



bcw INSIGHTS

ELECTION 2020

PREDICTING THE KEY ISSUES FROM THE 2020 BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTIONS



Heading into November 3, Americans were primarily focused on the race for the presidency—and understandably so. Thanks to a record push for voter turnout and the social and economic uncertainties impacting communities across the country, this year’s election has drawn massive attention.

But the presidential election wasn’t the only one taking place this week: Almost 100 state and local elections were also decided – including 86 out of 99 state legislative chambers. The truth is, many of these hard-fought races could end up having a far greater impact on public and private interests than the federal elections. State chambers decide issues from education to healthcare to criminal justice – many of the very issues driving the presidential election.

The beauty—and the challenge—of the federal system of representation in the United States is that every state is different; states choose policies and issues and act on legislation independently. Because of this, companies, coalitions and organizations that rely on a blanket top-down approach to issue advocacy and community resonance don’t always get the impact they want. Because of this, companies, coalitions and organizations that rely on a blanket top-down approach to issue advocacy and community resonance don’t always get the impact they want. Instead, groups that want to impact issues must shift to a tailored, community-by-community approach to grassroots advocacy—building community trust and meeting people where they live and work.

Out of the 86 chamber elections this year, 24 of them were considered battleground races—where the direction of the chamber hinged on just a few seats.

As the dust settles and Americans look toward new legislative sessions in 2021, what do these battleground election results tell us about the issues that will rise to the top in the coming year? Did contentious national elections create the much-discussed “down ballot” effect? How will shifts in demographics play out? How will local policymakers develop and try to implement their agendas in 2021?

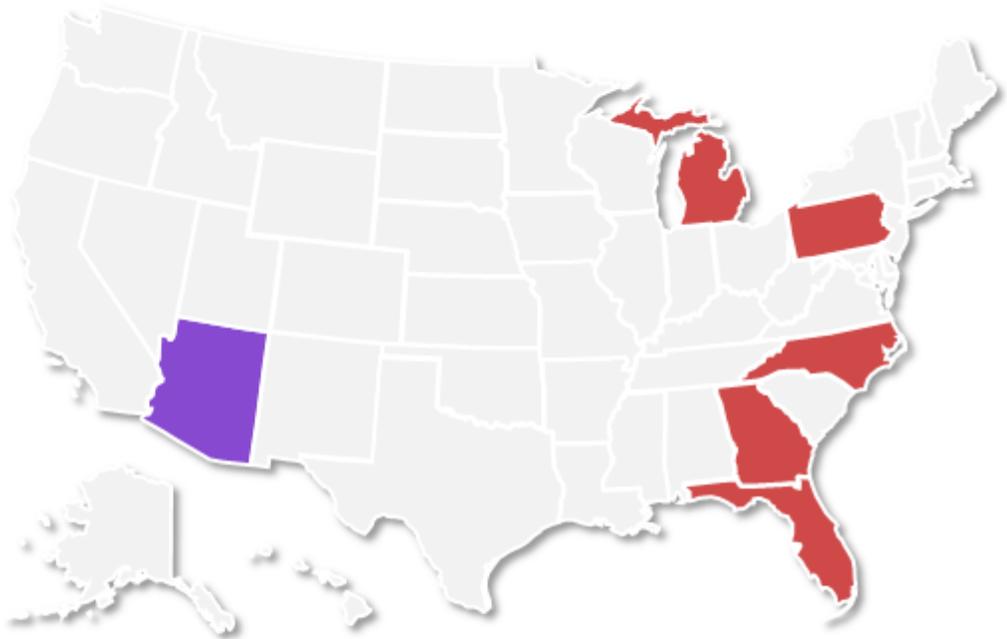
To help answer these questions, our team at Direct Impact leveraged the knowledge of our hundreds of local, on-the-ground experts to understand how the election will impact the critical issues in battleground states like Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina and Pennsylvania.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

