

Texas 2024 State Report

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Summary

In Texas, election administration functions in a seemingly constant back-and-forth between urban election offices, state officials, and the state judiciary. Local officials in the state's largest counties — Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis— have tested the limits of Republican state leaders through the expansion of progressive election policy, especially since the election of Donald Trump in 2016. This report will explore the interactions between municipal and state administrators over the last four years, and what issues onlookers might expect to arise in the administration of the November 2024 election and its aftermath. Through an exploration of historical election data, election administration policy changes, and an evaluation of administration performance in recent elections, this report will address Texas' election-related strengths and weaknesses as we inch closer to November.

Analysis of the 2024 Primary Elections

On March 5, Local Election Officials (LEOs) in each of Texas' 254 counties opened polling locations for election day voters, and few issues arose around the state, both on and before Election Day. At 10 AM on election day, then-Republican Presidential candidate and former Governor of South Carolina Nikki Haley [dropped her bid](#) for the Republican nomination.

There were very few reports of any issues in administering the March 5 election, and the minor issues that arose were easily resolved. Election officials and media outlets in Travis County [reported](#) an issue with precinct boundary and assignment alignment on Election Day that potentially slowed the voting process for around 9,000 registered voters. The county reported that the issue had been resolved by 10:30 AM. Minor technology issues were also [reported](#) at locations in Irving and Denton (which are in the Dallas/Fort Worth area), but the Election Day Voter Center utilized in Denton County meant that voters could vote at any location in the county, and did not need to wait for problems at a polling location to be resolved.

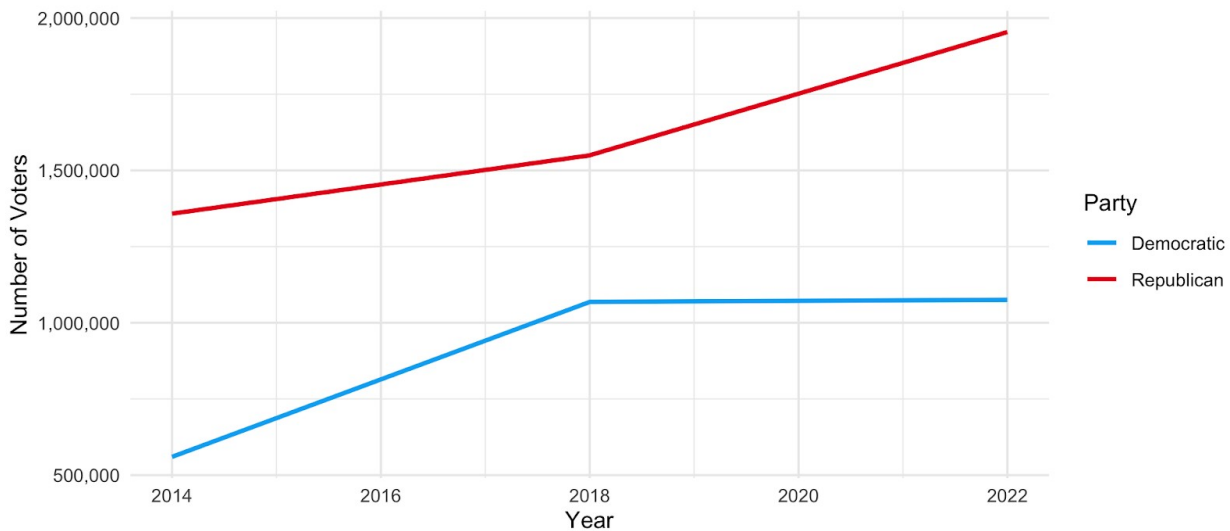
However, these issues reported in Travis, Denton, and Dallas counties were exceptions to the rule on March 5th: wait times were short statewide, and election officials reported few staffing or data issues. Critically, though, turnout in the primary election was low, particularly in a year with so many important down-ballot races.

The coming paragraphs and figures will discuss turnout in Texas' 2024 primary, especially in conversation with the state's primary in 2020, using metrics like voter registration/affiliation, county-level turnout, vote mode, and percentage of votes for each party's frontrunner to better understand trends in Texas elections. In Texas, 3,389,256 voters participated in the 2024 Texas Primary, totaling 18.9% of the state's 17,949,512 registered voters. This is down from the more competitive primary season of 2020, when 4,019,059 voters cast a ballot, making up 24.8% of the state's then-registered population of 16,211,198.

Party Affiliation and Voter Registration

Although Texas does not require voters to register with a political party, historical data shows how voters participated in primary elections in both presidential and midterm elections, which provides approximate measures of relative partisan strength.

Figure 1: Voter Affiliation in Texas Midterm Primaries by Year



Data source: Texas Secretary of State's Office
Graph source: MIT Election Data and Science Lab

