

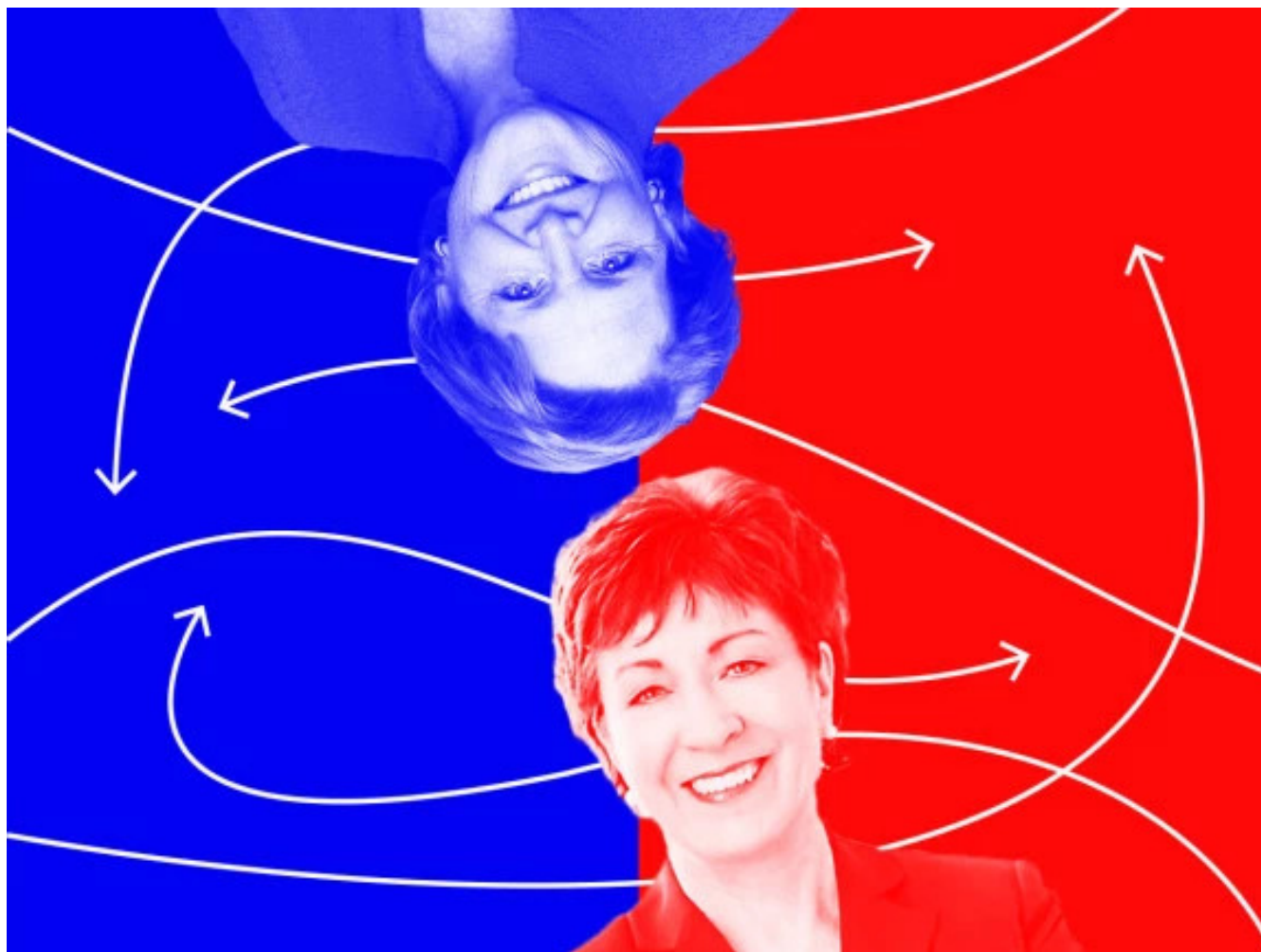
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Which Republican Senators Are Most Likely To Fight Trump?

And which Democrats are most likely to work with him?