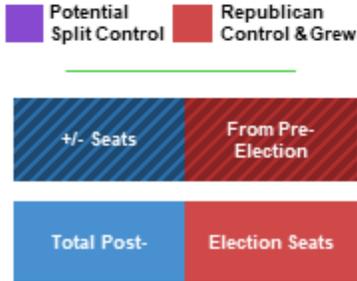
OUR KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **The expected “[Blue Wave](#)” did not come.** Republicans strengthened their majorities in state legislatures across the country by growing their number of seats, flipping one governorship (Montana) and flipping two chambers (New Hampshire’s Senate and House). Meanwhile, the Democrats are only on track to flip at most one state chamber (Arizona’s House).
- **Issues that dominated the national stage—pandemic response, the economy, racial injustice, the environment and healthcare—had varying levels of impact and play in state-wide elections.**
- **We’re already seeing the impact of the nation’s shifting demographics on legislative priorities and elections.** In 2020, we saw the most diverse group of candidates run and be elected into offices across the country—especially on the local levels.
 - The [Los Angeles Board of Supervisors](#) is arguably the most powerful local elected board in the country, as it oversees the largest budget of any similar body in the nation and presides over the most populous county in the U.S. Following the election of State Sen. Holly Mitchell, the Board will be fully comprised of women in the coming year.
 - A [Rainbow Wave](#) swept local, state and congressional elections this year as a record number of LGBTQ+ people were elected, including the first two openly gay Black members of Congress (both from New York), the first openly transgender state senator (Delaware) and multiple “firsts” for LGBTQ+ people elected in Georgia, Kansas, Tennessee and Vermont.
- **Following the 2020 Census, these new state legislatures will lay the groundwork for the next decade’s election landscape and resource allocation.** Redistricting following a census determines where billions of dollars in local and state funding will go over the next decade—funding used to support education, health systems, social service programs and businesses of all sizes.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS



KEY



Note: Some elections still to be determined.

ARIZONA

HOUSE



SENATE



KEY ISSUES: Economic Relief – COVID-19; Healthcare; Education

FLORIDA

HOUSE



SENATE



KEY ISSUES: Economic Relief; COVID-19 Response; Environment – Waterways

GEORGIA

HOUSE



SENATE



KEY ISSUES: State Budgets & Taxes; Casinos & Gambling

MICHIGAN

HOUSE



SENATE (no race in 2020)



KEY ISSUES: COVID-19 Response; Healthcare

NORTH CAROLINA

HOUSE



SENATE



KEY ISSUES: COVID-19 Response; Healthcare - Medicaid; Education; Rural Broadband

PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE



SENATE



KEY ISSUES: Economy & Economic Relief; Jobs; Healthcare

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

ARIZONA



State Leadership

Governor: Doug Ducey (R)

State House: (TBD)

State Senate: (TBD)

Key Issues

 **Economic Relief – COVID-19**

 **Education**

 **Healthcare**

While results for key House and Senate races are still being tabulated, the 2020 election has provided an opportunity for Democrats to gain seats in Arizona’s Republican-held chambers. The latest numbers suggest seem to indicate that campaign pushes by the Democrats have paid off at the state level, gaining 23 seats in the House and taking the majority in the Senate for the first time since 2009. The Senate was a shock to many but is a clear example of the growing political shifts due to changing state demographics.

As the coronavirus pandemic continues, issues dominating the conversation across the state include education, health care, jobs, the economy and racial unrest. These issues are priorities for both parties and represent a shift in the overall tenor of legislature.

Since 2010, many Latinx and young progressive voters in Arizona have taken a stance against the state’s Senate Bill 1070. Signed into law by former Republican Gov. Jan Brewer, the bill encouraged racial profiling – particularly of those of a Latinx background – by allowing police officers to question anyone they deemed “suspicious” about their immigration status. What began as a small movement against these racially charged policies in Maricopa County has grown to a larger grassroots effort across the state.

