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Can Beto O'Rourke Defeat Ted Cruz in the November 2018 Texas Senatorial Race?

Race, Age, Voter Registration and Participation Rates in the Lone Star State

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Executive Summary

The Texas senatorial race between Ted Cruz and Beto O'Rourke will be decided by voter participation rates of both Republican and Democratic constituencies. Unfortunately, for O'Rourke young people between 18 and 24 years of age, African-Americans, and especially Latinos, have the lowest voter participation rates in the state, and nationally as well and these are the core of Democratic voters. Republican constituencies, largely white, older and rural have had much higher historical participation rates in the state.

The most important determining factor in this election will be the participation rates of Latinos who now are as numerous as non-Hispanic whites in the state. However, while over 62% of non-Hispanic whites voted in the 2016 presidential election, only 40% of eligible Latino voters went to the polls.

There are few indications that the Latino vote will increase significantly in this election according to recent news reports. Irrespective of the racist demagogic attacks on Latinos across the country by the current president, and his surrogate in Texas, Cruz, it appears that Latinos in Texas are going to continue sitting on the sidelines as if their vote does not matter.¹

If there is no change in the political attitudes and participation rates of Latinos, an O'Rourke victory will be quite difficult, although there are other factors which could possibly influence the outcome. Among these are the voting rates of young people, African Americans, and urban and suburban women of all races who may have been impacted by the bitter Kavanaugh confirmation process.

Introduction

The senatorial campaign in Texas for the election of November 2018 pits two highly contrasting candidates much like the gubernatorial races in Georgia and Florida. Ted Cruz, the incumbent, is a right-wing extremist with deep roots in Texas politics. His selection as the Republican candidate for Senator was somewhat of an upset and interpreted as a rejection of more traditional Republican politics in the state as he defeated a sitting Lieutenant Governor, David Dewhurst in the Republican primary. He was backed by the extreme right wing of the Republican Party endorsed by the Tea Party Express, Sarah Palin and a litany of other extremists cut from the mold of the current president of the United States who have taken over the Republican Party. Cruz crusaded against the Affordable Care Act, is in the pocket of the NRA and gun lobby, played an important role in the government shutdown of October 2013, is against a woman's right to choose, favors the repeal of DACA, and despite his conflicts with the current president during the Republican primaries of 2016, is clearly an important part of the machinery of the Republican Party which enables the most insidious and destructive president in the history of the United States.

Beto O'Rourke has represented the 16th congressional district of Texas in the U.S. House of Representatives since his victory in the November 2012 election. He took office in January 2013. The district encompasses El Paso where O'Rourke was born, served on the El Paso City Council between 2005 and 2011 and is heavily Democratic. O'Rourke is the polar opposite of the right-wing extremist Cruz. He supports a woman's right to choose, gun control, immigration reform and DACA, legalization of recreational marijuana, and nearly all

¹ See Sean Sullivan and Mike DeBonis "'It keeps me awake at night': Democrats fear lackluster Latino support could undercut bid for Congress" Washington Post, October 12, 2018. Also see Melanie Zanona, "Dems struggle to mobilize Latino voters for midterms" The Hill, <https://thehill.com/latino/411032-dems-struggle-to-ensure-latino-support-in-midterms>.

progressive causes. He is a mild-mannered campaigner and has visited every single county in Texas in his campaign for governor, even those that voted heavily for the current President in 2016 and which are predominantly white. This strategy of a broad appeal is very different from Stacy Abrams in Georgia and Andrew Gillum in Florida in their gubernatorial races who are focusing on Democratic constituents in the hope that they will register and vote at higher rates than in the past: African Americans, Latinos, and younger voters.

Still, however, the politics of race will be central to this senatorial race in Texas despite O'Rourke's direct appeal to voters in regions of the state which voted for the current president in 2016 and are predominantly white. Here is why.

