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Texas Election Summary – Fall 2022

Overview

Republican Gov. Greg Abbott decisively won a third term Tuesday, defeating Democrat Beto O'Rourke in a race that focused on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, a high-profile power grid failure, voting rights, abortion, and school shootings. The victory underlined Abbott's durability after record spending that topped more than \$200 million in a state where Republicans in recent years have seen their lopsided margins of victories shrink. Still, as we head into the bi-annual Texas Legislative Session in January 2023, Abbott will remain buffeted by a solid GOP majority in the Legislature following victories in the Texas House and Senate.

As far as statewide races go, the Republican slate has swept 13 straight elections since the last Democrats were elected in 1994, and last night was no different. All statewide officeholders up for re-election held their respective offices with the average margin of victory for all key statewide offices being 10% or higher. If Democrats have anything to show for this election, it's that they won two of three congressional seats up for grabs in South Texas — denying Republicans their hopes of statement victories in a heavily Hispanic region.

Texas House

Redistricting largely took competitive seats off the map and instead locked in stable Republican majorities and solid Democratic blocs in each legislative chamber. In the House, Republicans gained three seats but failed to capitalize on a few opportunities that party leaders believed were clearly winnable. The Republicans' victories were most visible in South Texas, where the GOP won key races after targeting the historically Democratic region following President Joe Biden's underperformance there in 2020. Conversely, Democrats were able to secure wins in two seats that were previously held by Republicans.

Key Wins for Republicans

- HD37, which is held by Rep. Alex Dominguez (D-Brownsville), was won by Republican Janie Lopez, 52%-48%. Dominguez unsuccessfully sought a Senate seat.
- HD52, which is held by Rep. James Talarico (D-Round Rock), was won by Republican Caroline Harris, 56%-44% (2 boxes were still out at press time). Talarico won in nearby HD50.
- HD65, which is held by Rep. Michelle Beckley (D-Carrollton), was won by Republican Kronda Thimesch, 60%-40%. Beckley unsuccessfully ran for statewide office.
- Republicans also retained control of two previously held Democrat seats flipped during the interim, with Rep. Ryan Guillen (party switch) and Rep. John Lujan (special election) keeping their seats.

Key Wins for Democrats

- HD70, which is held by Rep. Scott Sanford (R-McKinney), was narrowly won by Democrat Mihaela Plesa, 50.7%-49.3%, over Jamee Jolly (R). Sanford did not seek re-election.

- HD92, which is held by Rep. Jeff Cason (R-Bedford), was won as expected by Salman Bhojani (D), 58%-42%. Cason did not seek re-election.

Of the seats won by both parties, only HD 37 and HD 92 appear to be truly competitive wins coming out of redistricting. Overall, Republicans will enter the session with an 86-64 advantage in the Texas House.

Texas Senate

The Texas Senate only had a few races to speak of, and none were consequential to the chamber's majority, which remains solidly Republican. In one notable race, Republicans extended their overall numbers by at least one after state Rep. Phil King, R-Weatherford, won the election to Senate District 10, formerly held by Democrat Beverly Powell. The district was previously anchored entirely in Tarrant County but was dispersed to the west and south in last year's redistricting process and made more advantageous for Republicans. Powell, who had filed for reelection, eventually quit the race claiming it was unwinnable after redistricting.

Senator Roland Gutierrez (D-San Antonio) retained his seat while former Senator Pete Flores (R-Pleasanton), won an open seat, followed by the departure of Sen. Dawn Buckingham, who elected to run (and won) the open Land Commissioner spot. Meanwhile, in South Texas, Republicans came within 570 votes of winning a second senate seat; however, Morgan LaMantia (D) defeated Adam Hinojosa (R), 50.2%-49.8%, in a race that will almost certainly go to a recount. King's victory means that Republicans now hold at least 19 of the Senate's 31 seats.

Key Takeaways

Republicans have mixed results with Hispanic Texans. Biden won the Hispanic vote by 19 points in 2020, but that was down from Hillary Clinton's 27-point margin in 2016, which is due, in part, to targeted efforts by Republicans to win over Hispanic voters. And, over the past two years, Republicans have made steady gains in numerous races and at all levels of elected office with Hispanic Texans. During this election, national Republicans had their eyes on three South Texas congressional seats but only claimed one, which was a disappointment felt by party officials in Washington. The Texas House of Representatives expanded its numbers by winning a key South Texas seat and retaining seats currently held by Hispanic Republicans.

Republicans retain both chambers ahead of the 2023 Legislative Session. The balance of power leading into the 2023 Texas Legislative Session will remain in the hands of Republicans. Following pivotal election victories in 2020, ahead of redistricting, Republicans in the Texas House and Senate were able to cement maps for the upcoming election cycle(s) to ensure majorities remained. Gains made by Republicans during the interim were achieved through party switches and aggressive campaigns to unseat long-held Democrat seats in South Texas.