

# Tensions mount over US election contests in Florida, Georgia, Arizona

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In the wake of the US midterm elections that shifted control of the US House of Representatives to the Democrats while increasing the Republican margin in the Senate, political tensions have mounted over remaining undecided statewide races in three states: for US senator in Florida and Arizona, and for governor of Georgia.

The Senate races in Arizona and Florida remained too close to call, with the margins tightening as ballot-counting continued in the days after the November 6 vote. In Florida, the number by which Republican Rick Scott led Democratic incumbent Bill Nelson had fallen to only 15,175 votes, 0.18 percentage points of the total, a figure that would trigger a state-mandated hand recount.

As vote counting of lengthy ballots proceeded slowly in the Democratic-leaning Florida counties of Broward and Palm Beach, Scott sued local officials. “No ragtag group of liberal activists or lawyers from DC will be allowed to steal this election from the voters of this great state,” Scott howled. The reaction of the candidate, the outgoing governor of the state, recalled the tactics following the 2000 presidential vote, when the Bush campaign effectively stole the presidency by suppressing a full recount of the state’s votes.

In Arizona, Democrat Kyrsten Sinema led Republican Martha McSally by only 9,000 votes in the contest to succeed retiring Republican Jeff Flake. If the leads in Florida and Arizona hold up through remaining counting, and the Republicans emerge victorious as expected in a November 27 runoff vote in Mississippi, the Democrats will have lost a net of two seats in the Senate, giving the Republicans a 53–47 margin, counting Senators Bernie Sanders of Vermont and Angus King of Maine, independents who caucus with the Democrats.

Despite the widespread anger at the Trump administration and its policies, Democratic incumbents in the Senate went down to defeat in Missouri, Indiana and North Dakota after running right-wing campaigns. Democrat Jon Tester held on in Montana, and Republican incumbent Dean Heller lost to Democrat Jacky Rosen in Nevada. Democrat Beto O’Rourke narrowly lost his Senate race against Texas Republican incumbent Ted Cruz, despite raising and spending more than \$70 million.

Gubernatorial races were still in doubt in both Florida and Georgia, and were expected to remain so for at least the next few days. Excluding the close races in Georgia and Florida, Democrats had picked up seven governorships previously held by Republicans, with wins in Nevada, New Mexico, Kansas, Wisconsin, Illinois, Michigan and Maine. They also won California, New York and Pennsylvania. The Republican defeats in the three states which accounted for Trump’s victory margin in the Electoral College, Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, demonstrate the widespread anger at the Trump administration’s policies.

In Florida, Tallahassee Mayor Andrew Gillum conceded to Republican candidate Ron DeSantis on Election Night, but as counting continued, DeSantis’ lead narrowed to only 0.44 percentage points, a figure that would lead to a state-mandated machine recount. In both of the statewide Florida contests, thousands of absentee, provisional and overseas ballots remained to be counted, enough to lead to recounts, if not outright Democratic victories.

The Republicans and Democrats appear to be reprising their roles from the Florida election crisis in 2000. While the Republicans take the offensive demanding a halt to vote counting, the Democrats

respond with meek objections. It is the Republican Scott who has gone on the offensive with legal action, while the Democratic candidate for governor Andrew Gillum was so ready to concede that he gave a speech announcing it even though there is still a possibility that he could win.

The margin between the Republican and Democratic candidates for governor of Georgia is not nearly as close as in Florida, with 63,000 votes, or about 1.6 percent of the total, separating Brian Kemp from Stacey Abrams. But because of a third-party Libertarian candidate, Kemp was much more narrowly above the 50 percent mark, only 13,000 votes. Under state law, a head-to-head runoff vote between Kemp and Abrams would take place in December in the event that Kemp's vote ends up falling short of 50 percent, and Abrams has accordingly refused to concede defeat.

Kemp refused to acknowledge that the race remained undecided. The Republican announced his resignation as Georgia secretary of state and the appointment of a transition team. Kemp had ignored earlier demands that he resign his official position, which oversees the administration of the voting process. He was accused of acting to suppress the vote in his official role while he was himself the candidate, purging hundreds of thousands of voters from the registration rolls and invalidating absentee ballots.

In the 435 contests for the House of Representatives, 12 seats remain undecided, all previously held by the Republicans. The Democrats have made a net gain of 31 seats, enough for a secure majority, but are ahead in five of the remaining twelve. A gain of 36 seats would raise the Democratic majority in the House to 231–204, a margin of 27 seats.

Many of the seats won by the Democrats are in upscale suburban districts long held by the Republicans. In Illinois, for example, Democrat Sean Casten defeated incumbent Peter Roskam for the seat once held by Henry Hyde, the longtime anti-abortion Republican, while Democrat Lauren Underwood defeated incumbent Randy Hultgren for the seat held for two decades by the former Republican Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert. In Texas, Democrat Lizzie Fletcher defeated incumbent John Culberson in the Houston suburban district that once sent George H. W. Bush to Congress.

In Georgia, Democrat Lucy McBath defeated

incumbent Karen Handel for the seat once held by Newt Gingrich, the Republican speaker before Hastert who spearheaded the Clinton impeachment in 1998–99. McBath, a former Delta Airlines flight attendant, ran as an advocate of gun control. Her son Jordan Davis, an African-American youth of 17, was fatally shot six years ago by a white man after an argument over the volume of music coming from his car.

Few of the successful Democrats have McBath's working-class background. One-third of the first-time Democratic representatives are "CIA Democrats" like Max Rose in New York, Abigail Spanberger and Elaine Luria in Virginia, Elissa Slotkin in Michigan, Tom Malinowski and Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey, and Jason Crow in Colorado, with resumes highlighting service in the intelligence agencies, the military or the State Department.

The midterm results underscore the fact that the Democrats, far from offering any genuine alternative to the Republicans and Trump, are part of the big business conspiracy against the working class. They sought to prove themselves as the party of the military-intelligence apparatus and of Wall Street, which in fact gave a greater amount to the Democrats than to the Republicans this year, in the most expensive congressional elections in history, with more than \$5.2 billion raised and spent.



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