

## Letter from Texas: June 2026

### Texas and California: Two congressional redistricting maps; two very different likely results

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The U.S. Constitution of 1787 established the House of Representatives with 65 initial numbers. Subsequently, representation from each state was to be based on a decennial census, starting with a head count in 1790. As new states were added and the population surged, Congress increased the number of U.S. House members from 105 in 1791 to 435 in the 1930s, when the total was frozen. The number of seats each state received was determined by an apportionment formula, and states could assign their seats as they saw fit within their boundaries. Over the years, many refused to adjust their congressional districts even as populations shifted from rural areas to growing cities and suburbs. That ended in the 1960s when federal courts issued a series of “one-person, one vote” decisions that mandated electoral districts had to be equal in population. Congressional districts must now be equal in population within each state with two or more members. This means that 44 states must redistrict after each census even if their delegation size does not change. This mandated redistricting must be done before the next congressional elections, so new maps were produced in 2021 in most states well before the 2022 midterm elections.

The 2020 census counted 29,145,506 residents in Texas as of April 1, which entitled the state to two additional seats in the US House. Each of the 38 new Texas districts would include 766,987 people. The census counted 39,538,223 Californians, an increase from 2010, but at a slower rate than the nation, so the Golden State lost a seat in the U.S. House for the first time. Each of the 52 California districts would contain 760,350 people. Since both states had changes in the size of their respective House delegations and as well as large internal population shifts, major adjustments were required in 2021, with the expectation these lines would hold for a decade. That has not, however, been the case. Over the last year the United States has witnessed an unprecedented series of mid-decade redistricting battles across a dozen states. Texas was the tip of the spear, quickly followed by California.

Things got started, as they usually do these days, with the Trump White House. The *New York Times* reported in June 2025 that the administration, concerned about falling poll numbers and the usual pattern of an incumbent’s party losing seats in midterm elections, informed Texas officials that five more Republican seats were needed from the Lone Star State. That was a tall order. The 2021 map had been carefully crafted to give Republicans 25 of 38 seats (66%) in a state where the GOP averages about 55% of the total congressional vote. Despite the initial reluctance of Governor Greg Abbott and most GOP congressmembers, Texas Republicans fell in line. Democratic legislative resistance was spirited but ultimate futile and a new map was enacted. There was pushback in a federal court case, but the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the federal court to respect the legislative plan, and the new map for 2026 went into effect.

The White House strategy was working as planned in Texas. What the Administration had not anticipated, however, was the reaction of California Governor Gavin Newsom. Upon learning of the Texas plan, Newsom announced his heavily Democratic state would counter Texas with a new map flipping five of the nine existing Republican seats in the state from red to blue. This was difficult. Quick action by the Democratic legislature in Sacramento was needed; a map that would give Democrats an advantage in 48 of 52 districts had to be produced; and a state referendum would have to be approved by voters to suspend the non-partisan congressional redistricting process California had used since 2010. All of these boxes were checked, and state courts and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to intervene. California thus joined Texas in presenting voters with a dramatically redrawn, hyper-partisan, congressional map for the 2026 midterm election.

Voters in these two biggest American states will render a final verdict on these maneuvers in November, but the recently available results from the June 2026 California “top-two” primary compared to the earlier “open” primary results in Texas strongly suggest Democrats will do much better than Republicans this fall in these two states.

***California voters are likely to give Democrats a 48-4 congressional edge in November***

The California Secretary of State’s report of June 26, 2026 showed virtually all June 3 primary ballots had been tabulated. There were still a few days left for several thousand voters who returned defective mail ballots to “cure” the problem and have their choices added to the official tally, but none of the congressional races are close enough for these remaining ballots to affect the results.

California uses a voter-initiated “top-two” primary process to qualify candidates for the November ballot. All candidates run together with their party preference (or no-party-preference) listed on the ballot. All voters, without respect to party registration, receive the same ballot and can vote for one candidate in each contest. The top two finishers advance to the General Election, even if one receives a majority of primary votes. This system often creates chaos at the top of the ballot (61 candidates qualified for the open governor seat in 2026, including 24 Democrats). However, congressional ballots are usually much shorter with an average of 5-6 contestants.