By Nate Silver

Filed under Congress



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Out of the rubble of the Nov. 8 election, Democrats managed to pick up two U.S. Senate seats from Republicans — in Illinois and New Hampshire — while [holding on to all of their own](#). It was an underwhelming performance given how many chances Democrats had to gain seats all over the map. Still, Donald Trump will begin his presidential term with Republicans holding only a narrow Senate majority: either 51-49 or (more likely) 52-48, depending on the results of [Louisiana's runoff election](#) on Dec. 10.

That means defections of just two to three Republican senators could block Trump from confirming his cabinet, making successful Supreme Court appointments, or passing new

pieces of legislation. But how many anti-Trump Republicans can we really expect in the Senate, especially given that all but three Republican senators come from states that voted for him? And with the [daunting Senate map](#) that Democrats face in 2018 — with several red-state Democrats up for re-election — how many of their own senators might join with Trump on key votes?

Until the Senate convenes on Jan. 3, the best we can do is make educated guesses about the coalitions that will line up around Trump. But there are a few obvious factors that will presumably correlate with support for his agenda:

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- **Issue alignment:** Senators whose policy positions are more aligned with Trump's will be more likely to support him.
- **Personal support:** Senators who endorsed Trump — and there were a lot of gradations of endorsements and non-endorsements — will be more likely to support him.
- **Electoral incentive:** The better Trump performed in a senator's state, the more likely the senator will be to support Trump, other factors held equal, especially if the senator is up for re-election in 2018.

I came up with a quick way to measure each of these qualities on a 1-to-5 scale, where 5 implies a higher likelihood of supporting Trump. Although the calculation for the first factor, issue alignment, is fairly involved, this is *not* meant to be a terribly precise exercise. Instead, we just want to get a rough sense for how many potential Republican defectors or Democratic supporters there might be for Trump on contentious votes. Not to be overlooked: How easy or challenging it will be for Trump to gather the 60 votes

necessary to overcome potential Democratic filibusters, a tactic that [probably won't be going away](#) anytime soon.

Here's a brief description of how I calculated the score for each factor:

Issue alignment. Trump was an unusual Republican nominee in that he didn't have down-the-line conservative views, instead mixing extremely conservative stances on issues such as immigration with surprisingly moderate (or even leftist) ones on other issues such as trade — with a lot of improvisation (and inconsistency) along the way. Therefore, the usual statistical methods that rate members of Congress on a one-dimensional, liberal-conservative scale may not be the best way to predict compatibility with Trump.

Instead, I used data from [OnTheIssues.org](#), which tracks candidates' positions within 20 policy areas based on their public statements and voting history. The site rates candidates' positions on a 10-point scale from -5 to +5 — for instance, on immigration, -5 represents a conservative stance (start deporting people) whereas +5 is a liberal one (amnesty for immigrants who entered the country illegally).

We can calculate each senator's similarity to Trump in the aggregate over these various issues.¹ For each issue, I measured the distance between each senator's stance and Trump's position on the 10-point scale.² Then I squared the result, which punishes larger differences of opinion as compared to smaller ones, and weighted each issue based on how often Trump talks about it³ — so immigration matters more than school choice, for instance. This calculation resulted in a weighted, root-mean-squared distance (RMSD) from Trump, where lower numbers meant more similarity to him.

Which senators are most similar to Trump?

REPUBLICANS			DEMOCRATS				
SENATOR	STATE	SCORE	SENATOR	STATE	SCORE		
1	Perdue	GA	2.6	37	Heitkamp	ND	4.1
2	Scott	SC	3.1	–	Campbell*	LA	4.7
3	Risch	ID	3.4	52	Warner	VA	4.8
4	Sasse	NE	3.4	54	Donnelly	IN	5.3
5	Tillis	NC	3.4	55	Manchin	WV	5.3
6	Cassidy	LA	3.5	56	McCaskill	MO	5.7
7	Shelby	AL	3.6	58	Hassan	NH	5.8
8	Enzi	WY	3.6	59	Merkley	OR	5.9