Regardless of the outcome of the pending key state legislature races, it seems policies typically championed by Democrats will have a greater likelihood of action in the coming session.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

FLORIDA



State Leadership

Governor: Ron DeSantis (R)

State House: Republicans

State Senate: Republicans

Key Issues

-  **Economic Relief**
-  **COVID-19 Response**
-  **Environment – Waterways**

Florida's 2020 election meant more than 29 electoral votes up for grabs. In addition to the race for president, other key local elections on ballots across the state included all seats in the Florida House of Representatives and half of the State Senate. Heading into election night, expectations surrounding Florida's House and Senate races resembled that of the state's polling for the presidential election: The state legislature appeared to be a battleground. While Democrats hoped to pick up seats in both the House and Senate, Republicans ultimately maintained their stronghold and gained seats.

Many of the leading issues seen throughout the state were reflected in platforms for both Republican and Democratic candidates. A leading issue for both parties was the environment – a primary focus for Floridians considering the impact it has on their day-to-day lives. This issue was hotly debated in South Florida, where candidates campaigned on the promise to protect Florida's waterways. While the issue remains important to both parties, it is less likely to see action with Republicans still in control.

Protecting small business owners impacted by the pandemic, funding for small businesses and other efforts to boost the local economy were also key issues through the election and will continue be a priority into the next legislative session. While many candidates across both parties championed similar issues, Republicans gained traction when campaigning on the issues of the economy and coronavirus fiscal relief as the state remains open, despite a non-slowng pandemic.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

GEORGIA



State Leadership

Governor: Brian Kemp (R)

State House: Republicans

State Senate: Republicans

Key Issues

 **State Budget & Taxes**

 **Casinos & Gambling**

Georgia has been a state to watch during the 2020 election season, with all 180 seats in the State House and 56 seats in the State Senate up for grabs. While Republicans have controlled all branches of government at the state level since 2004, changing demographics indicate that this trend could be in peril in the years ahead.

Regardless of who maintains control or how many seats each side gains or losses, state finances and taxes will be hot-button issues in Georgia next year. Governor Kemp has declared state agencies must reduce spending due to lower tax revenues than projected, but lawmakers worry that this could prevent legislation that needs funding from moving forward.

The state budget shortfall also brings another idea into play that the Georgia legislature has been considering: [Legalizing casino gambling and/or horse racing](#). In May 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federal law banning commercial sports betting, allowing states to begin legalization discussions. While legalization efforts have failed in the past, the need for more tax revenue could breathe new life into this effort.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

MICHIGAN



State Leadership

Governor: Gretchen Whitmer (D)

State House: Republicans

State Senate: Republicans

Key Issues

 **COVID-19 Response**

 **Healthcare**

While Michigan's next State Senate election isn't for another two years, all of Michigan's 110 state house seats were up for election this year. After seven years of unified Republican leadership in all three branches, the 2018 election saw Democrat Gretchen Whitmer win control of the governor's mansion while Republicans kept control of the Senate and House.

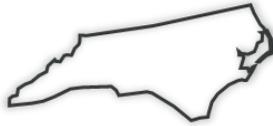
The state's divide in political ideology is reflected in its geography: In the upper peninsula and Northern areas of the state, social conservatism is growing. In the west, residents have held on to traditionally strong conservative beliefs, while the eastern parts of the state saw its residents move away from Democrats in 2016. Metro areas like Detroit maintain strong Democratic views but residents of the Detroit suburbs hold a mix of beliefs depending on their socioeconomic status. Meanwhile, the middle of the state is up for grabs.

Leading up to the election, it was clear the pandemic and the state's response to it were top of mind for Michigan voters. Going into November 3, [23 percent of Michigan voters](#) said they were most concerned about reopening the economy and schools. However, only 21 percent were most concerned with protecting public health—a reflection of the state's widening political divide. With the Michigan Supreme Court's decision to rescind Governor Whitmer's authority to issue COVID-19 emergency executive orders unilaterally, and the House Republicans' recent coronavirus response proposal to allow county health officials to make decisions on policies and orders based on local county data, voters were looking for a collective plan and unity across government leadership.

