

Inside Elections

with

Nathan L. Gonzales

Nonpartisan Analysis

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Georgia Senate: How to Blow a Lead

By Jacob Rubashkin

While Republicans revel in the messiness of the Democratic presidential primary, the GOP has an intra-party fight of its own in Georgia, with control of the Senate potentially on the line.

In August, GOP Sen. Johnny Isakson announced his resignation due to Parkinson's disease, triggering a special election to fill out the remainder of his term. He also created a headache for newly-elected Governor Brian Kemp, who was tasked with appointing a new senator to fill Isakson's seat until a special election could be held.

Kemp found himself between a rock and a hard place. President Donald Trump, whose endorsement helped secure Kemp's victory in a heavily contested gubernatorial primary just a year earlier, was advocating strongly for 9th District Rep. Doug Collins, a close Trump ally.

But Kemp went a different direction, selecting Atlanta mega-donor and businesswoman Kelly Loeffler, and setting up a competitive fight between Republicans.

Adding a layer of complexity to it all is Georgia's unique way of holding special elections for the Senate. Instead of separate primaries in which each party selects its nominee, all candidates from both parties will appear on the same ballot on Election Day in November. If no candidate can secure a majority of votes cast, then the top two vote-getters regardless of party advance to a runoff on January 5, 2021, two days *after* the new Senate convenes in Washington, DC.

The Lay Of The Land

The Peach State is a perennial source of hope for Democrats — and a perennial disappointment. Democrats have not won a single statewide elected office in Georgia since 2006, and since 2010, no Democrat has held statewide office.

Georgia hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential nominee since it narrowly went for Arkansas Gov. Bill Clinton in 1992 by just 0.59 percent. Since then, the state has become decidedly red presidential territory, going for George W. Bush by 12 and 16 points, for John McCain by 5 points, and for Mitt Romney by 7 points.

In 2014, Democrats thought they had a dream team headlining their ticket. The scions of Georgia's two most prominent Democratic families, Jason Carter and Michelle Nunn, ran competitive races for governor and senator, respectively, but both lost by 8 points in what became a Republican wave year.

In 2016, Georgia was one of several Sun Belt states viewed as in play for Hillary Clinton. She spent millions on advertising in the state,

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2020 Senate Ratings

Toss-Up

Gardner (R-Colo.)
McSally (R-Ariz.)

Tillis (R-N.C.)

Tilt Democratic

Lean Democratic

Peters (D-Mich.)

Likely Democratic

Shaheen (D-N.H.)

Solid Democratic

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.)

Tilt Republican

Collins (R-Maine)

Lean Republican

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

Likely Republican

Cornyn (R-Texas)
Loeffler (R-Ga.)
Perdue (R-Ga.)

Solid Republican

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)
Rounds (R-S.D.)

Sasse (R-Neb.)

Sullivan (R-Alaska)

| | GOP | DEM |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| 116th Congress | 53 | 47 |
| Not up this cycle | 30 | 35 |
| Currently Solid | 14 | 9 |
| Competitive | 9 | 3 |

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

Presidential Battlegrounds: Arizona

By Ryan Matsumoto

If the Democratic nominee won all three of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania this November, he would win back the White House (assuming no other changes to the 2016 electoral map). But if President Donald Trump were to win just one of those states, Democrats would need to make up ground elsewhere. One state Democrats are particularly excited about heading into November is Arizona. It is especially important because it also has a competitive Senate election, where Republican Martha McSally will fight to keep the seat she was appointed to by Republican Gov. Doug Ducey.

Arizona in Recent Elections

Arizona has been shifting to the left at the presidential level recently. In 2008, Arizona Sen. John McCain won the state by 9 percentage points while losing nationally by 7 percentage points. In 2012, Mitt Romney won Arizona by a 9 percentage-point margin while losing nationally by 4 percentage points. In 2016, Arizona took a turn to the left, voting for Trump by 4 percentage points while Hillary Clinton won the national popular vote by 2 percentage points.

Put another way, Arizona was 16 percentage points more Republican than the nation in 2008, 13 percentage points more Republican than the nation in 2012, and 6 percentage points more Republican than the nation in 2016.

Arizona has also leaned Republican in recent downballot elections. The *Inside Elections* Baseline score, which measures average partisan performance in Arizona over the past four election cycles, is 51.5 percent Republican and 46.6 percent Democratic.

Increasing Diversity

One reason Democrats have made gains in Arizona in recent years is its increasing racial diversity. In 2000, Arizona's population was 25 percent Hispanic or Latino, according to the U.S. Census. By 2010, Arizona's population had grown to 30 percent Hispanic or Latino. By 2018, Census estimates said that Arizona was 32 percent Hispanic or Latino. The growing Latino population benefits Democrats because Latinos lean to the left politically. In 2018, Democrat Krysten Sinema won the Latino vote 70 percent to 30 percent over Republican Martha McSally, according to exit polls.

Although Latinos make up almost a third of the statewide population, they make up a smaller portion of the eligible voter population (defined as U.S. citizens 18 years or older). This is because the Latino population

skews younger and many Latinos are recent immigrants. According to Daily Kos Elections, about 23 percent of Arizona eligible voters (defined as U.S. citizens 18 years or older) were Latino in 2018.



Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call
Krysten Sinema

improved the most of any racial demographic from 2014 to 2018.

As 2020 approaches, Democrats are hopeful that the Latino population's continued growth, as well as growth in the Latino eligible voter share, will deliver dividends. Turnout will also be key — if Democrats can increase Latino turnout closer to that of white voters, that would help them quite a bit.

Population Growth

Another critical piece of Arizona's political landscape is high population growth, particularly in the Phoenix metropolitan area. According to Census estimates, Arizona's population increased by 14 percent from 2010 to 2019, the seventh highest growth rate in the nation. Population growth was particularly pronounced in Maricopa County (16 percent) and Pinal County (19 percent).

Continued population growth in Arizona could help Democrats, since many of the new transplants are young college-educated professionals from liberal states such as California, Illinois, and New York. The 2018 exit polls for Texas, another Sun Belt state with similarly high population growth, showed Democrat Beto O'Rourke winning Texans who had moved there in the past 10 years by approximately 61 percent to 38 percent.

College-Educated Suburban Voters in Maricopa County

Politically, the most important county in the state is Maricopa County,

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which cast 60 percent of the state's votes in the 2016 presidential election. It encompasses the state capital of Phoenix as well as the surrounding suburbs.

Maricopa has a long history as a Republican stronghold, but has become much more competitive in recent years. It voted for Romney by 11 percentage points in 2012 before voting for Trump by just 3 percentage points in 2016. In 2018 it flipped, voting for Sinema by 4 percentage points to help her win the race.

The biggest shifts to the left in Maricopa came from suburban congressional districts with relatively high levels of college education.

The 5th District encompasses much of the East Valley region including Gilbert, Queen Park, and parts of Chandler and Mesa. According to Daily Kos Elections, 36 percent of the adults there have a bachelor's degree or higher, which is higher than the national average of 32 percent. This district voted for Romney by 29 percentage points, Trump by 21 percentage points, and McSally by 13 percentage points.

The 6th District encompasses the northeastern suburbs of Phoenix including Scottsdale, Paradise Valley, Cave Creek, and Fountain Hills. Forty-four percent of its adults have a bachelor's degree or higher, the highest of any congressional district in Arizona. It voted for Romney by 21 percentage points, Trump by 10 percentage points, and McSally by just 3 percentage points.

The 9th District is centered around Tempe (home to Arizona State University) and encompasses parts of Mesa, Chandler, Scottsdale, and Phoenix. Thirty-nine percent of its adults have a bachelor's degree or higher. It used to be more of a swing district, voting narrowly for Obama by 5 percentage points and Sinema by 4 percentage points (when she ran for U.S. House for the first time) in 2012. Since then, it's taken a sharp turn to the left, voting for Clinton by 16 percentage points and Sinema by 25 percentage points in the Senate race.