The “almost-final” congressional votes are reported by district in Table 1 on page 3. The table shows the total vote received by candidates who listed their party preference as Democrat or Republican, and the percentage of the total vote each group of candidates received (these often do not add up to 100 percent because of third party or no party contenders). The returns closely track the Democratic plan. Republican candidates received a majority in just four districts, compared to 48 where Democrats led. In addition to setting up a five-seat swing, the new map also protected Democratic incumbents who had close races in 2022 and 2024. Thirty-three districts had Democratic margins of more than 20 points, and the Democratic advantage was less than ten percent in just two districts (the 45<sup>th</sup> at +7.6%, and the 48<sup>th</sup> at +8.2%).

**Table 1: Votes cast for Republican and Democratic candidates in California Congressional Districts: June 3<sup>rd</sup> Primary**

| Dist. | Dem     | %     | Rep     | %    | Dist. | Dem     | %    | Rep     | %    |
|-------|---------|-------|---------|------|-------|---------|------|---------|------|
| 1     | 124,876 | 56.7  | 92,825  | 42.2 | 27    | 90,365  | 59.0 | 62,758  | 41.0 |
| 2     | 158,422 | 64.6  | 75,055  | 30.6 | 28    | 126,905 | 67.9 | 60,020  | 32.1 |
| 3     | 124,623 | 55.7  | 96,622  | 43.2 | 29    | 92,854  | 76.0 | 29,362  | 24.0 |
| 4     | 130,723 | 63.2  | 74,588  | 36.1 | 30    | 142,710 | 73.4 | 41,300  | 21.3 |
| 5     | 81,813  | 38.7  | 129,561 | 61.3 | 31    | 94,806  | 61.1 | 60,439  | 38.9 |
| 6     | 107,922 | 55.6  | 86,270* | 44.4 | 32    | 138,964 | 66.6 | 68,295  | 32.7 |
| 7     | 132,401 | 63.0  | 77,602  | 37.0 | 33    | 73,087  | 61.1 | 45,434  | 38.0 |
| 8     | 128,942 | 72.2  | 49,588  | 27.8 | 34    | 101,948 | 85.3 | 16,321  | 13.6 |
| 9     | 79,946  | 60.8  | 51,585  | 39.2 | 35    | 76,087  | 59.6 | 51,460  | 40.4 |
| 10    | 152,656 | 68.9  | 68,925  | 31.1 | 36    | 165,671 | 70.6 | 66,504  | 28.3 |
| 11    | 221,144 | 94.0  | 13,537  | 5.8  | 37    | 106,251 | 82.6 | 13,773  | 10.7 |
| 12    | 181,144 | 100.0 | --      | --   | 38    | 88,080  | 64.2 | 49,196  | 35.8 |
| 13    | 55,841  | 57.1  | 41,998  | 42.9 | 39    | 75,462  | 61.0 | 48,173  | 39.0 |
| 14    | 113,841 | 73.6  | 39,142  | 25.3 | 40    | 62,848  | 34.3 | 120,326 | 65.6 |
| 15    | 128,395 | 77.9  | 30,390  | 18.4 | 41    | 105,560 | 64.2 | 58,785  | 35.8 |
| 16    | 139,299 | 75.6  | 38,628  | 21.0 | 42    | 114,942 | 56.5 | 86,149  | 42.3 |
| 17    | 98,091  | 73.6  | 34,075  | 25.6 | 43    | 98,642  | 83.1 | 20,008  | 15.9 |
| 18    | 80,613  | 67.8  | 34,867  | 29.3 | 44    | 84,690  | 77.0 | 25,376  | 23.0 |
| 19    | 152,270 | 69.9  | 58,290  | 26.8 | 45    | 86,184  | 53.8 | 74,118  | 46.2 |
| 20    | 48,603  | 28.8  | 115,016 | 68.2 | 46    | 79,547  | 67.1 | 38,993  | 32.9 |
| 21    | 59,170  | 57.6  | 42,371  | 41.2 | 47    | 106,373 | 54.3 | 83,584  | 42.7 |
| 22    | 47,249  | 59.3  | 32,475  | 40.6 | 48    | 100,677 | 54.1 | 85,572  | 45.9 |
| 23    | 53,644  | 37.7  | 81,343  | 57.1 | 49    | 125,634 | 55.8 | 99,320  | 44.2 |
| 24    | 129,362 | 61.8  | 75,085  | 35.9 | 50    | 122,524 | 56.6 | 84,187  | 38.9 |
| 25    | 88,648  | 60.0  | 59,074  | 40.0 | 51    | 123,648 | 63.3 | 71,554  | 36.7 |
| 26    | 115,059 | 59.0  | 78,171  | 41.0 | 52    | 83,427  | 66.5 | 42,427  | 33.5 |

\*The incumbent Republican Congressman, Kevin Kiley, filed as an Independent, but said he would caucus with the GOP if reelected. His votes are included in the Republican total.

