

# 2020 Election – Texas Is Definitely In Play

*By Mark Fihn*

This article is an objective analysis of historical numbers, trends, with some scenarios about possible 2020 election results. I looked only back to 2012, mostly because new Congressional Districts formed after the 2010 Census went into effect then.

**Voter Participation:** The first numbers to evaluate are the simple numbers related to voter participation in Texas. Historically, Texas has one of the lowest participation rates in the country – more than 25 percentage points behind states with the highest voter participation rates, and about 10 percentage points behind the national average. There are many reasons for Texas' lagging participation in voting:

- Relative to other States, Texas makes it difficult for people to vote:
  - Voter registration is required within 30 days of an election. Many states have same-day voter registration.
  - Texas has more stringent voter identification rules than most states.
  - Early voting is not as lengthy, with fewer polling places per capita, than in most states.
  - Absentee balloting rules in Texas are more onerous than in most states.
  - Texas does not allow on-line voting, as some states do.
  - Texas requires a physical signature for registrations and absentee ballots. Most states allow for e-signatures.
  - Many states automatically confer voter registration upon the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Texas does not.
  - Texas is more aggressive about purging voter registration lists than most other states.
  - On Election Day, Texas has fewer polling places per capita than most states – sometimes resulting in long lines and frustrating waits.
  - Compared to most States, Texas makes it difficult for college students to vote.
- In recent years, Texas has been dominantly Republican, dampening voter turnout, as voters (from both parties) assume the election results are a foregone conclusion. (California and New York similarly have low voter participation rates for this reason).
- Because Texas has generally been assumed to go Republican in the Presidential election, Presidential candidates in recent years have done minimal electioneering in the State, spent relatively little on getting out the vote, or making local campaign promises that might inspire voter participation – all of which dampen voter turnout.
- It should also be noted that in Texas there is a huge difference between the number of voting-age citizens versus the number of voting-eligible citizens. Restrictions on voter eligibility are generally much more onerous in Texas than in most other states, (only New Jersey is more restrictive). 8% of Texas citizens are not allowed to vote, (primarily related to those in prison, on probation or on parole – but also related to mental health disqualifiers and to the simple fact that you must be registered to vote before you can actually vote). The national average for such disqualifications of citizens from voting is 4.5%, with Montana and West Virginia have the lowest disqualification rates – at 1.0%. In other words, amidst efforts to assure that non-citizens do not illegally vote, Texas disenfranchises many more actual citizens than in any other state.

Texas Voter Participation				
	Total Ballots Counted	Voting Eligible Population		Voter Participation Rate
2018	8,371,655	18,377,841	+5.3%	45.6
2016	8,969,226	17,448,910	+4.6%	51.4
2014	4,727,208	16,675,420	+3.4%	28.3
2012	7,993,851	16,119,973	+3.9%	49.6

The above numbers represent the eligible voters, not the voting-age citizens, (where the Texas voter participation rate is about 8 points lower). We can project that in the 2020 election, the number of eligible voters will be about 5% higher than in 2018 – or about 19,270,000 eligible voters.

**Texas Demographics:** Additionally, we know one other pertinent factor about the demographics of Texas that has changed in the past decade:

Texas Demographics by Race					
	Anglo	Black	Hispanic	Other	Total
2020*	11,914,045	3,466,308	12,968,026	2,193,599	30,541,978
2018	11,826,470	3,348,098	12,181,167	2,010,744	29,366,479
2016	11,729,618	3,230,618	11,439,402	1,840,607	28,240,245
2014	11,624,881	3,114,187	10,740,456	1,682,418	27,161,942
2012	11,552,523	2,986,753	10,016,357	1,503,570	26,059,203
2020*	39.0%	11.3%	42.5%	7.2%	100.0%
2018	40.3%	11.4%	41.5%	6.8%	100.0%
2016	41.5%	11.4%	40.5%	6.5%	100.0%
2014	42.8%	11.5%	39.5%	6.2%	100.0%
2012	44.3%	11.5%	38.4%	5.8%	100.0%

In the mid-2000s, Texas became a majority minority state, and as seen above that trend has continued... In 2018, the Hispanic/Latino population exceeded the Anglo population for the first time. In the 2020 election, for the first time, will see minority populations that represent more than 60% of the Texas population.

