Letter from Texas: December 2025 - January 2026

Asian American voters in Texas and the 2026 midterm elections

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After a slow summer, the political season in Texas picked up speed in the fall. The big off-year elections of 2025 were elsewhere, but there were meaningful contests in the Lone Star State on November 4. The national Democratic surge was evident in the elections to fill the seat of the late Congressman Sylvester Turner and a vacant state senate district in Tarrant County. The big blue wave also rolled across Harris County in a suburban school district where a Democrat-backed slate unseated Republican-supported incumbents.

This letter focuses on the growing Asian American population in the Lone Star State. Asian voter impact in Texas is most evident in Collin County north of Dallas and Fort Bend County southwest of Houston. An examination of recent voting patterns in these big suburban counties provides insight into how Asian voters are changing Texas politics.

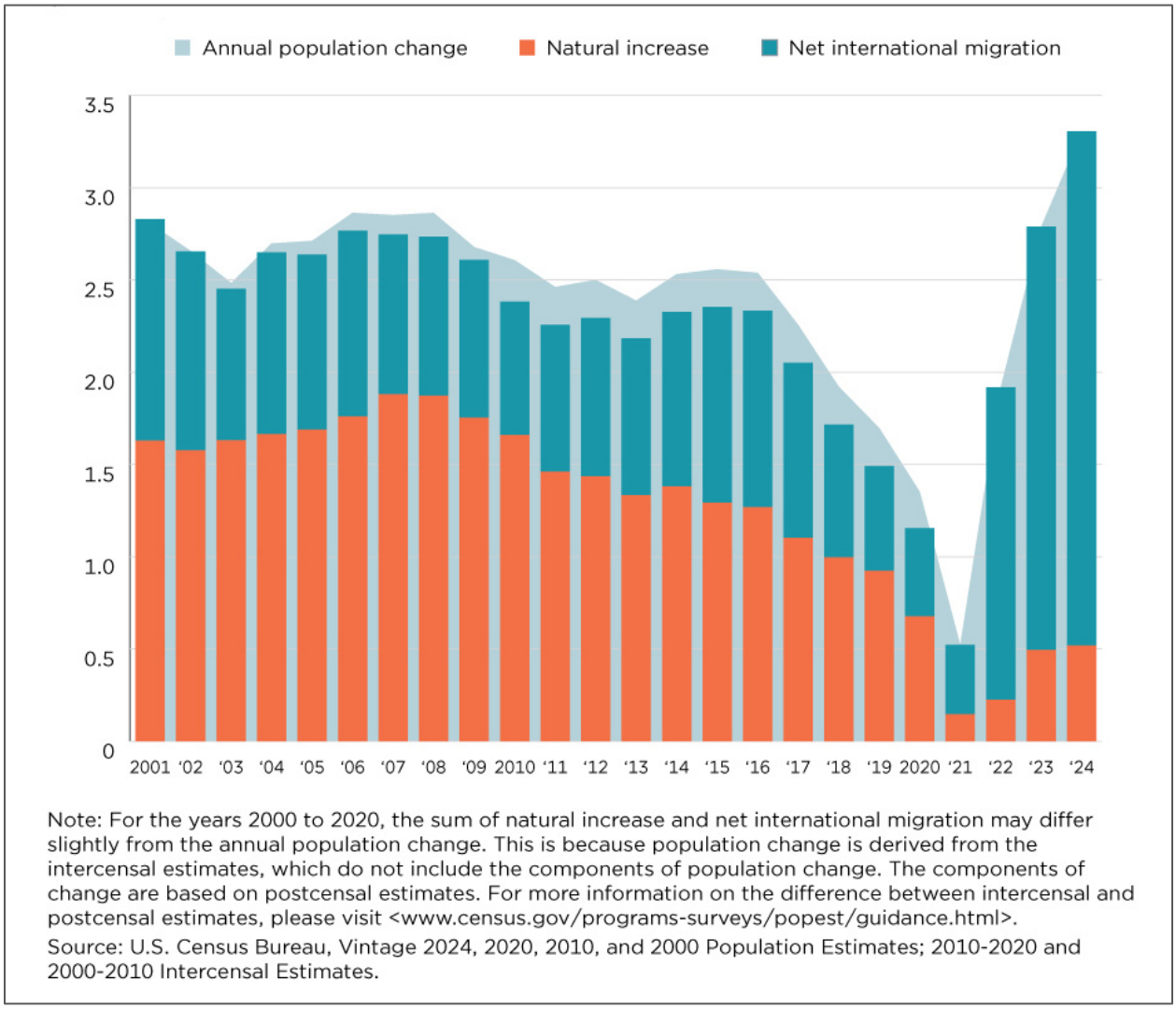
A December 2024 census report shows a dynamic shift in US population change