Figure 2: Voter Affiliation in Texas Presidential Primaries by Year

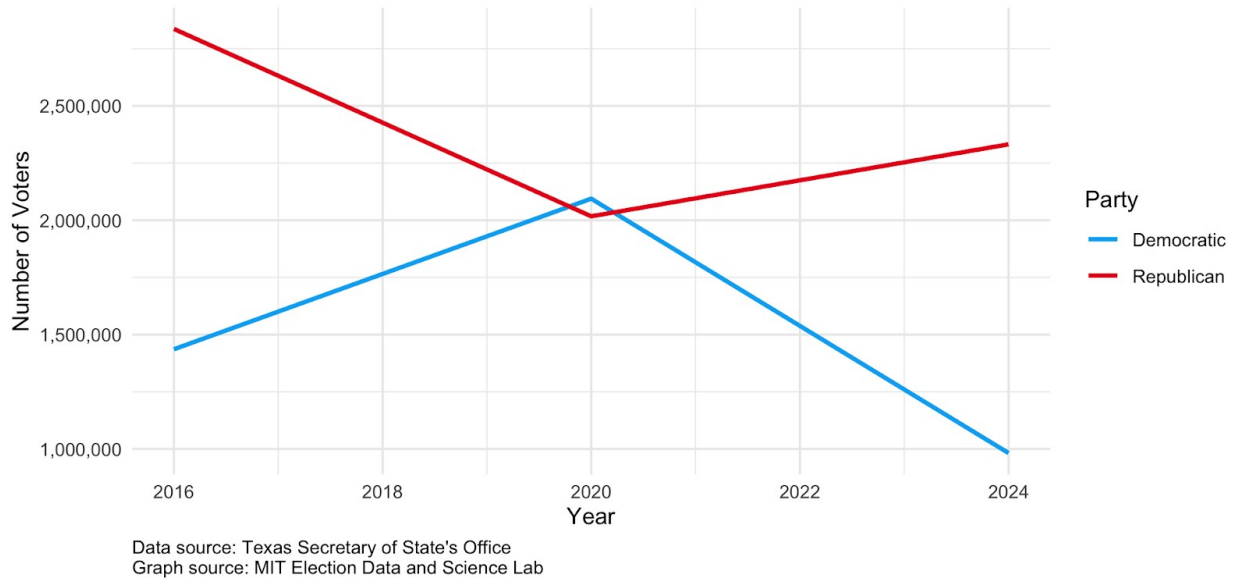


Figure 1 shows the turnout for the Democratic and Republican parties during midterm primaries in 2014, 2018, and 2022. While both parties saw a major increase in turnout from 2014 to 2018, only the Republican party saw a major uptick in affiliated primary participation between 2018 and 2022. In the Presidential Primary Elections, shown in Figure 2, high Republican turnout and low Democratic turnout in 2016 converged in 2020, when a crowded Democratic field faced off against a solidified Trump candidacy. In 2024, Democratic turnout decreased greatly, while Republican turnout increased from 2016. The decrease in Democratic primary turnout in 2024 can be attributed to voter apathy regarding an [unpopular](#) Joseph Biden re-election campaign and lack of competition for the nomination.

Figure 3: Percent Change in Texas Voter Registration by County (2020-2024)

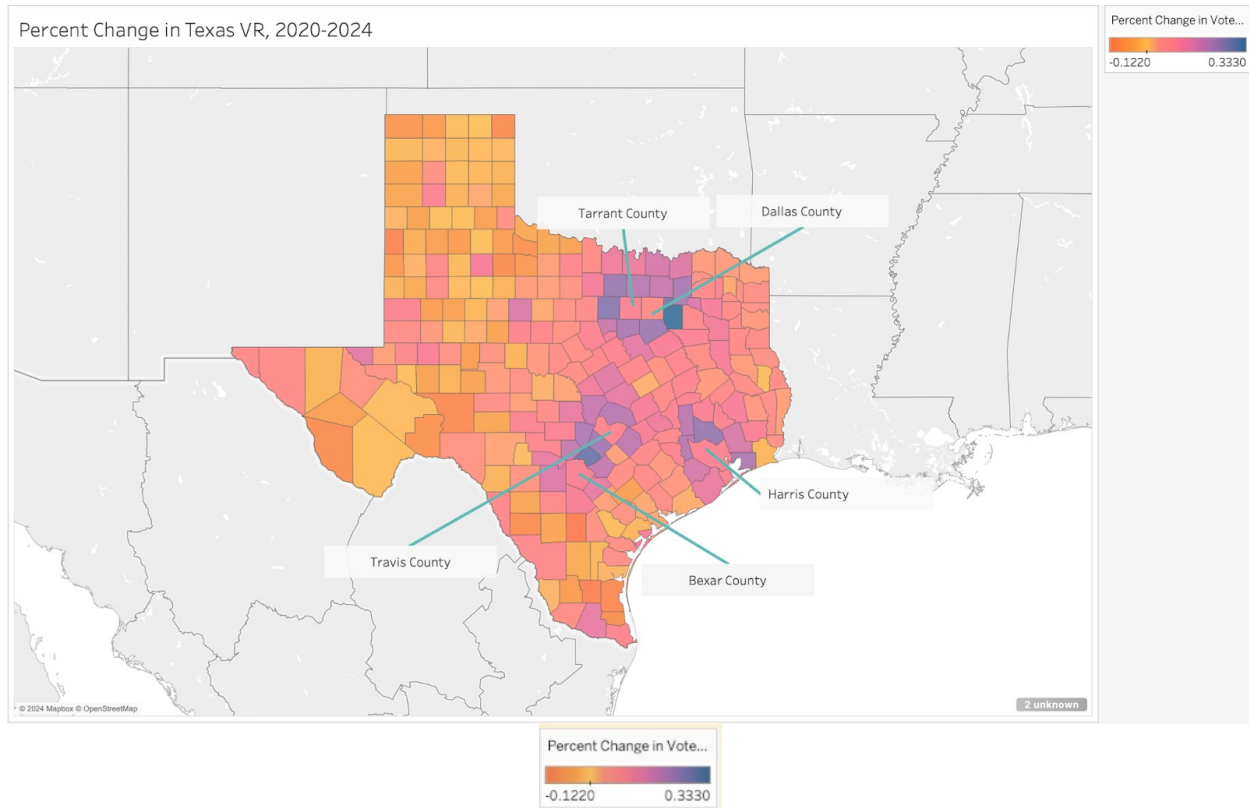
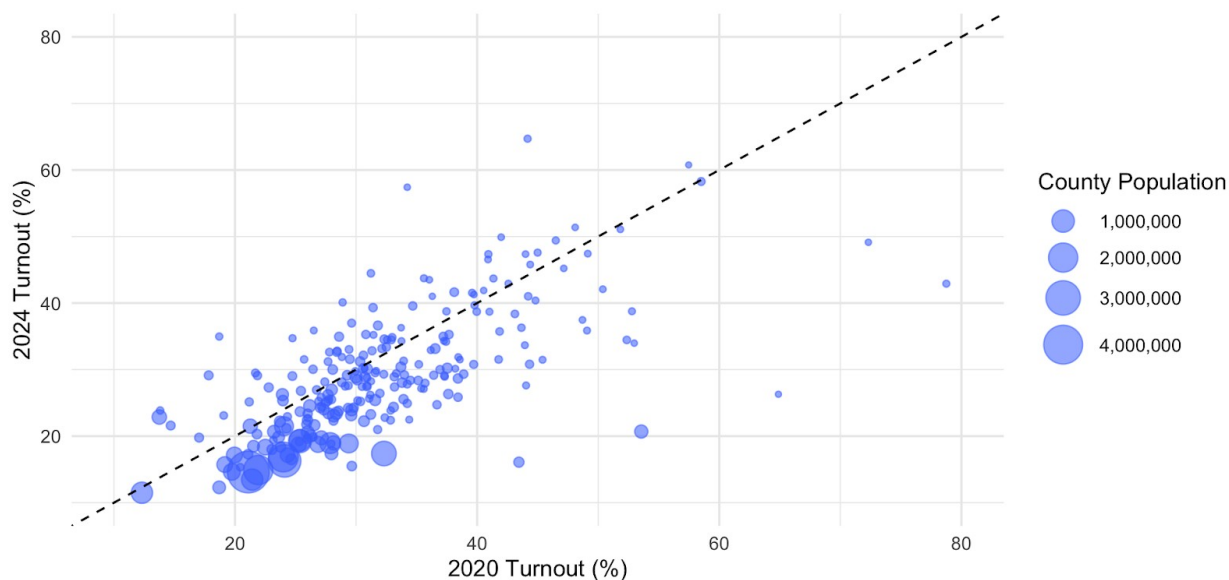


Figure 3, above, shows the percent change in voter registration in Texas counties. This map shows a trend that frequently makes the [news](#): newcomers to Texas call urban areas and their suburbs home, particularly those of Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis counties. These [new voters](#) will impact Texas elections, particularly local elections in and around metropolitan areas.

