

# The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

## [Balance of the Senate Appears Likely to be Determined by Two Runoff Georgia Races in January 2021](#)

With most Senate races decided, the majority in the upper chamber still hangs in the balance. Going into Election Day, Republicans held a slim advantage of three seats. Democrats hoped to flip the Senate and propel themselves into the majority, primarily through winning seats in swing states such as Colorado, Arizona, and North Carolina. Democrats had also hoped they would be able to flip the seats of long-serving Republican Senators such as Lindsey Graham and Susan Collins. Contrasting this, Republicans sought to defend their majority, and add to their caucus by winning back seats in traditionally Republican states, such as Alabama. Between the two parties, Republicans will be happier with the outcome, as they protected their majority and outperformed expectations in swing states. However, the two senatorial races in Georgia appear likely to be the final determining factor regarding which political party holds the majority in the Senate, with both poised to go to a runoff in early January 2021. As such, the focus of the nation will descend upon Georgia over the next couple of months, with fundraising there expected to hit record levels in two runoff elections that will play a decisive role in the political landscape of the Senate.

In the battleground states that were hotly contested by both parties, four Republicans emerged victorious, compared to two Democrats. Additionally, Georgia and North Carolina are currently too close to call, with the former likely headed for a run-off in January. In Arizona and Colorado, Democratic challengers Mark Kelly and John Hickenlooper defeated Republican incumbents Martha McSally and Cory Gardner. In Iowa, Maine, Montana, and South Carolina, Republican incumbents staved off their Democratic challengers. Democrats had high hopes of flipping seats in Iowa, Maine, and South Carolina in particular, with the Republicans representing those states under significant pressure.

Democrats underperformed expectations in various states that were viewed as swing states prior to the election. Specifically, Iowa and Maine were targets due to the perceived unpopularity of Republican incumbents, compared to the strong polling in favor of the Democratic candidates. Democrats had made no secret of their desire to oust Sen. Susan Collins, a moderate Republican, in Maine since her vote to acquit President Trump during his impeachment trial. According to most polls prior to the election, Collins was down significantly to challenger Sara Gideon. In Iowa, first-term Senator Joni Ernst was viewed as vulnerable due to the state leaning leftward in recent elections. Her challenger, Theresa Greenfield, polled strongly during the race, but was still defeated by Ernst. Moving forward, the Democrats can learn from the races in Iowa and Maine, particularly with respect to the growing inaccuracy of polling in recent years.

Giving Democrats hope will be the performance of incumbent Sen. Gary Peters in Michigan, and challengers Jon Ossoff and Raphael Warnock in Georgia. Republicans had made flipping Peters' seat in Michigan a priority, with businessman John James challenging the incumbent and running a strong campaign. Democrats, meanwhile, had focused strongly on flipping both seats in Georgia. Republicans held both seats prior to the election, with Senator David Perdue running for a second term, and Senator Kelly Loeffler seeking to permanently replace Sen. Johnny Isakson after he retired midway through his term and she was appointed to his seat on an interim basis. Ossoff and Warnock performed strongly in their respective races, and both contests look set to go to a runoff in January of next year. Under Georgia law, the winning candidate must win over 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff, and no candidate in either race has secured that total. This could prove crucial, as control of the Senate appears likely to come down to the result of these races in less than two months.