In 1859, Charles Minard, a French engineer who had been drawing "flow maps" for decades, produced a *Carte figurative* of Napoleon's disastrous Russian campaign of 1812-13. Minard combined six different types of data in a graph documenting the *Grande Armee's* catastrophic march to and from Moscow. The American political scientist Edward Tufte said it "may well be the best statistical graphic ever drawn" and used it as a prime example in *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information.*[1] I keep a poster of Minard's chart in my UH office to remind me how effectively visual displays can convey complex information.

A few weeks ago, I saw an example of this in a December 2024 US Census report. The graph is reproduced on the next page. Like Minard's famous *Carte*, it summarizes important trends including annual US population change over a 25-year period with the relative contributions of natural increase versus net international migration to overall growth.

[1] Edward R. Tufte (2001), p. 40.

Figure 1. U.S. Annual Population Change, Natural Increase and Net International Migration: July 1, 2000-July 1, 2024 (in millions)



Note: For the years 2000 to 2020, the sum of natural increase and net international migration may differ slightly from the annual population change. This is because population change is derived from the intercensal estimates, which do not include the components of population change. The components of change are based on postcensal estimates. For more information on the difference between intercensal and postcensal estimates, please visit <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/guidance.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Vintage 2024, 2020, 2010, and 2000 Population Estimates; 2010-2020 and 2000-2010 Intercensal Estimates.

Source: US Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/stories/2024/12/population-estimates/figure-2-population-estimates.jpg

The Census Bureau figure shows natural increase (excess of births over deaths) ticked up a bit in the first decade of the 21st century, but began a steady decline after 2008. US population growth continued because international migration began making up a larger share until the restrictive policies of the first Trump administration kicked in after 2017. Covid pandemic deaths drove natural increase after 2020 to near zero, which only partly recovered in 2023 and 2024. Most dramatically, the figure shows US population growth since 2022 *has been almost entirely driven by soaring net international migration.*

So, what does this have to do with Texas?

Quite a bit as a matter of fact. In the September 2025 Letter from Texas, I pointed out that the Lone Star State's population has been growing much faster than that of any other large state due to an economy adding about 200,000 jobs a year. The great majority of these jobs are in the metropolitan areas of Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Austin and San Antonio. In an era of low birth rates, local natural population increases cannot provide the workers needed. Nor can people moving from rural areas and smaller cities in Texas fill the gap. Domestic migration from others states has helped, especially from states with high housing costs like California, New York, and Illinois. But… that is still not nearly enough. This leaves international migration as the largest source of new Texans.

Earlier this year the Census Bureau also released a report estimating population growth in Texas since 2020 totaled more than 2.1 million people. Table 1 shows just 26.6% of this increase was due to births exceeding deaths. Domestic migration from other states accounted for 35.0% of population growth. The largest source - international migration - added more than 820,000 residents, or 38.4%, to the Lone Star State's population. Some of these foreign-born migrants came directly to Texas, but many others resettled here after first locating elsewhere in the United States.

The importance of international migration is especially evident in the Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston areas. In the latter case, more than one-half for the population gain since 2020 was accounted for by people relocating to the area who were born outside the United States.

Table 1: Cumulative Change in Components of Resident Population in Texas, April 1, 2020 to July 1, 2024

	Natural Change (Births minus Deaths)		Net International Migration		Net Domestic Migration	
State	567,553	26.6%	820,761	38.4%	767,730	35.0%
Big Metropolitan areas:						
DFW	188,154	27.5%	262,219	38.2%	236,937	34.5%
Houston	183,538	28.9%	329,257	51.8%	123,180	19.4%
San Antonio	41,179	20.9%	40,677	20.6%	115,454	58.5%
Austin	63,300	23.1%	71,614	26.1%	139,140	50.8%

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Division, March 2025 release

The sources of international migration changed greatly in the 21st century. In the last decades of the 20th century, persons coming to the United States were predominately Hispanic, with Mexico being the largest source. However, according to the Pew Research Center, net migration from Mexico ended in 2007 and has only partly been replaced by persons born in Central or South America.

