely 80% to 95%, Lean 60% to 80%, and Toss-up 40% to 60%, with the same bands on the Republican side. A seat is marked as changing party when the model rates it Lean or stronger toward the party that does not hold it.
- Polling averages use likely-voter results, including voters leaning toward a candidate, where pollsters publish them. Each pollster and sponsor counts once, at its newest poll. Polls paid for by a campaign or party are discounted 3 to 4 points. Polls of individual House districts are recorded but never enter the model.
- Spending is tracked from Federal Election Commission filings, but money never moves a rating.
- "Swing from 2024" compares a race's polling margin with President Trump's 2024 margin in the same place.
- This is a personal analysis for friends and family, not a forecast from any news organization, campaign, or party.

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