REPUBLICANS			DEMOCRATS				
SENATOR	STATE	SCORE	SENATOR	STATE	SCORE		
9	Sullivan	AK	3.6	60	Tester	MT	5.9
10	Gardner	CO	3.6	61	Klobuchar	MN	6.1
12	Johnson	WI	3.6	62	Shaheen	NH	6.1
12	Alexander	TN	3.6	63	Schatz	HI	6.1
13	Young	IN	3.6	64	King	ME	6.1
14	Barrasso	WY	3.6	65	Casey	PA	6.2
15	Cruz	TX	3.7	66	Carper	DE	6.3
16	Rubio	FL	3.7	67	Booker	NJ	6.4
17	Ernst	IA	3.8	68	Stabenow	MI	6.4
18	Toomey	PA	3.8	69	Kaine	VA	6.4
19	Daines	MT	3.8	70	Coons	DE	6.5
20	Inhofe	OK	3.8	71	Heinrich	NM	6.5
21	Fischer	NE	3.8	72	Cortez Masto	NV	6.6
22	Graham	SC	3.8	73	Blumenthal	CT	6.6
23	Burr	NC	3.9	74	Wyden	OR	6.7
24	Hoeven	ND	3.9	75	Murphy	CT	6.7
25	Crapo	ID	3.9	76	Peters	MI	6.8
26	Sessions	AL	3.9	77	Gillibrand	NY	6.8
27	Cochran	MS	3.9	78	Feinstein	CA	6.9
28	Flake	AZ	4.0	79	Harris	CA	7.0
29	Capito	WV	4.1	80	Bennet	CO	7.0
30	Corker	TN	4.1	81	Nelson	FL	7.0
31	Isakson	GA	4.1	82	Brown	OH	7.0
32	Cotton	AR	4.1	83	Menendez	NJ	7.1
33	Thune	SD	4.1	84	Sanders	VT	7.1
34	Cornyn	TX	4.1	85	Leahy	VT	7.1
35	Boozman	AR	4.1	86	Durbin	IL	7.1
36	Lankford	OK	4.1	87	Reed	RI	7.2
38	Wicker	MS	4.2	88	Schumer	NY	7.2
39	Hatch	UT	4.2	89	Franken	MN	7.2
40	Lee	UT	4.2	90	Hirono	HI	7.2
41	Moran	KS	4.3	91	Warren	MA	7.2
42	McConnell	KY	4.3	92	Whitehouse	RI	7.3
43	Grassley	IA	4.4	93	Udall	NM	7.3
44	Roberts	KS	4.4	94	Markey	MA	7.4
45	Heller	NV	4.5	95	Cardin	MD	7.4
46	Kennedy*	LA	4.5	96	Duckworth	IL	7.5

REPUBLICANS			DEMOCRATS				
SENATOR	STATE	SCORE	SENATOR	STATE	SCORE		
47	Blunt	MO	4.6	97	Baldwin	WI	7.5
48	Rounds	SD	4.6	98	Van Hollen	MD	7.5
49	Murkowski	AK	4.7	99	Cantwell	WA	7.6
50	Portman	OH	4.8	100	Murray	WA	7.7
51	Paul	KY	4.8				
53	McCain	AZ	5.0				
57	Collins	ME	5.8				

*Either Campbell or Kennedy will be elected in the Louisiana runoff on Dec. 10.

SOURCE: ONTHEISSUES.ORG

Because of Trump's unorthodox stances, no senator is a carbon copy of him. (Perhaps that will change once Trump has been in office four years and reshapes the party in his image.) The closest, according to our similarity score, is Sen. David Perdue of Georgia, who like Trump was a wealthy businessman before running for office. And in general, senators who were first elected during the tea party era from 2010 onward are more similar to Trump than those who have held longer tenures in office. The former group includes some senators, such as Ben Sasse of Nebraska, who have [publicly feuded with Trump](#). Their beefs with Trump may have less to do with differences over policy and more about his style of leadership and fitness for office.