If Democrats can make further gains in the Phoenix suburbs, or even just maintain most of the gains that Sinema made in her 2018 Senate victory, they will have a real shot at carrying the state in the 2020 presidential election.

The 2018 Midterm Elections

Arizona Democrats were encouraged by the results of the 2018 midterm elections, when they won elections for Senate, Secretary of State, and Superintendent of Public Instruction. In the Senate race, Sinema defeated McSally by 2 percentage points. In the Secretary of State race, Democrat Katie Hobbs defeated Republican Steve Gaynor by 1 percentage point. And in the Superintendent of Public Instruction race, Democrat Kathy Hoffman beat Republican Frank Riggs by 3 percentage points. All three of these victories were notable, since Democrats had not won a statewide election in Arizona since 2006.

Despite those three losses, Republicans delivered strong performances in other races. Popular Republican Gov. Doug Ducey defeated Democrat David Garcia by 14 percentage point margin, while Republicans won elections for Attorney General, Treasurer, and Mine Inspector by 3 percentage points, 9 percentage points, and 3 percentage points, respectively.

Both sides should be careful though about overinterpreting midterm election results. Sinema's win occurred in the context of a D+9 national environment, while Ducey benefitted from the power of incumbency.

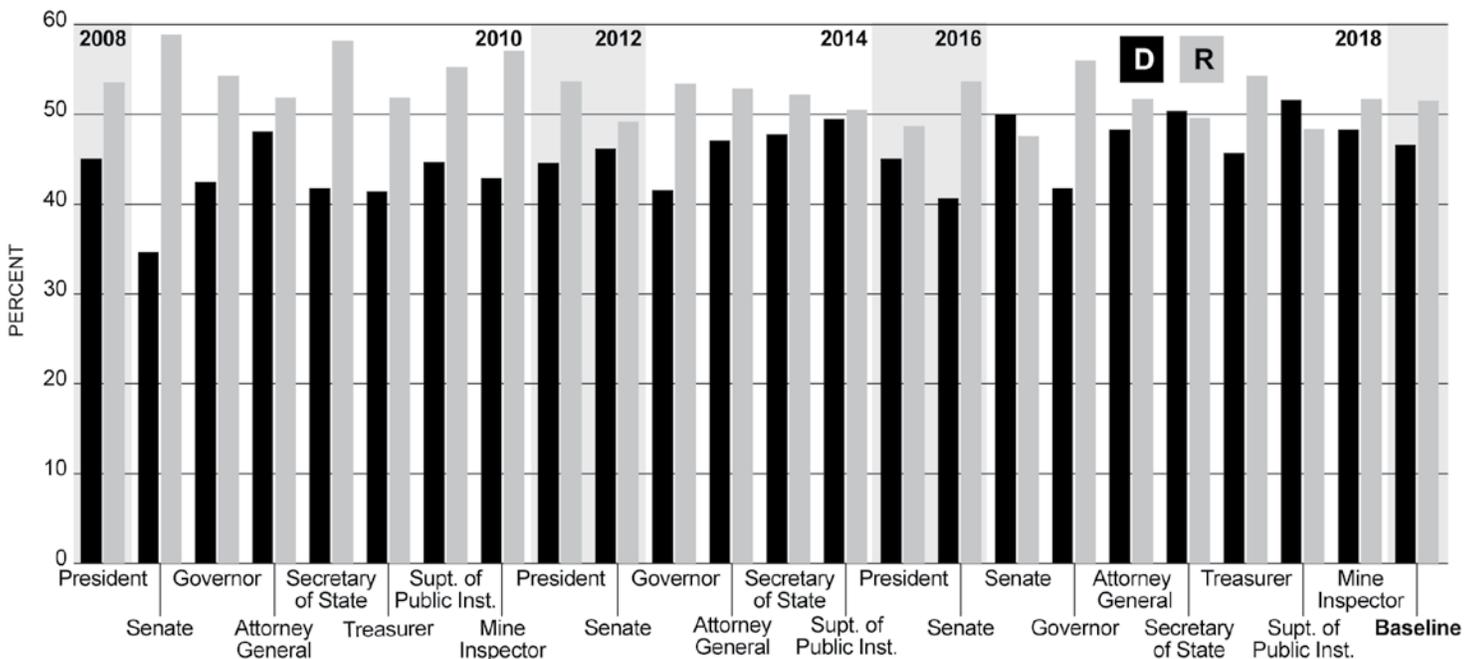
Early Polling

Early polling in Arizona suggests the state will be competitive again in 2020, although there's been limited general election polling since January. According to the RealClearPolitics averages through March 5, Biden led Trump by 0.3 percentage points but Trump led Sanders by 5.0 percentage points.

The Bottom Line

If Trump continues to excel with white working class voters in the Midwest, Arizona may provide Democrats an alternative Sun Belt path to the White House. Three keys to the race include: (1) the effect of population growth in the Phoenix metropolitan area (2) Latino turnout and (3) whether or not the Democratic nominee can replicate Sinema's margins with college-educated voters in the Phoenix suburbs. **IE**

Statewide Election Results in Arizona



Key Senate Races Start to Take Shape

By Jacob Rubashkin

The fight for the Senate got a little clearer with primaries in three Super Tuesday states. But the biggest news this week might have been in Montana, where Democrats are hoping for a last-minute boost before Monday's filing deadline.

Alabama

Once again, the Republican primary for an Alabama Senate seat is going to a runoff, and the president has a complicated relationship with one of the two finalists.

Jeff Sessions, who previously represented the state in the Senate from 1977 to 2017 before serving as US Attorney General under President Donald Trump, completed the first leg of his political comeback by advancing to a March 31 runoff with former Auburn football coach Tommy Tuberville. Sessions' time in Trump's cabinet was clouded by Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian interference, which the AG recused himself from to Trump's eternal frustration. Unable to shake Trump's ire, Sessions was fired (resigned "at your request") the day after the 2018 midterms. After staying quiet about this race for months, Trump lashed out at Sessions on Twitter, mocking him for his second-place finish behind Tuberville, and berating him for not stopping the Mueller investigation. Rep. Bradley Byrne finished third and former GOP Senate nominee Roy Moore finished a distant fourth with 8 percent.

Either Sessions or Tuberville will start the general election with the advantage over Democratic Sen. Doug Jones. Current rating: *Lean Republican*.

Montana

The biggest 2020 Senate news didn't even happen on Super Tuesday, but the day after, when the *New York Times* reported that Montana Governor Steve Bullock, himself a former Democratic presidential candidate, was leaning toward running for Senate after months of declining. Bullock, the popular two-term governor of the Big Sky state, is the only Democrat who could give incumbent Steve Daines a real race. If Bullock does jump in, it could reshape the fight for control of the Senate,

creating another pickup opportunity for Democrats and putting the Republicans on the defensive in yet another state.

Bullock, whose affable, low-key style never caught on in the presidential primary, won his first term in 2012, in a nailbiter against former Rep. Rick Hill. Four years later, he won a more comfortable 4-point victory over now-Rep. Greg Gianforte, even as Trump romped in the state and elsewhere. Republicans are skeptical he'll be able to recreate that magic in a presidential year and against an incumbent, particularly with some issue positions he took during the presidential race. If Bullock gets in before the Monday deadline, we'll change the rating from Solid Republican to Lean Republican.

North Carolina

Former state Sen. Cal Cunningham was always the Democratic favorite to take on first-term Sen. Thom Tillis in this pivotal state, but a primary challenge from the left by state Sen. Erica Smith, and some meddling by a GOP-funded Super PAC made the race complicated and expensive. Cunningham secured the Democratic nomination with 57 percent to Smith's 35 percent. Cunningham will now face Tillis in a contest that is key to Democrats' hopes of taking back the Senate. Current rating: *Toss-up*.

