

KANE RUSSELL
COLEMAN LOGAN

JUDICIAL ELECTIONS REPORT

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DEMETRI J. ECONOMOU
DREW ROBERTSON
KATHRYN G. LAFLIN

2024's General Election presented a level of judicial turnover unseen since the Obama years.

Republicans went 25 for 26 in contested appellate court elections.

Flipped 23 appellate seats red.

Republicans ousted incumbent Democrat District Judges in Harris County for the first time since 2014, and seem poised to threaten Democrat strongholds.

Are these gains sustainable?



Demetri J. Economou
Houston
713.425.7432
deconomou@krcl.com



Drew Robertson
Dallas
214.777.4287
drobotson@krcl.com



Kathryn G. Laflin
Houston
713.425.7434
klaflin@krcl.com

Overall Reactions

Casual observers will be quick to attribute these judicial election results to the effect of Donald Trump on down-ballot races. And they are right—this election was unlike anything seen in Texas for Republicans. Trump’s presence atop the Republican presidential ticket was one reason for that.

But the seeds of this judicial turnover were planted in the waning days of the Obama administration and germinated after the 2018 midterm elections, when it was Democrats who swept the Texas appellate races. At the same time, the Texas legislature had moved to abolish straight ticket voting (implemented in 2020), making it more difficult for down-ballot candidates to ride the coattails of successful top-line tickets. Democrats said at the time this would hurt them in blue urban areas. In 2024, we saw that happen.

Take Harris County (Houston) as the prime example:

- There were a total of 1,548,293 votes cast in the county for President.
- Contested District Judge races averaged around 1.45 million. That’s around 100,000 votes difference, in races that were ultimately decided by an average of 14,988 votes. The closest race was decided by just 1,251 votes (Landrum over Perdue).
- Harris/Walz carried the county by 51.82% to 46.51%.
- Yet we had Republican flips at the District Court, and a healthy portion of Republican votes from Harris County contributing to victories at the First and Fourteenth Court of Appeals.

This is not to say that the absence of straight ticket voting is the *sole* cause of the 2024 Red Wave in Texas. Far from it. Shifting voter demographics, Democrat job performance in the state (or, in many cases as to the judiciary, “perceived performance”), strong campaigning, and targeted PAC money all contributed to Republican down-ballot success. And, of course, Donald Trump.

Maintaining Momentum

It is too early to say that it is impossible for Republicans to maintain this momentum into the 2026 midterms. But it would be improbable. Midterm backlash against the governing party is a historically measurable fact. The 2026 midterm title card also won’t feature Trump and Cruz, but instead Abbott and Cornyn. Turnout will be lower.

At least at the District Court level, Republicans will still have the advantage in 2026 of running against incumbent Democrats (rather than defending incumbent positions associated with the governing party in Washington). This allows Republicans and their PACs to continue a challenger strategy, which should fare better in this particular midterm than others.

Target Rich Environment

As discussed in this Report, there are several important counties which Trump flipped red in 2024 and made 10+ point gains over 2020, yet Democrat incumbent judges ran unopposed.

In addition to Harris County (where several District Court races were not contested), we’ll discuss measurable gains in Dallas, Bexar, Jefferson, and Webb Counties, and throughout the Rio Grande Valley, and how these present Republican targets in 2026.

Dallas County / Fifth COA

While Kamala Harris overwhelmingly carried Dallas County with 60% of the vote, strong Republican turnout in surrounding Collin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, and Rockwall Counties delivered a surprising Republican sweep of the 8 seats at stake on Dallas's Fifth District Court of Appeals.

The Dallas Court of Appeals' lone Republican, **Justice Emily Miskel** (appointed by Governor Abbott in 2022), narrowly won her first full six-year term on the court, defeating Dallas County District **Judge Tonya Parker**. Meanwhile, all four of the Democratic incumbent justices up for reelection this cycle (each having been first elected in 2018) were defeated in their reelection bids.

- **Justice Ken Molberg** lost his seat to former Dallas County District **Judge Mike Lee** (50.9% to 49.1%).
- **Justice Erin Nowell** lost to Dallas criminal defense and family law attorney **Cynthia Barbare** (50.5% to 49.5%).
- **Justice Robbie Partida-Kipness** was defeated by Dallas business and bankruptcy law attorney **Jessica Lewis** (51.5% to 48.5%).
- **Justice Amanda Reich** suffered the narrowest defeat of the four, losing reelection to Dallas family law specialist **Earl Jackson** by less than 7,000 votes (50.2% to 49.8%).



Justice Emily Miskel



Jessica Lewis



Judge Mike Lee



Earl Jackson



Cynthia Barbare



Gino Rossini

Republicans also picked up all three of the open seats on the court. Having previously defeated incumbent Justice Cory Carlyle in a surprise primary result, former Dallas County Family District **Judge Kim Cooks** lost her general election bid to board-certified appellate lawyer **Gino Rossini**.