Source: Office of California Secretary of State, unofficial totals as of June 25, 2026

Of course, the partisan vote pattern could be different in the General Election. However, the history of top-two primary voting compared to November results in California does not support that prospect.

Table 2 summarizes the June primary voting results in California compared to the General Election starting in 2012 when the top-two plan went into effect. There were 369 congressional elections over this span. In these contests, the combined Democratic primary vote exceeded the Republican total in 263 instances. *In every case the top Democrat went on to win the General Election.* However, in the 106 cases where Republican candidates got more primary votes than Democrats, the GOP lost 25 of these seats in the General Election.

**Table 2: Results in California Congressional Primaries compared to the General Election outcome: 2012 – 2024**

| Year  | Districts where<br>Dem Primary vote<br>Exceeded Rep vote | November<br>District Winner |     | Districts where<br>Rep Primary vote.<br>Exceeded Dem vote | November<br>District Winner |     |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----|
|       |                                                          | Dem                         | Rep |                                                           | Dem.                        | Rep |
| 2012  | 30                                                       | 30                          | 0   | 23                                                        | 8                           | 15  |
| 2014  | 33                                                       | 33                          | 0   | 20                                                        | 6                           | 14  |
| 2016  | 39                                                       | 39                          | 0   | 14                                                        | 0                           | 14  |
| 2018  | 40                                                       | 40                          | 0   | 13                                                        | 6                           | 7   |
| 2020  | 42                                                       | 42                          | 0   | 11                                                        | 1                           | 10  |
| 2022  | 40                                                       | 40                          | 0   | 12                                                        | 0                           | 12  |
| 2024  | 39                                                       | 39                          | 0   | 13                                                        | 4                           | 9   |
| TOTAL | 263                                                      | 263                         | 0   | 106                                                       | 25                          | 81  |

Source: Office of California Secretary of State

What explains this disparity? Relative turnout. Republican voters are more likely to return their primary ballots than Democrats in the June elections when 8 – 10 million votes are cast compared to the 10 – 15 million who vote in the November General Elections. Hispanic voting, heavily Democratic in California, is typically light in primaries, but upticks in the fall.

These tables strongly suggest Governor Newsom is going to win his counter-Texas congressional bet. He muscled through the legislature a major change in the California rules; commissioned a map that would likely deliver five new Democratic seats; and convinced an initially skeptical public to replace the popular non-partisan process by a vote of 7,453,339 (64.4%) to 4,116,998 (35.6%). Finally, the distribution of the primary votes across the 52 congressional districts exactly matches what the map drawer projected.

## ***The enacted Texas congressional map, by contrast, is a much riskier bet for the GOP in November 2026***

When President Trump decided in June 2025 to press the Texas GOP to junk a performing congressional map that had returned 25 Republicans to Washington D.C. in November 2024, it seemed to pose little risk. The President had just beaten Kamala Harris by almost 14% and Republican gains among Hispanics, especially in South Texas, had surged with all the lower Rio Grande counties swinging into the GOP column. Squeezing out five more seats would be challenging but seemed within reach given recent trends. Accordingly, a D.C. based redistricting expert crafted a new map to protect all 25 existing GOP seats, while packing Democrats into eight super-majority districts. That left five targeted districts, that – *if* 2024 voting patterns persisted – should produce Republican majorities.

That rosy scenario began to unravel in the summer of 2025. Trump's tariffs were unpopular with a majority of Texans, including many small business owners. The Administration's near-complete closure of the border was popular but was quickly overshadowed by aggressive ICE roundups which hit particularly hard in South Texas. Polling confirmed a that big swing among Hispanic voters against Republicans nationally was also occurring in Texas. Election results provided hard evidence of this shift.