Figure 4, below, compares turnout in Texas' 2020 and 2024 primaries by county. Because Texas voters do not register with a party beforehand, all graphics (if applicable) will represent cumulative votes cast, regardless of party affiliation.

Figure 4: Texas Primary Turnout by County: 2020 versus 2024

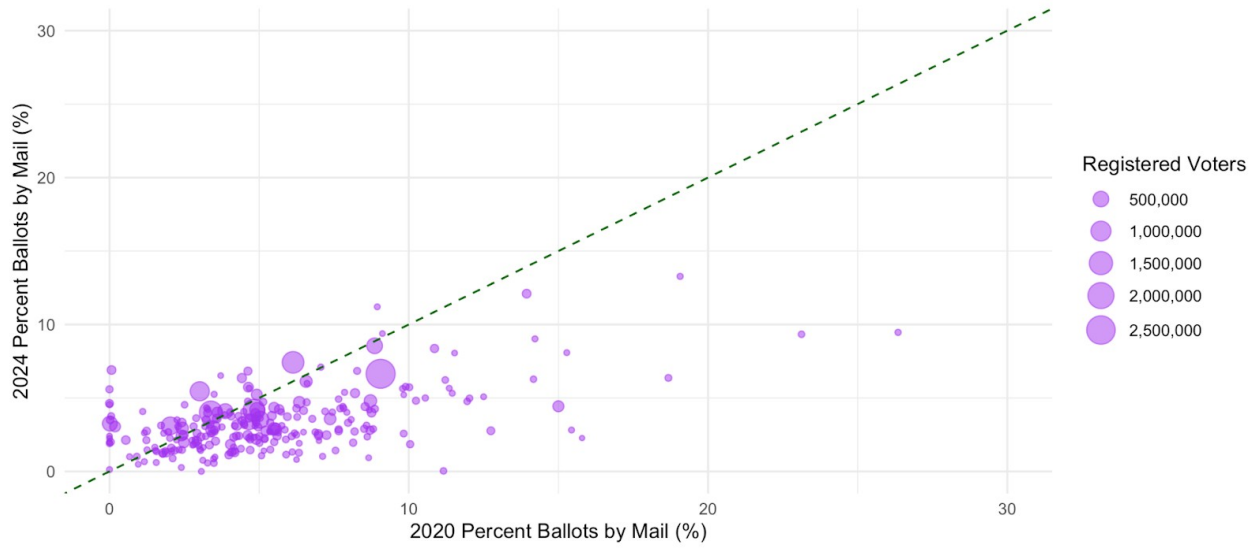


The trend in Figure 4 suggests a decrease in turnout in most populous Texas counties, particularly those with low turnout in the 2020 primary. This includes almost halved turnout in Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis, where turnout fell to the teens in 2024.

Voting Mode

In the May 5, 2024 Republican primary, [2,323,019 votes were](#) cast for a presidential candidate, while [982,069 were cast](#) for a Democratic presidential candidate that day. The usage of mail-in ballots in Texas was much higher in 2020 than in 2024. Figure 5, below, compares the overall share of ballots cast by mail in the 2020 and 2024 primary elections.

Figure 5: Texas Primary Mail Voting: 2020 versus 2024



The decline has been roughly linear, and few counties saw an increase in mail-in ballots in the 2024 primaries. This may be attributable to decreased voter concerns regarding COVID-19. Figure 8 splits the trends at the statewide level apart by party.

Figure 6: Vote Mode in Texas Primaries by Party (2020 and 2024)



Figure 6 shows that, from 2020 to 2024, the number of Republican election day votes increased by about the same amount as the number of Republican early in-person votes, while Republican mail-in votes actually *decreased* overall. In contrast, the total number of Democratic votes decreased, with in-person election day votes increasing the most, while early votes declined noticeably and mail-in votes stayed relatively flat. Evidently, resistance to mail-in voting among Texas Republicans has persisted and maybe even grown, while usage of mail-in voting by Democrats remains fairly stable.

To supplement these aggregated data, we turn to the Texas Secretary of State's [especially rich data](#) on peoples' chosen vote modes throughout every early voting period, which updates the number of ballots cast by mode every day of early voting, and divided across the two partisan contests.

In the early voting period, Republicans cast 45,351 votes early by mail, while 65,880 Democrats cast early mail-in votes. And yet, 1,180,959 Republicans voted early in-person, compared to only 530,881 Democrats. So in the 2024 early voting period, Democrats cast about 59% of early mail-in votes, but only about 31% of in-person votes. In the 2020 presidential primaries, in contrast, Democrats cast about 56% of early mail-in ballots and about 47% of in-person early votes, a much more even split. Taken together with the overall numbers in Figure 6, it is apparent that Texas Republicans have shifted dramatically away from mail-in voting, while Texas Democrats have continued to use that vote mode.

