

Sen. John Cornyn Might Get Knocked Out In First Round Of Fight For Political Life, New Polling Shows

DAILY CALLER

(Photo by Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images)

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Adam Pack Reporter

Allies of Republican Texas Sen. John Cornyn have spent tens of millions of dollars to reelect him, but this war chest may not be enough to juice the longtime incumbent's polling numbers in the final weeks of the brutal GOP primary, according to new surveys.

The nasty and expensive three-way contest between Cornyn and his two challengers — Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Rep. Wesley Hunt — is widely expected to go to a runoff election between the top two finishers, scheduled for late May. Cornyn, in his most difficult reelection fight since his first election to the Senate in 2002, could get shut out of the two-man brawl after the first round of voting in early March. (**RELATED: Texas Democrat Accused Of Calling Ex-Opponent 'Mediocre Black Man'**)

A J.L. Partners survey **released** Thursday found 27% of likely GOP primary voters support Paxton with Hunt narrowly edging Cornyn (25.7% to 25.5%). Another 21.7% were undecided.

The survey's result showed little movement albeit a narrowing margin from early December when the pollster **found** Paxton leading with 29% of likely primary voters and Cornyn and Hunt each at 24%.

That Cornyn is hovering in the mid-20s points to the serious challenge the four-term incumbent is facing to just secure a spot in the May runoff despite dominating the field in the money race.

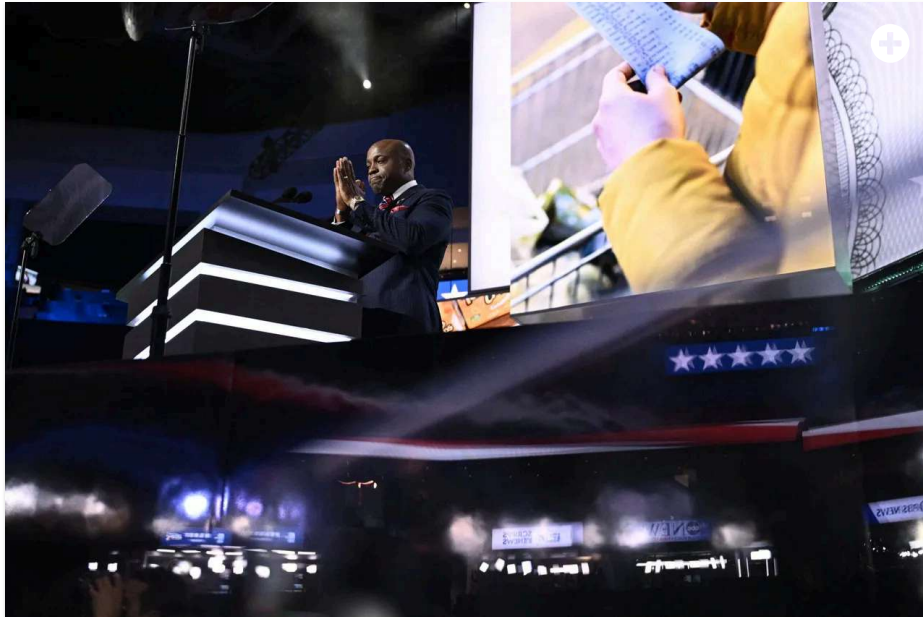
Cornyn's allies have spent more than \$50 million on campaign advertising to-date. In stark contrast, Lone Star Liberty PAC — the main outside spending group supporting Paxton — has spent less than 1% of the pro-Cornyn groups combined, The New York Times **reported**.

Standing for Texas, a nonprofit organization promoting Hunt's insurgent campaign, has **spent** roughly \$6 million so far.

In a scenario where Cornyn is among the two top vote-getters during the first round of voting, he could face an uphill battle in the runoff election during which some incumbents have **performed** poorly throughout the state's recent history.

The poll also found that Paxton holds a narrow one-point lead over Cornyn (41% to 40%) in a hypothetical two-man race.

Cornyn and his allies are **pledging** another \$10 million ad blitz over the next several weeks ahead of the March 3 contest. Early voting begins in 11 days.



US Representative of Texas Wesley Hunt gestures as he speaks during the first day of the 2024 Republican National Convention at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 15, 2024. (Photo by Brendan SMIALOWSKI / AFP) (Photo by BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP via Getty Images)

A snapshot of a recent Texas survey, leaked to the Daily Caller News Foundation, also raises questions about Cornyn's viability in the three-way contest.