By contrast, a few Republican senators really don't have much in common with Trump, policywise. Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, especially, has more differences with Trump than similarities. Arizona Sen. John McCain and Trump may both be "mavericks," but not in a way that will necessarily be compatible with one another. Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul's libertarian-ish views are a bad mix for Trump's populist ones. And moderate, pro-free-market Republicans such as Ohio Sen. Rob Portman may find themselves at odds with Trump on issues such as trade.

Among Democrats, Trump has some commonalities with moderate, populist Democrats such as North Dakota Sen. Heidi Heitkamp, Indiana Sen. Joe Donnelly and West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin. Heitkamp, in particular, rates as being closer to Trump on the issues than many Republicans. Several of these Democrats also happen to be up for re-election in 2018 in states that Trump won by wide margins (more about that in a moment). Meanwhile, the least similar senators to Trump are Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell of Washington, liberal Democrats who (unlike many of their liberal compatriots) [support free trade](#).

(Note: for easier comparison with the other metrics, I translated the RMSD scores to a 5-point scale, where 5 indicates more similarity to Trump. You can find that calculation in the footnotes.⁴)

Personal support. I also rated the senators on a 5-point scale based on whether, when and how they endorsed Trump. (The primary sources are Daniel Nichanian’s [spreadsheet](#) and FiveThirtyEight’s own [endorsement tracker](#) from the primaries). The rating scale is as follows, ranging from least supportive of Trump to the most.

- **1 point — endorsed Hillary Clinton.** All current and newly elected Democratic senators fall into this category, except for Foster Campbell, the Democrats’ candidate in the Louisiana runoff, who [didn’t endorse either Clinton or Trump](#).
- **2 points — endorsed Evan McMullin or Gary Johnson.** This category applies only to Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, who [endorsed and then voted for McMullin](#).
- **3 points — didn’t endorse Trump or anyone else.** Several Republicans, [such as Collins](#), fall into this category, including some like McCain who unendorsed Trump after the “Access Hollywood” tape surfaced.
- **3.5 points — ambiguous on Trump.** Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia [called on Trump](#) to “re-examine his candidacy” after the “Access Hollywood” tape, but never formally unendorsed him, nor did she ever reaffirm her original endorsement.
- **4 points — wavered, then endorsed Trump.** These candidates eventually endorsed Trump by Election Day, but either unendorsed him at some point during the campaign before [re-endorsing him](#), [endorsed one of his opponents](#) in the primary or ran against him in the primary.
- **5 points — endorsed Trump without wavering.** Everyone else falls into this category.

Electoral incentive. Only three Republican senators — Collins of Maine, Cory Gardner of Colorado and Dean Heller of Nevada — came from states that Trump lost last week. In fact, many Republicans probably have more reason to worry about a primary challenge than their general election prospects. That could help keep Sasse in line, for example.

By contrast, 11 or 12 Senate Democrats will hail from states won by Trump, depending on whether Campbell wins the Louisiana runoff. But there are obviously varying degrees

of Trumpiness in their states. It looks as if Trump will eventually win Michigan by a couple 10ths of a percentage point — [results](#) aren't finalized yet — but Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow doesn't have as much to worry about as Heitkamp, given that Trump won North Dakota by 36 percentage points. I translated Trump's margin of victory or defeat in each state onto a 5-point scale, as detailed in the footnotes.⁵

Calculating the Trump support score. Finally, I estimated each senator's overall likelihood to support Trump by averaging the three categories, but with a twist: I put more weight on the state's electoral environment if the senator is up for re-election soon. In particular, I gave the electoral incentive category 1.5 times the weight of the other categories if the senator is up for re-election in 2018, the same weight as the other categories if he or she is up in 2020, and a weight of 0.5 if he or she was just elected and isn't on the ballot again until 2022.

Here are the scores for the 51 or 52⁶ Republican senators, ranked in inverse order of their Trump support score.

Which Republicans might defy Trump?

