First primaries held in US mid-term election campaign

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The first primary contests of the 2026 US mid-term election campaign took place on Tuesday, with the two parties of the financial aristocracy, the Democrats and Republicans, pouring tens of millions of dollars into contests in Texas, North Carolina and Arkansas.

Texas was the main focus of both parties, as well as the corporate media, which portrayed the outcome of a handful of tightly contested races as a clear signal that the Democratic Party will make significant gains in the general election on November 3. The Republican Party holds narrow majorities in both houses of Congress, 218-214 in the House of Representatives, with three seats vacant, and 53-47 in the Senate.

More than $100 million was spent on the primary campaigns for the Texas seat in the US Senate now held by four-term Republican John Cornyn. The incumbent Republican accounted for two-thirds of this, an estimated $65 million-$70 million, raised from billionaire oligarchs in the oil industry, military contractors and financial institutions.

This sum dwarfed that spent by his two opponents, state Attorney General Ken Paxton and Representative Wesley Hunt, who both sought to appeal to the party's fascist base, attacking Cornyn as part of the Washington establishment. Paxton made a name for himself on the fascist right through legal persecution of abortion clinics, as well as leading the effort by Republican attorneys-general to overturn the 2020 election. But he raised only $4 million, and was regarded as damaged goods, impeached by the Republican-controlled state House on corruption charges in 2023 but retaining his office when the state Senate refused to convict him.

Despite the disparity in resources, Cornyn won only a narrow plurality in the primary and faces a runoff in May against the fascist Paxton, who finished second. President Trump had declined to endorse any of the three candidates before the primary, but Paxton had the support of Trump's 2024 campaign manager Chris LaCivita and his best-known fascist media advocate, Steve Bannon.

Trump announced Wednesday that he would choose between Cornyn and Paxton soon, and would demand that the non-endorsed candidate drop out of the runoff. This would represent an unprecedented assertion of presidential control over a state political race, furthering Trump's bid for dictatorial power. Senate Republican Leader John Thune appealed to Trump to endorse Cornyn, and warned that if the scandal-ridden Paxton won the nomination the Republican majority in the Senate would be threatened.

In the Democratic primary there was a similar disparity in fundraising, with state Representative James Talarico, a former seminarian with the backing of the party leadership and business interests, raising $25 million, while his opponent, Congresswoman Jasmine Crockett, raised barely $5 million.

As in the Republican race, the better-financed candidate won, although in the Democratic contest it was a decisive outcome, with Talarico receiving 52 percent of the vote compared to 46 percent for Crockett, who conceded defeat. Talarico has emphasized his religious education, claiming it will make him more acceptable to Christian fundamentalists who have voted for Trump.

Voter turnout was high for a mid-term primary election, with a *New York Times* analysis suggesting that more voters chose to cast ballots in the Democratic primary than in the Republican primary for the first time in many decades when there have been contests in both parties.

The biggest shift was among Hispanic voters,

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particularly in the counties in the Rio Grande Valley, which Trump won in 2024 after losing by landslide margins to Hillary Clinton in 2016. In five majority-Latino counties, more voters turned out to vote in the Democratic primary Tuesday than cast ballots for Kamala Harris in the presidential election, according to an analysis by *Politico*.

One local Democratic Party official, Sylvia Bruni, chair of the Webb County Democratic Party in south Texas, told *Politico* that it was anti-Trump sentiment, not enthusiasm for the Democrats, that was expressed in the vote. She said: "It's not the party that's driving people to the polls. It's the horrendous behaviors of the man in the White House and his cronies. That's what's driving people to the polls."

The Democratic race included nearly $4 million in ads supposedly supporting Crockett, but paid for by the campaign of Republican Governor Greg Abbott, who viewed Crockett as the weaker of the two candidates in November. This is a further instance of the cynical interventions by the two capitalist parties across nominal party lines. In 2024 this was done mainly by the Democrats, who funded ads to support the most extreme-right candidates in several Republican primaries.

The Texas contest is one of a half-dozen seats which the Democratic Party has targeted in its effort to win back control of the Senate, along with Alaska, Iowa, Maine, North Carolina, and Ohio. The Democratic nominee in North Carolina was also chosen Tuesday, former Governor Roy Cooper, who had the full backing of the party establishment and only nominal opposition. He will face former Republican National Committee Chair Michael Whatley, who was handpicked by Trump, first for the RNC and then as the Republican candidate to replace retiring Republican Thom Tillis.

Democratic and Republican nominees were also selected for 56 seats in the House of Representatives. Republicans hold all four Arkansas seats, 10 out of 14 seats in North Carolina, and 27 out of 38 in Texas. North Carolina and Texas were heavily gerrymandered by Republican state legislatures for the current election, with the aim of gaining five seats in Texas and one or two seats in North Carolina.

The result has been forced retirements among Democrat representatives and one member vs. member primary, in which Representative Al Green—who was ejected from Trump's State of the Union speech this year and last—narrowly trailed a much younger black Democrat, Christian Menefee, with a runoff set for May.

Trump successfully purged the only member of the Texas Republican delegation who vocally opposed his claims of a "stolen election" in 2020 and condemned the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol. Representative Dan Crenshaw was defeated by a Trump-endorsed state senator.

In the media coverage of the election result, there was little discussion of the likelihood that the November election will be held under conditions of military occupation of major US cities, or with armed and masked federal agents supervising the polls.

But a preview of sorts was on display in Dallas County, the second-largest in the state, where the Republican-controlled county government changed precinct structures so that Democrats and Republicans had different polling stations, leading many Democrats to be turned away because they went to the wrong station.

The Democratic Party went before a local judge, who ordered polling stations to stay open an additional two hours to accommodate those who had been denied the opportunity to vote. But at the end of that time, the Texas Supreme Court, acting at the request of Republican state Attorney General Paxton, overturned the local order and told election officials in Dallas to set aside all the ballots cast during that period.

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