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State Elections 2008

Overview

All eyes are on the New York Senate!

Democrats are expected to win control of the **New York** Senate for the first time in 40 years when the votes are counted November 4th; a seismic result that many in the business community fear will increase state regulation, curtail profits and stifle innovation in the nation's third largest marketplace. An election-day win will give Democrats control of the governor's office and both chambers of the legislature.

The Senate GOP and its long-term majority leader Joseph Bruno have rejected the progressive agenda in Albany for decades. But Bruno resigned from the leadership in June and from his seat in July and today the GOP has a single-vote edge in the Senate. Democrats last won control of the Empire State Senate in the 1966 election and have had the majority for only 14 of the past 100 years.

Democrats will easily retain control of the Assembly and Governor David Paterson, also a Democrat, is not up for election. Most analysts have the Senate leaning Democratic. Every seat in the 62-member Senate is up for grabs and the GOP is seen as more vulnerable than Democrats. For example, this year there were Republican incumbents in seven New York Senate districts who have served since the 1970s. These districts are now seen as Democrat-controlled and many are being contested fiercely.

There are only 11 governors' races this year and while a few are being hotly contested none of the big-market governors are up for election. If there is to be significant change, it will come in the legislatures where 79 percent of the 7,382 legislative seats in the states are up for grabs. The following six states will not be electing state legislators this year: **Alabama, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey and Virginia**. Only House seats will be decided in **Michigan and Minnesota**, as there are no Senate elections there.

Nationwide state legislative elections are difficult to predict. Democrats, riding Barack Obama's coattails, say they will widen their majority control over legislative chambers. The Obama campaign has funneled money from its huge war chest into non battleground

states to help with voter registration, identification and get-out-the-vote. This will undoubtedly help all the “down the ticket” Democrats. Also, this year a record number of young Democratic voters were registered and voted in the presidential primaries. If they turn out for the general elections, Democrats could have an edge all along the ticket. One projection has Democrats controlling both chambers of all the legislatures in the Northeast, from **West Virginia**, north and east to **Maine**.

GOP legislators say they will win back seats Democrats won by narrow margins in 2006. The national party has also pumped money into get-out-the-vote campaigns in battleground states. They argue that Democrats “picked the low hanging fruit” two years ago and that these elections will be much more competitive this year.

The party that wins this year will be in a good position to control state politics for the next decade. State lawmakers elected to four-year-terms this year will help redraw state congressional and legislative districts in 2011, after the 2010 census numbers are reported. A Democrat-controlled New York Senate, for example, will be able to gerrymander districts to its advantage in future elections.

Historically, legislative gains tend to coincide with what’s happening at the top of the ticket and on average, the party that wins the White House stands to gain about 125 more legislative seats. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports at least 28 of the 84 legislative chambers with elections this year will be tough-fought battles where either party could secure control.

This year Democrats have a 27-20 edge in state Senates, a 30-19 lead in state Houses or Assemblies. The **Oklahoma** and **Tennessee** Senates are tied and the fight for control in each is said to be spirited. **Nebraska** has a unicameral, non-partisan legislature.

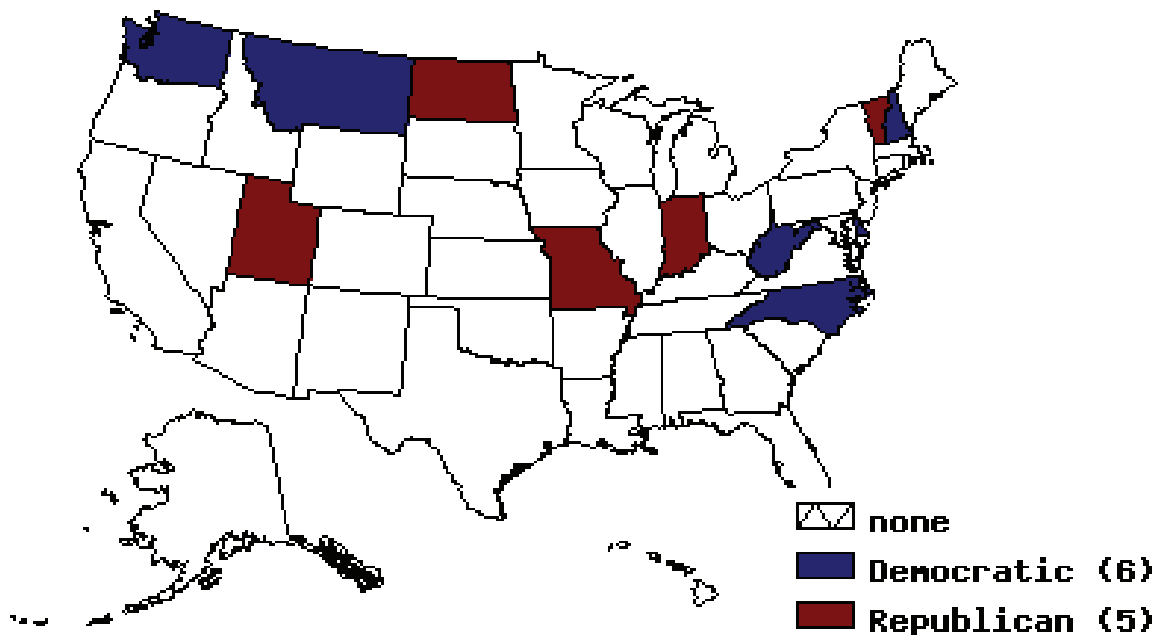
Some of the most divisive legislative battles are being waged in presidential campaign battlegrounds. Here are three examples:

