

The Battle for the U.S. Senate—Who Will Win in 2012?

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McDermott Will & Emery Senior Advisor Jon Decker conducts a state-by-state examination of the 33 U.S. Senate election races in 2012. Prior to joining McDermott, Jon was a White House correspondent for Reuters and has been a member of the White House Press Corps since 1995.

While much of the political world is focused on the race for the White House, in 2012 the fate of the U.S. Senate hangs in the balance as well. For Democrats, maintaining the party's slim 53–47 majority will be difficult.

In the 2012 cycle, there are 33 Senate races on the ballot. Twenty-three of those are currently held by Democrats. Nine of them are for open seats. As things stand today, there are seven races that can be considered *truly competitive*. Two races are simply too close to call.

What follows is an analysis and forecast of each of those Senate races. Although much can change over the next nine months, this is an educated forecast based on current information as to the way the Senate map would look if the Presidential election were held *today*.

State	Prediction
Arizona	Open seat, leans R (six-term Rep. Jeff Flake is expected to retain the seat now held by Sen. Jon Kyl)
California	Safe Democrat (Sen. Dianne Feinstein is expected to easily win her fourth full term in the Senate)
Connecticut	Open seat, likely Democrat (three-term Rep. Chris Murphy and former Connecticut Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz are competing for the Democratic nomination in this Democratic-leaning state)
Delaware	Safe Democrat (Sen. Tom Carper is expected to be re-elected to serve his third term)
Florida	Toss-up (Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson is expected to face a tough challenge from Republican Rep. Connie Mack IV)
Hawaii	Open seat, leans Democrat (Rep. Mazie Hirono and former Rep. Ed Case are

	running for the Democratic nomination, and the winner will be the favorite going into the general election)
Indiana	Likely Republican (although Sen. Richard Lugar will face a stiff primary challenge from a Tea Party member, he is expected to win a seventh term in the Senate; if he loses the nomination, Democratic Rep. Joe Donnelly of South Bend could win the seat)
Maine	Likely Republican (Sen. Olympia Snowe is a safe bet to retain her seat unless she gets “tea-partied”)
Maryland	Safe Democrat (Sen. Ben Cardin will easily win his second term)
Massachusetts	Toss-up (Democrats are betting that former consumer finance watchdog Elizabeth Warren can take down Sen. Scott Brown)
Michigan	Likely Democrat (Sen. Debbie Stabenow is still the favorite despite the state’s economic morass)
Minnesota	Safe Democrat (No big Republican has come forward to threaten popular Sen. Amy Klobuchar’s prospects for re-election)
Mississippi	Safe Republican (Democrats have no credible candidate to challenge Sen. Roger Wicker)
Missouri	Toss-up (Despite not having a consensus candidate, Republicans are confident they can undermine Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill’s good-government reputation and flip this seat)
Montana	Toss-up (Democratic Sen. Jon Tester and Republican Rep. Denny Rehberg are waging one of the most competitive Senate races in the country)
Nebraska	Open seat, likely Republican (with Sen. Ben Nelson retiring, this should be another pick-up for Republicans; State Attorney General Jon Bruning and State Treasurer Don Stenberg are vying for the Republican nomination)
Nevada	Leans Republican (Polls give the edge to interim Republican Sen. Dean Heller in a tight race over Democratic Rep. Shelley Berkley)
New Jersey	Likely Democrat (Sen. Bob Menendez, who takes nothing for granted, is an almost certain lock to win re-election)
New Mexico	Open seat, leans Democrat (in a race to fill the open seat of retiring Sen. Jeff Bingaman, most polls show Democratic Rep. Martin Heinrich with a

	consistent lead over Republican ex-Rep. Heather Wilson)
New York	Safe Democrat (Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand is expected to cruise to victory and win her first full six-year term in the Senate)
North Dakota	Open seat, toss-up (Democratic State Attorney General Heidi Heitkamp will face Republican Rep. Rick Berg in a race to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Kent Conrad)
Ohio	Leans Democrat (Sen. Sherrod Brown is demonstrating strength in his re-election race with most polls showing him comfortably ahead of Republican Ohio State Treasurer Josh Mandel)
Pennsylvania	Likely Democrat (Republicans still have to choose a nominee to run against Sen. Bob Casey, who appears likely to win a second term)
Rhode Island	Safe Democrat (Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse is a lock to win re-election)
Tennessee	Safe Republican (so far, no Democrat has filed to challenge Republican Sen. Bob Corker, who is growing in stature in the Senate)
Texas	Open seat, safe Republican (the race to succeed retiring Republican Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison is still shaping up, but Lt. Governor David Dewhurst is seen as the favorite to win the Republican primary and the general election)
Utah	Safe Republican (Sen. Orrin Hatch is expected to easily retain his seat in this solid-red Republican state, unless he gets tripped up like Sen. Bennett by the Tea Party)
Vermont	Safe Democrat/Independent (Sen. Bernie Sanders, an Independent who caucuses with Democrats, should easily win re-election)
Virginia	Open Seat, toss-up (the race for the open Senate seat between former Governor Tim Kaine and former Sen. George Allen is a statistical dead heat)
Washington	Safe Democrat (Sen. Maria Cantwell's poll numbers are looking strong in her run for re-election)
West Virginia	Likely Democrat (Sen. Joe Manchin's poll numbers are so strong that Republicans still lack a candidate)
Wisconsin	Open seat, toss-up (Democrats have cleared the field for Rep. Tammy Baldwin to run for retiring Democratic Sen. Herb Kohl's seat; on the Republican side, former U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