There were two special elections in Texas on November 4, 2025. One was in the 18<sup>th</sup> Congressional District in Houston to replace the deceased Congressman Sylvester Turner; the other one was to fill a vacant state senate seat in Tarrant County. In the heavily Democratic CD 18, the GOP vote dropped from 30.6% in November 2024 to 14.6% in 2025. The Republican decline was particularly sharp in Hispanic precincts. Texas Senate District 9 was solidly Republican (Trump won it by 17% in 2024 and the Republican state senator had a 20% advantage in 2022). In a 2025 three-person race, a rookie Democratic candidate with little money, Taylor Rehmet, took 47.6% of the vote against two Republicans who spent \$4 million. More shocking, Mr. Rehmet went on to win a January runoff with 57.3% of the vote despite being outspent six-to-one. A key to his win was his strong performance among Hispanic voters. As I pointed out in my February letter, Kamala Harris got 63.9% of the vote in the 22 precincts in the 9<sup>th</sup> District where the Hispanic voting age population (VAP) was greater than 80%. Taylor Rehmet got 89.6% in those same precincts.

On the eve of the 2026 March primary, Mark Jones and Bill King of Rice University published an analysis entitled "Texas redistricting unlikely to add 5 new Republican seats."<sup>1</sup> Jones and King pointed out:

In addition to their problems with the Latino vote, Republicans are facing headwinds with Texas voters more generally. According to the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas, Trump's net approval among Texans dropped 20 percentage points in 2025, falling from a 14-point net positive rating in February to a 6-point net negative rating by December. In addition to Latinos, the drop-off was also particularly steep among independents and younger voters. The redistricting itself was also unpopular with Texans, with 68% in one poll saying that a mid-decade redistricting plan that favored one party over the other was a major problem.

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<sup>1</sup> The Brookings Institution, March 2, 2026.

The March primary results confirmed Jones and King’s assessment that the GOP plan was likely to fall short of the five-seat gain projected. First, Democratic primary voting exceeded Republican voting 2.312 million to 2.166 million – a red flag for a midterm election where both parties had competitive contests and far more money was expended by GOP candidates than Democrats. Second, and more importantly, the breakdown of voting in the 38 congressional districts, documented in Table 3 on page 7, shows that, while the new map succeeded in “packing” Democratic voters into eight supermajority districts, Democratic voters still outnumbered Republicans in six other districts, and in two additional districts the GOP advantage was tiny (50.1/49.9 in CD 5, and 51.5/48.5 in CD 12). There were five other districts where the total vote for Republican candidates was less than 55% of the vote. All five districts of the Texas districts that touch the border had more Democratic than Republican primary voters, as did the majority Hispanic districts in the Houston area (CD 9) and San Antonio (CD 35) that had been redrawn as part of the five-seat plan.

**Table 3: March 2026 primary votes cast for Republican and Democratic candidates in Texas Congressional Districts**

| District | Republican Vote |       | Democratic Vote |       |
|----------|-----------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| 1        | 80,547          | 69.5% | 35,304          | 30.5% |
| 2        | 66,011          | 57.5% | 48,700          | 42.5% |
| 3        | 79,508          | 62.0% | 48,800          | 38.0% |
| 5        | 52,424          | 50.1% | 52,262          | 49.9% |
| 6        | 63,703          | 58.4% | 45,306          | 31.6% |
| 7        | 22,152          | 26.3% | 61,930          | 73.7% |
| 8        | 63,740          | 60.0% | 42,425          | 40.0% |
| 9        | 31,685          | 47.5% | 34,865          | 52.4% |
| 10       | 75,204          | 58.3% | 53,793          | 41.7% |
| 11       | 59,885          | 61.3% | 37,847          | 38.7% |
| 12       | 54,931          | 51.5% | 51,648          | 48.5% |
| 13       | 79,968          | 73.9% | 28,198          | 26.1% |
| 14       | 63,015          | 55.2% | 51,234          | 44.8% |
| 15       | 30,083          | 35.4% | 54,714          | 64.5% |
| 16       | 19,807          | 26.8% | 54,031          | 73.2% |
| 17       | 59,724          | 55.5% | 47,972          | 44.5% |
| 18       | 9,581           | 9.2%  | 95,039          | 90.8% |
| 19       | 77,794          | 77.6% | 22,513          | 22.4% |
| 20       | 9,240           | 12.3% | 66,084          | 87.7% |
| 21       | 95,502          | 59.0% | 66,240          | 41.0% |
| 22       | 63,218          | 56.8% | 48,147          | 43.2% |
| 23       | 55,263          | 48.3% | 59,222          | 51.7% |
| 24       | 71,506          | 54.2% | 60,354          | 45.8% |
| 25       | 60,296          | 53.0% | 53,523          | 47.0% |
| 26       | 80,779          | 58.6% | 57,136          | 41.4% |
| 27       | 67,371          | 54.3% | 56,613          | 45.7% |
| 28       | 16,833          | 19.9% | 67,571          | 80.1% |
| 29       | 9,635           | 15.4% | 52,884          | 84.6% |
| 30       | 14,238          | 11.9% | 105,617         | 88.1% |
| 31       | 76,748          | 58.1% | 55,348          | 41.9% |
| 32       | 69,187          | 54.7% | 57,421          | 45.3% |
| 33       | 13,118          | 15.5% | 71,611          | 84.5% |
| 34       | 36,581          | 39.4% | 56,335          | 60.6% |
| 35       | 47,129          | 46.2% | 54,856          | 53.8% |
| 36       | 62,970          | 56.9% | 47,628          | 43.1% |
| 37       | 15,239          | 10.4% | 131,169         | 89.6% |
| 38       | 61,409          | 53.9% | 52,418          | 46.1% |
| TOTAL    | 1,990,232       | 48.3% | 2,132,189       | 51.7% |