Texas

A crowded Democratic field narrowed this week, but Democrats still have a ways to go before they select a candidate to take on Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn. MJ Hegar, who ran a surprisingly competitive race in 2018 against GOP Rep. John Carter in the 31st District, led the primary pack with 22.3 percent, but she failed to meet the 50 percent threshold needed to avoid a runoff, so she'll face state Sen. Royce West on May 26. Labor organizer Cristina Tzintzún Ramirez, who was endorsed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, finished a close third. Democrats are looking to capture the magic Beto O'Rourke had in his 2018 nailbiter against Sen. Ted Cruz, but so far this race has lagged behind those high expectations. Current rating: *Likely Republican*. **IE**

House Primary Results: Alabama, North Carolina, Texas

Alabama

1st District (Greater Mobile) Open; Bradley Byrne, R, ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate. Mobile County Commissioner Jerry Carl and former state Sen. Bill Hightower advanced to a March 31 runoff of the GOP nomination. One of them will be a member of Congress next year. Current rating: *Solid Republican*.

2nd District (Southeastern Alabama) Open; Martha Roby, R, not seeking re-election. Roby is one of just 13 Republican women in the House, and the GOP will be replacing her with a man. Moving company CEO Jeff Coleman advanced to the March 31 runoff for the GOP nomination, where he'll face former state Rep. Barry Moore. Jessica Taylor, co-founder of the "Conservative Squad," formed at the end of 2019 as an alternative to "The Squad," which includes Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, finished third. Current rating: *Solid Republican*.

North Carolina

2nd District (Raleigh exurbs) Open; George Holding, R, not seeking re-election. Former U.S. Senate nominee Deborah Ross won the Democratic primary and is the prohibitive favorite in the general election. She received 70 percent of the vote. The district was significantly redrawn prior to the 2020 elections. Current rating: *Likely Democratic*.

6th District (Part of Greensboro, rural Piedmont) Open; Mark Walker, R, not seeking re-election. Philanthropist/2018 13th District nominee Kathy Manning won the Democratic primary and is the prohibitive favorite in the general election. She received 48.4 percent against a crowded field. The district was significantly redrawn prior to these 2020 elections. Current rating: *Likely Democratic*.

11th District (Appalachian North Carolina) Open; Mark Meadows, R, not seeking re-election. Meadows' surprise retirement right before

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the filing deadline left Republicans scrambling to get into this race. Right now, real estate agent and local GOP activist Lynda Bennett appears to have the edge with 22.7 percent of the vote, but she'll be forced into a runoff because she didn't reach the 30 percent threshold required to win outright. She'll face 24-year-old Madison Cawthorn, a real estate businessman and motivational speaker (20.4 percent) who narrowly edged out state Sen. Jim Davis (19.3 percent). The two will face each other on May 12. Current rating: *Solid Republican*.

Texas

7th District (West Houston) Lizzie Fletcher, D, elected 53%. Rep. Will Hurd's retirement means that the GOP caucus is losing its one black member of the House of Representatives. But party operatives believe they can begin to rebuild their party's racial diversity with candidates such as Tuesday's victor Wesley Hunt, a West Point graduate and former helicopter pilot with three degrees from Cornell. He won a convincing 61.1 percent of the primary vote and he's one of the best fundraisers among Republican challengers nationwide. But incumbent Lizzie Fletcher is formidable, with nearly \$2 million COH as of Feb. 12. Current Rating: *Lean Democratic*.

10th District (Austin to western Houston) Mike McCaul, R, elected 51%. Civil rights attorney Mike Siegel lost to McCaul in 2018 by just 5 points, and he's angling for another shot in 2020. But Siegel, who missed the 50 percent threshold by 6 points on Tuesday, will first have to face primary care physician Pritesh Gandhi in a May 26 runoff. The biggest spender in the Democratic race, EMILY's List-endorsed Shannon Hutcheson, placed a distant third, with 22.9 percent. Current Rating: *Likely Republican*.

12th District (Parker and western Tarrant Counties) Kay Granger, R, re-elected 64% in 2018. The congresswoman decisively beat back a challenge from Chris Putnam, winning 58-42 percent. Putnam ran with the backing of the conservative Club for Growth. The Club went hard against Granger, spending almost \$1 million, but Granger received reinforcements from the establishment-aligned Congressional Leadership Fund, as well as President Donald Trump, who endorsed her on Twitter. Current rating: *Solid Republican*

21st District (Parts of Austin and San Antonio connected by Texas Hill Country) Chip Roy, R, elected 50%. Roy first won this seat in 2018 in a closer-than-expected race. This time, he'll face former state Sen. Wendy Davis, who captured national attention for her 2013 filibuster of an anti-abortion bill and was the Democratic nominee for governor in 2014. Davis has outraised Roy this cycle, though they both had roughly the same cash on hand on Feb. 12: \$1.3 million. Without Beto O'Rourke, who lost this district by a few hundred votes against Ted Cruz in 2018, at the top of the ticket, this isn't a top tier race yet. Current rating: *Likely Republican*.

22nd District (Southern Houston suburbs) Open; Pete Olson, R, not seeking re-election. Republicans will not get their preferred Republican candidate in this open Houston district. Pierce Bush, a nephew of George W. and Jeb's who entered the race late, failed to advance to the runoff. Instead, voters will choose between Fort Bend County Sheriff Troy Nehls, who pulled in 40.5 percent, and Kathaleen Wall, who won 19.4 percent. National Republicans have their doubts about Wall, who ran a poor campaign for the GOP nod in the 2nd District in 2018, but she brings vast personal wealth to the race: she spent more than \$6 million in 2018, and has already put in more than \$3 million in the 2020 race. Current rating: *Tilt Republican*.

23rd District (El Paso and San Antonio) Open; Will Hurd, R, not seeking re-election. With Hurd retiring, this district is the Democrats' best pickup opportunity in the country. Gina Ortiz Jones, the retired Air

Force intelligence officer who came within 1,000 votes of unseating Hurd in 2018, breezed through the Democratic primary. She'll face either Navy veteran Tony Gonzales, who is endorsed by Hurd, or Air Force veteran Raul Reyes, an outspoken Hurd critic, who advanced to a May 26 runoff. Current Rating: *Lean Democratic*.

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2020 House Ratings

Toss-Up (2R, 7D)

| | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| GA 7 (Open; Woodall, R) | NY 11 (Rose, D) |
| IA 3 (Axne, D) | NY 22 (Brindisi, D) |
| IL 13 (Davis, R) | OK 5 (Horn, D) |
| IL 14 (Underwood, D) | SC 1 (Cunningham, D) |
| | UT 4 (McAdams, D) |

Tilt Democratic (9D)

| |
|--------------------------|
| CA 21 (Cox, D) |
| GA 6 (McBath, D) |
| IA 1 (Finkenauer, D) |
| IA 2 (Open; Loebbeck, D) |
| ME 2 (Golden, D) |
| MN 7 (Peterson, DFL) |
| NJ 3 (Kim, D) |
| NM 2 (Torres Small, D) |
| VA 7 (Spanberger, D) |

Tilt Republican (7R, 1I)

| |
|---------------------------|
| IA 4 (King, R) |
| MI 3 (Amash, I) |
| MN 1 (Hagedorn, R) |
| NJ 2 (Van Drew, R) |
| PA 1 (Fitzpatrick, R) |
| PA 10 (Perry, R) |
| TX 22 (Open; Olson, R) |
| TX 24 (Open; Marchant, R) |

| | GOP | DEM |
|---------------------|-----|-----|
| 116th Congress | 200 | 234 |
| Currently Solid | 170 | 199 |
| Competitive | 30 | 35 |
| Needed for majority | 218 | |

Lean Democratic (7D, 1R)

| |
|-----------------------|
| CA 48 (Rouda, D) |
| KS 3 (Davids, D) |
| NJ 7 (Malinowski, D) |
| NV 3 (Lee, D) |
| TX 7 (Fletcher, D) |
| TX 23 (Open; Hurd, R) |
| TX 32 (Allred, D) |
| VA 2 (Luria, D) |

