

Larry Hogan won two terms as governor. A Senate victory will be more challenging.

Pamela Wood

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Former Gov. Larry Hogan is working to overcome voter trends and a voter registration disadvantage in his bid to become Maryland's next U.S. senator. (Daniel Kucin Jr./AP)

Larry Hogan knows what he's up against in his campaign to become Maryland's

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Sure, the Republican won statewide elections twice and remained popular through his two terms as governor.

But voter registration and voter behavior present a significant challenge for Hogan in his Senate campaign. Not only does Maryland have a significant registration edge favoring Democrats, but voters across the nation very rarely elect senators from the opposite party from the one that dominates their state. Just five of 100 senators represent states that chose a different party's candidate for president.

Voters increasingly are aware of the national implications of their choices for the Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives, experts say, and are more often basing their vote not on the individual candidate, but on what their selection means for party control in Washington. The road to D.C. is littered with the campaigns of once-popular governors who later lost Senate races.

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Hogan could be further dragged down by being on the same ballot as Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump, who remains deeply unpopular in Maryland.

“I said from the beginning when I got in the race, and I’ve said repeatedly: I’m obviously the underdog in this race,” Hogan said. “It’s a very difficult thing to do. Rarely ever does anyone pull off overcoming that kind of a deficit at the top of the ticket.”

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Senate, and Maryland's race to succeed the retiring Sen. Ben Cardin is among those that could factor into which party holds the majority going forward.

Of the nation's 100 senators, only a handful got to Capitol Hill or remained there by overcoming a party deficit. And some who have succeeded find themselves in extremely tight reelection bids in this politically polarized nation, including Democratic Sens. [Jon Tester of Montana](#) and [Sherrod Brown of Ohio](#).



Democrat Angela Alsobrooks and Republican Larry Hogan are vying to become a U.S. senator from Maryland. Hogan faces an uphill battle in trying to flip a reliably blue state to red. (The Baltimore Banner)

'A nationalized race'

"The problem for Hogan is that voters look at voting for governor differently than voting for senator," said Jessica Taylor, the Senate and governors editor for the Cook Political Report.

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Cook is one of the websites that rates the competitiveness of political races; the Maryland Senate race between Hogan and Democratic nominee Angela Alsobrooks is currently in the “likely Democrat” category.

Taylor explained that voters typically evaluate a gubernatorial candidate based on their individual message and accomplishments, which enables a candidate like Hogan to be successful even when facing a party disadvantage.

“If you’re voting for Senate, it becomes a nationalized race. Who do you want to be in control of the Senate and the agenda?” Taylor said. Voters might like Hogan personally or like his Maryland politics, “but he has an ‘R’ beside his name and he would caucus with Republicans and give them power.”

That’s a message Democrats have been hammering all summer — that a vote for Hogan is a vote for putting Republicans in charge on Capitol Hill. Party leaders gleefully mention that Hogan was recruited to the race by Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell every chance they get.

Hogan, meanwhile, has promoted himself as an independent thinker with a track record that had Maryland voters’ approval.

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“If all they care about is red and blue, then I’m not going to win,” Hogan said. “But if they care about records and about people and who they think is going to actually go to represent everyone, then I will win. So that’s what the campaign is all about.”

But there’s plenty of examples of former governors who, like Hogan, tried to swim upstream against political currents and lost: Montana Democrat Steve Bullock in 2020; Tennessee Democrat Phil Bredesen in 2018; Democrats Ted Strickland of Ohio and Evan Bayh of Indiana in 2016; Hawaii Republican Linda Lingle in 2012; Virginia Republican Jim Gilmore in 2008.

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“I’m obviously the underdog in this race. ... Rarely ever does anyone pull off overcoming that kind of a deficit at the top of the ticket,” Republican Senate nominee Larry Hogan told The Baltimore Banner. (Pamela Wood)

Outliers who have succeeded

Senators who have found success across party lines have often carved their own niche, reminding voters back home that they’ve brought back funding and looked out for their interests.

Such is the case with Sen. Susan Collins, a Republican from Maine. Over the course of her career, Republicans have experienced diminishing numbers and influence in Maine, but Collins has remained in office. In 2020, Trump lost the state by 9.1 percentage points while Collins won reelection by 8.6 percentage points — a 17.7 point difference.

“She’s emphasized this more over time because she’s had to: demonstrating how

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she is willing to go against the party when it's appropriate," said Mark Brewer, professor and chair of the University of Maine's political science department.

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Collins has taken some positions at odds with the national Republican party, including supporting abortion access and not voting for Trump for president. She is considered one of the most moderate lawmakers in Washington.

Hogan likewise has offered more support for abortion access than most Republicans and has publicly been at odds with Trump. He's supported some gun control measures and routinely speaks against partisan gerrymandering, even when politically motivated district-drawing could help his own party.

Hogan often talks about wanting to be a voice of reason and compromise amid dysfunction in Washington, though it's unclear how successful he would be as a freshman senator.

"The only question for Hogan is: Has the national image of the Republican Party changed to such a large degree, that it doesn't really fit the image that he's trying to sell?" Brewer asked. "Can he overcome that with Trump at the top of the ticket?"

It's hard to find a less popular politician in Maryland than Trump: Trump lost to President Joe Biden in Maryland by about 33 points in 2020, and his disapproval rating stood at 61% in Gonzales Research & Media Services poll results released

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deficit than Collins did in Maine four years ago.

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Larry Hogan walked in the Annapolis Pride parade in June, not a typical type of campaign event for a Republican.
(Ulysses Muñoz/The Baltimore Banner)

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representing West Virginia this year. A longtime Democrat who often found himself either being courted or marginalized by his party because he was a swing vote, Manchin recently switched to being a political independent.

In 2016, Trump won West Virginia by 42.15 percentage points. But two years later Manchin managed to win — as a Democrat — by 3.3 percentage points.

Manchin and Hogan have both been involved in the centrist group No Labels, and Hogan said Manchin is a “good friend.”

Over Manchin’s tenure, West Virginia swiftly moved to becoming dominated by Republicans — something that may have contributed to his decision to retire, said Sam Workman, director of West Virginia University’s Institute for Policy Research and Public Affairs.

Workman said politicians like Manchin and Hogan made their mark “by wading into the center of politics” and finding ways to help their states. That just doesn’t have as much sway with voters in the current political landscape — especially when they weigh the national implications of who they’re voting for, Workman said.

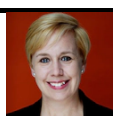
“The space for the politicians who can say, ‘I’m not of the same party as you but I have brought these benefits to the state and I’ve been a good steward of state government’ — the space for that type of argument is a lot smaller,” Workman said.

That said, Hogan is a skilled politician and campaigner and shouldn’t be counted out, Workman said.

“While this is difficult, it’s not impossible,” Workman said. “If anyone is going to do it, he’s the one to do it for the Republicans.”

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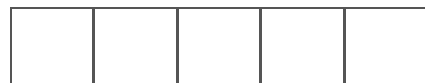
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