A Specter is Haunting Republican Texas --- the Specter of Demographic Transformation

Texas is a state that is in the middle of extraordinary demographic changes which over the long term may swing the state from solid Republican to Democratic. Whether these transformations have gone far enough at the moment for Beto O'Rourke to win in November remains to be seen. Above all is the relative decline of the white population compared with other race/ethnic groups. This is germane because the Republicans have built their control over Texas national-level political offices largely with the support of its white population and a significant minority of Hispanics. In 2016 the only racial group the current president won in the state was non-Hispanic whites of whom 69% voted for him according to exit polls. These same polls indicated that 34% of the State's Latinos; 26% of Asians; and 11% of African Americans voted Republican in November 2016.²

Since 1990 the Texas non-Hispanic white population has steadily declined as a percentage of all Texans and according to the U.S. Census Bureau data there are now nearly as many Latinos in the state as non-Hispanic whites.³ In 1990 non-Hispanic whites comprised 61% of the total Texas population. This fell to 42% in 2017. Over the same period Latinos increased from 25.4% to 39.4% of all Texans. Non-Hispanic Blacks remained relatively stagnant as a percentage of the Texas population: 11.7% in 1990 and 11.9% in 2017. Asians also increased from 1.8% to 4.8% of all Texans between 1990 and 2017. Today a majority of the Texas population hails from minority race/ethnic groups. See tables 1 and 2.

² See CNN exit polls, election 2016, Texas at <https://www.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls/texas/president>

³ See U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin, June 21, 2018, at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-kits/2018/estimates-characteristics.html>

Table 1
Texas Population by Race, 1990 - 2017

	1990	2000	2010	2017	Growth 1990 - 2016
Non-Hispanic White	10,270,607	10,812,874	11,326,246	11,886,381	15.7%
Latino	4,306,304	6,784,522	9,636,897	11,156,514	159.1%
Non- Hispanic Black	1,979,815	2,346,294	2,897,957	3,368,473	70.1%
Asian	306,888	563,123	970,708	1,366,658	345.3%
Other	87,768	341,358	425,306	526,570	500.0%
Total	16,951,382	20,848,171	25,257,114	28,304,596	67.0%

Table 2
Texas Population by Race, 1990 - 2017
(in percentages of total population)

	1990	2000	2010	2017
Non-Hispanic White	60.6%	51.9%	44.8%	42.0%
Latino	25.4%	32.5%	38.2%	39.4%
Non- Hispanic Black	11.7%	11.3%	11.5%	11.9%
Asian	1.8%	2.7%	3.8%	4.8%
Other	0.5%	1.6%	1.7%	1.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

The expansion of the state's Latino population has occurred largely because of natural demographic expansion among Latinos, mostly people of Mexican origin, who have been in the state for generations and were born in the U.S. The current president with his racist anti-immigrant obsessions and diatribes, used as dog-whistles to attract white supremacist support, has falsely pushed the idea that an 'infestation' of Mexican criminals has 'invaded' the U.S. especially in border states such as Texas. In fact, two-thirds of all Texas Latinos were born in the U.S. in 2016 and a third of those born outside of the U.S. have become naturalized citizens. Nearly 80% of all Texas Latinos were citizens of the United States in 2016.

However, because Latino citizens are significantly younger than the non-Hispanic black or white populations, and have not yet reached the age of 18 which would permit them to vote if registered, the Latino electorate is not as proportionally as large as Latinos are in the overall population. Only 61.4% of Latino citizens in Texas were 18 years of age and older and eligible to vote compared with 81.1% of non-Hispanic whites, 75.2% of non-Hispanic blacks, and 73.7% of Asians. This is clearly why the non-Hispanic white vote is much larger than

the proportion of non-Hispanic whites in the Texas population despite the fact that they are about the same size demographically.

Table 5
Percentage of Citizen Population 18
Years of Age and Over and Eligible
to Vote in Texas, 2016

Non-Hispanic White	81.1%
Non- Hispanic Black	75.2%
Asian	73.7%
Latino	61.4%

Even though non-Hispanic whites fell from nearly 69% of all eligible voters in the state in 1990 to 52.4% in 2016, they were still a majority of potential voters. While Latinos eligible to vote rose from 18.2% of all possible voters in Texas if registered in 1990 to 28.9% of the state's electorate in 2016, this was well below their 39% share of the overall population. This will change in the future as the Latino population ages. Asians have also increased from less than 1% of possible voters if registered in 1990, to 3.7% in 2016. There was a marginal increase of African-American potential voters from 11.7% to 13.1% of the total electorate over the same period. (see tables 3 and 4).

