11 States Hold Gubernatorial Elections as Party Control Only Flips in Montana

Eleven states across the country held gubernatorial contests on Election Day, with the most competitive races occurring in Montana, Missouri, and North Carolina. The other states holding gubernatorial elections were Indiana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Delaware, Washington, and West Virginia. Among these states, Republicans won eight, and Democrats took the remaining three. The gubernatorial races across the country were largely seen as a referendum on governors' handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Interestingly, no incumbent governors were defeated, and most of the races ended up being decided by a comfortable margin of victory. Only one state, Montana, saw a flip in party control of the governorship.

Prior to Election Day, Montana's gubernatorial race was expected to be one of the most competitive nationwide. The race featured Democratic Lieutenant Governor Michael Cooney facing Republican House Representative Greg Gianforte. The two candidates were vying to replace outgoing Gov. Steve Bullock, who was defeated in Montana's Senate race by incumbent Republican Sen. Steve Daines. Gianforte won his U.S. House seat in a special election after being defeated in Montana's 2016 gubernatorial election by Bullock. In this week's race, Gianforte defeated Cooney comfortably, winning by a margin of roughly 12%. Most experts rated the race as a toss-up, and it was expected to be one of the country's most competitive gubernatorial races.

Another gubernatorial race that was expected to be among the most competitive occurred in Missouri. Incumbent Gov. Mike Parson campaigned for another term against Democratic challenger Nicole Galloway. Parson was initially elected as Lieutenant Governor to Eric Greitens, but he was elevated to the governorship after Greitens resigned in scandal. Parson served the remaining two years of Greitens' term after his resignation, and was seeking to secure a full four-year term. Parson used a similar strategy to Josh Hawley when he defeated incumbent Senator Claire McCaskill in 2018, by running up the margins in rural regions to offset Democratic strongholds in urban areas.

North Carolina also held a notable gubernatorial race, with incumbent Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper winning re-election over Republican Dan Forest. Despite partisan differences, Forest had served as Cooper's Lieutenant Governor in his previous term, and urged bipartisan unity among North Carolinians in his concession speech. The race in North Carolina largely focused around the coronavirus pandemic, with Forest urging the state to re-open its economy quickly, and Cooper preferring a slower approach. The majority of polls showed Cooper with a strong advantage entering Election Day, but the overall vote ended up being much closer. Cooper finished with about 51% of the vote, with Forest carrying roughly 47%.