SENATOR	STATE	RE-ELECT YEAR	ISSUE ALIGNMENT	PERSONAL SUPPORT	ELECTORAL INCENTIVE	TRUMP SUPPORT SCORE
Collins	ME	2020	2.5	3	2.5	2.7
Heller	NV	2018	3.5	3	2.5	2.9
McCain	AZ	2022	3	3	3.5	3.1
Gardner	CO	2020	4	3	2.5	3.2
Portman	OH	2022	3	3	4	3.2
Murkowski	AK	2022	3	3	4.5	3.3
Flake	AZ	2018	3.5	3	3.5	3.4
Graham	SC	2020	4	2	4.5	3.5
Lee	UT	2022	3.5	3	4.5	3.5
Toomey	PA	2022	4	4	3	3.8
Paul	KY	2022	3	4	5	3.8
Rubio	FL	2022	4	4	3	3.8
Sullivan	AK	2020	4	3	4.5	3.8
Capito	WV	2020	3.5	3.5	5	4.0
Rounds	SD	2020	3	4	5	4.0
Cruz	TX	2018	4	4	4	4.0
Boozman	AR	2022	3.5	4	5	4.0
Thune	SD	2022	3.5	4	5	4.0

SENATOR	STATE	RE-ELECT YEAR	ISSUE ALIGNMENT	PERSONAL SUPPORT	ELECTORAL INCENTIVE	TRUMP SUPPORT SCORE
Tillis	NC	2020	4.5	4	3.5	4.0
Hatch	UT	2018	3.5	4	4.5	4.1
Blunt	MO	2022	3	5	4.5	4.1
Kennedy*	LA	2022	3	5	4.5	4.1
Sasse	NE	2020	4.5	3	5	4.2
Roberts	KS	2020	3.5	4	5	4.2
McConnell	KY	2020	3.5	4	5	4.2
Cochran	MS	2020	4	4	4.5	4.2
Cornyn	TX	2020	3.5	5	4	4.2
Grassley	IA	2022	3.5	5	4	4.2
Isakson	GA	2022	3.5	5	4	4.2
Johnson	WI	2022	4	5	3	4.2
Crapo	ID	2022	4	4	5	4.2
Burr	NC	2022	4	5	3.5	4.3
Scott	SC	2022	4.5	4	4.5	4.3
Daines	MT	2020	4	4	5	4.3
Alexander	TN	2020	4	4	5	4.3
Inhofe	OK	2020	4	4	5	4.3
Ernst	IA	2020	4	5	4	4.3
Wicker	MS	2018	3.5	5	4.5	4.4
Moran	KS	2022	3.5	5	5	4.4
Lankford	OK	2022	3.5	5	5	4.4
Fischer	NE	2018	4	4	5	4.4
Cotton	AR	2020	3.5	5	5	4.5
Risch	ID	2020	4.5	4	5	4.5
Young	IN	2022	4	5	4.5	4.5
Corker	TN	2018	3.5	5	5	4.6
Hoeven	ND	2022	4	5	5	4.6
Shelby	AL	2022	4	5	5	4.6
Sessions	AL	2020	4	5	5	4.7
Enzi	WY	2020	4	5	5	4.7
Cassidy	LA	2020	4.5	5	4.5	4.7
Perdue	GA	2020	5	5	4	4.7
Barrasso	WY	2018	4	5	5	4.7

*Kennedy's position is pending results of Dec. 10 runoff in Louisiana

SOURCES: ONTHEISSUES.ORG, DANIEL NICHANIAN, DAVID WASSERMAN

Collins, although she's **reportedly** set to back Trump's nomination of Jeff Sessions as Attorney General, is a good bet to be the most frequent Republican vote against Trump, not having much in common with him on the issues, never having endorsed him, and hailing from a blue state — although Maine was much closer than usual this year. Still, her vote alone wouldn't be enough to block Trump.

Instead, there's a set of five to 10 Republican senators who might defect from Trump, depending on the circumstances. One group consists of Republicans who might be on thin ice with swing voters if Trump proves to be an unpopular president. Heller — the only Republican from a Clinton state up for re-election in 2018 — probably faces the most acute electoral pressure. Democrats will also almost certainly make a serious play for Arizona Sen. Jeff Flake's seat in 2018 given that Arizona is trending blue and they don't have very many alternatives, and Flake was among the more consistent Republican critics of Trump over the course of the campaign. And Gardner will face a potential toss-up race in 2020.