Figure 7: Texas Primary In-Person Early Voters in 2020 and 2024

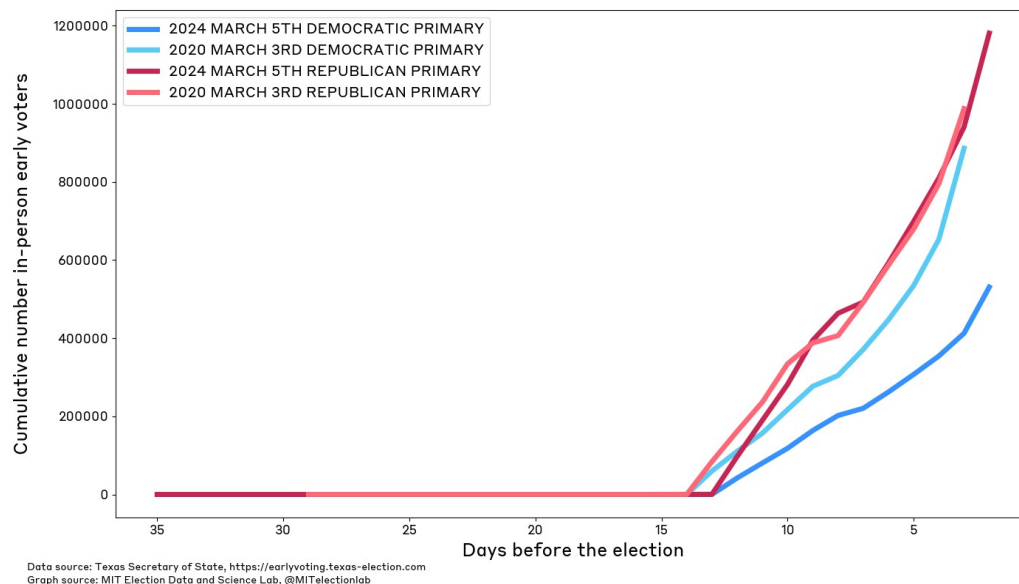
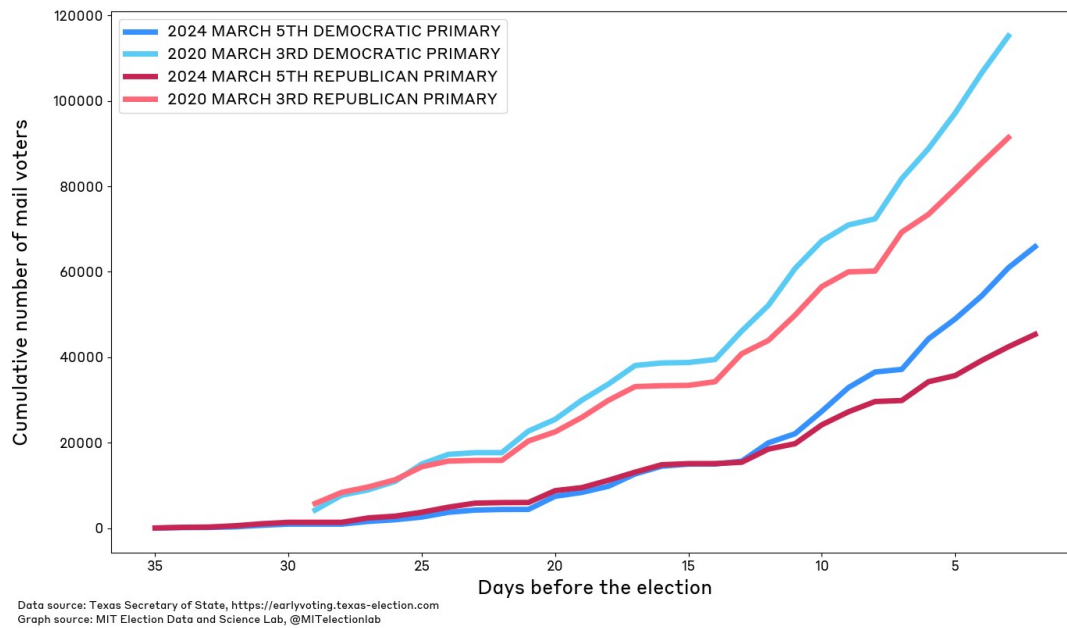


Figure 7, above, shows the number of in-person early voters over time in Texas, by party, in the 2020 and 2024 primaries. The 2020 primary was held before the COVID-19 pandemic became the national emergency that upended so much of everyday life, including voting. Thus, it is perhaps not too surprising that the number of Republican voters choosing to vote in person during the early voting period in 2024 is strikingly similar to the number who did so in 2020, even following a tightly similar trend over time. In contrast, in-person early participation in the Democratic primary fell by roughly 350,000 votes. In November's General (Uniform) Election, it will be important to note whether this trend of low in-person participation among Democratic voters, or whether this was specific to the conditions of their primary election contest.

Figure 8: Texas Primary Mail-In Early Votes in 2020 and 2024



Although some decrease in votes cast during the early vote period because of lessened safety concerns was anticipated, this gap was not closed by mail-in or election-day ballots. Figure 8, above, shows Texas' mail-in early votes in the 2020 and 2024 primaries, by political party. Lackluster early vote turnout was not accounted for by mail-in ballots, either, as turnout for both parties fell significantly, particularly in the last few days of the mail-in period. The fact that Republicans lag in this area is particularly striking, however, given how many more Republicans voted in the 2024 primary (and that voters of each party cast such similar numbers of votes in the 2020 primary) overall.

Part of the story may be the [mixed messaging](#) Republican voters have received over the last several years regarding mail-in ballots. Donald Trump's position on mail-in ballots [has shifted](#) along with those of many other prominent Republicans, which may subject Republican voters to cross-pressures that produce different electoral behaviors among voters within the party. Overall, Figure 6 shows that mail-in voting fell among Texas's Republican primary voters, and remains exceptionally low given their dominance in the state.

