

Hispanics, Women, and Cowboy Boots:
Projecting Partisan Change Deep in the Heart of Texas

Almost every political pundit in the country has made their bet as to whether Texas will be a red state, blue state, or battleground state in the coming presidential elections. Texas has gone for the Republican candidate in every presidential election since 1980. If Texas were to become a swing state, with its thirty-eight electoral votes, presidential candidates would want to start dusting off their old hats, breaking in their cowboy boots, and opening up their wallets to cover the twenty television markets in this vast state. By analyzing population projections from the Texas State Demographer's Office and survey data from the University of Texas/*Texas Tribune* polls, we find that the partisan breakdown of eligible Texas voters will likely change drastically over the next two decades, but whether or not this change is actually reflected in election day results sooner rather than later may depend upon two key factors. The first is the ability of either party to attract Hispanic voters and increase turnout among this key growing demographic group, which is projected to make up over half of Texas' population in just fifteen years' time. The second and often overlooked factor is the ability of either party to increase turnout among women, a group which has had historically low levels of voter turnout in Texas, even in recent elections in which women voted at higher rates than men across the rest of the country.

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Texas stands on the precipice of historic change. This longtime conservative state that has been solid Republican red will soon find itself morphing to a shade of purple on its potentially quick path to a Democratic blue. It is the contention of the authors that it is not just an issue of *if* this change is coming but rather *when* it will arrive. In this paper, we provide details on how changing demographics and participation rates will usher in this transformation in a very short order. Of particular note is, of course, the growth rate of the Hispanic population in Texas. This coupled with increasing participation rates among women bodes well for the traditional Democratic bloc of voters, and what's more, all this demographic change is quickly converging on the fastest growing state in the nation. Figure 1 illustrates how Texas' share of the United States' population has been steadily increasing for decades. This growth appears unlikely to be reversed any time soon, which means that Texas' influence upon the national political stage is bound to increase, as its share of power in the U.S. House of Representatives and the electoral college increases.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The main contributors to growth of the Texas population come from foreign-born Latino migrants as well as a continuing steady stream of in-migration, about 200,000 people every year for the last ten years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. It's also worth noting that Texas currently has the third highest birth rate in the nation at 15.4 births per 1000 as compared to a national birth rate of 13 births per 1000 (The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Vital Statistics Report, 2012). Through these sources of growth, great political change is looming for the Lone Star state.

In order to determine the future partisan make-up of Texas, we use population projection data from the Texas State Demographer's Office and the February 2015 survey data from the University of Texas/*Texas Tribune* Texas Statewide Survey. The survey data provides us with a view of the current partisan breakdown of Texans by demographic groups. We then use that partisan breakdown to forecast partisanship trends employing the estimated changes in demographics from the population projections. This, of course, assumes that party identification within each demographic group remains the same over the next several decades, with neither party making any significant inroads in attracting new voters. How well that assumption can hold up would very much depend on the parties themselves and their willingness to adjust to future circumstances, as they are surely capable of noticing demographic trends themselves. However, as Green, Palmquist, and Schickler (2002, p. 83) note, party identification does tend to be very stable even over long periods of time. Even if a party were committed to expanding its base, they may not have the capacity to do so (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002, p. 228).

Figure 2 uses data from the Texas State Demographer's Office to show the projected population of Texas by race and ethnicity. By 2020, it is estimated that the Hispanic population will be the largest demographic group in Texas, and by 2050, the Hispanic population will outnumber the non-Hispanic white population by a margin of over two-to-one. The African-American population is projected to remain a fairly stable portion of the overall Texas population throughout the same time period. These estimates are fairly conservative, as they are from the 0.5 migration scenario determined by the Texas State Demographer's Office. This scenario estimates that in the future, Texas will experience only one half the migration that it experienced from 2000-2010.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Figure 3 shows the projected partisan make-up for Texas through the year 2050, while Table 1 provides a much more detailed breakdown of this growth over time. Looking at this data, we can see that, largely because of the growth of the Hispanic population, Democratic Party identifiers are projected to outnumber Republican Party Identifiers as soon as 2020, though only by about 6%, which could make Texas a swing state in the near future with either party having the capability of attracting enough of their voters to the polls to win the state. That margin is expected to grow steadily to 10% by 2050, potentially making Texas a solid blue state, unless the Republican Party finds a way to attract Hispanic voters. From this data, it appears that those demographic groups currently associated with the Republican Party may become a much smaller proportion of the Texas population by 2050, while those groups currently associated with the Democratic Party may continue to grow.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

[Insert Table 1 about here]