Table 3
Texas Electorate by Race, 1990 - 2016

	1990	2000	2010	2016	Growth 1990 - 2016
Non-Hispanic White	7,750,649	8,255,835	8,918,146	9,357,051	20.7%
Latino	2,056,431	3,030,845	4,216,204	5,155,067	150.7%
Non- Hispanic Black	1,316,104	1,590,258	2,017,406	2,337,223	77.6%
Asian	105,050	231,936	467,873	657,317	525.7%
Other	60,735	196,690	236,002	350,482	477.1%
Total	11,288,969	13,305,564	15,855,631	17,857,140	58.2%

Table 4
Texas Electorate by Race, 1990 - 2017
(in percentages of total electorate)

	1990	2000	2010	2016
Non-Hispanic White	68.7%	62.0%	56.2%	52.4%
Latino	18.2%	22.8%	26.6%	28.9%
Non- Hispanic Black	11.7%	12.0%	12.7%	13.1%
Asian	0.9%	1.7%	3.0%	3.7%
Other	0.5%	1.5%	1.5%	2.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Registration and Voting Rates by Race in the 2016 Presidential Elections

In the 2016 presidential elections non-Hispanic whites in Texas had significantly higher voting rates than every other race/ethnic group in the state although African-American registration rates were slightly higher. If Beto O'Rourke is going to be victorious against his Republican opponent this is going to have to change. To state this another way, not generally recognized by most observers, non-Hispanic black, Latino, and Asian voters, who vote heavily Democratic, hold the key to this election. Large numbers are eligible to vote and if they do, O'Rourke will win the senate seat. In fact, if they went to the polls at rates commensurate with their share of overall potential voters, the Republican candidate who won Texas would have lost, and this is without question from a purely statistical perspective. There are enough progressive non-Hispanic whites in the urban areas of the state, and who will vote Democratic, to assure this. In 2016 26% of them voted Democratic.

It ought to be noted that in 2012 the Republican candidate for the presidency won the state by a 15.8% margin, garnering 57.2% of the vote to 41.4% for the Democratic candidate. The Republican margin over victory in Texas shrank to 9% in 2016, 52.2% to 43.2%. If this trend continues, waning support for Republican candidates, O'Rourke may have a real change of winning the Texas senatorial seat.

Table 6 is indicative of what occurs at the state level when particular race/ethnic groups, for whatever reason, don't participate in elections. This is a major challenge facing O'Rourke, the Texas Democratic Party, and the Democratic party across the nation in states with significant Latino and African-American populations. Although non-Hispanic whites comprised 54% of eligible voters in Texas in 2016 their higher registration and voting rates meant that they accounted for 61.3% of all votes cast and that is one of the reasons the Republican candidate won Texas.

The real story in Texas revolves around the much-trumpeted 'sleeping giant' of U.S. politics, the Latino vote. In November 2016 it was barely awake. Only 40.5% of eligible Hispanic voters in the state of Texas went

to the polls in the presidential election of that year. As a result, although Latinos represented 27.5% of eligible voters in the state, they cast only 20.1% of actual votes on election day.

Although a significant share of Latinos voted Republican in 2016 (34% according to exit polls) a majority of Latino voters cast ballots for the Democratic candidate. The Latino vote in Texas is the most critical for Democratic candidates in the state who have yet to find a successful strategy to mobilize this potential sector of electoral support that continues to largely sit on the sidelines election after election. Despite the fact that Cruz is of Cuban origin, he is an extreme right-wing Republican supported by the current anti-immigrant and racist president. That means that in all likelihood Texas Latinos who participate in the election will vote heavily for O'Rourke in November 2018.