Matthew Kolodoski

In the smallest margin of victory of all the Dallas appellate races, Dallas County Criminal District **Judge Tina Clinton** lost to Dallas litigator **Matthew Kolodoski** by roughly 1,500 votes (incumbent Justice Bill Pedersen chose not to seek reelection for this seat). Finally, the open Chief Justice position, which is largely an administrative role on the Dallas County of Appeals, was claimed by former Dallas County Commissioner and current Dallas County Criminal District **Judge J.J. Koch**, who defeated current Dallas County District **Judge Staci Williams**.



J.J. Koch

Within Dallas County itself, Democrats continued to cruise to easy victories. Incumbent **Judge Eric Moyer** easily defeated challenger Leah Feldhender to win reelection to the 14th Judicial District Court. Meanwhile, Democratic challenger **Kim Bailey** defeated the Republican incumbent, **Judge Ashley Wysocki**, on the 162nd Judicial District Court (Judge Wysocki had previously been appointed by Governor Abbott to fill an unexpired term on that court).

Incumbent District **Judges Tonya Parker** and **Staci Williams** will also retain their seats on the 116th and 101st Judicial District Courts, respectively, having lost their bids for the Dallas Court of Appeals.

Harris County / First & Fourteenth COAs

Ten of the eighteen seats in the First and Fourteenth Courts of Appeals were up for election this year.

Out of the five seats up for election on the First Court of Appeals, all five were won by Republican candidates, including the three against Democratic incumbents.

- **Andrew Johnson**, Vice Chair of Appellate Litigation at Thompson Coe, unseated incumbent **Justice Sarah Beth Landau** (52.9% to 47.1%).
- Career prosecutor **Clint Morgan** defeated incumbent **Justice Julie Countiss** (52.6% to 47.4%).
- **Judge Kristin Guiney** (Presiding Judge of the 183rd Criminal District Court in Harris County) won against incumbent **Justice Richard Hightower** (52.9% to 47.1%).
- Former **Justice Jennifer Caughey** won her open seat contest against civil practitioner **Brendetta Scott** (53.3% to 46.7%).
- **Susanna Dokupil**, Special Counsel for the Office of Attorney General, beat **Amber Boyd-Cora** for an open position (52.8% to 47.2%).



Andrew Johnson



Judge Kristin Guiney



Clint Morgan



Justice Jennifer Caughey



Susanna Dokupil

Republicans also won the five seats up for election on the Fourteenth Court of Appeals, unseating four incumbents.



Maritza Antu



Katy Boatman



Judge Brad Hart



Tonya McLaughlin



Judge Chad Bridges

- Former Criminal District Judge **Maritza Antu** unseated incumbent **Justice Frances Bourliot** (53.0% to 47.0%).
- **Katy Boatman**, a civil litigator with Hunton Andrews Kurth, defeated incumbent **Justice Meagan Hassan** (53.1% to 46.9%).
- Former Criminal District **Judge Brad Hart** beat incumbent **Justice Meg Poissant** (52.9% to 47.1%).
- Solo practitioner **Tonya Rolland McLaughlin** defeated incumbent **Justice Charles Spain** (53.5% to 46.5%).
- Fort Bend County District **Judge Chad Bridges** defeated **Velda Renita Faulkner** for an open seat (54.07% to 45.93%).

The Harris County Civil District Courts also saw significant changes in this last election. Out of the twenty-four Civil District Courts in Harris County, fourteen seats were up for election.

Five Republican candidates unseated incumbent Democrat Judges, including in some of the closest judicial contests in Texas.

- Former Civil Judge **Michael Landrum** returns to the bench after defeating incumbent **Judge Nicole Perdue** by a mere 1,251 votes.
- Solo civil practitioner **Nathan Milliron** beat incumbent **Judge Elaine Palmer** by only 2,342 votes.
- **Sonya Aston**, General Counsel to Texas State Sen. Paul Bettencourt, overcame incumbent **Judge Jeralynn Manor** by just 2,837 votes.
- Insurance and personal injury defense attorney **Lee Kathryn Shuchart** unseated incumbent **Judge Fredericka Phillips** (50.6% to 49.4%).
- Civil litigator **Bruce Bain** defeated incumbent **Judge Ursula Hall** (50.9% to 49.2%).



Judge Michael Landrum



Nathan Milliron



Sonya Aston



Lee Kathryn Shuchart



Bruce Bain

On the other side of the aisle, five incumbent Democratic Judges retained their seats, including contested wins by **Judge Kristen Hawkins** (11th District Court), **Judge Michael Gomez** (129th District Court), and **Judge Cheryl Elliott Thornton** (164th District Court). Judges Hawkins and Gomez carried their races by around three points while Judge Thornton survived by a single point. Unopposed victories were recorded by **Judge Kyle Carter** (125th District Court) and **Judge Dawn Rogers** (334th District Court).