Lean Republican (5R)

| |
|----------------------|
| MO 2 (Wagner, R) |
| NE 2 (Bacon, R) |
| NY 2 (Open; King, R) |
| NY 24 (Katko, R) |
| OH 1 (Chabot, R) |

Likely Democratic (12D, 2R)

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| AZ 1 (O'Halleran, D) | PA 17 (Lamb, D) |
| CA 10 (Harder, D) | |
| CA 25 (Vacant, D) | |
| CA 39 (Cisneros, D) | |
| CA 45 (Porter, D) | |
| FL 26 (Mucarsel-Powell, D) | |
| NH 1 (Pappas, D) | |
| MI 8 (Slotkin, D) | |
| MI 11 (Stevens, D) | |
| NC 2 (Open; Holding, R) | |
| NC 6 (Open; Walker, R) | |
| NY 19 (Delgado, D) | |
| PA 8 (Cartwright, D) | |

Likely Republican (13R)

| |
|---------------------------|
| AZ 6 (Schweikert, R) |
| FL 15 (Spano, R) |
| IN 5 (Open; Brooks, R) |
| MI 6 (Upton, R) |
| NC 8 (Hudson, R) |
| NC 9 (Bishop, R) |
| NY 1 (Zeldin, R) |
| OH 12 (Balderson, R) |
| TX2 (Crenshaw, R) |
| TX 10 (McCaul, R) |
| TX 21 (Roy, R) |
| TX 31 (Carter, R) |
| WA 3 (Herrera-Beutler, R) |

moved benefiting Democrats, * moved benefiting Republicans Takeovers in Italics

Continued from page 1

and while *Inside Elections* rated it as Lean Republican, several other prognosticators called it a tossup. Clinton went on to lose by 5 points.

But the most crushing defeat for Georgia Democrats came in 2018, when state House Minority Leader Stacey Abrams fell just short against Kemp in her bid to become the first black female governor in American history. Kemp's two-point victory was marred by charges of voter suppression and allegations that the then-Georgia Secretary of State had used his position to his unfair advantage, and Abrams, who delivered the best electoral performance for a Georgia Democrat running for governor in two decades, has remained nationally prominent.

The 2018 midterm cycle was not entirely a bust for Democrats, who flipped the long-time GOP 6th District and came within 500 votes of flipping the 7th District.

This Senate race, as well as those two House races, will turn on whether 2018 was a high water mark for Democrats in the state, or if it was indicative of a more permanent shift leftward.

Two to Tango

Isakson's early retirement sets up an unusual situation this fall. In addition to this special election, Georgia will also have a regularly scheduled election for its' Class 2 Senate seat (all Senate seats are divided into three classes), currently held by Republican businessman David Perdue. Perdue will face either former congressional candidate and liberal cause celebre Jon Ossoff, or former Columbus, Ga. mayor Teresa Tomlinson, and unlike the concurrent special election, this election will feature discrete primaries, so only one Democrat and one Republican will face each other in November. However, the same runoff rules apply here, so if no candidate receives a majority in November, the race progresses to a runoff on January 5, the same date as the potential runoff in the special election.

While it's less likely the Perdue race will go to a runoff than the special election because it will be a traditional race between Democratic and GOP nominees, it's not out of the realm of possibility. In 2008, first-term Republican Sen. Saxby Chambliss was held to just under 50 percent by Democrat Jim Martin in November, before winning a resounding runoff victory a month later.

This could lead to a situation where not one but two Senate seats — and potentially control of the entire chamber — would not be known until *after* the Senate convenes on January 3, 2021. In the previous 55 instances when both of a state's Senate seats were on the ballot in the same year, just eight featured a split decision, where one party won one seat, and another party the other. And the last time a double-barrel race saw one incumbent win and the other seat flip was all the way back in 1962, in New Hampshire.

The Republican Incumbent

Kelly Loeffler was born in Bloomington, Illinois on Nov. 27, 1970, where her parents own a farm, and she often recounts working as a child in the soybean fields. Loeffler attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, completing a Bachelor of Science in business administration (1992) and went to work for Toyota in various cities across the country before returning to school, receiving an MBA from DePaul University in 1999.

Loeffler spent brief stints at CitiBank in Stamford, Conn., financial firm William Blair in Chicago and private equity firm Crossroads Group in Dallas before landing in Atlanta in 2002.

It was there that she started working for Intercontinental Exchange (ICE), an energy and commodities trading company seeing an explosion in business following the collapse of Enron, where she headed up



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call

Kelly Loeffler

investor relations, communications, and marketing. The company was run by Jeffrey Sprecher, whom Loeffler would marry in 2004.

Loeffler continued in her senior role as ICE grew into an exchange powerhouse; the

company went public on the NYSE in 2005 and *bought* the NYSE in 2013 in an \$8.6 billion deal. In 2018, after 16 years at ICE, Loeffler became the founding CEO of the ICE subsidiary Bakkt, a cryptocurrency exchange, only stepping down from that post when she was appointed to the Senate.

In 2011, Loeffler, a 5'11" former high school basketball player, joined with philanthropist Mary Brock, the wife of then-Coca Cola CEO John Brock, to purchase Atlanta's WNBA team, the Dream, which she has co-owned since. She also sits on several boards in Atlanta.

Though she never held office prior to her appointment, Loeffler was not unknown in GOP circles, having established a reputation as a generous donor. FEC filings show that Loeffler has routinely made maximum contributions to Republicans in House and Senate races across the country over the past 15 years, as well as regular five-figure donations to the Republican National Committee and the NRSC. And in 2012, she was one of the top political donors in the country, giving \$750,000 to a Romney-aligned Super PAC. (She has also given small-dollar donations to a handful of Democrats through the years, including Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow and Georgia Reps. David Scott and John Barrow.)

Loeffler was announced as Sen. Isakson's replacement on December 4, 2019 by Gov. Kemp. She was sworn into the Senate on January 6, 2020. She currently sits on the Agriculture Committee, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and the Joint Economic Committee.

Loeffler quickly announced she would stand election for the remainder of Isakson's term, and committed to spending at least \$20 million of her own money to that end, a financial heft that likely influenced Kemp in her direction. The latest FEC filings, detailing campaign finance information from the last three months of 2019, showed Loeffler already loaned her campaign \$4 million and raised an additional \$459,000.

Her campaign is led by veteran Georgia political strategist Billy Kirkland, who most recently worked in the White House for Trump and then Vice President Mike Pence, and previously managed David Perdue's successful 2014 Senate campaign.

The Republican Challenger

Doug Collins, who was passed over by Kemp in favor of Loeffler, is pursuing the seat anyways, to the frustration of many of his Republican colleagues.

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Collins was born August 16, 1966 in Gainesville, Ga., a small city in rural Hall County, 54 miles northeast of Atlanta. After graduating from North Hall High School (1984) he commuted to North Georgia College in nearby Dahlonega, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in political science and criminal justice (1988).

After working for several years in the hazardous waste industry, Collins decamped to the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and after graduating with a Master of Divinity



Doug Collins

Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call

(1996), he returned to Gainesville to start a family with his wife Lisa, a schoolteacher. There, Collins operated a scrapbooking store with his wife, and was the senior pastor at Chicopee Baptist Church until 2005, when he began commuting to Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, from which he graduated with a JD in 2008.

In 2006, Collins, still in law school, ran for an open seat in the Georgia House, winning unopposed in both the Republican primary and general election and taking his seat in 2007. In September of 2008, Collins, who had joined the Air Force Reserve as a chaplain following 9/11, was called up to active duty and did a five-month tour on Balad Air Base in Iraq. Despite being overseas during campaign season, Collins chose to seek re-election, again running unopposed in the primary and general. In 2010, Collins opened his own law firm, and ran for a third term in the legislature unopposed.

