



Is Texas Going the Way of California?

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At one time, California was a reliable state for the Republicans, producing a couple of presidents, several governors, senators, and members of the House of Representatives. California's Proposition 13, which reduced property taxes via initiative petition in the 1970s, launched an anti-tax revolt across the country and previewed the national mood swinging more conservative in the 1980s.



But then came the surge of immigration and other factors, and California went from a red state to a purple state, and finally to a solidly blue state in a very short period of time. Even Orange County, California, once a bastion of conservatism, is now represented only by Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Could Texas be the new California?

After all, Texas produced a couple of Republican presidents (although the Bushes were not considered very conservative), governors, senators, and a solidly Republican delegation.

With all of the talk about Donald Trump's breaking through in the "Blue Wall" of Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin in his victory over Democrat Hillary Clinton in 2016, were Trump to lose Texas and its 38 electoral votes in 2020, what happens in Michigan might not matter that much.

What is particularly concerning to Republicans is that Texas might be ready to not only flip in the presidential contest, but other races down the ballot — U.S. House races and the U.S. Senate contest pitting incumbent Republican John Cornyn against a yet-unnamed Democrat — could be in jeopardy for the GOP.

What happened? "The Texas GOP took a little bit of it for granted," Representative Randy Weber, a four-term Republican member of the House, said recently.

"Republicans need to be very concerned about Texas," said Texas Republican Representative Brian Babin. "Texas is definitely in play. We need to take this very, very seriously."

Representative Will Hurd, a Republican House member who is retiring, was even more blunt. "Texas is indeed purple."

While Donald Trump tended to do better than 2012 Republican nominee Mitt Romney in most states,



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Trump's margin of victory in 2016 in Texas was nine percentage points, compared to Romney's 16-point win over incumbent Democrat President Barack Obama. While Jimmy Carter of Georgia was the last Democrat to win Texas in a presidential contest, several factors can be cited for a possible switch back to the Democrats.

Many Republicans have expressed concern about the narrow reelection victory of Senator Ted Cruz in 2018. Cruz had won 12 states in his unsuccessful bid to capture the Republican nomination for president in 2016, ultimately finishing second to Trump. When Cruz was first elected in 2012, he had easily bested his Democratic opponent by 16 percentage points. Yet, against U.S. Representative Beto O'Rourke in 2018, Cruz was only able to win by 2.6 percent of the vote in the most expensive race for a U.S. Senate seat in American history.

Cruz recently told an interviewer that he is quite concerned about whether Texas will remain in the Republican column in next year's presidential election. "The president's reelection campaign needs to take Texas seriously."

But Cruz is optimistic that not only Trump, but other GOP candidates, such as his fellow Texas Republican Senator John Cornyn, will ultimately win next year, but recently mentioned several reasons that Republicans should beware of 2020 — and beyond. "Historically, the cities have been bright blue and surrounded by bright red doughnuts of Republican suburban voters. What happened in 2018 is that those bright red doughnuts went purple — not blue, but purple. We've got to do a more effective job of carrying the message to the suburbs."

The suburbs appear to be the areas that are now deciding U.S. elections, in Texas and elsewhere. In the past, large cities have gone Democratic, with rural areas going Republican. In fact, states such as Illinois would be Republican, were it not for cities such as Chicago. Texas continues to be red — for now — because of its vast rural farming-dominated counties (there are more than 250 counties in the state).

And, of course, there is the growing population of Texas, with its vibrant economy. Unfortunately for the Republicans, those moving into Texas from northern states tend to bring their more liberal politics with them. And, of course, Texas is experiencing a rising tide of immigrants from south of the Rio Grande. While the newer immigrants cannot legally vote, their descendants tend to vote Democrat. Even the Hispanic Cruz could only manage 40 percent of the Hispanic vote when he won 56 percent overall in 2012. This process of immigration leading to more Democratic Party voters has been going on in the Lone Star state for a number of years, and it is causing the predictable shift in political affiliation we now see.

Were the Democrats able to win the Texas Legislature in 2020, they would redraw the legislative and congressional districts after the 2020 census — perhaps completing the process of Texas becoming the new California.

One note of optimism for Republicans, however, is that the Democrats nationally have moved so far to the Left that swing voters might swing more than usual for the Republicans. "Texans aren't buying what [the Democrats] are selling," said Republican U.S. Representative Chip Roy, who is on the Democratic Party's "hit list." Roy is a member of the conservative House Freedom Caucus, and thinks the Democrat push for a host of liberal programs — such as the Green New Deal and Medicare for All, will, in the end, backfire on them.

What happens in Texas next year could determine the future of American politics for the next generation.



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