

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

DIGEST

FEBRUARY 2020

This issue brought to you by



2020: More Than a Presidential Race

By Nathan L. Gonzales

Based on proportional media coverage, the presidential contest will be the biggest (and maybe only) race in the country. But focusing solely on the race for the White House misses more than half of the story of 2020.

The legislative effectiveness and success of President Donald Trump in a second term or a new Democratic president depends on which party controls Congress. The Senate majority is in play, and the House matters, too. Republicans are unlikely to win the majority in 2020, but the margin will lay the foundation for the next midterm elections.

Down-ballot races are important as well, considering states can drive policy while Washington is gridlocked, and control of state government is important heading into the next round of redistricting.

There are a handful of other key reminders as the election shifts to a long sprint.

We don't have national elections in this country. The fight for the Senate is obviously a state-by-state battle, and the fight for the House is won in individual districts. But the race for the White House is a state-by-state contest as well. In 2020, focus on the state- and district-level polling, rather than the national numbers.

Polling isn't all bad. Remember in 2016 that national polls showed Hillary Clinton leading Trump by about 3 percentage points and she finished ahead of him by 2.1 percentage points in the national results. That's pretty darn good polling. Of course those national polls measured a race that didn't exist.

The state-level polling wasn't always as accurate, but the flawed analysis arguably stemmed from a lack of polling. For example, no public polls were conducted in November in Minnesota, where Clinton won by just 1.5 percentage points. This year, the call should be for more, quality polling in individual states and districts, rather than less.

This election is not the end of the world. Every election is dubbed "the most important election of our lifetime," and the 2020 results will have consequences. But no matter the results, it won't be the end of the world or a political party.

If Trump loses re-election, the media and Democrats will declare the end of the Republican Party. But in that scenario, if Democrats gain control of the levers of government in Washington, they will likely push a liberal legislative agenda that will create a backlash in the 2022 midterm elections and allow the GOP to come roaring back to relevance.

So if your party wins in 2020, enjoy it because it won't last long. If your party loses, take a deep breath because you'll be back soon. There is no permanence in politics.



2020 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up

Gardner (R-Colo.) Tillis (R-N.C.)
 McSally (R-Ariz.)

Tilt Democratic

Tilt Republican

Collins (R-Maine)

Lean Democratic

Lean Republican

Peters (D-Mich.)
 KS Open (Roberts, R)
 Ernst (R-Iowa)
 Jones (D-Ala.)

Likely Democratic

Likely Republican

Shaheen (D-N.H.)
 Cornyn (R-Texas)
 Loeffler (R-Ga.)
 Perdue (R-Ga.)

Solid Democratic

Solid Republican

NM Open (Udall, D)
 Booker (D-N.J.)
 Coons (D-Del.)
 Durbin (D-Ill.)
 Markey (D-Mass.)
 Merkley (D-Ore.)
 Reed (D-R.I.)
 Smith (D-Minn.)
 Warner (D-Va.)

TN Open (Alexander, R)
 WY Open (Enzi, R)
 Cassidy (R-La.)
 Capito (R-W.Va.)
 Cotton (R-Ark.)
 Daines (R-Mont.)
 Graham (R-S.C.)
 Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.)
 Inhofe (R-Okla.)
 McConnell (R-Ky.)
 Risch (R-Idaho)

	GOP	DEM	
116th Congress	53	47	Rounds (R-S.D.)
Not up this cycle	30	35	Sasse (R-Neb.)
Currently Solid	14	9	Sullivan (R-Alaska)
Competitive	9	3	

Takeovers in Italics, # moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans

Races to Watch

Indiana's 5th District

The open seat race is a good barometer for at least two key trends: the blue shift in the suburbs and the challenge for House Republicans to even maintain their small number of women on Capitol Hill.

[Click here for full article](#)

Presidential Battleground: Pennsylvania

As Democrats strategize about how they can reassemble the 'Blue Wall', Pennsylvania will be at the top of their list.

[Click here for full article](#)

Virginia's 7th District

It's becoming a familiar story: many of Republicans' best House takeover opportunities are represented by some of Democrats' strongest new incumbents.

[Click here for full article](#)

Presidential Battleground: Michigan

Michigan was one of the biggest surprises (and closest states) of the 2016 presidential election, and Donald Trump will likely need to recreate his magic in order to win re-election.

[Click here for full article](#)

CALENDAR

Feb. 22	Nevada Caucuses
Feb. 29	South Carolina Primary
March 3	Super Tuesday (14 states)
March 10	Democratic Primaries (7 states)
March 17	Democratic Primaries (4 states)

Ratings Roundup *(Click for full ratings)*

- [• Senate](#)
- [• Governor](#)
- [• House](#)
- [• President](#)

Candidate Conversations



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

Cynthia Lummis (R)

Wyoming Senate —
Rating: Solid Republican

Interview Date: Jan. 14, 2020

Date of Birth: Sept. 10, 1954;
Cheyenne, Wyo.

Education: Univ. of Wyoming
(Bachelors, law school)

Elected Office: U.S. House (former), state Treasurer (former), state Senate (former), state House (former)

Current Outlook: Lummis is the frontrunner to replace GOP Sen. Mike Enzi, who is not seeking re-election. She's been elected statewide six times and was a formidable candidate before Rep. Liz Cheney declined to run. Lummis has Club for Growth and Senate Conservatives Fund behind her in a race where the most important election is the GOP primary.

[Click here for full evaluation](#)



Cal Cunningham (D)

North Carolina Senate —
Rating: Toss-up

Interview Date: Dec. 6, 2019

Date of Birth: Aug. 6, 1973;
Winston-Salem, N.C.

Education: Univ. of North Carolina Chapel Hill (1999);

Vanderbilt Univ.; American Univ.; London School of Economics

Elected Office: State Senate (former); 2010 Senate candidate

Current Outlook: Cunningham is the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination in the race to challenge GOP Sen. Thom Tillis. Cunningham has been endorsed by the DSCC and has raised the most money, but must get past state Sen. Erica Smith and others in the March 3 primary. If he wins, Cunningham will be in one of the most competitive and expensive Senate races in the country and a key contest that will decide control of the Senate.

[Click here for full evaluation](#)



Nathan L. Gonzales
Editor & Publisher
nathan@insideelections.com
[@nathanlgonzales](#)

Jacob Rubashkin
Reporter & Analyst
jacob@insideelections.com

Stuart Rothenberg
Senior Editor
stu@insideelections.com

Ryan Matsumoto
Contributing Analyst
ryan@insideelections.com

Robert Yoon
Contributing Reporter & Analyst
robert@insideelections.com

Will Taylor
Production Artist
will@insideelections.com