International migration to the US has shifted to South and East Asia, with India now the largest source. This is the case in Texas. As shown in Table 2, the 2000 US Census counted about 555,000 persons in Texas who identified themselves as Asian (99%) or Pacific Islander (1%). That number increased to 948,000 in 2010 and 1.69 million in 2020. Recent estimates put the state's AAPI population over two million and their state percentage share at 6.6%. The great majority of Asian Americans in Texas have clustered in parts of the Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston metropolitan areas. That concentration enables us to assess the impact of Asian American voters in Texas in the most populous suburban counties in these metropolitan areas.

Table 2: Asian and Pacific Islander Growth Surges in Texas

	Population	AAPI	%
2000	20,853	555	2.7
2010	25,145	948	3.8
2020	29,145	1,619	5.5
7/1/24	31,290	2,065	6.6

Source: US Census for 2000, 2010, 2020, and the Census Bureau's July 2024 estimates. Data are in thousands.

Fort Bend and Collin Counties

Two of the fastest growing areas in 21st century Texas have been Collin County, north of Dallas, and Fort Bend County, southwest of Houston. In 2000, the US Census counted 491,675 persons in Collin County and 354,452 in Fort Bend County. The most recent Census Bureau estimate placed Collin County's population at 1,272,999 – a gain of more than 780,000 since 2000. Fort Bend's estimated population was 971,888 – a gain of about 617,000 in the 21st century.

A big contributor in both counties has been a surge in Asian migrants. In 2000, the US Census reported there were 33,902 persons of Asian ancestry in Collin County, accounting for just 6.9% of the local population. That increased six-fold by 2020 when the Census

recorded 206,884 persons of Asian/Pacific Island identity in the county, making up 19.4% of the population. July 1. 2024 estimates show that percentage increasing to 21.4% while the Anglo population – which was 76.1% in 2000 and 63.1% in 2010 – has dropped below 48%. The same pattern holds in Fort Bend County. In 2000 there were 39,545 Asian/Pacific Islanders in the county. In 2020, that number was 194,276, a five-fold increase.

Demographic change brought political shifts. Collin County was dark red at the beginning of this century. George W. Bush got 128,179 votes there in 2000 compared to just 42,884 for Al Gore. By 2020 the Republican vote for Donald Trump had doubled to 252,318, but the Democratic vote for Joe Biden was 230,943, or 5.4 times greater than in 2000. Fort Bend also went strongly for George W. Bush in 2000 and 2004, but no Republican presidential nominee has carried the county since Mitt Romney in 2012.

Some of this shift reflects a growing national wealth/educational divide. In the Age of Trump, Republicans perform better with working class and less educated voters while losing ground with higher income persons who have more formal education. Collin and Fort Bend County residents are among the highest income and educated populations in Texas. The most recent census estimates place median annual household income at $117,588 for Collin County and $113,409 for Fort Bend County. The state median is $76,292. Nearly 55% of Collin adults have at least BA degree. In Fort Bend, the number is 49.3%. The state average is 33.1%.

Both counties have become bluer because Blacks and Hispanics, who are much more likely to vote Democratic than suburban Anglos, have been moving out of the cities of Dallas and Houston. In 2000, the combined Black and Hispanic population in Collin County was 15%. In July 2024, the census estimate was 28.3%. Fort Bend County was 40.7% Black/Hispanic in 2000; in 2024, their combined population was 47.8%.

That said, the growing Asian presence in both counties, and the accompanying decline in the Anglo population share, is also fueling the big partisan change in these populous suburbs. On the next page, Table 3 documents this pattern. According to the Texas Legislative Council data used for the 2025 congressional redistricting, there are 18 Fort Bend voting precincts with a majority of AAPI voting-age-persons (VAPs) in the 2020 census count and seven such precincts in Collin County. The table compares how these majority Asian areas voted in contrast to majority Anglo precincts in these counties from 2016 to 2024.

Table 3: Partisan voting in Asian-majority precincts in Fort Bend and Collin Counties compared to Anglo precincts: 2016 – 2024

Fort Bend County

		Asian Majority Precincts			Anglo Majority Precincts		
		Rep	Dem	Other	Rep	Dem	Other
2016	President	38.1%	58.5%	3.4%	68.4%	26.6%	4.5%
2018	US Senate	36.0%	63.5%	0.5%	68.4%	30.9%	0.8%
2020	President	37.9%	60.6%	1.5%	65.0%	33.3%	1.8%
2022	Governor	40.2%	58.4%	1.4%	67.9%	30.8%	1.6%
2024	President	44.8%	47.9%	7.2%	64.7%	33.0%	2.3%
	US Senate	41.3%	54.9%	3.7%	63.1%	34.8%	2.3%

