



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 25, 2014

## Preliminary Polls Show Republicans Might Take Back Senate

Despite the elections being seven months away — a virtual lifetime in politics — pollsters are coming out of the woodwork to offer their statistical opinions on the outcome in November. Most of them agree that control of the Senate, now firmly in Democrat hands, [is up for grabs](#).

Stu Rothenberg, editor of the *Rothenberg Political Report* and an accurate predictor of the 2010 congressional races, said that “the Republicans are at least even money — maybe a little better than that — at taking over the Senate.” Sam Wang, who blogs at the Princeton Election Consortium website and who accurately predicted the election outcomes in 2012, said “It’s too early to make a precise prediction, except to say that Democrats are nearly certain to lose Senate seats” in November. He added: “Basically, the odds are 50-50, and anyone who makes a more precise prediction is out on a limb.”

Alan Abramowitz, a longtime successful pollster going back to the 1980s, echoed the same sentiment: “You could almost predict the day after the 2008 elections that the Democrats would be likely to lose some seats in the Senate six years later.”

At present his models show the Democrats likely to lose five or six seats in November, potentially giving control of the Senate — now held by the Democrats 55-45 — to the Republicans.

None of these predictions, however, generated any pushback from Democrats. It wasn’t until Nate Silver offered his predictions that the Democrats took notice. Silver, it will be remembered, correctly predicted the presidential election outcome in 2008 along with the winner in 49 of the 50 states. In addition, he correctly predicted the winner in all 35 Senate races that year.

That was no fluke. In 2012 he not only predicted Obama’s reelection, he also correctly predicted the winner in all 50 states. In addition he accurately predicted the outcomes in 31 of the 33 Senate races that year.

Now running his FiveThirtyEight blog under the auspices of ESPN, Silver rocked the Democrats’ world on Sunday with his forecast:

We think the Republicans are now slight favorites to win at least six seats and capture the chamber.

The Democrats’ position has deteriorated somewhat since last summer, with President Obama’s





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approval ratings down to 42 or 43 from an average of 45 percent before.

Furthermore, as compared with 2010 or 2012, the GOP has done a better job of recruiting credible candidates ... with some exceptions.

His 13-page analysis and summary can be read [here](#), state-by-state and race-by-race. In summing up his forecast, Silver allowed himself plenty of wiggle room:

There are still more than seven months for news events to intervene and alter the national climate.

There are 10 races that each party has at least a 25 percent chance of winning, according to our ratings. If Republicans were to win all of them, they would gain a net of 11 seats from the Democrats, which would give them a 56-44 majority in the new Senate.

If the Democrats were to sweep [all of them], they would lose a net of just one seat and [still] hold a 54-46 majority.

So our forecast might be thought of as a Republican gain of six seats — plus or minus five.

Tentative though it was, Silver's forecast roused the Democrats from their slumber. The executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), Guy Cecil, sent out a memo the next day in response, using Silver's forecast to reassure and rally the troops for the long uphill climb to November:

Nate Silver and the staff at *FiveThirtyEight* are doing groundbreaking work, but, as they have noted, they have to base their forecasts on a scarce supply of public polls. In some cases more than half of these polls come from GOP polling outfits. This was one reason why *FiveThirtyEight* forecasts in North Dakota and Montana were so far off in 2012. In fact, in August of 2012 Silver forecasted a 61% likelihood that Republicans would pick up enough seats to claim the majority. Three months later Democrats went on to win 55 seats.

He touted the party's Bannock Street Project, which is investing \$60 million in 10 of the most critical states, hiring more than 4,000 paid staffers to drum up voters in November. But the project has loftier goals:

[Our] effort will need all of that [money] — and perhaps more — to achieve its goal, which is nothing short of changing the character of the electorate in a midterm cycle.

Indeed, the DSCC has sent at least 11 e-mail blasts to financial supporters with Silver's name in the subject line, raising concerns and hoping to raise funds to keep the Senate in the party's hands in November.

The odds of their doing so go beyond pollsters forecasting a shift toward Republicans in the Senate. History is also working against them. In 12 of 17 midterm elections since the end of World War II, the party occupying the White House has lost ground in the Senate. In 2006, six years into George W. Bush's presidency, Democrats won control of the House and the Senate, while in 1998, in the middle of Bill Clinton's second term, Republicans held onto their majorities in the House and Senate, while at the midpoint of Ronald Reagan's second term, Democrats won control of the Senate.

Public support for Democrats has been slipping, according to the aggregate results posted at the Real Clear Politics website, with both parties now about equal in public support.

The entire hubbub about November fails, so far at least, to address the key issue: not what party will control the Senate, but who. Liberal Republicans can be just as dangerous to the health of the Republic



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as moderate Democrats. If Abramowitz is right, however, the political ideology of those sitting in the Senate after November will be much more favorable to that health than those being retired:

The Democrats who are retiring, plus the ones likely to lose, tend to be more moderate Democrats. [Those replacing them] are going to be very conservative.

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