While the racial make-up of Texas is certain to create political changes, the impact of these racial changes is somewhat muted because a disproportionately large population of the Hispanic community is comprised on non-citizens. Additionally, the Hispanic population is considerably younger than the state as a whole, meaning that a larger percentage of Hispanics are still not old enough to vote. And lastly, a disproportionate percentage of the black population is in prison, on parole or on probation, such that they are not eligible to vote in Texas.

**2020 Statewide Elections in Texas:** Democrats are excited about statewide elections in 2020, given enormous improvements in recent elections. Republicans argue that Texas is still solidly Republican – and that the Beto O’Rourke result in 2018 is nothing but an exceptional situation.

Texas vote results for President of the United States				
	Republican	Democratic	Other	Total
Votes 2016	4,685,047	3,877,868	406,311	8,969,226
Votes 2012	4,569,843	3,308,124	115,884	7,993,851
Percent 2016	52.2	43.2	4.6	
Percent 2012	57.2	41.4	1.4	

Texas vote results for US Senate				
	Republican	Democratic	Other	Total
Votes 2018	4,260,553	4,045,632	65,470	8,371,655
Votes 2014	2,861,531	1,597,387	140,220	4,648,358
Votes 2012	4,440,137	3,194,927	229,758	7,864,822
Percent 2018	50.9	48.3	0.8	
Percent 2014	61.6	34.4	4.0	
Percent 2012	56.5	40.6	2.9	

The problem Republicans have with the suggestion that Beto O’Rourke’s strong performance was unusual, is that it wasn’t just Beto – Democrats did unusually well throughout Texas, but Democrats also did well throughout the entire nation. Texas Republicans cannot rely on the assumption that historical GOP strength and ongoing efforts to make it difficult for Democrats to vote will assure victories in 2020. It is true that Beto O’Rourke was very charismatic and liking,

competing against Ted Cruz – a bullying competitor who alienates many – including many Republicans. In any case, neither Ted Cruz nor Beto O’Rourke is running in the 2020 Senate election. We don’t know who will be the candidate for the Democrats yet, but there are several popular personalities competing in the upcoming primary. And although John Cornyn is much more likable than Ted Cruz, he will necessarily be running as a strong supporter of Donald Trump. And riding on Trump’s coattails may be a big problem for Republicans.

- First, in 2016, Trump’s results in Texas were less than enthusiastic. Against Hillary Clinton, an unpopular Democratic candidate, Trump did not fare that well. In the 2012 Presidential election, Romney beat a very popular Obama by 15.9 points. Trump managed to beat Clinton by a significantly reduced margin of 9.0 points.
- Trump’s 2016 win was prior to numerous policy positions that have impacted Texans negatively in a more direct way than to most Americans, (healthcare impact, trade war, caging of immigrants on the border, etc.). While Trump’s “base” is strong in Texas, for many moderate Republicans and Independents, it will be difficult for Trump to replicate 2016 in Texas.
- In fact, 4 Republican incumbent Representatives have announced they will not seek re-election. At least one factor in these retirements is a recognition that running in Trump’s glow will be difficult in 2020. At least 3 of 4 of these incumbents are in Districts that could easily flip to Democrats.
- And it’s entirely likely, almost certain in fact, that in the next 9 months, Trump will do something atrocious that will again bring his credibility to question...

<b>Texas vote results for Highest Turnout Election</b>				
	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democratic</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Did not Vote</b>
Senate Vote 2018	4,260,553	4,045,632	65,470	10,006,186
POTUS Vote 2016	4,685,047	3,877,868	406,311	8,479,684
Senate Vote 2014	2,861,531	1,597,387	140,220	12,027,062
POTUS Vote 2012	4,569,843	3,308,124	115,884	8,126,122
Percent 2018	23.2	22.0	0.4	54.4
Percent 2016	26.9	22.2	2.3	48.6
Percent 2014	17.2	9.6	0.8	71.7
Percent 2012	28.3	20.5	0.7	50.4

The numbers above include the number of people eligible to vote that did not vote, highlighting the extent to which Texans are not involved in the electoral process. The number of people in Texas who did not vote in the 2018 election is roughly equivalent to the total combined populations of Hawaii, New Hampshire, Maine, Montana, Rhode Island, Delaware, South Dakota, North Dakota, Alaska, Vermont, and Wyoming (States that combined have 37 Electoral votes)!