In 2012, following reapportionment, Collins chose to run for the newly redrawn and vacant 9th Congressional District, which encompassed the northeast corner of the state, including Gainesville. In a reversal of roles from the current Senate special, Collins entered the Republican primary as the establishment choice facing an insurgent opponent: media personality Martha Zoller, a self-described "conservative firebrand" who had support from Sarah Palin, Mike Huckabee, and Newt Gingrich. After edging out Zoller by just 700 votes but failing to capture a majority, Collins was forced into a primary runoff, where he captured 55 percent of the vote.

In 2014 he easily beat back a primary challenge from retired Brigadier General Bernard Fontaine, and in 2016 he hung a 40 point primary victory on the attempted comeback campaign of former Rep. Paul Broun. In 2018 he ran unopposed in the primary and won the general by almost 60 points.

Collins rose to national prominence during the 2019 impeachment inquiry. As ranking member of the Judiciary Committee, Collins quickly became one of the president's most forceful defenders, blasting Democrats during hearings and on shows like *Hannity* and *Fox & Friends*. In doing so, he caught the eye of the president, who would take to Twitter to applaud his media appearances. Collins' performance throughout impeachment eventually led the president to push for Kemp to appoint him as senator.

Collins has never been a major fundraiser, rarely raising more than \$1.5 million per cycle and never hitting \$2 million. He entered this race too late to file a fourth quarter FEC report for the Senate race, but he had

\$1.7 million in his House campaign account on Dec. 31, 2019, which he can transfer to his Senate campaign.

Collins' team is led by campaign manager Scott Paradise, a former spokesman for now-Sen. Josh Hawley of Missouri whose firm has done work for several Georgia representatives and the state Republican Party. The Collins campaign has struggled to attract vendors in the face of an NRSC boycott, and so far is keeping their consulting team under wraps.

The Democratic Challengers

Reverend Raphael Warnock, the Democratic favorite, was born in 1970 to two Pentecostal preachers. The eleventh of twelve children and the youngest of seven boys, he grew up in the Kayton Homes public housing project in Savannah, and graduated from Sol C. Johnson High School (1987) before attending Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he graduated with honors in 1991.

After college, Warnock pursued a Master of Divinity at the Union Theological Seminary in New York (1994) and then interned at the Sixth Avenue Baptist Church in Birmingham, Ala., where he was ordained and licensed a Baptist minister. He returned to New York to take a post at the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, where both Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. and Jr. had preached for decades.

He moved to Baltimore in 2000, taking up as the senior pastor for Douglas Memorial Community Church, and continued his studies with his professors at UTS, working toward a Master of Philosophy and a Ph.D. in systematic theology, which he earned in 2006.

In 2005, Warnock was called to serve as the fifth senior pastor at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where Martin Luther King, Jr. had preached from 1960 until his death in 1968. Warnock, the youngest ever



Raphael Warnock

Courtesy Warnock for Senate Campaign

to be appointed as such, has held the pulpit since.

Though this is his first time running for office, Warnock has been politically active in Georgia and across the South for the two decades, using his prominent position to speak on issues of

civil rights, criminal justice reform, voting rights, and the war on drugs. He delivered a benediction at the National Cathedral's prayer service following President Obama's second inauguration, became a leader in the fight for clemency in the Troy Davis case, and was arrested in 2014 while protesting Gov. Nathan Deal's decision not to expand Medicaid. He briefly flirted with a Senate candidacy in 2014 but chose not to run.

In 2017, Warnock was made chair of the New Georgia Project, a nonpartisan voter engagement nonprofit founded in 2013 by Stacey Abrams which targets young voters and voters of color. Warnock stepped down from the organization when he announced his candidacy on January 30.

He has not yet released fundraising numbers.

Also running is Matt Lieberman, the son of former Connecticut Senator and 2000 Democratic vice presidential nominee Joe Lieberman. Lieberman, a graduate of Yale College (1989) and Yale Law School (1994), has lived in Atlanta since 2005, when he moved to Georgia to be

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the principal of a Jewish day school. In 2007, Lieberman left his job to found a healthcare consulting business, and has since founded two tech startups.

A political newcomer, Lieberman emphasized his outsider status, his experience as a single father to two daughters, and his frustration with a “do-nothing” Senate.

Lieberman reported raising \$700,000 in the final three months of 2019, and had \$369,000 on hand to start 2020. In a mid-December GOP poll done by McLaughlin & Associates for Doug Collins, Lieberman was the choice of 42 percent of the respondents, but he was the only Democrat offered as an option alongside Loeffler and Collins.

The third major Democrat in the race is former US Attorney and state Senator Ed Tarver. Born July 22, 1959 in Killeen, Texas, Tarver attended Augusta College in Augusta, Ga., where he graduated with a Bachelor’s in political science in 1981. He joined the Army in 1982, serving for seven years and attaining the rank of captain before attending University of Georgia School of Law and graduating with a JD in 1991. After clerking for a judge in the Southern District of Georgia, he entered private practice.

Tarver’s first foray into politics came when Augusta’s powerful state senator resigned after being convicted on 127 federal counts of fraud and other crimes. Tarver entered the special election and beat former state Rep. Ben Allen by a count of 8075 to 3815, a margin of over 30 percent. Tarver ran unopposed for the seat in 2006, and in 2008 defeated Republican John Butler by 59 points, over 23,000 votes.

Tarver was nominated by President Obama to be the US Attorney for the Southern District of Georgia in 2009 and served until he resigned in 2017 along with 46 other US Attorneys at the request of President Trump. As US Attorney, Tarver prosecuted the largest Medicare fraud case in Georgia history, securing \$27 million in restitution in *US v. Martin Bradley III*.

The ‘General’ That’s a Primary

National Republicans are *mad* about this race being on the map at all. Collins’ entry further upsets an already challenging map for the GOP,

with 11 more Republican-held seats to defend than Democratic.

Had Collins chosen not to run, the November 3 election would have been a de-facto general between an incumbent (albeit an appointed one) and a serious Democratic challenger in a Republican-leaning state. The spectre of a runoff would still exist — as it did in two-person races in 2014 and 2018 — but the race would more resemble other contests being held across the country.

President Trump even tried to resolve the brewing fight amicably. He used an East Room appearance with both candidates in attendance to tell Loeffler that “you’re going to end up liking [Collins] a lot... Something’s going to happen that’s going to be very good,” and followed up two weeks later by publicly signalling to Collins that he was going to appoint him to be Director of National Intelligence.

But Collins immediately declined interest in the DNI job and jumped in the race anyways.