- Democrats need to pick up four seats to win control of the **Ohio** House. In an effort to help the ticket, Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland, a Democrat, last summer offered two GOP legislators government positions in an effort to end their reelection bids.
- Democrats hold a one-vote edge in the 203-member **Pennsylvania** House. Two years ago voters revolted ousting several GOP Pennsylvania legislators and judges after lawmakers voted themselves a middle-of-the-night pay hike. This year Democrats are embroiled in a scandal in which several leaders have been accused of using state employees to work on political matters. The Presidential race and continuing scandals make the Pennsylvania House an ongoing battleground.

- The **Nevada** Senate is also a battleground where Republicans hold an 11-10 edge. Democrats maintain a 27-15 edge in the Assembly and both parties are fighting district-by-district to grab control.

Below we will examine the most highly-contested 2008 gubernatorial races, the chances for party dominance in the state legislative races and the most debate-provoking ballot initiatives voters will be asked to weigh-in on this year.

Governors' Races



There are only 11 governors' races being contested this year, an unusually low number.

Currently, Democrats control the executive branch in 28 states and Republicans in 22. Gubernatorial elections will take place in **Delaware, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, North Carolina, North Dakota, New Hampshire, Utah, Vermont, Washington** and **West Virginia**. Six of these are currently held by Democrats and five by Republicans. Republicans are expected to hold their own in these races this year.

There are tight races in both **Missouri** and **Washington**.

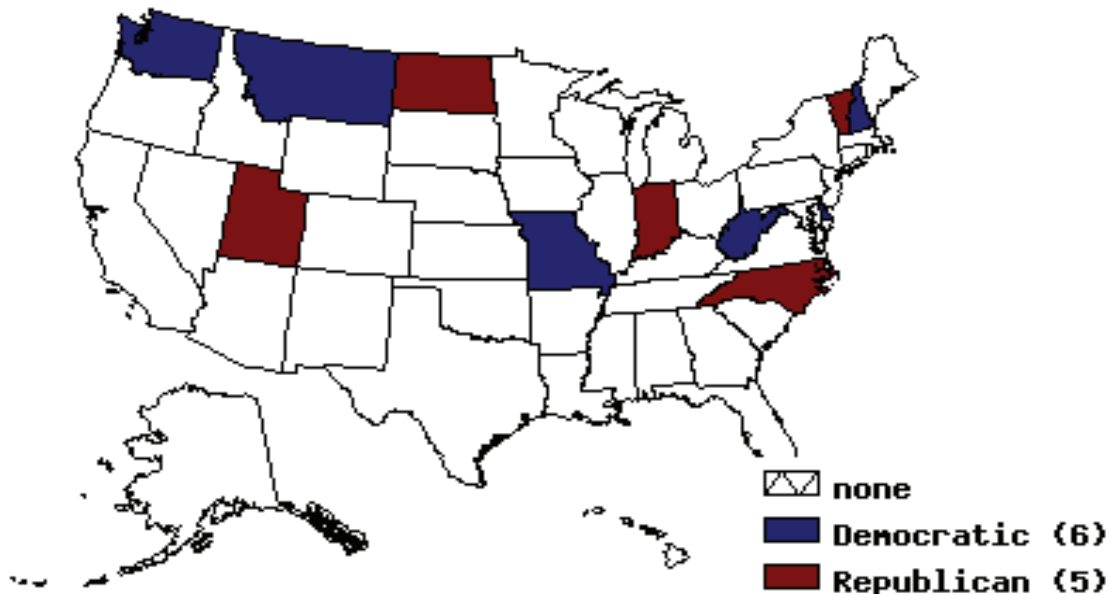
Missouri's Republican Gov. Matt Blunt surprised voters by retiring this year, which allowed U.S. Rep. Kenny Hulsof, a former state prosecutor, to seek and secure the GOP candidacy. Hulsof trails in the polls to Democratic candidate Jay Nixon, partly because the state is leaning towards Obama and partly because Hulsof is seen as a "Washington spender." This race will most likely be a Democratic upset.

