

All Eyes On Maine And North Carolina Senate Races

As we approach next year's midterm elections, Maine and North Carolina are the critical Senate seats for Republicans to hold. Will 2026 be the year that GOP incumbents Susan Collins and Thom Tillis pull it off again? In this week's Discussion Points, we are looking at election takeaways from those 2020 Senate races and what they could tell us about 2026.

Maine

In a state that former President Biden won by 9 over President Trump, Susan Collins won by almost 9 points (8.6%) — one of the most remarkable political victories in recent elections.

Maine 2020 (source: Edison Exit Polls)	Trump-Biden	Collins-Gideon
Moderates	-24	+7
Independents	-24	+3
Women	-23	+3
45+	-6	+17
18-44	-14	-6

- In a state in which independents (41% of the 2020 Maine electorate) outnumbered Republicans (31%) and Democrats (28%), Collins won independents by 3, compared to -24 for the presidential result. Among moderates, she won by 7, compared to -24 at the presidential level.
- Collins won women by 3, in contrast to President Trump who lost female voters by 23 in Maine.
- While Collins did not win voters under 45 (-6), the margin was much closer than the presidential result (-14). Among voters 45+, Collins won by 17 compared to the margin of -6 at the presidential level.
- Collins won 18% of Biden voters - a stunning percentage of crossover vote.

North Carolina

In 2020, North Carolina saw close races at both the Senate (Tillis +1) and presidential levels (Trump +1).

- Exit polls show that Tillis lost independents by 3, but he had a much closer margin among this group compared to other Senate GOP candidates who were unsuccessful that cycle (examples: McSally in AZ, -10; Gardner in CO, -8; Perdue in GA, -8) To make up the difference, Tillis was helped by a Republican party ID advantage of +3.
- The Senate margin among women voters was closer (-4 Tillis) than the margin at the presidential level (-7 Trump).

Economic Issue Advantages For Collins and Tillis

The advantage on the economy was central to both candidates' wins. Although the COVID pandemic was still going in full force, the economy was the top issue nationally and in Maine and North Carolina. Among voters whose top issue was the economy (35% of the Maine electorate), Collins won 86-8. In North Carolina, Tillis won 81-15 among economy voters (35% of the state's electorate). Given those advantages in both races, it is imperative that Republicans solidify their issue handling advantage on the economy to protect Republican candidates in what is sure to be a challenging midterm environment.

Have a good weekend.

David & Myra