Senators Susan Collins, John McCain, Dean Heller, Rob Portman and Lisa Murkowski. GETTY IMAGES

On the flip side are Republicans who might be free to defy Trump because they *don't* face much electoral pressure. McCain, who just won re-election in Arizona, was a thorn in the side of George W. Bush early in his first term and could do the same to Trump. Portman, Paul, Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski and Utah Sen. Mike Lee also won re-election last week by commanding margins and could afford to defy Trump if they have a philosophical disagreement with him. Graham, up for re-election in 2020 and never having been all that popular with the Republican base to begin with, is in a somewhat riskier position.

But if it won't always be that easy for Trump to rustle up support from 50 Republicans, there are also times when he can probably win votes from some Democrats:

Which Democrats might support Trump?

SENATOR	STATE	RE-ELECT YEAR	ISSUE ALIGNMENT	PERSONAL SUPPORT	ELECTORAL INCENTIVE	TRUMP SUPPORT SCORE
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SENATOR	STATE	RE-ELECT YEAR	ISSUE ALIGNMENT	PERSONAL SUPPORT	ELECTORAL INCENTIVE	TRUMP SUPPORT SCORE
Heitkamp	ND	2018	3.5	1	5	3.4
Campbell*	LA	2022	3	3	4.5	3.3
Manchin	WV	2018	3	1	5	3.3
Tester	MT	2018	2.5	1	5	3.1
Donnelly	IN	2018	3	1	4.5	3.1
McCaskill	MO	2018	2.5	1	4.5	2.9
Brown	OH	2018	1	1	4	2.3
Stabenow	MI	2018	2	1	3	2.1
Klobuchar	MN	2018	2	1	3	2.1
Casey	PA	2018	2	1	3	2.1
Hassan	NH	2022	2.5	1	3	2.0
Warner	VA	2020	3	1	2	2.0
Shaheen	NH	2020	2	1	3	2.0
King	ME	2018	2	1	2.5	1.9
Baldwin	WI	2018	1	1	3	1.9
Nelson	FL	2018	1	1	3	1.9
Peters	MI	2020	1.5	1	3	1.8
Kaine	VA	2018	2	1	2	1.7
Merkley	OR	2020	2.5	1	1.5	1.7
Franken	MN	2020	1	1	3	1.7
Heinrich	NM	2018	1.5	1	2	1.6
Bennet	CO	2022	1.5	1	2.5	1.5
Cortez Masto	NV	2022	1.5	1	2.5	1.5
Booker	NJ	2020	2	1	1.5	1.5
Coons	DE	2020	2	1	1.5	1.5
Carper	DE	2018	2	1	1.5	1.5
Murphy	CT	2018	1.5	1	1.5	1.4
Schatz	HI	2020	2	1	1	1.3
Udall	NM	2020	1	1	2	1.3
Blumenthal	CT	2022	1.5	1	1.5	1.3
Wyden	OR	2022	1.5	1	1.5	1.3
Cantwell	WA	2018	1	1	1.5	1.2
Whitehouse	RI	2018	1	1	1.5	1.2
Menendez	NJ	2018	1	1	1.5	1.2
Harris	CA	2022	1.5	1	1	1.2
Durbin	IL	2020	1	1	1.5	1.2
Reed	RI	2020	1	1	1.5	1.2

SENATOR	STATE	RE-ELECT YEAR	ISSUE ALIGNMENT	PERSONAL SUPPORT	ELECTORAL INCENTIVE	TRUMP SUPPORT SCORE
Feinstein	CA	2018	1.5	1	1	1.1
Gillibrand	NY	2018	1.5	1	1	1.1
Duckworth	IL	2022	1	1	1.5	1.1
Murray	WA	2022	1	1	1.5	1.1
Van Hollen	MD	2022	1	1	1	1.0
Hirono	HI	2018	1	1	1	1.0
Markey	MA	2020	1	1	1	1.0
Warren	MA	2018	1	1	1	1.0
Leahy	VT	2022	1	1	1	1.0
Cardin	MD	2018	1	1	1	1.0
Sanders	VT	2018	1	1	1	1.0
Schumer	NY	2022	1	1	1	1.0