Source: Office of Texas Secretary of State

Obviously, these Texas numbers are starkly different from the California primary results, where every one of the 48 districts targeted by Governor Newsom's map performed as expected.

### ***Looking ahead to November***

One should keep in mind that the November vote in Texas will be different from the March primaries. About 4.4 million turned out in March; I expect 9 – 10 million voters this November.

Also, we do not have comparable data in Texas as to how primary voting translates into General Election congressional results like Table 2 documents for California. No special elections are scheduled that would provide additional information on partisan shifts in Texas. There are, however, several post-primary developments that have implications for these contests. Most of these factors benefit the Democratic congressional candidates. Three do not.

### **Problems for Congressional Democrats in Texas**

First, the losing Democratic U.S. Senate candidate, Jasmine Crockett, has not yet embraced the winner, James Talarico, and the Congresswoman skipped the recent state party convention in Corpus Christi. Blacks are the most reliable Democratic voters in Texas, but Talarico lost African American precincts by a 9 – 1 margin in the March primary. Black voters are not likely to vote for Republicans this November, but their turnout levels will be critical. The absence of Black nominees on the statewide ticket also creates additional problems in the metropolitan districts with sizeable African American populations like CD 5 and CD 24 in the Dallas/Fort Worth area that Democrats hope to carry this year.

Second, aside from the U.S. Senate race, statewide Republicans have a huge financial advantage. Governor Greg Abbott has the largest campaign stash (over \$100 million and growing) in America, save for Donald J. Trump's \$350 million account. Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, who dominates the state senate, can raise huge sums, benefitting, like Governor Abbott, from the fact there is no limit in Texas on direct campaign contributions to state candidates. The Republican Attorney General nominee, State Senator Mayes Middleton, used nearly \$17 million of his personal funds to vastly outspend his GOP primary opponents, and one would expect him to double down having secured the nomination. On the other hand, the Democratic nominees for statewide office are mostly state legislators from urban districts, unknown to the great majority of state voters, with no history of raising substantial campaign funds.

Third, the Texas economy continues to outperform that of every other large state. The "economic miracle" Governor Abbott likes to talk about has generated huge job growth and corporate relocations to Texas for two decades. The state's strong economy, in my opinion, is the single biggest factor in sustaining the remarkable thirty-year run Republicans have enjoyed in Texas elections. This helps state-level Republicans more than federal office seekers, but there are surely spillover effects into congressional races in the state.



## Problems for Congressional Republicans in Texas

There is some good news for congressional Democratic candidates.

First, the whole 2025 redistricting process in Texas did not go down well with voters. The map was ordered from the White House with minimal state input. If President Trump enjoyed the same level of popularity as he previously had in Texas, that would not be a problem, but he does not. The most recent UT Austin poll<sup>2</sup> has Trump's job approval at -8%, pretty much where he has been stuck for the last year. Democrats "strongly disapprove/strongly approve" of the President by a 92% – 0 margin while more ominously, Independents strongly disapprove/strongly approve by 61% to 4%. Republicans strongly approve of Trump by just 52%, with 7% strongly disapproving. In lower turnout midterm elections, these strong approve/disapprove numbers are bad omens for the Republican congressional candidates.

