

FLORIDA STATE SENATE

Overview:

Florida's state Senate is divided into 40 districts, each representing an average of 470,033 residents. Normally, half of the Senate is up for re-election every two years. However, in 2016, Florida was required to redraw its Senate districts in response to a state Supreme Court ruling that its districts were unfairly gerrymandered. Therefore, in 2016, all 40 seats went to an election. In 2018, only the even-numbered seats are up for re-election. Currently, the Democratic Party holds 15 seats, the Republican party holds 24 seats, and one seat is vacant. The Senate was last under Democratic control in 1992; it was then split evenly until 1994, and has been under Republican control ever since. Taking back the Senate in 2018 is unlikely, but progress is possible; more important will be expanding our future possibilities by running more candidates.

Approach to Assessing Districts:

The Senate map is somewhat different from the House map in Florida. While most Democratic victories were in the Miami-Dade area, they also broke through in some red areas, most notable District 3 (anchored by Tallahassee but containing many small towns and rural areas), District 6 (featuring Bunnell and Palm Coast), District 30 (featuring Fort Myers and Cape Coral), and District 32 (featuring Port Lucie and Palm City). While they won in Tampa itself (District 19), the surrounding areas are all red. Orlando is especially inverted; they did not run in most of Orlando proper (Districts 12 and 14), but won in surrounding suburban and rural districts (Districts 11, 13, 15). With the new, un-gerrymandered Senate map, the Democratic Party could be competitive in many non-traditional suburban and rural areas with the right candidates. The map indicates a chance to pick up districts in 2018 by extending further into small-town and rural northeast Florida (District 8), reaching the Orlando/Tampa exurbs, (Districts 18 and 24), and expanding in Miami (Districts 36 and 40).

For long term success, however, it is more important to run boldly in districts in which we haven't run candidates in recent years. 2016 marked the potential start of a new era, as the Senate map was redrawn by court order due to gerrymandering. (This also makes pre-2016 results difficult to draw conclusions from). With this bold new chance to break through, the Democratic Party chose not to run candidates in 15 out of 40 seats. As a result, they picked up one new seat in this crucial election.

Of the 20 seats available in 2018, the Democrats didn't run a candidate in ten districts that are up for grabs. And some of the omissions are quite glaring. They include seats we hold at the HoR level and which Clinton won in 2016. Districts 12 and 14 (Orlando) and District 22 (Tampa) are notable examples. Indeed, District 14 is particularly inexcusable. An independent candidate, Richard Paul Dembisky, ran in this district as an independent in 2016. He ran from his home in Michigan, and actually asked reporters not to publish his name in their papers. **This candidate won 31.6% of the vote.** No one would vote for a candidate so flagrantly

unqualified except as a way to vote against the GOP. How would we have done had we run somebody?