- In 2012, Republicans beat Democrats by 7.8 points.
- In 2014, Republicans beat Democrats by 7.6 points.
- In 2016, Republicans beat Democrats by 4.7 points.
- In 2018, Republicans beat Democrats by 1.2 points.

Consider this trend differently, as Democrats outperformed Republicans from election to election.

- From 2012 to 2014, GOP lost 1,708,312 votes; Democrats lost 1,710,737 votes. -2,425
- From 2014 to 2016, GOP gained 1,823,516 votes; Democrats gained 2,280,481 votes. +456,965
- From 2016 to 2018, GOP lost 424,494 votes; Democrats gained 167,764 votes. +592,258

From 2018 to 2020, Texas Democrats need to outperform Republicans by 214,922 votes to win the Presidential election. That is not to say that Democrats will need 4,260,554 votes in 2020; they will almost certainly need to be more than that. For example, if Republicans rally 28.3% of the expected number of eligible voters in 2020, (19,270,000) – as they did in 2012 – that will translate to 5,453,410 votes. To win by more than a challengeable amount, Democrats would probably need about 6 million votes. Such high vote numbers seem unlikely since they would require a voter participation rate approaching 60%, which although certain normal for many states, is considerably beyond historical voter participation rates in Texas.

**National attention:** One big advantage that Democrats will have in 2020 is that the Democratic National Committee and major Democratic donors are likely to put MUCH more attention on helping Democrats win in Texas in 2020 than in the past. As Texas moves closer to voting “blue”, or at least “purple”, the eyes of the nation will be on Texas.

- In 2020, if Democrats win the Presidential vote in Texas, it’s almost certain that with Texas’ 38 Electoral votes the Democratic candidate will win the Presidency.
- If a Democrat wins the Presidential ballot in Texas, it’s likely that a Democrat will similarly defeat Cornyn for the Senate seat.
- And although it’s already predictable that 2-3 House seats will flip, a strong showing could flip 5-6 House seats.
- And needless to say, there are downstream State elections that could enable Democrats to flip both of the Texas State Houses.
- A quick look at Texas demographics, Hispanic, Black, and youth populations that will all increasingly exceed national averages by substantial margins, it’s in the best interests of the DNC to really reach out to Texas Democrats at this time.
- Perhaps the most notable thing about voter turnout in Texas is that people who do not vote dominate the State’s politics. Texas is simply the biggest opportunity to gain votes nationally. Don’t forget that because of substantial population growth in Texas relative to the nation’s population growth, starting with the 2022 elections, after reapportionment based on the 2020 Census, Texas will gain 3 Congressional seats. That means that Texas will have more influence in the House of Representatives and a bigger role in the Electoral College.

All of this points to a very likely prediction that Texas elections will come to the forefront in the nation. While this attention would detract from election efforts in other pivotal States, the GOP simply cannot afford lose Texas, so they will similarly need to divert funding away from other States to Texas.

House of Representatives, Texas delegation: The recent voting history for Representatives in Texas is also quite interesting – highlighting the power of gerrymandering as a method to negate representative democracy in the State of Texas:

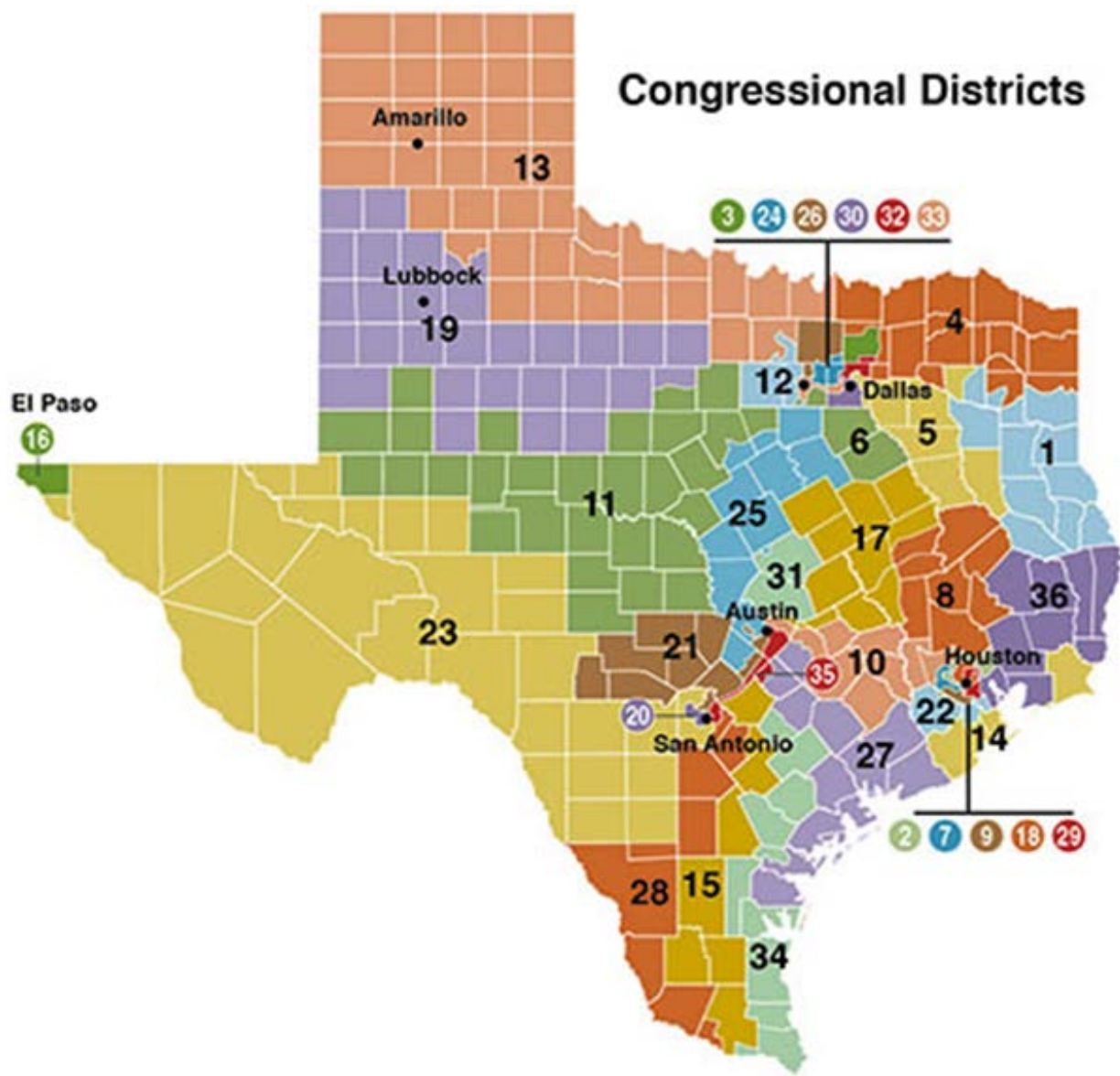
<b>Texas vote results for US House of Representatives</b>				
	<b>Republican</b>	<b>Democratic</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
Votes 2018	4,135,359	3,852,752	214,597	8,202,708
Votes 2016	4,877,605	3,160,535	490,386	8,528,526
Votes 2014	2,684,592	1,474,015	294,891	4,453,499
Votes 2012	4,429,270	2,959,900	285,068	7,664,208
Percent 2018	50.4	47.0	2.6	
Percent 2016	57.2	37.1	5.7	
Percent 2014	60.3	33.1	6.6	
Percent 2012	57.8	38.5	3.7	
Seats 2018	23	13	0	
Seats 2016	25	11	0	
Seats 2014	25	11	0	
Seats 2012	24	12	0	
Percent 2018	63.9	36.1	0.0	
Percent 2016	69.4	30.6	0.0	
Percent 2014	69.4	30.6	0.0	
Percent 2012	66.7	33.3	0.0	
Gerrymander 2018	+13.5	-10.9	-2.6	
Gerrymander 2016	+12.2	-6.5	-5.7	
Gerrymander 2014	+9.1	-2.5	-6.6	
Gerrymander 2012	+8.9	-5.2	-3.7	

The 2018 elections showcase the significant impact of gerrymandering. 47% of the vote for Representatives in 2018 went to Democrats, but only 36.1% of the seats went to Democrats.