The new map also angered Black and Latino elites by reducing the number of effective opportunity districts for minority voters. Two Black incumbents in Houston were pushed into a cage fight where Christian Menefee ousted Al Green in a May 26 runoff. Seven-term Black incumbent Marc Vessey's CD 33 in Dallas/Fort Worth was dismembered, and the Congressman is not seeking reelection. Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia's CD 29 in Houston was split, with her most reliable Latino voting precincts moved into a wholly new CD 9 stretching into East Texas. Garcia opted to run in the revised CD 29, where Black primary voters usually outnumber Hispanics. Will this reduction in voting opportunities for Black and Latino candidates make much difference to voters this November? Probably not a lot, but whatever effect will almost certainly favor Democratic candidates.

Second, down-ballot Democrats got the U.S. Senate matchup they wanted from the May 26 runoff where Attorney General Paxton defeated incumbent Senator John Cornyn. The GOP's Senate Leadership Fund and other Washington-based groups spent more than \$100 million to block Paxton – to no avail. Paxton's heavy ethical baggage, his struggle to raise campaign funds in a federal election where large direct contributions are not allowed, and deserved reputation as a far-right cultural warrior give Democrat James Talarico the best opportunity to win a U.S. Senate seat in 30 years. Talarico has also raised more money than any other federal candidate this year, which is hugely important given the Republican advantage in all other statewide races. The 38 congressional Democratic nominees, listed just below the senate race, figure to benefit most from the top-of-the ticket matchup. That was the case in 2018 when Beto O'Rourke's strong, well-financed, effort against Senator Ted Cruz helped flip two Republican congressional seats and more than a dozen legislative seats.

Third, the new congressional map is not only flawed in its assumption that Latinos and young voters who swung to President Trump in 2024 would remain Republican in 2026. More than a year's polling and recent special and primary voting data show that is likely not going to be the case. The new map also neglects demographic shifts that are putting Republican candidates at risk in districts with fewer Latinos, like CD 5 in the Dallas metro area. This district has been safely Republican for decades, but its demographics are rapidly changing. About half the voters live in eastern Dallas County, which has experienced major white flight in recent years and has become much more Democratic. In the March 2026 congressional primaries, for example, 35,547 votes were cast in the Democratic primary in the Dallas County precincts compared to 14,499 in the GOP primary. The map's major flaw, in my

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<sup>2</sup> The Texas Politics Project, June 22, 2026, James Hinson and Joshua Banks, "June Poll finds a competitive US Senate race in Texas and continuing economic concerns, data center backlash."

opinion, is pairing this increasingly Democratic part of Dallas with Kaufman County, the fastest suburban county in Texas (and third fastest in the US in 2024-2025). Kaufman, which now accounts for about 25% of the district's voters, is one of just 11 counties in Texas where Kamala Harris improved on Joe Biden's vote share, reflecting a surge of Black and Latino families into the area. The county, which gave Trump 74.2% of the two-party vote in 2016, saw his share drop to 67.2% in 2020, and 64.1% in 2024. In the 2026 primaries, the GOP voters outnumbered Democrats in Kaufman County by just 54.1% to 45.9%. Coupled with the declining Republican vote in Dallas County, the 5th District is likely to be competitive in 2026.

Fourth, the Texas Republican Party has continued to move farther to the right in the 2020s even as the state has become more diverse. The 2026 primaries made that clear with Senator Cornyn's blowout loss 64% to 36% in the May runoff. Republican runoff voters also nominated Bo French, a fire-brand cultural conservative over an incumbent Texas Railroad Commissioner backed by the energy industry. And in the March primary, incumbent State Comptroller Kelly Hancock, was defeated 57% to 24% by Don Huffines, who had run a far-right campaign against Governor Greg Abbott in 2022. The two top state Republicans, Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, have campaigned more on cultural issues than economic concerns, stressing vouchers for private schools, tightening already extreme abortion restrictions, posting the Ten Commandments in all school classrooms, and making sure Sharia law does not take root in the Lone Star State. They have been notably silent on ICE roundups in Texas, despite their unpopularity in Texas. Statewide Republicans espousing these positions will likely win most offices up this year, but in the six or eight congressional races that figure to be competitive, the Republican focus on woke issues as opposed to touting the state's strong economy seems, to this observer, a mistake.

