

Battle for Control of the Iowa State Legislature

2006 Elections Project
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The elections for the Iowa legislature will decide the most evenly split statehouses in the Upper Midwest. **Democrats hold an advantage in breaking the evenly split state senate as well as the state House**, which Republicans hold with the narrowest possible majority (51 to 49).

Iowa State Senate: GOP Bracing for Losses

The GOP is a bit disadvantaged in the battle to break the 25 to 25 draw with the Democrats and win a majority in Iowa's State Senate.

Republicans face competitive contests for at least two seats. Two republican senate districts are classified as 'competitive' (i.e. the 2002 election was won by 10 points or less). One of these districts is classified as 'very competitive' (District 37) because the Republican won it by 5 percentage points or less in 2002, while one district is 'moderately competitive' (Districts 45) because it was decided by 5 to 10 percentage points. (GOP state Senator Ron Wiecek's race for re-election in the moderately competitive District 27 is assured of success because the Democrats failed to field a challenger).

In addition to defending two Senate seats that were only narrowly won in 2002, the Republicans will also have to fight to retain six open seats in which the incumbent stepped down. One of these districts (#41) is open because the Republican incumbent (Maggie Tinsman) lost an intra-party challenge in the June primary to David Hartsuch. Open seats are easier to win than unseating an incumbent who enjoys name recognition and personal bonds with voters.

Another advantage for the Democrats is that they have more uncontested races than Republicans and are therefore assured of holding these seats. Democrats do not face a Republican challenger in five races (Districts 15, 17, 33, 39, 43), while the Republicans do not face a Democratic opponent in just three races (Districts 27, 29, 49).

The Democrats enjoy an incumbency advantage: of the 19 incumbents on the ballot, 14 are Democrats and just 5 are Republicans.

Based on all these measures of competitiveness and party vulnerability, the Republicans face an uphill battle to gain control of the state Senate and are at risk of losing seats.

Measures of Competitiveness and Party Vulnerability In 2006 Iowa State Senate Elections

Measure	Democrat-held districts		Republican-held districts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Competitive districts	0	0%	2 +	8%
Open districts	0	0%	6 ++	24%
Incumbents on ballot	14	56%	5	20%
Unchallenged by major party	5	20%	3	12%

+ One additional Republican-held competitive district (27) does not have a Democrat on the ballot.

++ Includes Senate District 41 in which the GOP incumbent lost the primary election.

Iowa State House: Advantage, Democrats

The Republicans maintain a 51-49 edge in Iowa’s House of Representatives, but Democrats appear to have an edge in winning seats and possibly the majority.

Republicans face more competitive races than do the Democrats. Of the 11 districts classified as competitive, 7 are in Republican-held districts and 4 are in Democratic hands.

In addition, Republicans will be fighting to retain 8 of the 10 open State House seats. Two of the Republican open seats (Districts 56, 82) resulted from Republican incumbents losing their primary election in June.

Democrats also hold an advantage in running uncontested campaigns in which the candidate faces no opponent: the Democratic candidate is **unchallenged by Republicans in 22 races as compared to 19 uncontested contests for Republican candidates.** Overall, 43 percent of State House races are uncontested – a strikingly high number. The effect is to undermine a central principle of democratic elections – that voters have a choice.

The result is that Democrats hold the incumbency advantage: there are more Democratic incumbents (47) on the ballot than Republicans (43).

Measures of Competitiveness and Party Vulnerability in 2006 Iowa State House Elections

Measure	Democrat-held districts		Republican-held districts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Competitive districts	4 +	4%	7 ++	7%
Open districts	2	2%	8 +++	8%
Incumbents on ballot	47	47%	43	43%
Unchallenged by major party	22	22%	19	19%

+ Three additional competitive districts (#31, 90, 92) for Democrat-held seats do not have a Republican challenger on the ballot.

