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SPOTLIGHT

Democrats Dance with Split-Ticket Ballots

The decline of crossover members weighs on the party.



FILE - North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper speaks at a campaign event in Charlotte, N.C., Sept. 12, 2024. (AP Photo/Nell Redmond, File)

Amelia Monroe

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The slow decline of split-ticket voting has hampered Democrats' successes in recent elections.

Much of the decrease can be attributed to a widening divide between state and national-level politicians since President Trump took office in 2016, with downballot candidates increasingly struggling to separate themselves from their national party.

J. Miles Coleman, the associate editor of *Sabato's Crystal Ball* at the UVA Center for Politics, said constituent work and heading a congressional committee has less of a sway on voters.

“The death of those kinds of committee assignments and local issues, to me, has increasingly taken a backseat to

whether you have a D or R behind your name,” Coleman told *Hotline*.

In a post-World War II era, Senate Democrats winning in a red state accounted for [70%](#)

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In 2022

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Democrats held onto most of the toss-up Senate seats, which is impressive considering they had the presidency at that time, Coleman said. But, with

President Trump back on the ballot in 2024, Democrats lost key Senate seats in Montana, Ohio, and West Virginia.

Outside those red states, Senate Democrats notched wins in swing states Trump carried, and in the upcoming midterm elections, Democrats will need to keep that streak alive if they have any hope of clawing back to power.

North Carolina and Georgia have two of the most [competitive](#)

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the map going into 2026. With former North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper (D) jumping in today and Sen. Jon Ossoff

(D-GA) seeking reelection, both races are key crossover seats that could decide the Senate majority.

During the 2020 election, Ossoff was able to flip Georgia's Senate seat by 1 point. The narrow margin makes Ossoff the top target for the Republicans.

Outside of these more volatile seats, Democrats' chances to expand the map depend on solidifying an identity outside of the national party—especially in seats that are not strictly Democratic, like Texas and Iowa, where they may have to find ways to appeal to a wider voter base rather than ride the ideological wave of the Democratic party.

“If you're a Democrat running in Texas, you can't take the standard Democratic position on every issue,” Coleman said.

— *Amelia Monroe*

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