They will be joined by three Democrat newcomers who also ran unopposed: **Denise Brown**, a plaintiffs' personal injury attorney; **Erika Hughes**, a former County Criminal Court at Law Judge; and **Takasha Francis**, Director of the Department of Neighborhoods for the City of Houston. Rounding out the Democrat wins was former Family Court Judge **Tracy Good**, who defeated civil practitioner **Brian Staley** in a squeaker.

Travis County / Third COA

In a county that Kamala Harris carried by almost 40 points, all District Court Judges—all being Democrats—ran unopposed. There was only one contested race for an open position on the Third Court of Appeals, won by Austin attorney **Maggie Ellis** (D) in a tight race (the only blue appellate win statewide).

Bexar County / Fourth COA

Bexar County was comparatively closer, with Kamala Harris winning by less than 10 points. All Democrat District Judges ran unopposed and maintained their seats.



Todd McCray



Justice Lori Brissette



Adrian Spears

At the Fourth Court of Appeals, Republicans won three races. Criminal attorney **Todd McCray** (R) defeated District Judge **Cynthia Marie Chapa** (D) for an open position; **Justice Lori Brissette** (R), a mid-year appointee to the court, displaced incumbent **Justice Luz Elena Chapa** (D); and civil litigator **Adrian Spears** (R) defeated incumbent **Justice Liza Rodriguez** (D).

Webb County

Webb County presents an interesting future option for Republicans. All District Court judges ran unopposed. Donald Trump won Webb County by over two percentage points, though other statewide and district-level contests (notably the Fourth Court of Appeals elections and Senator Ted Cruz's and Congressman Henry Cuellar's races) were carried by Democrats in the county. Given the outcome of the appellate court races in Webb County, it is unlikely any Republican challenger would have prevailed, but it was a much closer run thing in Webb County than in prior cycles.

Rio Grande Valley / Thirteenth COA

Trump swept the Valley, as he did every border county except for El Paso. Yet Democrat District Judges in Hidalgo and Cameron Counties ran unopposed. Similar to Webb County, it is unlikely that any Republican challenger would have prevailed given Democrats carrying the appellate court voting in those counties, but look for contested elections in the next cycle.

Republicans fared well at the Thirteenth Court of Appeals, with civil litigator **Jenny Cron** (R) displacing incumbent **Justice Nora Longoria** (D). Republicans also won two open positions on the court with District **Judge Ysmael Fonseca** (R) defeating **Joe Martinez** (D) and criminal law attorney **Jon West** (R) beating **Regi Compian Richardson** (D).



Jenny Cron



Judge Ysmael Fonseca



Jon West

Jefferson County / Ninth COA

Jefferson County (Beaumont) may, like the Valley and Webb County, present Republicans with a target in the future. While the two incumbent Democrat District Judges ran unopposed, Donald Trump carried the county by a whopping 9 points, well exceeding his 1.5-point margin in 2020. Republicans also held one seat (incumbent **Justice Leanne Johnson**) and added a seat (civil litigator **Kent Chambers**) in unopposed contests for the Ninth Court of Appeals.

Permian Basin / Eleventh Court

Donald Trump carried Midland County by 60+ points and in some Permian Basin counties 9 out of 10 voters voted for Trump/Vance. All incumbent Judges and Justices in the area—all Republicans—retained their seats.

El Paso / Eighth COA

Remains a safe Democrat stronghold. All incumbent Judges and Justices—all Democrats—retained their seats. Note, however, the drop-off in Democrat advantage in the county from 2020 (Biden/Harris: 67%, Trump/Pence: 32%) to 2024 (Harris/Walz: 57%, Trump/Vance: 42%). Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton also eclipsed 65% in the 2008, 2012, and 2016 elections.

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Our Positions

Kane Russell Coleman Logan PC is a non-partisan law firm. We do not take political positions and support judges across the political spectrum. This Report was intended to be and should be construed as purely educational.

Contributors

Demetri Economou is the Co-Chair of KRCL's Oil, Gas & Energy Law Practice Group and is based in the Houston office. His practice is focused on upstream energy litigation, lease and deed interpretation, surface use, operations contracts, and oilfield trade secrets.

Drew Robertson is a Director in KRCL's Dallas office. Drew handles complex commercial litigation in state and federal courts across the country and is a leader in KRCL's appellate practice.

Kathryn Laflin is an Associate in KRCL's Houston office. She focuses her practice on litigation, including insurance coverage and defense, products liability, real estate, construction, and commercial disputes.

KANE RUSSELL 
COLEMAN LOGAN

One Mission. Your Mission.

Dallas

Bank of America Plaza
901 Main Street, Suite 5200
Dallas, Texas 75202
214.777.4200

Houston

Sage Plaza
5151 San Felipe, Suite 800
Houston, Texas 77056
713.425.7400