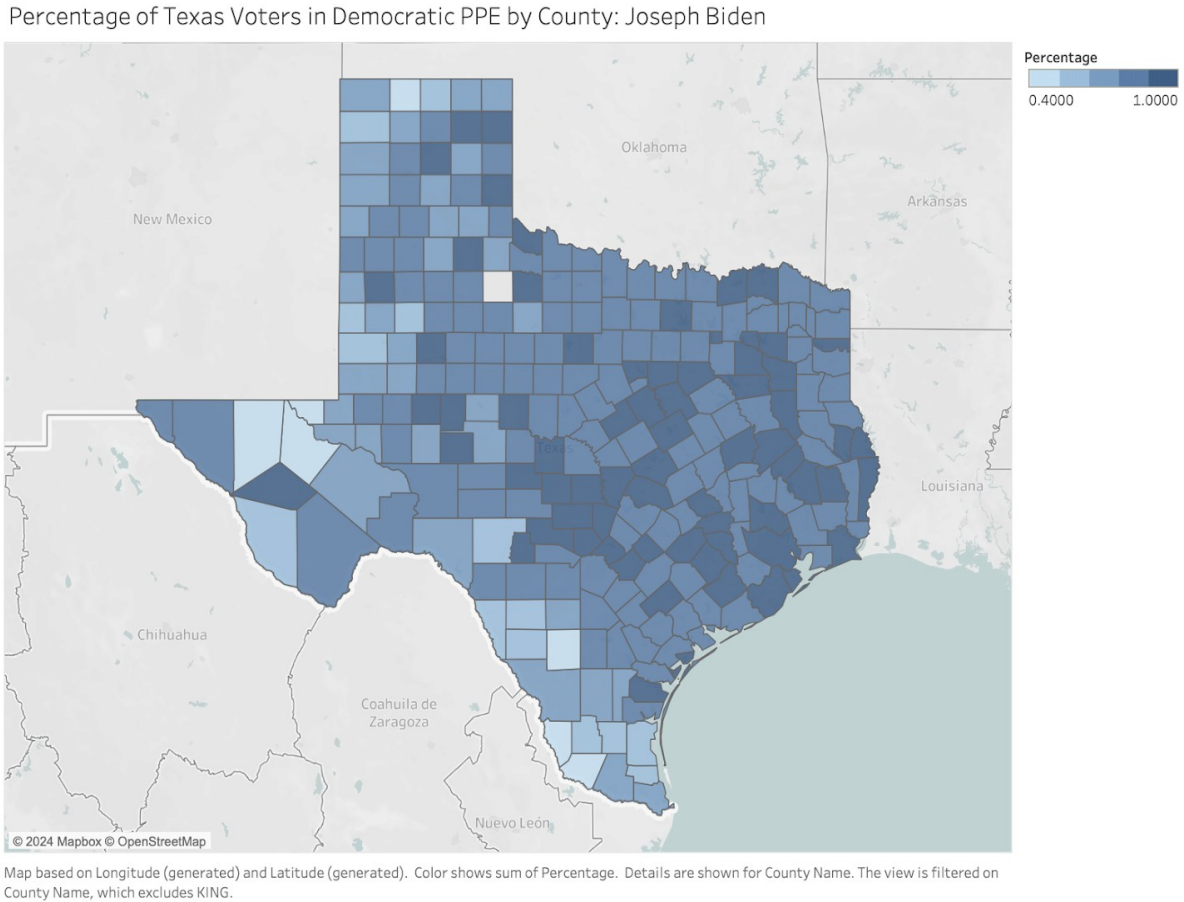
As further context for the practice of mail-in voting in Texas, the state rejected a [much higher share](#) of mail-in ballots than usual in the 2022 primary elections. The state reportedly rejected about 13% of mail-in ballots in that election. While the average rejection rate for mail-in ballots in primary elections is not known, this is much higher than what is typical in general elections; the [Elections Performance Index](#) (using data from [the Election Administration and Voting Survey](#) of the United States Election Assistance Commission) places the percent of mail-in ballots rejected as a percent of *all* ballots at a fraction of a percent in every even-year general election since at least 2008.

This spike in mail-in ballot rejection rates [occurred in the wake of](#) the state's new voter ID laws under [SB 1](#). Crucially, however, in the 2022 *general* election, [Texas's mail-in ballot rejection rate](#) was only 2.7%. [In 2023](#), a federal court in Texas issued a preliminary injunction against some of the rules that led to absentee ballot rejections. The high mail-in ballot rejection rates in the 2022 primaries, therefore, do not suggest that there will be high mail-in ballot rejection rates in the 2024 general election. Mail-in ballot rejection rates from the 2024 primary election in Texas have not been made available.

Vote Share

Having compared turnout by county and vote mode in the 2020 and 2024 primary elections, we now turn to vote share for the frontrunners of both the 2024 Democratic and Republican presidential primaries. We will see that the results are consistent with a broader narrative around the strengths of each of the candidates at the time of this primary contest: Biden faced difficulty retaining his support in the Rio Grande Valley, whereas Trump was weakest in urban areas.

Figure 9: Vote Share of Joseph Biden in the 2024 Texas Democratic PPE by County



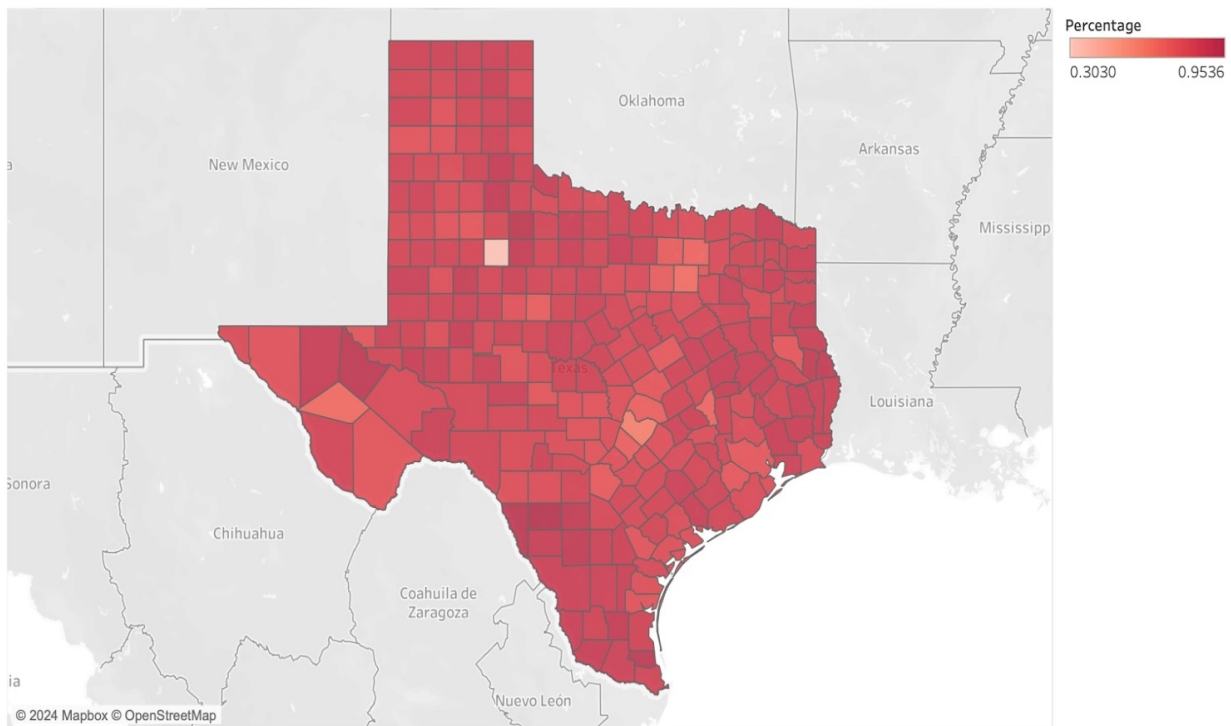
In March 2024, 982,069 Democratic primary voters cast a ballot for the presidential nomination, 831,247 of whom (84.6%) voted for President Joseph Biden. In the Republican primary, 2,323,019 voters cast a ballot for the Republican nomination, 1,808,269 of whom (77.8%) voted for Former President Donald Trump. The following figures show this vote share by county.

Figures 9 and 10, below, depict the percentage of participants in the Democratic and Republican primaries, respectively, who voted for their party’s frontrunner, Joseph Biden or Donald Trump.