The race for governor in Washington state is hotly-contested, as present Democratic Gov. Christine Gregoire is fighting the same Republican opponent she faced four-years ago, Dino Rossi. This governor's race is probably the most interesting, and least predictable, because in 2004 Rossi was actually named the governor until two recounts gave the seat to Gregoire. Rossi is hoping to win votes by playing up his "underdog" status and by exposing Gregoire's lukewarm reception in the state. Meanwhile, Gregoire is hoping her alignment with Obama, the sure-pick for president in the state, will secure her re-election. About 43 percent of voters say that Gregoire is doing a good or excellent job as governor while 34 percent say she is doing a poor job. The latest Rasmussen report predicts Gregoire attracting 50 percent of the vote, with Rossi receiving 48 percent. This one is too close to call.

North Carolina's governor's race is also seen as a surprisingly tight contest. Currently, GOP candidate Pat McCrory is ahead in the polls even though the presidential race is seen as a tossup and U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole, once considered a shoo-in, is locked in a tight reelection fight. McCrory has always done well with Democrats. He was elected mayor of Charlotte seven times—once with 78 percent of the vote, despite the fact that the GOP there accounts for less than 25 percent of the electorate.

While **Vermont** is a solidly blue state, Republican Governor Jim Douglas should win reelection to a fourth term in a three-way contest in which the Democrat and an Independent are vying for second place. **North Dakota** Gov. John Hoeven and **Utah** Gov. Jon Huntsman, both Republicans, are expected to win reelection easily.

The following map shows projections for which party will win the gubernatorial races this November 4:



The following table provides each gubernatorial race incumbent, current race candidates and links to each of the candidates' websites:

State	Incumbent	Last Election Percentage	Running or Retiring	D Candidate	R Candidate
<i>Delaware</i>	Ruth Minner-D	51	Retiring	Jack Markell	Bill Lee
<i>Indiana</i>	Mitch Daniels	53	Running	Jill Long Thompson	Mitch Daniels
<i>Missouri</i>	Matt Blunt-R	51	Retiring	Jay Nixon	Kenny Hulsof
<i>Montana</i>	Brian Schweitzer	50	Running	Brian Schweitzer	Roy Brown
<i>New Hampshire</i>	John Lynch	74	Running	John Lynch	Joe Kenney
<i>North Carolina</i>	Mike Easley-D	56	Retiring	Beverly Perdue	Pat McCrory
<i>North Dakota</i>	John Hoeven	71	Running	Tim Mathern	John Hoeven
<i>Utah</i>	Jon Huntsman Jr.	58	Running	Bob Springmeyer	Jon Huntsman Jr.
<i>Vermont</i>	Jim Douglas	56	Running	Gaye Symington	Jim Douglas
<i>Washington</i>	Christine Gregoire	49	Running	Christine Gregoire	Dino Rossi
<i>West Virginia</i>	Joe Manchin III	64	Running	Joe Manchin III	Russ Weeks

Legislative Races

About 79 percent of the 7,382 legislative seats in the nation are up for grabs this year. Pundits and pollsters in many states track legislative races very closely and they have Democrats gaining ground. In recent weeks, the **Arizona** House, **Ohio** House, **Nevada** Senate, **North Dakota** Senate and **Wisconsin** Assembly have shifted from leaning Republican to toss-up states, while the **South Dakota** Senate has shifted from a likely Republican state to merely leaning Republican.