These trends do not necessarily indicate that we would immediately notice a change at the ballot box, as voter turnout is a separate question. It has been well established that those with more education and higher incomes are more likely to vote (Campbell, Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960) (Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980), at least in part because people possessing these resources and attributes are in positions where they are likely to be exposed to social incentives and higher levels of information (Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). Overall, according to the 2014 Texas Fact Book, Texas ranks fiftieth amongst the states in terms of the percentage of population that has graduated from high school (81.4%) and thirty-first in the percentage of its population with a Bachelor's Degree or more (26.7%). When it comes to social welfare, Texas ranks tenth with a poverty rate of 18.1%, and it ranks third for the percentage of households with food

insecurity at 18.4%. These factors may help explain why voter turnout rates in Texas for the November 2014 midterm elections were at an abysmal 24.99% of the voting age population, or 33.7% of those registered to vote, according to the Texas Secretary of State's Office. It should be noted this most recent election did require voter identification according to state law, and this law seems to disenfranchise more of the traditional Democratic base (Brennan Center for Justice, 2006), though studies regarding the impact on voter turnout are still being conducted.

Yet these numbers only tell part of the story of voter turnout for Texas. When it comes to family income, there are still persistent gaps. In 2012, black families in Texas earned just 56% of what white families did, while Hispanic families earned just 52% (Jillson, 2015, p. 104). Poverty rates among Hispanic and black families were over three times that of white families in 2012 (Jillson, 2015, p. 110). In looking at educational attainment, while about 91% of whites in Texas have a high school diploma, that number is just 84% amongst blacks and 57% amongst Hispanics in Texas (Jillson, 2015, p. 138). SAT and ACT scores for white students in Texas have shown to be consistently higher among white students than among black or Hispanic students (Jillson, 2015, pp. 140-141). The positive news on the educational front, however, is that these gaps have been closing, though for now, it may suggest that voter turnout rates may struggle to gain momentum in Texas for a while. Figure 4 uses data from the U.S. Census Bureau to illustrate reported voter turnout rates among white, black, and Hispanic voters, both nationally and for Texas for every presidential election since 1984. While turnout among black voters has reached very comparable levels both nationally and in Texas, reported turnout among Hispanic voters is about half that, with turnout among Hispanic voters in Texas just below that of Hispanic voters nationally for the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

This means that while the Hispanic population may soon become a majority of the overall Texas population, if current trends in voter turnout rates continue, the Hispanic population may not as quickly become a majority of Texas voters. This differentiation could only increase the importance of voter registration drives and “get out the vote” efforts on behalf of both parties. This point also goes to the question of whether it matters if everyone votes or not. Sides, Schickler, & Citrin (2008) found a significant partisan differential between voters and eligible non-voters in Texas that seemed to be largely due to low turnout among Hispanics whom they found would have likely supported Democratic candidates had they voted. They found such a difference, in fact, that had every eligible voter in Texas actually voted, their findings suggest that Texas may have gone for the Democratic presidential candidates in 1992 and 1996. These current low turnout rates certainly point to a weak Democratic Party organization in Texas that could also have been part of the reason the party has difficulty recruiting quality candidates to run for office (Grieder, 2013, pp. 189-212).

That being said, even low turnout rates among a very large population of Hispanic voters in Texas could be felt very soon in presidential elections. Nationwide in the 2012 presidential election, Hispanics favored Democratic candidate Barack Obama by a 71% to 27% margin over Republican candidate Mitt Romney. This was an increase over the 2008 election where Hispanics favored Obama 67% to 31% for Republican candidate John McCain. Looking into these numbers further this difference becomes more profound as Hispanics age 18-29 favored Obama in 2012 by a 74-23% margin (Lopez & Taylor, 2012).

In regards to presidential elections, the possible Republican loss of Texas’ 38 electoral votes (or 14% of what one needs to get to 270) would require the GOP to pick up the swing states of Ohio (18), Virginia (13), and Nevada (6) just to mitigate the damage of losing that one

state; and if Texas' population does continue to grow, its share of the electoral college vote will only grow with it. From the 2012 election, the final electoral tally was 332-206 in favor of the Democratic candidate. If these results held, and the Democrats pick up Texas this would turn that majority to 370-168; this would almost be seen as insurmountable for the GOP to overcome. This may push the GOP to reconsider its current issue positions, messaging, and voter outreach strategies if it wants to have a chance of winning presidential elections in the future, though again, this may be very difficult for them to do given current research showing parties may simply not have the capacity to do so (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002).