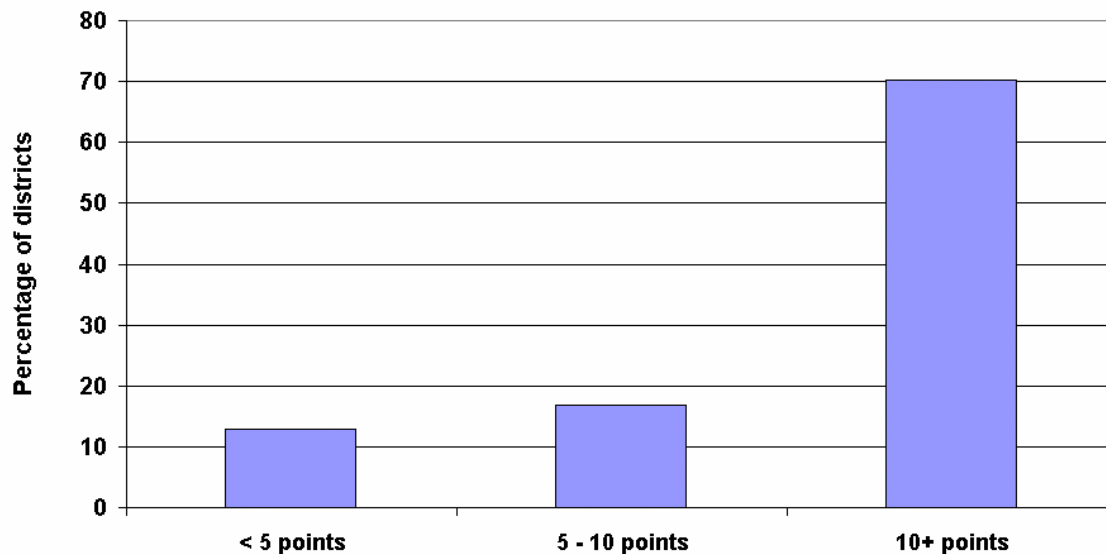
++ One additional competitive (#6) Republican-held district does not have a Democratic challenger on the ballot.

+++ Includes two House districts in which the GOP incumbent lost during the primary.

Strengthening Our Democracy Requires More Competitive Elections

Although the evenly divided state Senate makes the hotly contested races quite important politically, the reality is that the overwhelming majority of elections are unlikely to be competitive in Iowa. Of contested races in 2002 and 2004, **70% were decided by more than 10 points**. The large number of safe seats undermines a cornerstone of democratic accountability – the prospect that incumbents will be thrown out of office. Only 13% of the state senate contests were very competitive and 17% were moderately competitive.

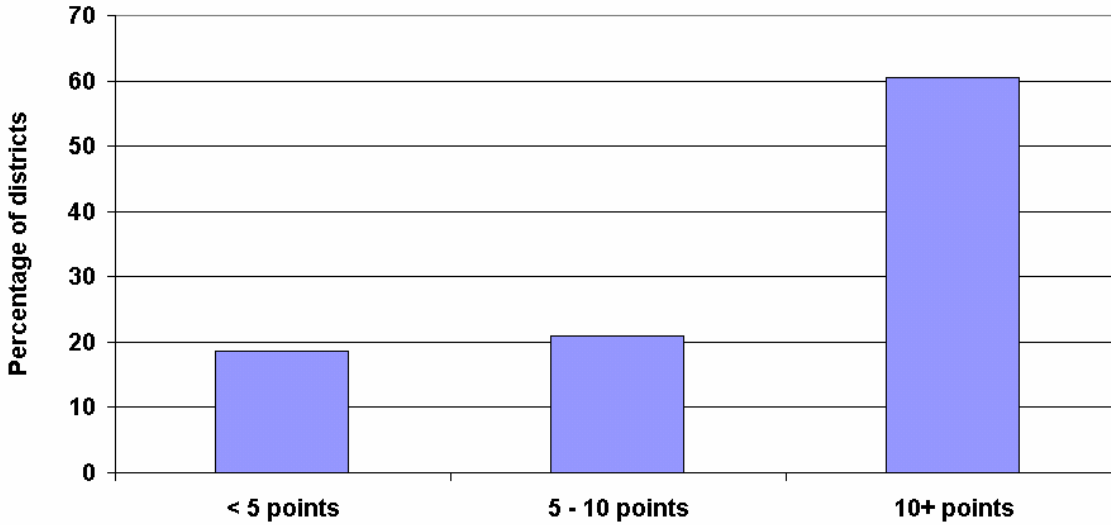
Competitive Districts in Contested Iowa State Senate Elections, 2002-2004



