

UMass Lowell
Survey of Texas Likely Voters

October 20-26, 2020

N=873 Texas Likely Voters

The sample has an adjusted margin of error +/-4.2%

See <http://uml.edu/polls> for full questionnaire/topline results and detailed methodology disclosure.

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Do you have a question about this poll? If so, tweet @UML_CPO and we'll get back to you.

HIGHLIGHTS

Trump and Biden in close race as Texas achieves swing-state status

President Donald Trump is about even with former Vice President Joe Biden in a close contest for Texas' 38 Electoral Votes in a new swing state poll of Texas likely voters released by the UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion. Will this be the election that deep red Texas turns blue? In the last month, the already close race has tightened.

With minor party candidates included on the ballot, Trump has the support of 48% of Texas likely voters, Biden is at 47%, other candidates are at 3%, and only 1% of Texas likely voters say they are undecided. Trump's 1-point advantage is well within the poll's +/-4.2% margin of error, indicating that the race is incredibly close. This also represents a small shift in the race; in a September 29, 2020 UMass Lowell Center for Public Opinion poll, Trump led Biden by 3 points.

The intrigue of a close Texas race is only increased by the fact that, for most of the early voting period, Texas has led the nation in early voting turnout as a percentage of 2016 turnout. As of this morning, the United States Election Project reports that the current voter turnout in Texas is an astonishing 91% of the total turnout in 2016.¹

Those who have already voted represent 60% of the respondents in this survey, which was fielded from October 20-26. Among those who have already voted, Biden leads Trump, 52% to 46%. But

¹ <https://electproject.github.io/Early-Vote-2020G/index.html>



among those who intend to vote on election day, Trump leads Biden 64% to 30%. With an unprecedented number of early votes in Texas already cast, it will be critical for the President to turn out his supporters, many of whom have decided to wait until election day.

Biden is winning 94% of Democrats, while Trump is winning 90% of Republicans. However, among pure Independents, 39% are for Biden compared to 48% for Trump. Biden does better among respondents with a Bachelor's degree (50% Biden to 45% for Trump) while Trump does better among those without a college degree (50% Trump to 45% Biden). But among whites without a college degree, Trump has his biggest lead, 70% to Biden's 25%. Trump leads among white voters overall 61% to 33%, while Biden leads among Black voters 84% to 13% and Hispanic voters 58% to 39%.

While Trump leads Biden, his approval rating is even among Texas likely voters at 50% approve and 50% disapprove. Among those who approve, 36% do so strongly and 14% somewhat. Among Trump disapprovers, 8% do so somewhat, and 42% strongly disapprove of the way he is handling his job as President.

With the two presidential debates in the books, a plurality of Texas likely voters believe that Joe Biden was the winner of each debate. On the first debate, Biden was given the nod by 41% of voters compared to 33% for Trump; another 15% said the debate was a draw and 10% were unsure. On the second debate, 43% gave Biden the win, 39% gave Trump the win, 8% said it was a draw, and 11% said they were unsure. When asked about the overall quality of the 2020 debates compared to previous years, 71% of Texas likely voters said that the debates were worse than in previous years, 8% said they were better, 13% said they were about the same, and 8% were unsure.

Cornyn lead on Hegar cut in half in tightening US Senate race

In a closely watched U.S. Senate race in Texas, Republican incumbent Senator John Cornyn has seen his lead cut in half in a race against Democratic challenger MJ Hegar. Cornyn, who previously led Hegar by ten points a month ago, now polls at 49% to Hegar's 44%, with 5% of voters undecided.

Cornyn continues to project weakness as an incumbent. His net favorability rating is just +1 (40% favorable, 39% unfavorable), and 17% of Texas likely voters have no opinion of him, while 5% have never heard of him. However, time may be running out for Hegar. While she appears to have gained ground on Cornyn since last month, her net favorables have also declined from +13 to +2 over the last month. She is now at 35% favorable and 33% unfavorable, with 24% no opinion and 8% never heard of.

Relevant to the Senate contests is the confirmation of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett. While our September poll showed that a majority of Texas voters prefer that the President wait



on nominating a replacement for Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, we found that a majority of Texas likely voters supported their Senators voting in favor of Amy Coney Barrett's nomination to the Supreme Court by a margin of 59% to 41%.

The Pandemic Election

A central defining issue of the 2020 election campaign has been the coronavirus pandemic and resulting policy response from the government. With case rates increasing around the country, including in Texas, it's important to understand how the virus is affecting the election.

Asked how satisfied they are with the federal government's response to COVID-19, 52% of Texas likely voters say they are unsatisfied, compared to 48% who are satisfied. Asked who is better suited to handle the pandemic, likely voters give the edge to Biden, 46% to 41% for Trump. On the question of whether it is safe to re-open schools, 51% of Texas likely voters say that is either probably (25%) or definitely (26%) not safe to reopen Texas local public schools for face-to-face instruction. Finally, when asked if Donald Trump could have avoided contracting COVID-19 by wearing a mask more often, 63% of likely voters say yes, while 37% say no.

What these questions show repeatedly is that the pandemic and the federal government response is a losing issue for President Trump. When the question is who will best handle the economy, Trump beats Biden 51% to Biden's 38% in Texas. That is his signature issue. But, as the pandemic takes over the narrative, Trump has found himself in the uncomfortable and difficult position of trying to defend his record on the pandemic – and that's why we see a state like Texas in play in 2020.

Other Findings from the poll

- Governor Greg Abbott has an approval rating of 56% (32% strongly approve, 24% somewhat approve)
- Asked who they think will win the 2020 Presidential election, Texas likely voters give Trump the slight edge: 44% say Trump will win and 40% say Biden will win. The perception of the race has shifted in the last month when the gap favored Trump by 12 points.
- The Trump campaign has made a concerted effort to pin to Joe Biden the label of a "corrupt politician," tying him to his son's activities in the Ukraine. Has it worked? Head to head, our survey asked likely voters about the candidates on a number of dimensions. On the question of "who is more corrupt?" 44% say Trump and 42% say Biden, with 9% saying they are about equal, and 5% unsure.