Finally, we come back to the 47<sup>th</sup> president. Donald Trump is obviously interested in Texas as his demand for five more congressional seats and his late boost of Ken Paxton in the Senate primary indicated. However, his interest does not seem to extend to actually helping the Texas Republican nominees for Congress this year. Texas voters, like Americans generally, say they want the President and Congress to focus on bread-and-butter issues – prices and affordability, wages and health care, housing, etc. Instead, the President has invested most of his energy in trying to get out of a war of choice most voters think was a mistake, touting vanity projects in Washington few care a fig about, pressuring the Department of Justice to prosecute his enemies, and passing an election security law to address what most outside the hardcore MAGA base do not see as a problem.

Recently, Mr. Trump had an opportunity to address an issue voters are concerned about – housing. In a remarkably unproductive congressional session, Republicans and Democrats had come together to pass a major housing bill that would, arguably, give the GOP a notable win on an affordability issue and dilute Democratic attacks on rising costs. A bill-signing photo opportunity would give Republican candidates fodder for fall election ads making their case for keeping control of Congress. Just as this was to unfold, President Trump pulled the rug from under his party by attacking the legislation and refusing to sign it unless he got a bill passed to impose voting restrictions.

In a news analysis piece for *The New York Times*, the veteran congressional reporter Carl Hulse noted:

It was just the latest twist in an increasingly tortured relationship between Mr. Trump and his fellow Republicans, who seem dumbfounded and wondering if for some reason the president was trying to sabotage their chances in November and cost them their majorities. And it reflected how profoundly Mr. Trump had crippled his once vaunted governing trifecta, now all but paralyzed by his whipsawing demands and pronouncements.<sup>3</sup>

President Trump's general disregard for this party's congressional chances this November was dramatically evident in his actions with respect to the 28<sup>th</sup> District of Texas, represented since 2004 by Democrat Henry Cuellar of Laredo. As the Trump tide rose across South Texas, the district came into play, particularly after the FBI raided the congressman's home in 2022 and his indictment in April 2024 for allegedly accepting \$600,000 from Azerbaijan business interests to influence American policy. But Republicans ran weak candidates against Cuellar in 2022 and 2024, although his margin was less than six percent in the most recent contest. That made Henry Cuellar a top target for national Republicans this cycle as he faced trial in Houston in April 2026.

The GOP in late 2025 worked hard to persuade Webb County Judge Tano Tijerina, a popular Democrat first elected in 2016, to change parties and run against the incumbent. Just after Tijerina announced he was filing against Cuellar, Donald Trump made another announcement on December 3, 2025: He was issuing a "full and unconditional pardon" to Henry Cuellar and wife. The next day, Cuellar filed for reelection ... as a Democrat.

National Republicans were furious. Four months later Cuellar was renominated in the Democratic primary and Tijerina secured the GOP spot. The March vote totals suggest Cuellar has a big advantage. He secured 39,228 votes to 15,214 for Tijerina. In Webb County, the congressman received 25,357 votes to Tijerina's 4,494. CD 28 was supposed to be one of the five new Trump seats. Thanks in part to the president's actions, that now seems out of reach.

## ***Conclusion***

The redistricting war looks over in California – Democrats are heavily favored to gain their targeted five seats and get a 48 – 4 delegation. Texas, by contrast, is a congressional battleground with close contests in about ten districts – the five the new map hoped to flip, and as many as another five where the map weakened GOP candidates. If Republicans rally and have a strong showing in November, they might net one or two seats and end up with a 26 – 12 or 27 – 11 Texas delegation. Conversely, if there is a blue wave this fall, Democrats could gain two or three seats, resulting in "a spectacular backfire" in the words of Mark Jones and Bill King.

We'd love to hear your thoughts, questions, or perspectives on these issues. Reach out to us at [murraytx@cougarnet.uh.edu](mailto:murraytx@cougarnet.uh.edu); your input helps inform our work and keeps the conversation going.

Renee Cross contributed to this report.

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<sup>3</sup> "Trump Repeatedly Thwarts Party Facing Midterms: His Own," *The New York Times*, June 26, 2026, p. A 11.