With coronavirus cases spiking again and Michigan's legislature remaining in Republican control, coronavirus response and recovery will continue to be top of mind for Michigan residents, making bipartisan partnership critical to earning Michiganders' trust.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

NORTH CAROLINA



State Leadership

Governor: Roy Cooper (D)

State House: Republicans

State Senate: Republicans

Key Issues

 **COVID-19 Response**

 **Education**

 **Healthcare – Medicaid**

 **Rural Broadband**

Like the presidential election, North Carolina has seen several too-close-to call local races in the state legislature. Having been a national and local battleground state for the last 10 election cycles, races in the state are won or lost in the suburban neighborhoods bordering both rural and urban centers. Even though the state recently went through forced federal redistricting, the new congressional district lines did not determine this election but will have ramifications that affect future redistricting efforts.

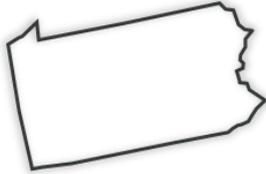
North Carolina splits party lines between rural and urban centers, yet political issues and ballot measures are often decided based on individual preferences in the suburbs. This is a result of the state undergoing a drastic rural and urban division in recent years. Urban centers have fast-growing economies built around banking, higher education, biotechnology and computer science; rural communities, however, have seen shrinking populations struggling to maintain schools and local hospitals due to inadequate state funding.

Despite the division, several key issues were at the forefront of many North Carolinian's minds going into this year's election, including expansion of Medicaid, public education funding, coronavirus relief and bridging the urban-rural divide. Over the past year, coronavirus relief and Medicaid expansion have been at the top of Democratic Governor Roy Cooper's agenda as attempted to work with the Republican Majority in both the House and Senate to pass measures on these issues. In addition, debates over education funding and how to bridge the rural-urban divide added to already hotly debated issues. However, little has been done on any front. Governor Cooper remains vigilant but ineffective, only retaining his veto-proof status.

While certain races have yet to be called, Republicans have picked up three additional seats and will retain their majority across both chambers. While this shifts the power dynamic slightly, debates around coronavirus relief, education and Medicaid are likely to stay top of mind. On the municipal level, expect more discussion on how to bridge the urban-rural divide across rural counties, access to rural broadband, and subsidies for farming communities as the state continues to leverage hemp crops.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

PENNSYLVANIA



State Leadership

Governor: Tom Wolf (D)
State House: Republicans
State Senate: Republicans

Key Issues

-  **Jobs**
-  **Economy & Economic Relief**
-  **Healthcare**

Pennsylvania's reputation as a critical battleground state doesn't only apply to national elections—races for the state's legislature are also hotly contested. The entire Pennsylvania State House and half of the Pennsylvania State Senate were up for election, with many races showing the potential to influence the political makeup of the state legislature. Many key races for the state house were in districts surrounding Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and south-central Pennsylvania—traditionally Democrat-safe areas that have faced growing challenges from Republicans. This wide geographic spread of races is typically a good indication of the issues that will rise in the northern portions of the commonwealth and spread into the state legislature.

While many battleground races in the state have yet to be called, those that have are favoring Democrat and Republican incumbents, meaning Republicans are likely to hold—and potentially grow—their control of the legislature. This said, races that resulted in new representation typically focused on issues such as education, affordable health care and strengthening the economy. Although new elected officials are few and far between, the issues they ran on are likely to take hold as they look toward establishing themselves in the house.

For the state senate, this year's race only saw half of the total seats up for consideration (25 out of the 50 seats). So far, Republicans have won some key competitive districts as they campaigned on the need to address effects stemming from the pandemic: Job security, economic growth and financial relief. While many races have yet to be called, current projections indicate that Republicans are likely to continue their hold on the chamber and the issues seen in key races indicate that healthcare and job growth will be priorities in Pennsylvania in the coming year.

KEY ISSUES & BATTLEGROUND STATE CHAMBER ELECTION RESULTS

About Direct Impact

For more than 30 years, Direct Impact, BCW's grassroots arm, has been at the forefront of the grassroots communications industry. Our national grassroots structure provides our clients with strategic guidance, centralized management and on-the-ground access to every media market, consumer base and political jurisdiction in the United States. Our nationwide network includes former elected officials, political operatives, marketing and branding professionals, and former members of the media. Together, we harness the power of local communities to leverage advocates, build consensus, shape conversation and strengthen reputation to create an immediate and lasting impact.

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