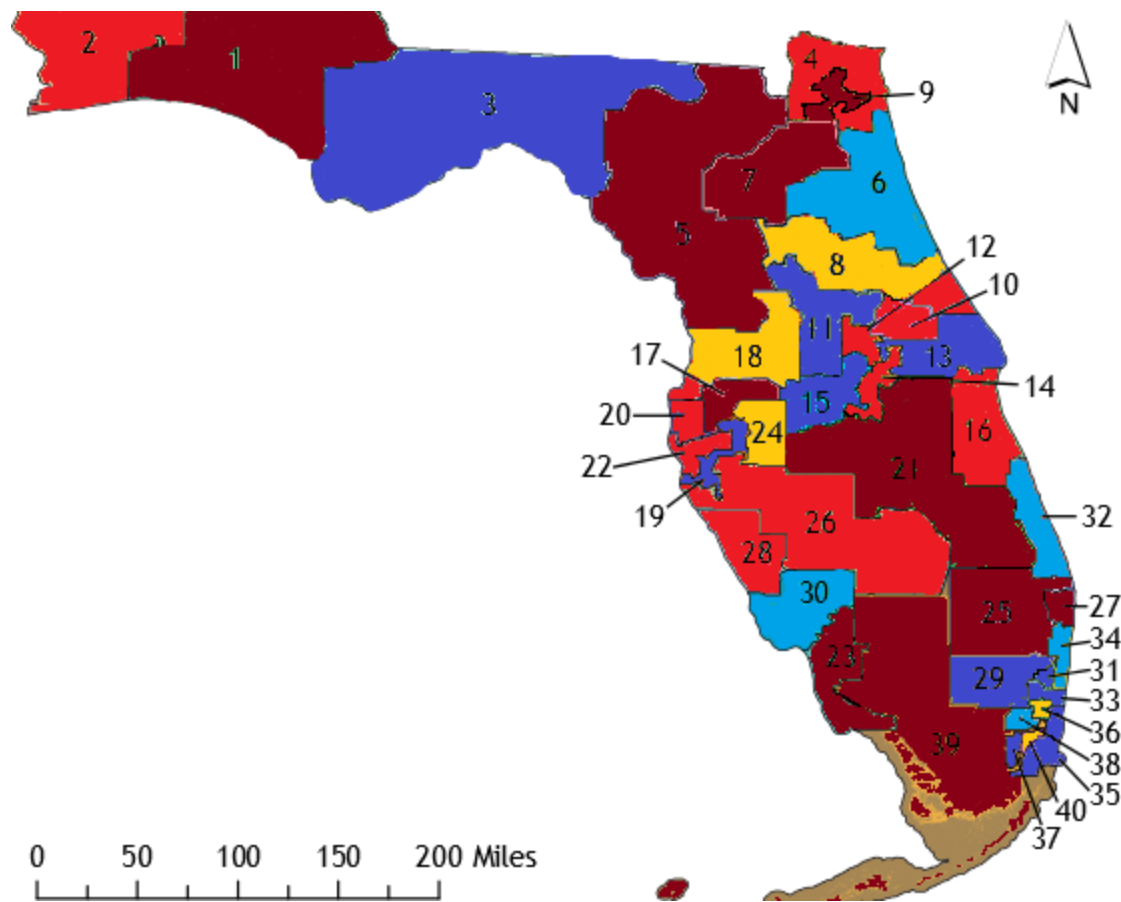


Fig. 1. Map showing partisan control of Florida's 40 state Senate districts. Blue districts are under Democratic control, red districts are under Republican control, and orange districts have Republican senators who won less than 60% of the vote in 2016 (and are up for re-election in 2018). Only the lighter-coloured red and blue districts are up for re-election in 2018.

Prospects for 2018:

First priority is the special election for District 40, happening on Sept. 26th. This seat became available after GOP Senator Frank Artiles resigned in the wake of racist comments he made. It's a critical chance to boost our standing in Miami. Annette Taddeo is our candidate, and she's facing popular state House rep Jose Felix Diaz. It'll be a tough race, but it's a big chance for us.

The single most important thing we can do is run twenty candidates in 2018. I don't think it's a stretch to say we could pick up seats in Orlando and Tampa (remember, almost 1/3 of District 14 voted for some random guy from Michigan with no platform simply because he wasn't a Republican). And at the state level, Floridians are actually quite open to Democrats. We won rural seats (3, 6, 30, and 32) and suburban seats (11, 13, and 15) that have eluded the party in

other states. Good candidate recruitment and just plain giving it a fair shot could be a winning strategy.

As to flipping the Senate in 2018, we'd need to pick up five seats to force a tie, and six to take control. This seems unlikely in 2018 unless we field a full slate of great candidates. For now, I'll conservatively set the goal of getting to 18 seats after the 2018 election. This sets us up nicely to try and flip the Senate by 2020, and make sure the post-2020 Congressional maps aren't a gerrymandered nightmare again.

Potential Pick-Ups in 2018:

- Rural and small-town seats: Districts 8 and 18. Candidates in these areas will want to emphasize opportunities and bringing jobs to the area. Guns are a losing topic in rural areas, and much of rural Florida is quite conservative, so tread lightly on social issues without compromising our drive for equality.
- Suburban seat: District 24. Will be necessary to identify local issues and use them to build on our successes in the past.
- Miami area: Districts 36 and 40. The District 40 special election in September is key. Continued outreach to the local Cuban-American population will be important. In this area, open opposition to Trump's agenda could be a boon, as long as it's supported by a focus on local issues.
- Previously uncontested districts: Districts 12, 14, and 22. We've had success in the House of Representatives in these areas, but did not run candidates in 2016. They could be quick pick-ups with the right candidate, or a chance to lay the groundwork for future successes.

Hall of Shame:

We didn't run candidates in the following districts in 2016: Districts 2, 4, 10, 12, 14, 16, 20, 24, 26, and 28. It's an infuriating combination of leaving potential wins on the table and failing to reach out to hostile areas with our message. If we're the party of all Americans, we need to be available to all Americans. In Florida, given our history of not running candidates, this may be the most important thing we do in 2018.