An interesting battle is underway for control of the **Texas** House, long a GOP bastion. Democrats need to pick up five seats to control the chamber. The closest contest is taking place in District 19 where Democrat Larry C. Hunter and Republican Rep. Mike Hamilton are deadlocked. Hunter has had a lot of money to spend and is benefiting from the Obama factor. There are about a dozen other hotly contested races that will determine

which party has control. Of these, six are considered toss-ups, four leaning Democrat, and two leaning Republican.

Republicans have lost seats in the Texas House steadily in recent elections and some believe that the best way for the GOP to stop the erosion is for Speaker Tom Craddick to immediately announce he will not run for another term. Craddick has refused to resign.

Alaska Democrats are hoping to draw even with Republicans in the Senate. Currently, the Senate is made up of 11 Republicans and nine Democrats. Last session six Republicans aligned with the Democrats to form a bipartisan majority, but the main GOP architects of that deal, Republican Senators Lyda Green and John Cowdery, are leaving the door open for Democratic gains across the 10 seats up for grabs. In the House, while the Democrats would only have to pick up three seats to pull even, the GOP is expected to retain control. The last time the Democrats had control of the House was in 1992, though they have been gaining ground in recent years.

In **New Hampshire** about 75 Democratic legislators are seeking reelection for the first time. New Hampshire is a toss-up state and the polls there show that John McCain continues to have a chance to win. The GOP stands to gain ground in the Granite State, home of the largest legislature in the country. In **North Carolina**, McCrory, the front-running candidate for governor, is expected to help the GOP in selected Senate districts.

The GOP is expected to retain firm control in both chambers in **Florida, Georgia and Missouri**.

In two Democratic-held chambers—the **Maine** Senate and the **Indiana** House - Republicans would need to win only a couple seats to take control. Both parties have allocated major get-out-the-vote resources in these states.

Please refer to the following chart for an overview of the legislative seats that will be up this election:

	Total Senate Seats	Senate Seats Up	Total House or Assembly Seats	House or Assembly Seats Up
Alabama	35	0	105	0
Alaska	20	10	40	40
Arizona	30	30	60	60
Arkansas	35	18	100	100
California	40	20	80	80
Colorado	35	17	65	65
Connecticut	36	36	151	151
Delaware	21	11	41	41
Florida	40	20	120	120
Georgia	56	56	180	180
Hawaii	25	12	51	51

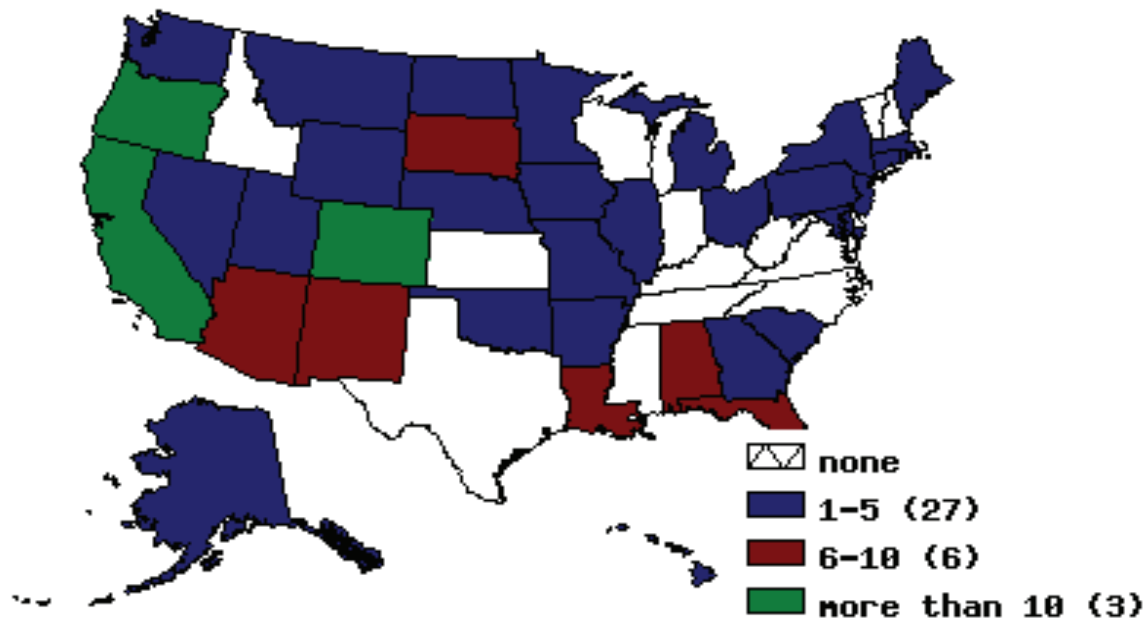
Idaho	35	35	70	70
Illinois	59	39	118	118
Indiana	50	25	100	100
Iowa	50	25	100	100
Kansas	40	40	125	125
Kentucky	38	19	100	100
Louisiana	39	0	105	0
Maine	35	35	151	151
Maryland	47	0	141	0
Massachusetts	40	40	160	160
Michigan	38	0	110	110
Minnesota	67	0	134	134
Mississippi	52	0	122	0
Missouri	34	17	163	163
Montana	50	25	100	100
Nebraska	49	25	Unicameral	
Nevada	21	10	42	42
New Hampshire	24	24	400	400
New Jersey	40	0	80	0
New Mexico	42	42	70	70
New York	62	62	150	150
North Carolina	50	50	120	120
North Dakota	47	23	94	46
Ohio	33	16	99	99
Oklahoma	48	24	101	101
Oregon	30	15	60	60
Pennsylvania	50	25	203	203
Rhode Island	38	38	75	75
South Carolina	46	46	124	124
South Dakota	35	35	70	70
Tennessee	33	16	99	99
Texas	31	15	150	150
Utah	29	14	75	75
Vermont	30	30	150	150
Virginia	40	0	100	0
Washington	49	25	98	98
West Virginia	34	17	100	100
Wisconsin	33	16	99	99
Wyoming	30	15	60	60