Figure 9 depicts Biden’s success at gaining overwhelming support in key parts of the state: Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis counties all supported Biden at rates over 80%, while the President struggled in West Texas, particularly Northwest Texas and the Rio Grande Valley (RGV). In La Salle, Reeves, Zapata, and Starr counties (all in the RGV), voters supported Biden at rates less than 45%. One overriding narrative is that Biden had a notably low vote share in the Rio Grande Valley, a weakness which had already appeared to some extent in the 2022 midterm elections and in 2020.

Figure 10: Vote Share of Donald Trump in the 2024 Texas Republican PPE by County

Percentage of Texas Voters in Republican PPE by County: Donald Trump



Map based on Longitude (generated) and Latitude (generated). Color shows sum of Percentage. Details are shown for County Name.

Figure 10, which depicts the results of the Republican presidential primary election, tells a different story. Former President Trump performed well in the RGV, Northwest Texas,¹ and East Texas, struggling more in urban counties like Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis, where Trump received less than 75% of votes.

Figure 11: March 2024 Texas Presidential Primary Turnout by County

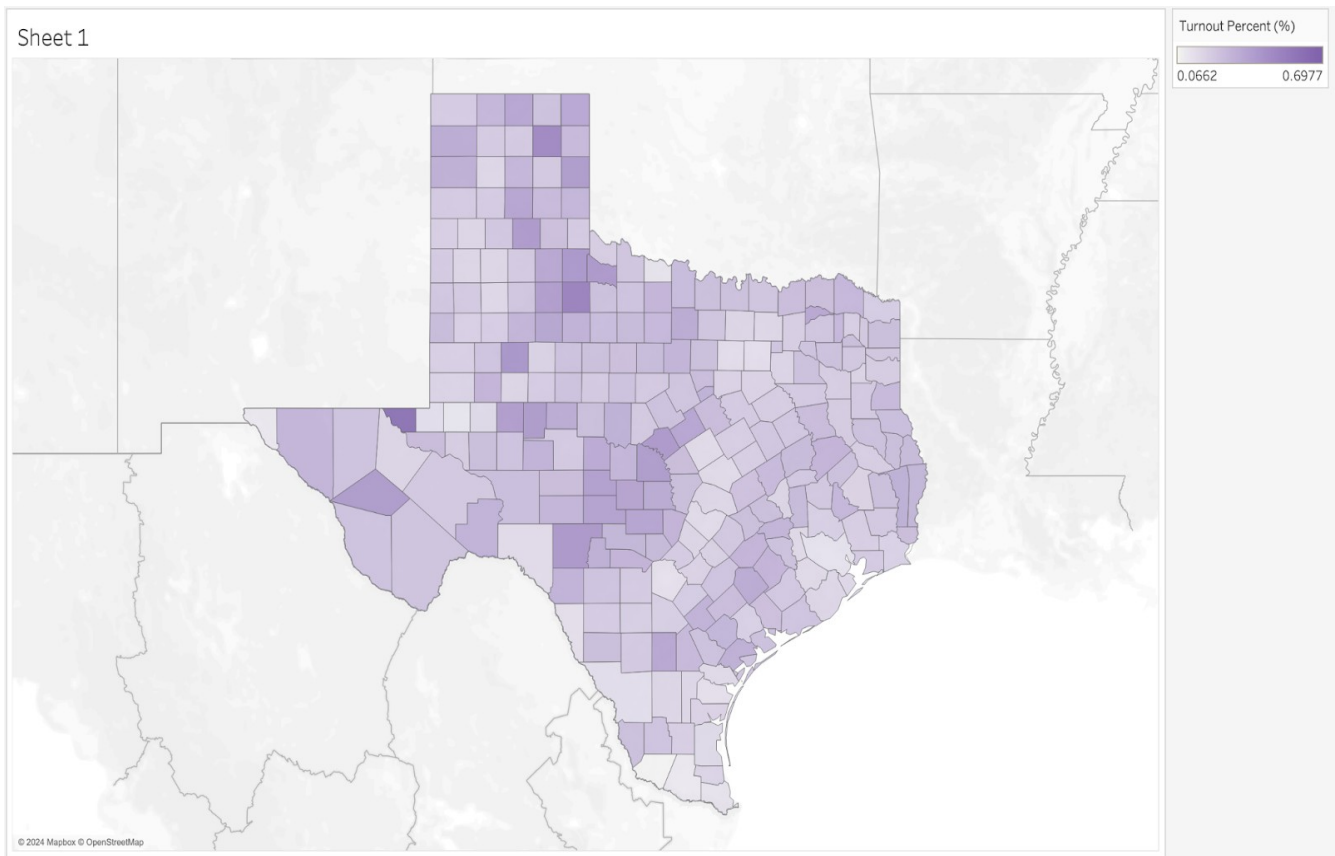
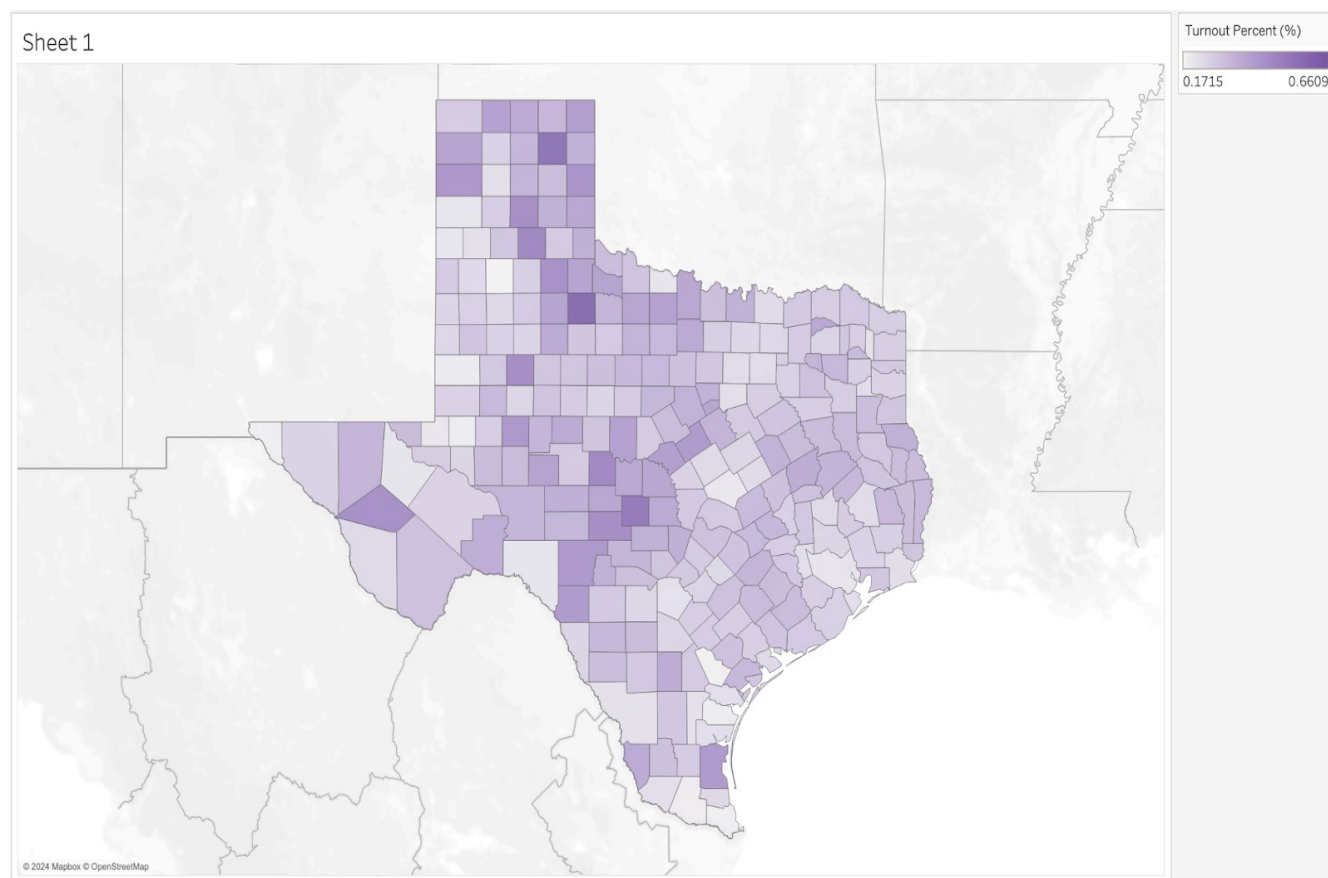