	Secretary and Gov. Tommy Thompson is battling with Tea Party favorite and former Rep. Mark Neumann, to be the Republican nominee)
Wyoming	Safe Republican (Sen. John Barrasso, M.D., has given himself the right prescription to win re-election in this solid Republican state)

Map 1 shows the current Senate makeup of the 112th Congress.

Map 2 shows the states in which a contested Senate election will take place in 2012.

Map 3 is an educated forecast, based on current information, of the way the map would look if the presidential election were held today. It assumes that former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney will be the Republican presidential nominee and that the faltering U.S. economy will not experience a profound turnaround over the next year. Two races (Massachusetts and Virginia) are too close to call.

Conclusions:

Even before turning to the seven toss-up races, Republicans should pick up one seat in the Senate (Nebraska). Of the seven truly competitive races, six are now held by Democrats. The lone seat held by Republicans that is in the toss-up category is Massachusetts.

Following are current predictions on the seven toss-up states:

State	Prediction
Florida	Democrat hold. Sen. Bill Nelson will face a tough challenge from Congressman Connie Mack. The Obama campaign's concentration on Florida is critical to Nelson's return.
Massachusetts	Too close to call. This will be one of the most expensive races in the country. Republican Scott Brown will win a clear majority of Independent voters in the Bay State, but the big question is whether that will be enough to overcome the onslaught of Democrats coming out to vote for President Obama. As part of her election strategy, former Harvard Professor Elizabeth Warren Senator is banking on keeping so-called "Reagan Democrats" in her camp. Brown's campaign is determined to peel off enough of those same voters to make up

	for the anemic Republican presence in the state. This race, along with Virginia (see below), will likely determine control of the Senate in the 113th Congress.
Missouri	Democratic hold. Blessed by a pair of possible opponents who are struggling to marshal resources and enthusiasm, Sen. Claire McCaskill will be returned to the Senate in a squeaker.
Montana	Republican pick-up. Rep. Denny Rehberg will knock off Democratic Sen. Jon Tester and return this seat to Republicans.
North Dakota	Republican pick-up. Former North Dakota Attorney General Heidi Heitkamp has had state-wide election success—winning her races with at least 62 percent support—but Republican Rep. Rick Berg is considered the favorite in this race thanks in part to the likelihood of Obama losing the state. North Dakota hasn't voted for a Democrat on the national ticket since 1964.
Virginia	Too close to call. This race is a true toss-up. Both Tim Kaine and George Allen have won state-wide contests. Republicans have had a number of major victories in recent years—including the race for Governor—however, this race will likely boil down to personalities and turn-out.
Wisconsin	Republican pick-up My pick depends on former Gov. Tommy Thompson winning the Republican nomination. Should that occur, I see Thompson beating Rep. Tammy Baldwin.

The Result

If this forecast holds true, Republicans would occupy 50 votes in the next Senate—with two races undecided. Should Democrats win both Massachusetts and Virginia, the Senate will be divided 50–50 after Election Day 2012. Should that be the case, control of the Senate will be determined by the presidential race. If President Obama wins re-election, the Senate will stay in the hands of Democrats. If the Republican nominee (likely former Governor Mitt Romney) wins the White House, Republicans will assume control of the U.S. Senate. See [The Battle for the White House: Who Will Win in 2012?](#) for more information.

Upcoming newsletters will continue to monitor the battle for control of the White House and the Senate.

Jon Decker is a senior advisor at McDermott Will & Emery LLP. Prior to joining McDermott, Jon was the White House correspondent for Reuters Television. He has been a member of the White House Press Corps since 1995. The information expressed in this piece contains author predictions that are based on current information and forecasting. In no way do they reflect an endorsement of any political party.

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