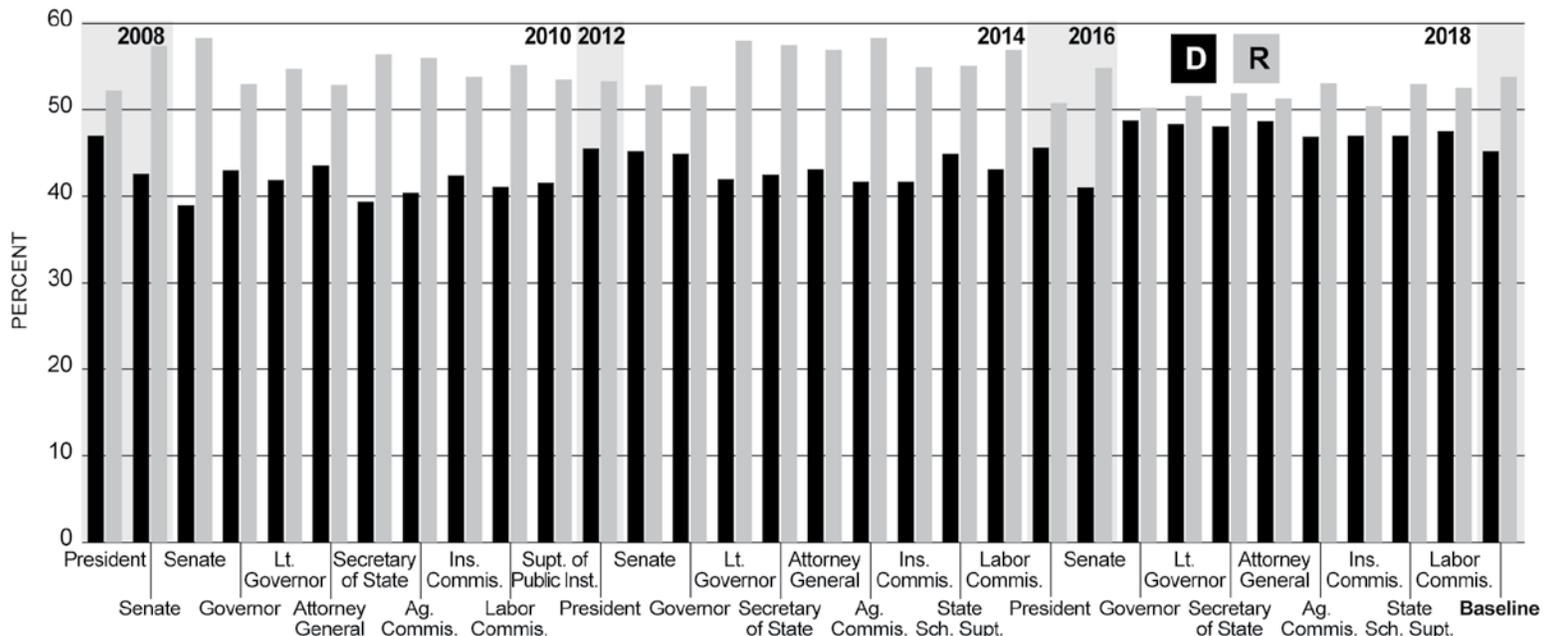
With two prominent Republicans sharing the ballot, it’s highly unlikely that either one of them will be able to win an outright majority in November. Even as Republicans have monopolized statewide elected offices, they have done so with majorities rarely exceeding the low 50s, and Republicans across the board agree that neither candidate can plausibly win “50 percent plus one” in November.

The presence of a credible Democrat on the ticket further alters Republican strategy going into the election, because it means neither Loeffler nor Collins can benefit from any serious cross-party support in November.

Kemp’s selection of Loeffler in December was predicated in part on her perceived appeal to women and suburban voters, two constituencies that have swung hard toward Democrats since 2016. Loeffler, a successful Atlanta businesswoman with a softer image and a history of supporting more moderate Republicans such as Mitt Romney, was seen as a good candidate to recapture those voters. It’s not surprising then that some hardcore conservative groups initially expressed concern over Loeffler’s appointment, as her natural constituency falls more toward the

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Statewide Election Results in Georgia



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middle of the spectrum.

But to Democrats' delight and Republicans' chagrin, she hasn't been able to run on that message. Instead, she's had to veer right in an effort to box out Collins, introducing herself to Georgians as a gun-toting, Trump-loving crusader against radical Islam and abortion. It's an indication of whose votes the Loeffler campaign believes it needs to capture to advance to the runoff: not independents and persuadable Democrats, who will have their own compelling options, but the Republican base.

The main fault line between the two Republicans will be authenticity, with the Collins campaign trying to paint Loeffler as inauthentic and out of touch with everyday Georgians.

The authenticity question cuts to the origins of this special. The stated rationale of the Collins campaign is to provide Georgia voters with a true choice on their elected representatives. As an appointee, Loeffler has yet to face voters, and Collins is stressing the importance of providing a chance for all Georgians to voice their opinion, not just the one Georgian in the governor's mansion. The way they see it, this is still Sen. Isakson's seat, and it won't really be Loeffler's seat until and if she wins it in an election.

Collins will also portray Loeffler as an inauthentic conservative. Loeffler's ownership of a WNBA team, the Atlanta Dream, will certainly come up during the race. The WNBA is by far the most progressive professional sports league in the country, with players across the country deeply involved in issues controversial for Republicans, including gun control, LGBTQ+ rights, and Black Lives Matter.

The Dream has worked with Stacey Abrams' legal firm Sage Works, which played a role in bringing the team to Atlanta in 2008. Abrams was featured on the team's "Inspiring Women Roster" in 2014, and Loeffler and Abrams actually appeared on court together during a playoff game in 2018, in the throes of Abrams' gubernatorial campaign against Kemp. (Collins has also appeared in photos with Abrams, a point the NRSC was quick to note, and Abrams named a character in one of her novels, a "young lawyer she described as lovable, if annoying" after Collins, her former colleague in the state legislature, per the AJC.)

Finally, Collins will argue that Loeffler, a multimillionaire, is out of touch with everyday Georgians. He has already compared her to former Democratic presidential candidate Michael Bloomberg, accusing her of trying to use her wealth to buy the race, and has attempted to contrast Loeffler's wealth with the down-to-earth image she is projecting. (Loeffler, who with her husband owns the most expensive house in the Atlanta metro area, has emphasized her blue-collar roots.)

The Early Ads

Loeffler was unknown outside of GOP circles prior to her appointment, and has spent the last two months blitzing the state with ads introducing herself to the broader electorate. She has already spent \$4 million on three TV spots that have aired across the state. The ads highlight her backstory — growing up on a farm, waiting tables through college — as well as her business credentials and support for President Trump. Though her distaste for Washington is a consistent theme, there's only one politician she actually goes after by name, and it's not Collins.

Courtesy Collins for Senate Campaign



The Collins campaign poked fun at Loeffler's hunting outfit in a digital spot.

Instead, she attacks Bernie Sanders and his "radical ideas."

Another online-only spot features her on a trail with a shotgun and in hunting attire and touts her support for the Second Amendment. (The Collins camp quickly cried foul, citing the fact that Loeffler lacked both a Georgia hunting license and a pointing dog typically used by bird hunters.)

The Loeffler campaign seems content to stick to its positive messaging and let outside groups do the dirty work for now. So far, the big outside spender in this race is the conservative Club for Growth, which has dropped over \$2 million in ads portraying Collins as an out-of-control tax-and-spender, even tying him to Nancy Pelosi and the San Francisco Opera. Collins once boasted of his high legislative scores awarded to him by the Club, but his score this session is significantly lower than in previous years, and the Club cites his "spending problem" as the main reason for their involvement in the race.

On the digital side, the McConnell-aligned NRSC is branding him in an online video as a "convenient conservative" who "wasn't with President Trump until a Senate seat opened up." The NRSC is also attempting to highlight the friendship between Collins, who as ranking member of the Judiciary Committee was one of the most aggressive and vocal opponents of impeachment, and Democratic impeachment manager Rep. Hakeem Jeffries. (Collins has described Jeffries as a close friend, and they worked together to pass a criminal justice reform bill two years ago — a bill that President Trump routinely touts as one of his chief accomplishments.) And a McConnell-allied GOP Super PAC is going further, attacking Collins for a Georgia state bill he co-sponsored with Stacey Abrams in 2008 which would have lowered the evidentiary standard for finding criminal defendants to be mentally incompetent, saying he and Abrams "helped murderers avoid the death penalty."

The attacks indicate that the Republican establishment is worried about Collins' appeal among more conservative voters and Trump loyalists.

It is unclear if that effort will be successful. Trump personally advocated for Collins' appointment to the seat over Loeffler and he holds the congressman in high regard. And a whole coterie of Trump confidantes has lined up behind Collins, including Fox News host Sean

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Hannity, House Intelligence Committee ranking member Devin Nunes, and Rudy Giuliani.

Loeffler, powered by her vast personal wealth and network of high-dollar donors, will significantly outspend Collins. The congressman has yet to go on air, but his campaign has already begun to engage in digital attacks on Loeffler designed to attract media attention, such as poking fun at Loeffler's "hunting trip." Collins also intends to rely on his earned conservative media and near-decade in Congress to make up for being outspent. This race is already the third-most expensive Senate race this cycle, according to data from Kantar Media, with over \$8.5 million in advertising.