Figure 11 shows the total turnout in Texas counties in the March 2024 Primary Election for President. Turnout was particularly low in North Texas, East Texas, and South Texas. West

¹The Former President performed very well in Northwest Texas, averaging 84.99% of the votes in the region defined by the State Comptroller's Office. However, the pink-ish outlier in Northwest Texas is Kent County, where the Secretary of State's Office reports Nikki Haley to have beaten Donald Trump by more than 34 percentage points. There is reason to believe that this is a data entry error, and we intend to replace the data with a corrected version in a future update of this report.

Texas and the RGV turned out at slightly higher rates, but lower than in 2020, as shown below in Figure 12. Because of data incompleteness for the Secretary of State’s secondary turnout report in 2020 and 2024, these maps use data from the official canvass for the U.S. President in both years.

Figure 12: March 2020 Texas Presidential Primary Turnout by County



Similarly, the March 2020 Primary Election for President saw higher turnout rates in West Texas and the RGV, while East and North Texas struggled to turn voters out to the polls.

Important Races, Deadlines, and Primary Battles

In the 2024 Primary Election, party-level battles stole the show from a relatively uncontested race between President Biden, former President Trump, and their respective challengers. At the forefront of these battles were Governor Abbott and Attorney General Paxton, who

clashed with moderate Republicans for different reasons: Abbott cites his frustration with Republicans who failed to send legislation to his desk that would allow public education spending on private schools, and Paxton aims to remove those who supported his impeachment trial from power. In Texas House of Representatives District 21, Attorney General Ken Paxton and former President Trump funded and endorsed David Covey, a challenger for Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan, who voted for Paxton's impeachment. Speaker Phelan secured a victory in the primary runoff election but by less than 400 votes. The campaign to exile moderate Republicans had success, too. For instance, after he voted against Governor Greg Abbot's school voucher agenda, Rep. Travis Clardy, from Texas House District 11, [faced opposition](#) supported by Abbott, Donald Trump, and Sen. Ted Cruz. After dumping more than \$2.3 million into Travis Clardy's House District 11 race, opponents to Clardy managed to defeat him in the primary, in favor of opponent Joanne Shofner. In the months leading up to the 2024 primary and primary runoff, donors [spent](#) a combined \$31.7 million on Texas House races and \$55.2 million cumulatively, more than doubling from \$26.4 million in 2020.

The primaries also determined nominees for recently vacant U.S. House seats. Incumbents Kay Granger (R-Fort Worth), Colin Allred (D-Dallas), and Michael Burgess (R-Denton) did not seek re-election. The Republican nomination for Granger's seat will be filled by State Rep. Craig Goldman, a foe of Ken Paxton due to his role in efforts to impeach Paxton over allegations that he used his office to protect a real estate developer who faced federal criminal charges. With Colin Allred stepping down from the 32nd congressional district to run for U.S. Senate against Ted Cruz, Julie Johnson will attempt to hold onto the seat. In Burgess' district, Republican nominee Brandon Gill received former President Trump's endorsement. Other U.S. House races to watch in November will be Texas' 34th, 15th, and 28th, where Vicente Gonzalez (D-McAllen), Monica De La Cruz (R-Rio Grande Valley), and Henry Cuellar (D-San Antonio) will fight to retain their seats.

Listed below are important dates for the Texas General Election cycle, [available from the Texas Secretary of State's office](#), including candidacy, registration, vote-by-mail, and in-person voting deadlines and dates.

Figure 13: Important Deadlines and Dates for 2024 General Election

Voter Registration Deadline	Monday, October 7, 2024 (29 days before the election)
Early Voting Period	Monday, October 21, 2024 - Friday, November 1, 2024
Last Day to Apply for Ballot by Mail (Received, not Postmarked)	Friday, October 25, 2024
Election Day (Uniform Election)	Tuesday, November 5, 2024
Last day to Receive Ballot by Mail	Tuesday, November 5, 2024 (Election Day) at 7:00 p.m. if carrier envelope is not postmarked, OR Wednesday, November 6, 2024 (next business day after Election Day) at 5:00 p.m. if carrier envelope is postmarked by 7:00 p.m. at the location of the election on Election Day (unless overseas or military voter deadlines apply)

Topics of Interest

Harris County

Harris County has been a national hotspot for election administration controversies in the last four years, and there has been a succession of different county clerks since 2020. An interim county clerk was appointed in 2020, after which, the Harris County Commissioner's

Court [worked](#) to consolidate the County Clerk's responsibility of running elections with the County Tax Assessor-Collector's responsibility of voter registration, to streamline county-level civic duties in a single office. The interim clerk's [successor resigned](#) after the 2022 primary election. In 2023, Republicans in the Texas Legislature passed [SB1750](#), which restructured the county's [election administration](#), and [audited](#) Harris County's 2022 elections.