For the 2020 House elections, 4 Republicans have already announced that they will not be running for re-election, removing the advantage of incumbency, to the extent that Democrats are expressing confidence about flipping 3 of the 4 seats. Based on voting in 2018, there are reasonable possibilities of Democrats flipping as many as 6 seats as highlighted in green below:

2018 Texas vote results for US House of Representatives – by District								
	Republican		Democratic		Other		Total	
District 1	168,165	72.3%	61,263	26.3%	3,292	1.4%	232,720	100%
District 2	139,188	52.8%	119,992	45.6%	4,212	1.6%	263,392	100%
District 3	169,520	54.3%	138,234	44.3%	4,604	1.5%	312,358	100%
District 4	188,667	75.7%	57,400	23.0%	3,178	1.3%	249,245	100%
District 5	130,617	62.3%	78,666	37.6%	224	0.1%	209,507	100%
District 6	135,961	53.1%	116,350	45.4%	3,731	1.5%	256,042	100%
District 7	115,642	47.5%	127,959	52.5%	0	0.0%	243,601	100%
District 8	200,619	73.4%	67,930	24.9%	4,621	1.7%	273,170	100%
District 9	0	0.0%	136,256	89.1%	16,745	10.9%	153,001	100%
District 10	157,166	51.1%	144,034	46.8%	6,627	2.2%	307,827	100%
District 11	176,603	80.1%	40,631	18.4%	3,143	1.4%	220,377	100%
District 12	172,557	64.3%	90,994	33.9%	4,940	1.8%	268,491	100%
District 13	169,027	81.5%	35,083	16.9%	3,175	1.5%	207,285	100%
District 14	138,942	59.2%	92,212	39.3%	3,374	1.4%	234,528	100%
District 15	63,862	38.8%	98,333	59.7%	2,607	1.6%	164,802	100%
District 16	49,127	27.0%	124,437	68.5%	8,190	4.5%	181,754	100%
District 17	134,841	56.8%	98,070	41.3%	4,440	1.9%	237,351	100%
District 18	38,368	20.8%	138,704	75.3%	7,260	3.9%	184,332	100%
District 19	151,946	75.2%	50,039	24.8%	0	0.0%	201,985	100%
District 20	0	0.0%	139,038	80.9%	32,925	19.2%	171,963	100%
District 21	177,654	50.2%	168,421	47.6%	7,542	2.1%	353,617	100%
District 22	152,750	51.4%	138,153	46.5%	6,502	2.2%	297,405	100%
District 23	103,285	49.2%	102,359	48.7%	4,425	2.1%	210,069	100%
District 24	133,317	50.6%	125,231	47.5%	4,870	1.9%	263,418	100%
District 25	163,023	53.3%	136,385	44.8%	5,145	1.7%	304,553	100%
District 26	185,551	59.4%	121,938	39.0%	5,016	1.6%	312,505	100%
District 27	125,118	60.3%	75,929	36.6%	6,374	3.1%	207,421	100%
District 28	0	0.0%	117,494	84.4%	21,732	15.6%	139,226	100%

District 29	28,098	23.9%	88,188	75.1%	1,208	1.0%	117,494	100%
District 30	0	0.0%	166,784	91.1%	16,390	9.0%	183,174	100%
<b>District 31</b>	<b>144,680</b>	<b>50.6%</b>	136,362	47.7%	4,965	1.7%	286,007	100%
District 32	126,101	45.8%	144,067	52.3%	5,452	2.0%	275,620	100%
District 33	26,120	21.9%	90,805	76.2%	2,299	1.9%	119,224	100%
District 34	57,243	40.0%	85,825	60.0%	0	0.0%	143,068	100%
District 35	50,553	26.1%	138,278	71.3%	5,236	2.7%	194,067	100%
District 36	161,048	72.6%	60,908	27.4%	0	0.0%	221,956	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,135,359</b>	<b>50.4%</b>	<b>3,852,752</b>	<b>47.0%</b>	<b>214,597</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>8,202,708</b>	<b>100%</b>



Democrats are targeting the following 6 Districts (highlighted in green) as having a reasonable possibility of flipping:

- District 10 – Republican incumbent Michael McCaul won the 2018 election by 4.3 points against a lightly-funded Democratic opponent. There are rumors that McCaul may retire, although that seems unlikely. Ongoing suburbanization in both Austin and Houston are turning the District increasingly blue.