The survey, conducted by the GOP polling firm Cygnal and not intended for public view, was commissioned by a Republican candidate running in a different statewide contest, who also polled the GOP Senate primary ballot.

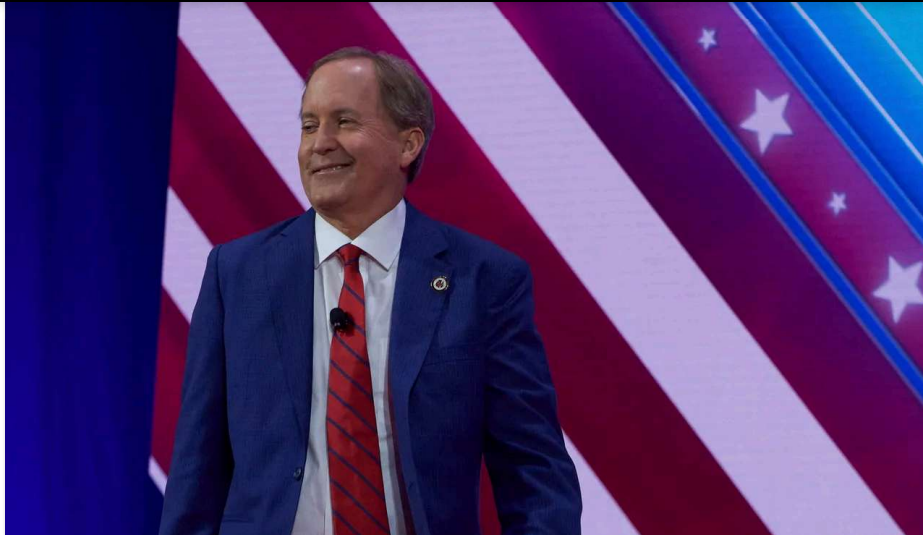
Paxton narrowly leads the field with 25.7% of the vote, followed by Hunt at 25.1% support and Cornyn trailing at 22.4%.

A whopping 26.9% of GOP primary voters are undecided despite the torrent of campaign advertising, largely by pro-Cornyn groups. The survey of 615 respondents was conducted between Jan. 26-28.

The Cornyn campaign declined to comment directly on the polls showing the incumbent in third place, though trailing both of his challengers within the surveys' margin of error.

"We have a plan to win the primary and we are executing it," Cornyn campaign senior advisor Matt Mackowiak told the DCNF.

If Cornyn fails to secure a spot in the anticipated May runoff election, he would be the first senator to lose to a primary challenger since 2010.



Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton during the 2024 Conservative Political Action Conference the Gaylord National Convention Center in Fort Washington, Maryland, Friday, Feb. 23, 2024. (Photo by Dominic Gwinn / Middle East Images / Middle East Images via AFP) (Photo by DOMINIC GWINN/Middle East Images/AFP via Getty Images)

Paxton, who is **divorcing** his wife of 38 years and has a history of ethical baggage, has viability concerns in a general election setting that national Republicans are taking seriously.

The National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), a pro-Cornyn group, **circulated** internal polling this week showing Paxton vulnerable to a general election challenge from Democratic Texas state legislator James Talarico.

Paxton trails Talarico by three points in a head-to-head matchup and barely leads Democratic Texas Rep. Jasmine Crockett, who is viewed as a weak general election candidate. Cornyn conversely leads Talarico by three points and holds a comfortable 7-point lead over Crockett.

The NRSC survey, intended to show Cornyn's strength over Paxton in a general election setting, did not include Hunt.

Though Cornyn supporters argue that a Paxton general election scenario will force Republicans to spend massive sums to shore up his candidacy, Paxton has alleged that Cornyn's decision to run for a fifth term has already cost Republicans tens of millions of dollars.

"He's stolen \$50+ million from races in NC, ME, MI, and GA and what does he have to show for it?" Paxton wrote in a **statement** on X. "He's stuck in the mid-20s, doesn't even know if he'll make the runoff, and is set to lose by huge margins even if he does."

President Donald Trump, who often acts as a kingmaker in GOP primary contests, has not intervened. Senate Majority Leader John Thune **told** the DCNF in January that although he's asked Trump to publicly back Cornyn, those conversations have to materialize in an endorsement.



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