The turnover in Harris County's election administrators is part of a much larger story. Texas, like many states and regions across the nation, has struggled to retain election officials. A Bipartisan Policy Center [report](#) found that 40% of Texas' chief election officials were replaced from 2018 to 2022. High turnover has been [attributed](#) to threats to election officials and the increasing politicization of the role.

In Harris County, a tight race for the 180th District Court judgeship in 2022 [resulted](#) in an election challenge and a recount that left a Bexar County judge who oversaw the challenge unable to make a determination about the rightful winner. The case revealed that proof of residency and reasonable-impediment forms had not been filled out properly or revealed information that should have left people who cast a ballot ineligible to vote, citing flaws in training. This case points to the larger struggle of urban election offices to recruit, retain, *and* [train](#) election workers to handle an increasingly difficult job at the polls.

Ballot Secrecy

Another point of contention in Texas election administration is ballot secrecy. In the last four years, the Texas Legislature, transparency advocates, and the Secretary of State's Office have made notable changes regarding ballot secrecy that will likely be relevant during and after the November 2024 election.

Texas, like many other states, has had trouble with adequately preparing election offices to serve both as administrators and public officials, and questions around the security of elections have forced LEOs to be on the defensive. Since 2020, election security advocates

have [overwhelmed](#) Local Election Officials all over the country with requests for election data, especially cast vote records.

Though some states have curbed the release of information like cast vote records and ballot images, the Texas Legislature has encouraged it. The passage of [House Bill 5180](#) in 2023 gave the public [access](#) to cast ballots sixty-one days after Election Day. The connection between cast vote records and voter privacy is a [complex area](#) of [active study](#), but the particular collection of information that was released appeared to be enough to [identify](#) how some specific people voted without their consent. In response, Texas Secretary of State [Jane Nelson](#) and Attorney General [Ken Paxton](#) released separate advisories that election officials should not post identifying information. These events are an important case for the pressing national conversation about how to balance transparency, security, and the right to a secret ballot, especially as states have suddenly begun to release vote count data at nearly unprecedented granularity.

Cost of Elections

Over the last four years, the cost of Texas elections has been driven up by the legislature, data management companies, and right-wing advocates. On the legislative end, [House Bill 1217](#) attempts to standardize voting hours for all counties, including small rural ones. This shift, aimed at regulating election timing and ensuring consistency, has meant the closure of polling locations due to a lack of anticipated funding in small, rural counties. [Wood](#) and [San Patricio](#) counties have reported strains on their budgets because of recently passed election bills that have come without additional funding from the state. Senate Bill 924 limits the ability of counties to combine precinct-level vote locations, meaning many counties were required to expand the number and staffing of polling locations. In Hidalgo County, [43 new locations](#) (an increase of 50%) will require staffing and funding.

In Gillespie County, hand counts have [altered](#) the way the county handles election spending and ballot tabulating. Although Gillespie County has not confirmed the continuation of the change in November, estimates have [suggested](#) that hand-counting the General Election would cost the county double what it spends on a traditional presidential election. Rural areas

are not the only jurisdictions facing financial troubles: Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, Collin, Williamson, and Hays counties, which all use Votec’s VEMACS voter registration management system, are facing a [35% surcharge](#) due to Votec’s financial troubles.

Texas Political Parties

Both the Texas Republican and Democratic Party Conventions were eventful in 2024. At the former, Republicans [moved](#) to close Texas’ (open) primaries by vetting primary voters through certificates of affiliation while also choosing to ban candidates the party censures from participating in Republican primaries in the state for at least two years. At the Texas Democratic Convention, delegates [proposed](#) a new rule that would allow Democrats in the state to vote ‘No Preference’ in the Presidential Preference Election. Although the rule change was recommended in committee, it was not adopted at the convention.

Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature has been another setting for changes in election administration. Figure 14, below, details some of the legislation passed in the last two legislative sessions (2021 and 2023), especially those laws that are relevant to the content of this report.

Figure 14: [Texas](#) Election Law Changes

Law	Year	Description
House Bill 357 (Bucy)	2023	Requires the Secretary of State to set the runoff date for all runoff elections resulting from an election held on a uniform election date. This bill also modifies the authentication provisions for the ballot-by-mail tracker by eliminating the requirement for a voter to provide a registration address.
House Bill 5180 (Wilson)	2023	Cast vote records and ballot images (if maintained) shall be made available by the general custodian of election records for public inspection no later than the first day after the final

		canvass of an election.
House Bill 1217 (Swanson)	2023	Standardizes the days and hours for early voting at the main early voting polling place across counties for primary elections, the general election for state and county officers, and special elections ordered by the Governor.
Senate Bill 1599 (Hughes)	2023	Modifies certain procedures related to voting by mail, including the corrective action process for applications for ballot by mail and mail ballots.
Senate Bill 1933 (Bettencourt)*	2023	Authorizes the Secretary of State to order administrative oversight of a county office responsible for administering elections or voter registration in a county with a population of more than 4 million.
Senate Bill 1750 (Bettencourt)*	2023	Abolishes the office of elections administrator in a county with a population of more than 3.5 million.
House Bill 246 (Swanson)	2023	Requires the Secretary of State to establish a pilot program requiring a county to use a video recording device to record: (1) all areas containing voted ballots and (2) ballot counting activity performed by the early voting ballot board after the polls close on election day.
Senate Bill 924 (Springer)	2023	Provides that election precincts may only be combined in counties with a population of less than 1.2 million that are not participating in the countywide polling place program (CWPP). Additionally, the bill provides that election precincts may only be combined if the commissioner's court cannot secure a suitable public building as a polling place location and the combined polling location adequately serves the voters of the combined precinct. Under the bill, a combined election precinct may not contain more than 10,000 registered voters.

Senate Bill 1 (Hughes)	2021	The law bans drive-thru voting; provides new regulations for early voting hours, including a ban on 24-hour voting; bans the distribution of mail-in ballot applications; introduces new ID requirements for voting by mail; alters the correction process for mail-in voting; enhances protections for poll watchers; establishes monthly citizenship checks; and creates new rules for voter assistance.
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*Only impacts a single county in the state, Harris.

Conclusion

In November, Local Election Officials and the Secretary of State's Office will be required to anticipate issues like low turnout, high turnover in election administrations, new questions about how best to balance transparency with vote privacy, changing requirements for vote-by-mail ballots and ballot curing, high election costs, and new election laws that have not yet applied to a Presidential election cycle. Post-election, Local Election Officials in urban counties will likely attempt to ensure voter confidence in election results to avoid more state-led intervention in local policymaking. For the most part, though, Texas election administrators are prepared to conduct safe, secure, and accessible elections to the electorate.