A question is will Latino voter registration and participation remain as dreadfully low as they were in November 2016? Can the Democratic Party and its candidates come up with some innovative strategies to register Latinos in the state and elsewhere? Relying on the same old strategies of the past will not work simply because they have not worked in moving registration rates among Latinos upward in Texas and in key states with large Latino populations since the 1988 presidential election.⁴

The African-American registration rate in Texas was slightly higher than that of non-Hispanic whites, in large part because of the Obama presidency. Although, voter participation rates were lower at 57.2% of eligible voters compared with non-Hispanic whites at 62.9%, African-American voters in 2016 voted at rates commensurate with their share of the electorate. Non-Hispanic black voters were 13.6% of the Texas electorate and cast 14% of all ballots in November 2016.

Finally, despite remaining relatively small, the Asian electorate of Texas was the fastest growing race/ethnic group eligible to vote in the state between 1990 when there were about 105,000 potential Asian voters, to 2016 when that stood at over 657,000. Although comprising about 4% of eligible voters in the state, in a tight election Asian voters could play a decisive role. For this to occur their voter participation rate is going to have to move up from the 47.3% of 2016.

⁴ See Laird W. Bergad, "The Latino Voter Registration Dilemma" January 2016, <http://clacls.gc.cuny.edu/files/2016/01/CLACLS-CNNe-Report-1-The-Latino-Voter-Registration-Dilemma.pdf>

Table 6
Voting Registration and Participation Rates by Race, Texas Presidential Election 2016

2016 Presidential Election	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Asian	Hispanic
Percentage of Electorate	54.0%	13.6%	4.1%	27.5%
Percentage Electorate Registered by Race	72.7%	73.1%	58.5%	55.5%
Percentage of Electorate Voted	62.9%	57.2%	47.3%	40.5%
Percentage of Registered Electorate Voted	86.6%	78.2%	80.9%	73.0%
Percentage of Actual Voters	61.3%	14.0%	3.5%	20.1%

Age

Race is one factor which must be examined if voting patterns and outcomes are to be understood in Texas. The other is age. Younger voters of all races in the state of Texas voted heavily for the Democratic candidate in the 2016 presidential election. Those between 18 and 24 years of age voted Democratic 58% to 32% according to exit polls. Voters between the ages of 25 and 29 voted 51% to 41% Democratic. Even voters between 30 and 39 years of age split 46% Democratic to 46% Republican.

However, voters between the ages of 18 and 24 of all races have consistently had the lowest voting rates of any demographic group. In 2016 only 32% of eligible voters in this age category voted and this compares to the other extreme, voters 65 years of age and older of whom 69% voted in November 2016. (See table 7).

Elections in Texas and throughout the U.S. are not determined by the famous ‘American people’ that politicians across the political spectrum constantly refer to. They are elected by ‘who’ votes meaning which race/ethnic, and age groups, ‘bother’ to register and vote. The current president won because white and older voters cast ballots at much higher rates than younger and minority voters who support Democratic candidates in every state, even the reddest states of the U.S. Nearly 61% of all votes cast in Texas in November 2016 were by people over the age of 45 and most of them were white.⁵ This is NOT the ‘American people’. This is the population who exercised their right to vote!⁶

The challenge facing Beto O'Rourke in Texas is to get Democratic constituencies to exercise their civic responsibilities to register and vote at higher rates: African-Americans, Latinos, and younger voters of all races.

⁵ See Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2016, Table 4C, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-580.html>

⁶ It is no wonder that President Obama, campaigning in California for Democratic candidates on September 8, 2018 said ““The biggest threat to our democracy is not one individual,” he told 700 people crammed into a ballroom. “It’s not one big super-PAC billionaire. It’s apathy. **It’s indifference, it’s us not doing what we are supposed to do.**” <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/08/us/obama-california-democrats-trump.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

If he is successful at shifting the structure of the voting public in Texas away from white, older, rural voters toward more inclusion of actual legal and potential voters, he will win the senatorial race there. This is a gigantic IF especially among Latinos who historically have simply not registered or voted in Texas at above the 40% rate in presidential elections since the 1980s.