*Campbell's position is pending results of Dec. 10 runoff in Louisiana

SOURCES: ONTHEISSUES.ORG, DANIEL NICHANIAN, DAVID WASSERMAN

Heitkamp, Manchin and Donnelly (and Campbell, if he wins the Louisiana runoff) are probably the biggest defection risks for Democrats, not being all that far apart from Trump on the issues and coming from extremely red states that are voting again in 2018. Sen. Jon Tester of Montana and Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri also face tough re-election bids, but they're further removed from Trump on the issues and have a track record of standing with their party on major votes.



Senators Heidi Heitkamp, Joe Manchin, Joe Donnelly, Jon Tester and Claire McCaskill. GETTY IMAGES

But if the bad news for Democrats is that three to six of their votes could potentially be in play depending on the issue, the good news is that the rest of their senators are likely to be pretty unified. Because Democrats lost so many Senate races in swing states in 2014 and 2016, most of their remaining senators come from reliably blue states, and also have reliably liberal voting records. Some 43 Democrats have a Trump support score of 2.0 or lower, which is two more than they need to sustain a filibuster.

In short, the Senate — after a relatively dormant period during President Obama’s second term — will be the center of attention again once Trump enters office. There will potentially be a fair amount of party crossover, with Democratic senators supporting Trump and Republican ones opposing him, sometimes on the same vote. Relatively minor differences in Trump’s popularity could make a big difference in whether his agenda is passed or stymied, as these senators calculate the impact of their vote in 2018 or 2020. And special elections — such as the one that brought Massachusetts’ Scott Brown into the Senate in 2010 — could make a big difference. But with a large GOP majority in the House of Representatives, the Senate will be the closest thing to a check on Trump’s power until voters go to the polls again.

CORRECTION (Nov. 21, 10:41 a.m.): A previous version of this article misidentified one of the two Republican-controlled Senate seats Democrats won in 2016. It was New Hampshire, not Nevada.

CORRECTION (Nov. 21, 12:24 p.m.): A previous version of this article included tables that incorrectly calculated each senator’s Trump support score. The calculation did not properly weight the score based on the year in which the senator is up for re-election, as the article stated. The tables have been corrected to match the calculation method described in the article, and the relative ranking of some senators has shifted slightly as a result. In addition, a table mistakenly listed Senator-elect Kamala Harris of California and Sen. Patty Murray of Washington as being up for re-election in 2020. They will next be on the ballot in 2022.

Footnotes

1. If this all sounds vaguely familiar, that’s because this is essentially the same process we use for [CARMELO](#), our algorithm to identify similar NBA players, or the same as [PECOTA](#), which was CARMELO’s baseball predecessor.
2. If OnTheIssues didn’t rate a senator on a particular issue, I estimated the score based on the average position of the 10 most similar senators.
3. Specifically, based on the number of statements about each issue as tracked by OnTheIssues.org.
4. The translation works as follows:
 - 5 points — RMSD of 3 or lower
 - 4.5 points — RMSD of 3 to 3.5
 - 4 points — RMSD of 3.5 to 4
 - 3.5 points — RMSD of 4 to 4.5

3 points — RMSD of 4.5 to 5.5

2.5 points — RMSD of 5.5 to 6

2 points — RMSD of 6 to 6.5

1.5 points — RMSD of 6.5 to 7

1 points — RMSD of 7 or higher

5. The scale is as follows:

5 points — Trump won the state by 20 or more percentage points.

4.5 points — Trump won by 10 to 20 percentage points.

4 points — Trump won by 5 to 10 percentage points.

3.5 points — Trump won by 2 to 5 percentage points.

3 points — The state was within 2 points.

2.5 points — Clinton won the state by 2 to 5 percentage points.

2 points — Clinton won by 5 to 10 percentage points.

1.5 points — Clinton won by 10 to 20 percentage points.

1 points — Clinton won by 20 percentage points or more.

6. Again, pending the results in Louisiana