Ballot Questions

Fifty-nine [initiatives](#) and two [referenda](#) will be on the November 4, 2008 ballot in 16 states. There will be five [commission referrals](#), 84 [legislative referrals](#), and three

[automatic referrals](#); for a total of 92 ballot measures that reached the ballot through means other than signature collection. Altogether, there will be 153 ballot measures on ballots in 36 states that aim to define abortion, limit taxation, legalize the use of medical marijuana, regulate immigration and ban same-sex marriages. The links above define each method that can be pursued to place a question on a state ballot.

The map below shows the number of propositions on the ballot in each state:



Traditionally, ballot initiatives do not receive the same attention as high-profile candidate races, but as the number of citizen-initiated ballot measures grows, these questions play a larger role in modern elections. The initiative process allows voters to draft new state laws or amend the state constitution by collecting a specified number of voter signatures. If the proposal is adopted by a majority of voters, it amends a statute or state constitution. According to [American Politics Research Journal](#), voter turnout in initiative states is estimated at three to 4.5 percent higher during presidential elections than in non-initiative states.

Voters' willingness to spend freely on ballot questions may be curtailed this year by the growing financial crisis. It could affect bond proposals, health care expansion for children and the abolishment of state income tax pending in **Massachusetts** and **North Dakota**. "The voters are thinking they're going to tighten their belts now, and I expect they're going to think government ought to tighten its belt too," said John Matsusaka, president of the [Initiative and Referendum Institute at the University of Southern California](#).

Ballots in **Colorado**, **Oregon** and **California** contain the most measures, a total of 14 in Colorado and 12 each in Oregon and California. Social issues continue to dominate,

including limiting access to abortion in California, Colorado and South **Dakota**. The proposal in South Dakota is the most broad-sweeping, as it would ban abortion altogether except in cases of rape, incest and endangerment to the mother's health.

Ballot questions in **Arizona**, California, **Missouri** and Oregon are asking for stricter immigration laws, while both Colorado and Nebraska will ask voters to reverse affirmative action provisions. Initiatives to prohibit same-sex marriage are on the ballot in Arizona, California and **Florida**, which relates to the proposed ban on adoption by gay couples in Arizona.

In Colorado, oil and gas interests have spent \$11 million in their attempt to defeat a measure that would strip oil companies of tax subsidies, which would add an additional \$321 million in taxes to the industry next fiscal year.

Arkansas, Colorado, **Maine**, **Maryland**, Massachusetts, Missouri, **Ohio** and Oregon are all asking their voters to weigh-in on gambling proposals that would increase state revenues in order to fund schools and college scholarships.

For a list of all the state measures approved for ballots, as well as those that failed to qualify, please [click here](#).