There's something for each Republican to like in the scant polling that's been done in this race so far. Collins released a poll from McLaughlin & Assoc. taken in mid-December of likely voters showing him ahead of Loeffler 32-11 percent. But that poll was conducted just as Loeffler was beginning to introduce herself to the state, and her camp released a poll from Public Opinion Strategies taken in mid-February showing Loeffler and Collins effectively tied with 20 and 19 percent, respectively, and indicating that Loeffler's support had increased 5 points since January. And a University of Georgia poll from early February showed Loeffler and Collins with nearly identical favorable/unfavorable ratings: Loeffler at 33 fav/28 unfav and Collins at 34/26.

Collins' camp countered with a poll from Battleground Connect taken in late February showing him ahead of Loeffler 28-20 percent, and leading among Republicans 50-32 percent. Most notably, the Battleground Connect poll showed Loeffler with a 27 fav/42 unfav rating, putting her 15 points underwater — Collins clocked a 32 fav/34 unfav.

It's still very early in the cycle, all the polls show large numbers of undecided voters, and the field is still settling — points all parties acknowledge.

But each side sees things moving in their direction. Loeffler and her allies believe that if she really has already drawn to a tie with Collins in just a few months, she will be in good position by the fall. Meanwhile, Collins' camp continues to be heartened by his lead among Republican voters, his deep ties to Georgians, and the durability of the image he has

built up over his decade-plus in politics.

Then there's the Trump factor. No one anticipates the president to align himself with either Loeffler or Collins, but Trump's actions are notoriously hard to predict and he has been known to go against the wishes of his advisers and Senate allies when it comes to endorsements. In a race this close, a single tweet from Trump would mean the difference between life and death for either of these candidates. Expect both of them to continue wrapping their arms as tightly around Trump as possible, just in case his Twitter fingers get itchy a couple months down the line.

None of the three major Democrats are currently on the air, but with the first votes not cast until November, it's very early in the race, and two of the three just recently launched their campaigns. Democrats also are not particularly worried about the likely spending discrepancy either — all sides anticipate the Loeffler vs. Collins battle to be an all-consuming money pit for Republicans, potentially allowing the Democrats to coast to November relatively unscathed.

Of the Democrats, only one, Rev. Warnock, has any real potential to make the runoff. He has locked up unanimous support from the Georgia Democratic political establishment, and he'll have every major Democrat in the state on the campaign trail with him, in addition to national figures such as Sens. Kamala Harris and Cory Booker.

While he joined the race after the December FEC filing deadline, Democrats are not particularly concerned about his fundraising. But he'll need to post big first quarter numbers to reassure observers who may still be skittish about the first-time candidate's ability to raise money, and to signal dominance to his lesser-known Democratic opponents. With Loeffler prepared to spend so much money, it is imperative for Warnock to show financial viability early on, and the first quarter deadline will be his first major test.

Warnock will want to capitalize on the chaos in the Republican party, and present himself as a unifying leader for Georgians. Democrats in the state think his background will allow him to compete all over the state, not just in the increasingly blue urban areas. A common refrain among party insiders regarding Warnock's cross-state appeal is that although he resides in Atlanta, he's not from the city originally, having been born and raised in coastal Savannah. And Democrats think that his deep religious background will allow him to connect with more traditionally conservative voters across the state.

Neither of the other two Democrats, Lieberman or Tarver, have a realistic path to victory.

Some Democrats in the state are cautiously optimistic about the potential for Warnock to win this race in November. Republicans are more adamant that the *only* way Warnock wins is to win it outright, and are worried about it happening. But Warnock would need everything to go his way.

The Loeffler-Collins battle would have to get so vicious as to turn not just true independents but soft Republicans against both candidates entirely. With how the race has gone so far, and the egos involved, this could happen.



The Club for Growth has already spent over \$2 million on ads, including this one, attacking Collins.

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Both Warnock's Democratic opponents would need to drop out. Warnock will need all the support he can get from solid Democrats in order to capitalize on the Loeffler/Collins dash to the right. If Lieberman and Tarver siphon off even just a percentage point or two of the Democratic vote, reaching 50 percent becomes incredibly difficult. But both Lieberman and Tarver have maintained they will stay in till November.

Finally, Warnock would likely need a friendly face at the top of the ticket. If the Democratic nominee is Joe Biden, who has indicated that he'll seriously contest Georgia, who has demonstrated strength among black voters, and whose moderate image will be less off-putting to new suburban Democrats and soft Republicans, the path becomes slightly easier.

The 'Runoff' That's a General

Republicans are confident that whichever of their candidates advances to the January 5, 2021 runoff will be favored to win, and history is on their side.

No Democrat has won a statewide victory in a Georgia runoff in at least 30 years. Turnout in Georgia runoffs is always significantly lower than in the general, and both GOP and Democratic operatives agree that hurts Democratic prospects. In 2018, 3.4 million people voted in the general election for secretary of state, while just 1.4 million voted in the ensuing runoff.

However, there are reasons to think that 2020 could buck that trend.

What happens in November in both the race for the Senate and the White House will have a profound effect on the January runoff. If Trump is re-elected and Democrats fail to net at least three seats in the Senate in November, then this race could end up being irrelevant such as the 2016 Louisiana Senate runoff.

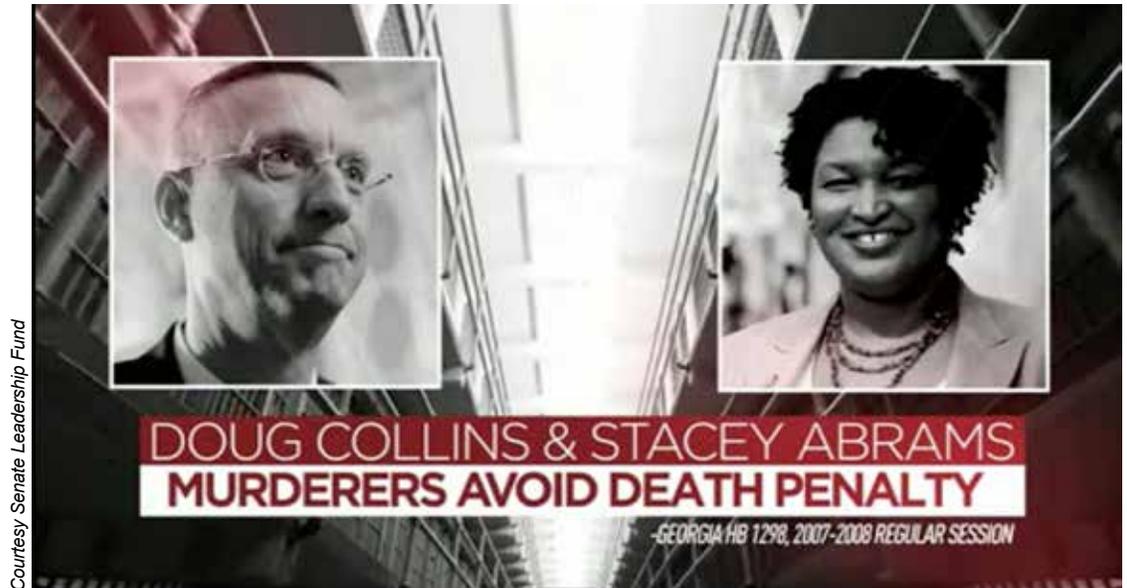
But control of the Senate could be at stake. If Trump is re-elected, the Senate determines two more years of lifetime judicial appointments (including multiple potential Supreme Court vacancies). If a Democrat wins, control of the Senate dictates not just appointments but the fate of the entire Democratic legislative agenda.

A runoff to determine Senate control would attract outsized nationwide attention and outside spending and could buck the turnout trend. If Democrats can sustain even a slight enthusiasm advantage, they might have a shot.

National operatives are skeptical that such a "tipping point" situation would come to pass. While the Georgia special is expected to be competitive, it's not a top-tier pickup opportunity at the moment. For this race to be the tipping point for Senate control, Democrats would have to win some, but not all, of the more competitive races on the map.