Collin County

		Asian Majority Precincts			Anglo Majority Precincts		
		Rep	Dem	Other	Rep	Dem	Other
2016	President	43.3%	53.5%	3.8%	68.2%	27.9%	3.9%
2018	US Senate	39.9%	59.4%	0.7%	66.8%	32.5%	0.7%
2020	President	40.8%	57.8%	1.4%	64.4%	33.9%	1.8%
2022	Governor	40.9%	58.1%	1.0%	66.9%	31.8%	1.3%
2024	President	45.9%	49.6%	5.2%	65.0%	33.2%	1.9%
	US Senate	42.2%	55.4%	2.6%	64.4%	34.1%	1.5%

Sources: Racial/ethnic data is from the Texas Legislative Council report RED-605T. Voting precinct data are from the Collin and Fort Bend County election website archives.

Asian voters in suburban Texas generally track national voting patterns. Democratic candidates in presidential and other top-of-the-ticket races won comfortable majorities from 2016 to 2022. However, in 2024, Donald Trump improved his vote share in Asian precincts, while Kamala Harris under-performed Joe Biden by nearly 13 percentage points in Fort Bend County and eight percent in Collin. Harris's weakness was especially evident with Muslim voters, whose dissatisfaction with the Biden administration's support for Israel in the Gaza war created a protest vote than benefitted Donald Trump and the Green Party candidate Jill Stein.

Table 3 also shows suburban Anglo voters in both counties produced sizeable GOP majorities in the half-dozen recent elections analyzed. The Republican margins eroded a bit between 2016 and 2024, most likely because these precincts, while still dominated by non-Hispanic white voters, were experiencing a small, but steady, influx of Asian, Black, and Hispanic adults. The bottom line in both counties is that as the Anglo population share declines and the Asian proportion rises, the partisan balance shifts. This is not because Asian voters strongly identify with the Democratic Party, but rather because they are far less supportive of Republicans than non-Hispanic white voters.

Asian voters and the 2026 elections in Texas

Summarizing, in an era of increased international migration to the US, explosive job growth in the Texas Triangle has attracted hundreds of thousands of persons of Asian ancestry. This has had the greatest impact in suburban areas like Fort Bend and Collin Counties, where Democrat-leaning Asian voters have eroded the once solid Republican majorities. Looking at these recent trends, what do they portend for the 2026 midterm elections?

My take is the return of Donald Trump to the White House in January 2025, and the aggressive anti-immigration policies his administration has pursued, are driving Asian voters to be become more politically engaged, and to push the many "swing" voters in these diverse communities toward supporting Democratic candidates in 2026. The strongest evidence of this is from the Virginia elections in November 2025. Loudoun County, a fast-growing suburban area – like Collin and Fort Bend in Texas – also has a large, highly educated, proportion of Asian voters. According to *Sabato's Crystal Ball* – a respected source at the University of Virginia – the 2025 Democratic candidate for governor, Abigail Spanberger, not only out-performed Kamala Harris'ss 2024 vote by 15%, but also ran five percentage points better than Joe Biden in 2020 in Loudoun County.[2]

These results are hardly surprising given President Trump's harsh rhetoric on migrants generally; his efforts to overturn birthright citizenship; pause the naturalization process for resident aliens; and review the status of naturalized persons with the aim of stripping citizenship from some foreign-born Americans.[3] The Trump administration is also cutting back on H-1B visas that enabled many Asian immigrants to legally enter and work in the US. Trump's policies have been a been a boon for immigration attorneys, but are not at all helpful to Republican candidates running in districts with large Asian American populations.

These off-putting (to Asian voters) national policies have been compounded in Texas by recent actions of Governor Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton. Two cases stand out. Abbott and Paxton have vigorous attacked a proposed Islamic-focused development in

[2]J. Miles Coleman and Kyle Kondik, "Sifting Through the NJ/VA Results … ", The Center for Politics, University of Virginia, November 13, 2025.

[3] Hamed Aleaziz, "Trump Aims to Strip Citizenship of More Foreign-Born Americans," The New York Times, December 19, 2025, pp. 1, 16.

an unincorporated area of Collin and Hunt Counties. Originally known as EPIC City, now renamed The Meadows, the state's Republican leaders have reversed Texas' usual policy of encouraging exurban housing projects while employing a variety of tactics to stop, or at least slow down, this particular development.