Table 7
Registration and Voting Rates by Age
Category in Texas, November 2016
Presidential Election

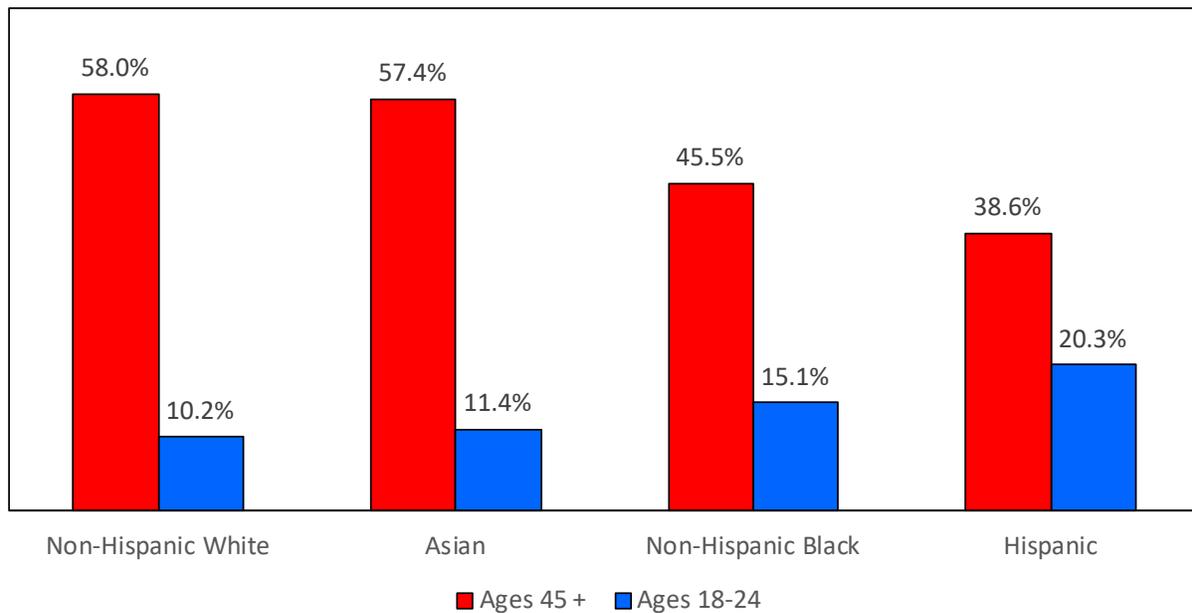
Age Category	Registration Rates	Voting Rates
18 to 24	47.6%	31.9%
25 to 34	60.2%	46.5%
35 to 44	67.6%	53.7%
45 to 64	72.8%	62.3%
65+	78.3%	69.0%

The issue of age and voting is brought into sharp focus in Texas by examining the age structure of the electorate by race. This also helps understand why Texas has remained a red state and the hurdles facing Beto O'Rourke. Non-Hispanic white potential voters are much older than non-Hispanic black or Latino voters and it is precisely these age categories which have the highest voter registration and participation rates. To phrase this another way, older white voters comprise a share of actual voters which is much higher than their proportion among all potential voters.

At the same time Hispanics have the highest percentage of their electorate, or potential voters, between the ages of 18 and 24 and non-Hispanic whites have the lowest. This is the age category with the absolutely lowest registration and voter turnout rates. African Americans are in the middle. Thus, the fact that Hispanics have an overall low voter participation rate in general is in large part due to the age structure of the Latino population and the failure of younger Latinos to participate in the political system.

Asians were a small percentage of the overall electorate in Texas and their age structure was similar to that of non-Hispanic whites, although they voted heavily Democratic in 2016. (See figure 1).

Figure 1
Percent of Electorate 45 Years of Age and Older and Ages 18-24 by Race, Texas 2016