- District 21 – Incumbent Chip Roy was narrowly elected for the first time in the 2018 election – by 2.8 points. The District represents the Hill Country to the West of Austin, an area increasingly shifting blue. Popular former Texas State Senator, Wendy Davis, is running as Roy’s primary Democratic challenger.
- District 22 – Incumbent Pete Olson is retiring after winning the District by only 4.9 points in 2018. The District is just to the west of Houston and is quickly shifting blue with the suburbanization of Houston.
- District 23 – Incumbent Will Hurd is retiring, after winning the District by only 0.5 points in 2018. Most analysts believe Democrats will almost certainly win this Seat in 2020.
- District 24 – Incumbent Kenny Marchant is retiring after winning the District by only 3.1 points in 2018. The District represents an increasingly blue area north of Dallas.
- District 31 – Incumbent John Carter won the District in 2018 by only 2.9 points. The District, to the North of Austin is rapidly turning blue as Austin’s sprawl heads north. Note: Carter is 78 years old and has suffered recently from some health problems. He lives in my Congressional District and I saw him recently – and can attest that he appears “feeble”, as compared to only 3-4 years ago when I last saw him. In my opinion, he will NOT be involved in an “active” campaign. I will not be surprised if he retires. If his health is not an issue, I suspect he will win by a narrow margin.

It may not happen in 2020, but simple demographic changes that unless the Republican Party quickly makes significant changes that more directly focus on the needs of the majority-minority population, the Democratic Party will soon dominate the politics of Texas. While gerrymandering, voter suppression, and the big financial interests of special interest groups may delay the demise of the Republican influence in Texas, such efforts are only temporary.

Democrats in Texas are cautiously optimistic about substantial gains in the upcoming 2020 election. And in addition to the Federal elections/trends discussed in this article, Texas Democrats are also quite focused on also resetting the State level political scene.

Republican friends that I talk to all seem intensely convinced that 2018 was an anomaly, and that Texas will remain red dominantly red in 2020, and likely beyond, to the point of sounding over-confident... In my experience, over-confidence is the biggest explanation whenever the underdog wins...

I moved to Texas in 1982 – at age 23 – a time when State politics in Texas was dominated by Democrats. Back then, only 4 of 24 legislative districts were controlled by Republicans. But a transition was taking place, for example with the elections of Governor Bill Clements and Senator Phil Gramm. By the mid/late 1990s Republicans became dominant in all of Texas politics. In other words, it was mostly my generation, (white men now in their 50’s and 60’s) who facilitated this political change. But now in 2020, these same white men have stridently sought to preserve their political might – without accommodating to the profound demographic changes in Texas. Now, a new generation of younger leaders, increasingly comprised of women, blacks, and Latinos, is again changing the political landscape in Texas.

2020 may be the year we see a substantial political change in Texas, one that will be unlikely to change again for another generation. Texas can look at the example of California, which similarly shifted from Republican to Democrat – only about 20 years sooner...

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Note: I previously thought the shift from Republican to Democratic domination in Texas would be in 2024 or perhaps 2026. Due to the disrespect that Donald Trump has brought to American politics, I believe that he is quite likely to be the cause of a more rapid political shift than I’d previously expected.

Additional note: With both Beto O’Rourke and Julian Castro withdrawing from the Democratic race for President, it’s now mostly certain that the next President will not be from Texas. But there is still a possibility that the next Vice-President will be from Texas. I believe that the Democrats will have a woman on the 2020 ticket, so if Elizabeth Warren or Amy Klobuchar get the nomination, it’s quite possible that either of them would pick either O’Rourke or Castro as a running mate. If Sanders, Biden, Buttigieg, or Bloomberg are chosen, I can imagine outside possibilities of a Texas woman running mate – in either Cecile Richards or perhaps Wendy Davis.