Governor Abbott also designated CAIR – one of America's largest Muslim advocacy and civil rights groups – a "foreign terrorist organization" in November 2025. Abbott said in a radio interview his CAIR declaration was a response to concern from members of the Texas GOP about the state's growing Muslim population and the success of candidates like Zohran Mamdani in New York City's mayoral election. "The concern is high, especially when you see someone like Mamdani getting elected and the cataclysmic problems that's going to cause …. We have freedom of religion, however, your religion cannot become a threat to our freedom".[4]

About 420,000 Muslims live in Texas, constituting 20% of the state's Asian population. Many share traditional Republican values on social and economic issues, but overt attacks on their faith will likely drive more Muslim voters to Democratic candidates in November 2026. This, coupled with the alienation of other large Asian communities, like Indians impacted by crackdowns on H-1B visa holders, makes a double-whammy possible in 2026: GOP policies drive up Asian turnout and while reducing the Republican share of this enlarged vote.[5]

It is quite possible, of course, that the Republican 2026 statewide margins will be so large, as in the 2022 midterms, that however Asian voters in Texas break will not make much difference. But, in my opinion, 2026 is looking a lot more like the 2018 midterms, when Beto O'Rouke lost to Senator Ted Cruz by just 2.6%. If that is the case, keep in mind these numbers:

- Cruz's margin in 2018 was 214,921 votes out of 8.4 million votes.
- There are now 600,000 more Texans of Asian ancestry than was the case in 2018.

Conclusion

When I introduced these monthly reports in August, I posed the question: Why launch a Texas letter in the summer of 2025? My answer was President Donald J. Trump. If Kamala Harris had eked out a narrow presidential win last year, Texas Republicans would be, in my

[4] Molly Hennessy, "In Houston suburbs, Abbott's attack on CAIR unnerve Muslim residents," The Washington Post, November 30, 2025.

[5] See, for example, Pranshu Verma and Supriya Kumar, "H-1B workers flew to India to renew U.S. visas. Now they're stuck," The Washington Post, December 19, 2025.

opinion, assured of extending their 30+ years of dominance in the Lone Star State for the next four years.

But Harris lost. Trump won. Trump 47 has turned out to be a far more dominant and controversial chief executive than Trump 45.[6] He is also less popular than he was in his first term, lately plagued by poor ratings on handling the economy – his strongest card with swing voters last year. There have been about 50 special and off-year elections in 2025. Democrats have improved their performance compared to November 2024 in every case, by an average of about 13%. The same pattern held in Texas last month.

We are, of course, nine months from the midterm elections of 2026. Things could turn around this next year. Jason Miller, a longtime Trump advisor, recently called current polling a "temporary blip" that will reverse when tax cuts passed last year take effect in the first quarter of 2026. "Once the economy rockets to where everybody's predicting it to be for Q1 and Q2, that will snap back."[7]

Maybe, maybe not. Lame-duck presidents usually see a steady decline in popularity in second terms. If that pattern holds in the coming year, Texas Republican candidates will face their most challenging environment since the 1990s. One element of that challenge is weakness with the fast-growing Asian American vote in the Lone Star State.

Six years ago, Texas House Speaker Dennis Bonnen was surreptitiously recorded by Michael Quinn Sullivan, a Republican operative who later released the tape. Most of the hourlong conversation focused, in very unflattering terms, on Texas legislators who had recently chosen him as their leader. Bonner soon resigned as Speaker and did not seek reelection. But some of his candid comments ranged farther afield over the hour-long conversation including the comment: "… all due respect to Trump, who I love by the way – he's killing us in urban, suburban districts."[8]

A big reason Trump was "killing us" in urban, suburban districts five years ago was his alienation of a large majority of Asian American voters. The re-elected president has, in my opinion, worked hard for the last year to repeat that feat. We will find out how much this matters in November 2026.

The February Letter from Texas will focus on the upcoming March 3rd party primaries. Both Democratic and Republican primaries feature major top-of-the-ticket races this year, a prelude to what, I believe, will be the most competitive November general elections since the 1990s.

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[6]Peter Baker, "Second Term Looking More Like a Reign," The New York Times, December 21, 2025.
[7] Ibid., p. 21.

[8] Alexa Ura and Alex Samuels, "This is all confidential", Key excerpts from secret recording of House Speaker Dennis Bonner," The Texas Tribune, October 15, 2019.

We'd love to hear your thoughts, questions, or perspectives on these issues. Please don't hesitate to reach out to us at murraytx@cougarnet.uh.edu; your input helps inform our work and keeps the conversation going.

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