Regardless of the national picture, Democrats are optimistic about their chances in a hypothetical January runoff, for two reasons.

As the state gets younger and less white, two populations Republicans have struggled to attract, Democrats see opportunity to



The McConnell-aligned SLF is highlighting Collins' work on criminal justice reform and his ties to Democrats.

increase their voter base. Georgia Democrats are particularly heartened by the massive number — 352,000 — of newly registered voters in the state this year, because that cohort is younger and less white than the existing voting population. The party is also quick to point out that unlike other battleground states that have seesawed between Democrats and the GOP over the past decade, Georgia Democrats have consistently increased their vote share in top-of-ticket races year over year, from Roy Barnes 43 percent mark in the 2010 gubernatorial race to Abrams 48.8 percent in 2018. Democrats hope that by November 2020, enough new voters will be on board to erase Republicans' demographic advantage. Republicans acknowledge that outcome as an eventuality, but don't believe Democrats will get there for another several cycles.

The second reason is the divisive nature of the GOP contest. While Senate primaries in other states conclude as early as March, Georgia's jungle primary format means that Loeffler and Collins will be trying to damage each other as much as possible all the way till November. Democrats hope — and Republicans worry — that the two months before the January runoff will not be long enough for Republicans to patch over their differences and unite against their Democratic opponent, regardless of whether Collins or Loeffler advance.

If Loeffler advances, she'll have to work to re-establish the moderate, suburban-friendly image that she spent the primary season shedding. And she'll have to do so without alienating any Collins voters on the right who have lingering doubts or frustrations. Loeffler needs huge margins out of traditionally Republican rural north Georgia, including Collins' own 9th District and the neighboring 14th. In 2018 those districts gave Kemp 78.8 and 75.4 percent of the vote, respectively and his combined vote margin in the two, 289,000, was over five times larger than his statewide margin of 55,000. If the suburbs and cities continue their steady march leftward — or even if they just vote Democratic at similar levels to 2016 and 2018 — Loeffler needs to knock it out of the park in Collins country.

If Collins advances to the runoff, he'll have done so after nine months of hits by the DC Republican establishment and outside groups, and with no help from the party infrastructure. Were this to be a normal primary / general calendar, he too might be able to count on the gravity of a

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presidential year election to consolidate Republicans around his candidacy. But in January, there's no Trump or Bernie Sanders to drive Republican turnout — Collins will have to generate his own excitement among not just his core supporters, but Loeffler voters and soft Republicans across the state. There's no doubt that national Republicans would rather see Collins in the Senate than Warnock and will put resources behind Collins if he is the Republican in the runoff. But after nine months of attacking Collins on his record, his friendships, and his commitment to the Republican Party, it's going to be an awkward pairing, and the party will have to work hard to convince Republicans that Collins is not just an acceptable choice, but one worth turning out for on a Tuesday in January.

On the Democratic side, Democrats hope Warnock can make it to the runoff without ever facing serious attacks from Republicans, or any of his Democratic opponents, who will struggle to generate the fundraising or media coverage they would need to hit him.

Warnock's path to victory in a runoff is still an uphill climb. When asked what it would take for a Democrat to finally win in Georgia, 2014 gubernatorial nominee Jason Carter said a candidate would have to "perform like him in rural Georgia and like Hillary Clinton in metro Georgia," which is an elegant way of expressing a complex situation. The growing urban-rural divide has affected Democrats nationwide in the age of Trump. Abrams underperformed Carter's margins by an average of 5 percent in the 139 most rural counties in the state, while outperforming him by 6.2 percent in the 20 densest counties. Had Abrams matched Carter's margins in the 139 most rural while maintaining her lead in the metro areas, she would have seen a comfortable victory over Kemp.

Democrats — including Carter, who has endorsed Warnock — believe that Warnock can reclaim some territory in more rural areas with his inspiring life story and his religious appeal, using the nine free months he'll have to take his message across the state before he faces any direct Republican opposition. They're also skeptical that Loeffler will play as well

in the suburbs as Republicans hope, after being pulled to the right by Collins.

And while Republicans are less concerned about losing rural areas that are trending red, they are worried by data showing that even slight increases in black voters as an overall percentage of the electorate could push Democrats over the finish line. Warnock has long been involved in voter registration efforts, and boosting black turnout will be an integral piece of his campaign.

If and when the runoff finally comes around, Republicans believe they'll be able to state an effective case against Warnock. GOP players are excited about using Warnock's ties to controversial preacher Rev. Jeremiah Wright, whom Warnock defended when Wright's sermons became a flashpoint in the 2008 election, to paint the pastor as a radical unfit for office. And Warnock's many years worth of publicly available sermons will face intense scrutiny from GOP opposition researchers, who will be looking for anything they can use to demonstrate the Democrat's "extremism." Warnock, for his part, is expecting and unbothered by this, telling the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* that "preaching at its best points out those contradictions but then shows us the path forward."

The Bottom Line

Even though it's trending blue, Georgia is still a red state, and this race should theoretically be an easy hold. It still ranks below Colorado, Arizona, Maine, North Carolina, Iowa, and maybe now Montana, in pickup opportunities for Democrats.

But the chaos brewing between the two Republican contenders, coupled with the state's unique runoff system, adds a layer of intrigue — and for the national GOP, frustration — to this election.

National Democrats aren't likely to prioritize this race at the moment, but if the situation across the aisle continues to deteriorate, expect some more attention from the national party and outside groups, on both sides.

And if come January, Democrats do need to win a runoff to take back the Senate, then buckle up. **IE**

House Primary, Continued from page 5

24th District (Suburbs north of Dallas and Fort Worth) Open; Kenny Marchant, R, not seeking re-election. Retired Air Force Col. Kim Olson, who lost a close statewide race for agriculture commissioner in 2018, finished on top of the Democratic field with 40.9 percent, but it wasn't enough to avoid a runoff. She'll face local school board member Candace Valenzuela, who won 30.4 percent and has secured endorsements from EMILY's List and Sen. Elizabeth Warren, on May 26. The victor will face Republican nominee Beth Van Duyne, the former Irving, Texas mayor who most recently served as a regional administrator in Trump's Department of Housing and Urban Development. Current Rating: *Tilt Republican*.

28th District (San Antonio, Laredo) Henry Cuellar, D, re-elected 84.4% in 2018. The conservative Democratic incumbent, who drew nationwide ire from progressives for his Trump-friendly floor votes and stances on gun control and abortion, barely won renomination against Jessica Cisneros, a 26-year-old immigration lawyer who was endorsed by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sens. Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. Cuellar, who was supported by national Democrats such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and the DCCC, won with 51.9 percent. Current Rating: *Solid Democratic*.

31st District (Williamson and Bell counties) John Carter, R, re-elected 51%. Engineer Donna Imam and 2018 Dem primary runner-up

physician Christine Mann will advance to a May 26 runoff. Imam (34.7 percent) and Mann (30.7 percent) will compete for the chance to take on Carter, who survived a close call against MJ Hegar in 2018 but is looking less vulnerable this time around. Current Rating: *Likely Republican*.

32nd District (Suburban North Dallas) Colin Allred, D, elected 52%. Tech executive Genevieve Collins, the preferred candidate of the GOP establishment, avoided a runoff Tuesday night by winning a decisive 52.6 percent of the vote. Her nearest challenger, retired Navy Seal Floyd McLendon, garnered 34.2 percent. Collins, who is one of the best Republican fundraisers this cycle, will face an uphill climb against freshman Allred, who had a war chest of almost \$2 million on Feb. 12. Current Rating: *Lean Democratic*. **IE**

CALENDAR

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| March 10 | Democratic Primaries (7 states) |
| March 17 | Democratic Primaries (4 states) |
| March 24 | Georgia Primaries |
| April 4 | Democratic Primaries (4 states) |
| July 13-16 | Democratic National Convention (Milwaukee) |
| Aug. 24-27 | Republican National Convention (Charlotte) |