The Geography of Voting and the Latino Population

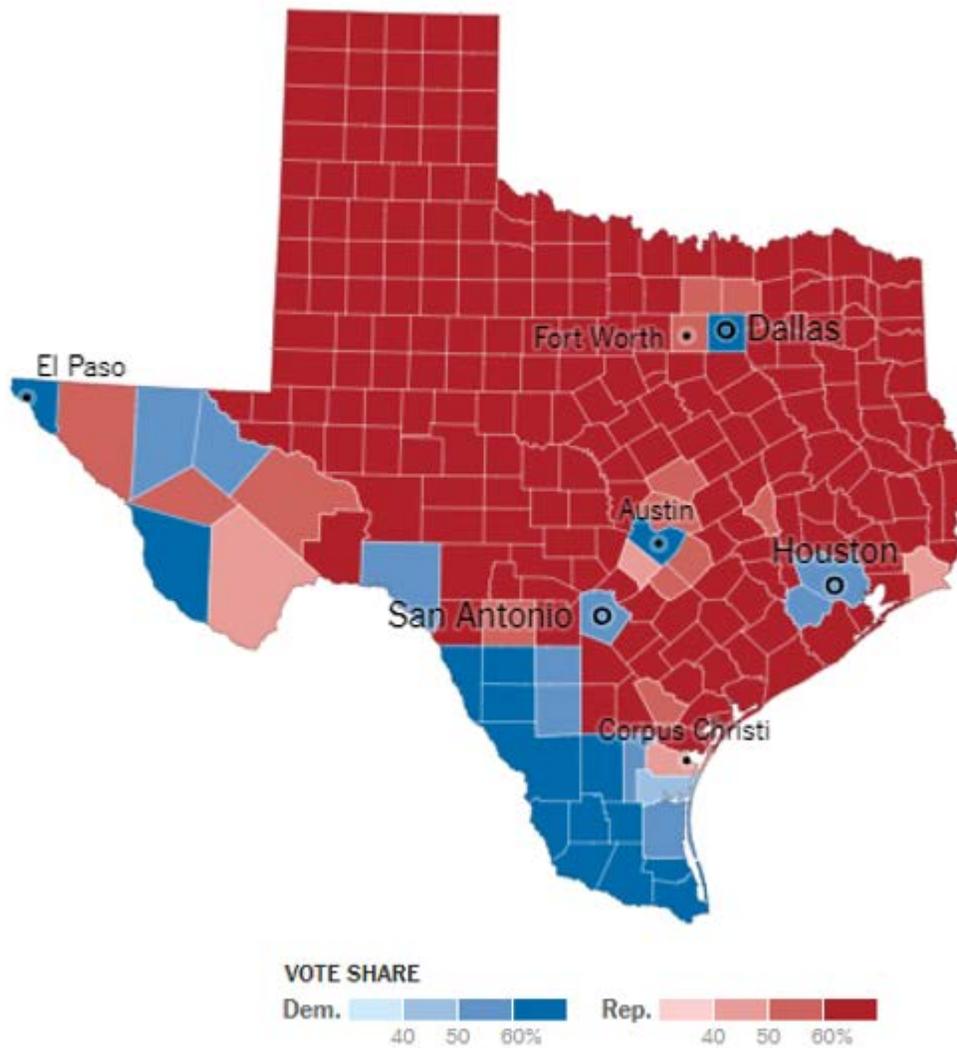
In the 2016 presidential election the democratic candidate won in Texas urban centers and along the border areas with Mexico where there were heavy concentrations of Latinos, despite the fact that Latino voter participation rates were so low. (See Map 1).

Beto O'Rourke may be campaigning in every county in Texas to attract as many votes as possible from all race and ethnic groups, but the key to this election is whether or not Latinos will break the cycle of low registration and voter turn-out rates which have typified their political behavior in the past. Map 2 indicates with clarity the counties in which Latinos in the state are concentrated. If O'Rourke, and the Democratic Party can somehow mobilize Latinos in these counties to register and vote, this may be the key to whether he wins or loses.

Recent news is not very good. An article in the Washington Post of October 12, 2018 indicated quite clearly that there is absolutely no evidence that Latino voters are registering in higher numbers than in the past in Texas, nor that Latino voter turnout will be anything but the dismal low rates which have kept Texas Republican in elections of the past two decades.⁷

⁷ Sean Sullivan and Mike DeBonis "It keeps me awake at night': Democrats fear lackluster Latino support could undercut bid for Congress" Washington Post, October 12, 2018. Also see Melanie Zanona, "Dems struggle to mobilize Latino voters for midterms" The Hill, <https://thehill.com/latino/411032-dems-struggle-to-ensure-latino-support-in-midterms>

Map 1
Texas Presidential Election November 2016
Results by County



Map 2
Latinos as Percentage of Total Population by Texas County, 2016

