

## Candidate Resources:

# How to win in a Red District

March 2026



### Top Line

1. Many legislative districts in Texas have been won by Republicans by wide margins in recent elections. 70% Republican or more is not uncommon.
2. The Trump administration is doing everything they can to help Democrats. Most of their policies are deeply unpopular and are causing visible harm.
3. But that alone is not enough to turn a deep red district blue. Democrats also need to demonstrate that they have workable solutions to problems that people in your district care about.
4. What follows is a list of suggested actions to improve the odds of flipping a red district. Some of these may not apply in your district, and that's ok. Take the ones that seem helpful to you.

Please share with us other ideas you have for winning in a red district – you can email us at [info@centerforpolicyprogress.org](mailto:info@centerforpolicyprogress.org)

### Ideas for winning in a red district

1. Stress practical solutions to real problems
  - a. Republicans have failed at this. Under GOP leadership, Texas is behind most other states on the things that matter, like health care, a healthy environment, and levels of violent crime.
  - b. Data on how Texas ranks on important metrics can be found on our website, [here](#).

- c. As a result of their failure, Republicans are staying away from the important issues. They want to talk about election fraud, which is virtually non-existent, and Sharia Law, which is already prohibited by the US Constitution. Republicans don't want to talk about the economy, health care or affordability, because their policies are making these problems worse. **But these are what people care about.**
  - d. Republican candidates represent the continuation of an unacceptable status quo.
  - e. In contrast, Democrats have practical, popular, tested solutions to real problems. We suggest a lot of those in our issues papers, [here](#).
- 2. Emphasize local issues** – make sure your issues page and your elevator speech cover the issues that people in your district care most about. Right now, these are likely to include the cost of living (affordability), healthcare, education, safety, and in many districts, water.
- 3. Focus on Facts** – On issue after issue, facts support progressive positions. The more we can get the facts out there, the better Democrats will do. [Papers on our website](#) contain key facts about the issues, including the economy, affordability, education, healthcare, safe communities, immigration and infrastructure.
- 4. Position your opponent and the GOP as extreme** – Many Republican positions are very unpopular, supported by only a fringe minority of the electorate. This includes the complete ban on abortion access (even in the case of rape or incest), refusing to consider any changes to reduce gun violence, cruel immigration and detention practices, and failure to take any action to address climate change. On these and other issues, Republican candidates hold extreme, harmful positions.
- 5. Avoid vulnerable positions** – Republicans will use anything they can against you, whether it is true not. But don't make it easy for them.
- a. "Defund the Police" from 2024 is a good example. This position was deeply unpopular with a huge majority of Texans. However, "Policing reform" was supported by most Texans. And most people who said "defund the police" did not literally mean to eliminate the police. "Policing reform" was more accurate, more widely popular, and less likely to be used against a progressive candidate.
  - b. Potential examples for 2026 include:
    - i. "Abolish ICE". We need some form of "Immigration and Customs Enforcement" which is what ICE stands for. Under Trump, ICE has strayed far from its

principles and mission, and so it needs massive reform. But if you propose to abolish ICE, count on that being used against you, effectively.

- ii. Marijuana policy – both “legalization” and “decriminalization” may convey unwanted connotations. “Legalization” sounds like no limits at all, and “decriminalization” sounds technical. “Reforming marijuana policy” may be a better way to frame the issue, allowing you to be more specific about what you support.
- iii. “Socialism”. Socialism is an economic term with a specific meaning: “collective or governmental ownership and administration of the means of production and distribution of goods.” (Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/socialism>)
  - Few candidates advocate for the government to run our banks, airlines, and factories. But many people who use the term “Socialism” are thinking about the strong social safety net, limitations on corporate power, and support for labor laws in countries like Sweden.
  - But Sweden is not Socialist! (Cato Institute, <https://www.cato.org/blog/debunking-myth-swedish-socialism-again>) It is often referred to as a mixed economy.
  - So, you may want to advocate for things like a stronger social safety net, limits on corporate power, etc. Those are legitimate progressive positions, but they are not Socialism. Using the term Socialism is inaccurate and politically harmful.
- c. For all your policy positions, be aware of how they might be used as attack lines.
- d. And when your opponent accuses you of an extreme position you don’t hold, be loud and direct in setting the record straight. Other potential policy attacks, which in fact few if any Democrats support, include “Open Borders”, “Taking away your guns”, and “Attacking Christianity”. Don’t let them score points unfairly. And avoid own goals. Be clear on what you are for, and what you are not.

**6. Listen** – You don’t always have to be providing the answers. Many times, your constituents just want to be heard. And they may give you some good ideas. One approach that may work well when someone asks you about an issue is “I’ll tell you where I stand, but I also want to hear what you think”, share your 20 – 30 second position (“elevator speech”), then listen.

**7. Look and act the part** – A representative in the state or US legislature is a serious job. Look the part, in a way that is appropriate for you and your district. It shows that you

respect the position, and the people in your district. Fairly or unfairly, appearance matters.

- 8. Create a strong issues page. We provide some tips [here](#).**
  - a. Be clear on what you support, and why.**
  - b. Borrow from leading candidates' websites and issues pages** – Candidates for higher offices often have well-thought out and well-articulated policy positions. They have won elections before, and they have staff that have helped them craft their policy positions. Don't copy them, but you can use them for inspiration and ideas.
  - c. We would be very happy to review your issues page and provide suggestions.**
  
- 9. Coordinate campaigns** – Work with the other Democratic candidates whose districts overlap yours. You can coordinate on things like priorities and messaging, door knocking strategies, and joint appearances. Presenting a unified front is more powerful and more efficient.
  
- 10. Work with allied organizations** - Progressive organizations in your area can be valuable allies to get the word out about how harmful Republican policies have been and how important it is to support progressive candidates. And many can provide helpful endorsements that you can include on your website.
  
- 11. Practice** –
  - a. Write down your “elevator speech” response to any issues you are likely to be asked about.
  - b. Aim for 15 - 30 seconds, which is about 50 or 60 words.
  - c. Try to include a relevant fact or two and indicate specifically what you will do or support as their representative.
  - d. Practice these with someone posing as a friendly questioner and someone posing as a challenging questioner.
  - e. Of course, these need to be based on what you believe and what you support.
  - f. Be ready to go a level or two deeper if they have follow-ups. But being clear up front on what you support and why will set the stage for further discussion.
  - g. These short answers can also be helpful to your volunteers when they are door-knocking or talking about you with voters.
  
- 12. Ask us** – we are here to help. We will be happy at any time to review your issues page, practice your elevator speeches, etc. Email us at [info@centerforpolicyprogress.org](mailto:info@centerforpolicyprogress.org).