Note: "Contested races" defined as districts in which both Republican and Democratic candidates are on the general election ballot. Figure denotes the percentage of contested districts decided by less than five points, between 5 and 10 points, and more than 10 points based on 2002 and 2004 election results.

Iowa state House elections are more competitive than state Senate races but the great majority are safe seats. In contested races in 2002 and 2004, 61% were decided by more than 10 points. Nineteen percent were very competitive and 21% were moderately competitive, and.

Competitive Districts in Contested Iowa State House Elections, 2002-2004



Note: "Contested races" defined as districts in which both Republican and Democratic candidates are on the general election ballot. Figure denotes the percentage of contested districts decided by less than five points, between 5 and 10 points, and more than 10 points based on 2002 and 2004 election results.

Competitive and Open Iowa State Senate Districts

District	Democrat	Republican	Third Party	District characteristics
5 (GOP)	Rich Olive	James M. Kurtenbach		Open
9 (GOP)	Bill Heckroth	Tom Hoogestraat		Open
19 (GOP)	Robert M. Hogg	Renee Schultze		Open
35 (GOP)	Merle O. Johnson	Larry L. Noble		Open
37 (GOP)	Staci Appel	Julian B. Garrett		Open, competitive
41 (GOP)	Phyllis Thede	David Hartsuch		Open
45 (GOP)	Becky Schmitz	David Miller (I)		Competitive

Competitive and Open Iowa State House Districts

District	Democrat	Republican	Third Party	District Characteristics
10 (GOP)	Susan R. Radke	Dave Deyoe		Open
13 (GOP)	Alan Steckman	Bill Schickel (I)	Gary Van Horn (Independent)	Competitive
17 (GOP)	Alek Wipperman	Pat Grassley		Open
18 (GOP)	Andrew Wenthe	David Lalk (I)		Competitive
19 (DEM)	Bob Kressig (I)	Matt Reisetter		Very competitive
20 (GOP)	Doris J. Kelley	David Wieland		Open
23 (GOP)	Pete McRoberts	Dan Rasmussen (I)		Competitive
35 (GOP)	Jan Kvach	Kraig Pausen (I)		Very competitive
36 (DEM)	Swati A. Dandekar (I)	Nick Wagner		Competitive
37 (GOP)	Art Staed	Andy Anderson		Open
38 (DEM)	Tyler Olson	Don Palmer		Open
39 (DEM)	Dawn Pettengill (I)	Connie Jacobsen		Competitive
56 (GOP)	Nancy Bleth	Matt W. Windschitl		Open
59 (GOP)	Jim Sammler	Dan Clute		Open
66 (DEM)	Ako Abdul-Samad	Jack Whitver	Brett Blanchfield (Libertarian) Jeff Johannsen (Independent)	Open
69 (GOP)	John Calhoun	Walt Tomenga (I)		Competitive
75 (GOP)	Eric J. Palmer	Danny C. Carroll (I)		Very competitive
79 (GOP)	Clara Oleson	Jeff Kaufmann (I)		Competitive
80 (DEM)	Nathan K. Reichert (I)	R. Greg Orr		Very competitive
82 (GOP)	---	Linda J. Miller	Joe Hutter (Independent)	Open
98 (GOP)	Sally Vitamvas	Greg Forristall		Open