One point that we have neglected to mention until now is the role that women may play in all of this demographic change in Texas. According to the February 2015 University of Texas/*Texas Tribune* Survey, about 47% of women identify with the Democratic Party, about 44% with the Republican Party, and about 9% as independents. Compare this to about 40% of men who identify with the Democratic Party, 47% with the Republican Party, and 9% as independents. This gender gap in Texas is consistent with the persistent national partisan gender gap, characterized by disproportionately more Republican Party support among men and more Democratic Party support among women (Box-Steffensmeier, De Boef, & Lin, 2004). This gap could potentially become more significant if we look at turnout rates among men and women in Texas, shown in Figure 5. Since the 1984 presidential election, there has been a growing gap in the turnout rates of men and women, so while the Democratic Party may not see immediate returns at the ballot box from the growth of the Hispanic population in Texas, the growing gender gap would seem to lean more in the favor since, like everything else, the gender gap is bigger in Texas. If either party could increase the turnout rates among women in Texas to even

just be on par with the overall turnout rates among women nationally, this could have a dramatic effect on election outcomes.

[Insert Figure 5 about here]

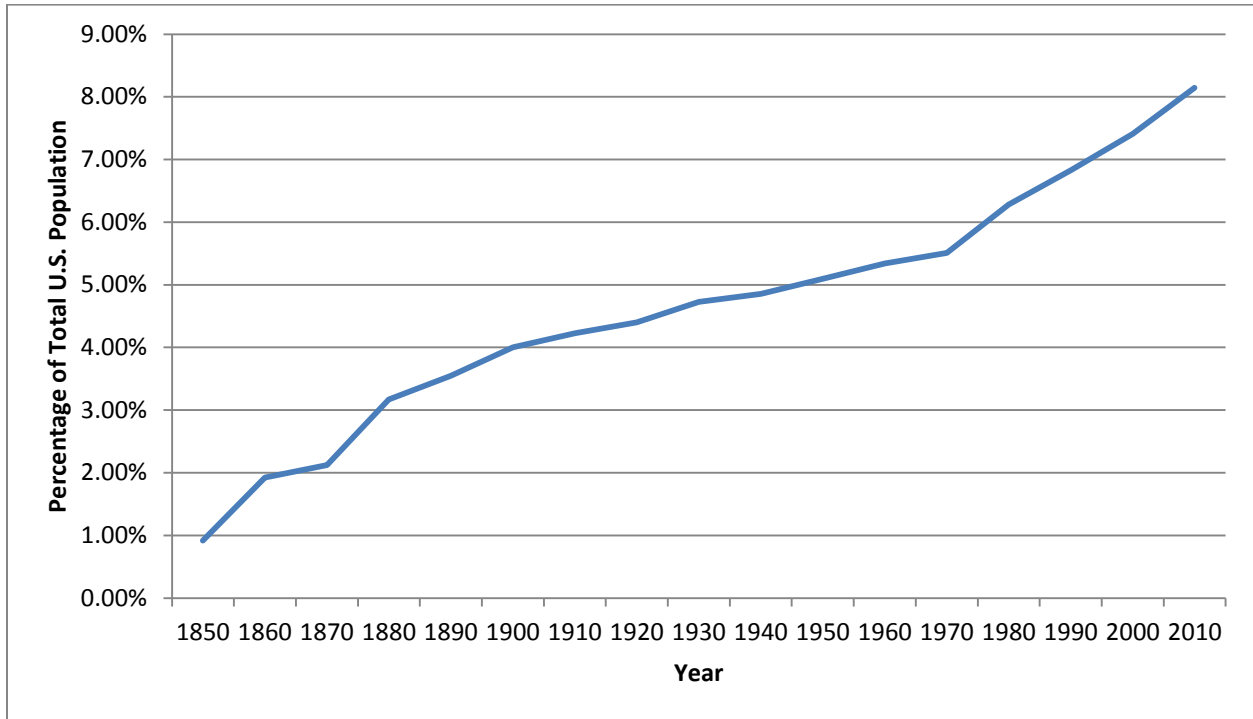
Texas Democrats have not won a statewide election in over twenty years, and yet only fifty years ago the Democratic Party in Texas could have been considered dominant. In fact, let's not forget that Allan Shivers ran for governor of Texas in 1952 as both the Democratic and Republican Party candidate, and yet he won decisively as a Democrat by a three-to-one margin (Grieder, 2013, p. 135). Since then Texas has realigned with the Republican Party, and really, throughout all of its partisan shifts through the years, Texas has always remained a conservative state just as it has been since before the Civil War. For Texas to elect a Democrat today, there would need to be a significant shift rather than just another partisan realignment, and it appears that shift is coming in the form of significant demographic change. As we have shown, the increasing gender gap in voter turnout in Texas would help increase Democratic Party support at the polls, and the growth of the Hispanic population would make Texas a blue state by 2020, though due to low turnout among this population, actual change in electoral results may take much longer. That is, unless the parties can convince a few more voters to be irrational and go to the polls.

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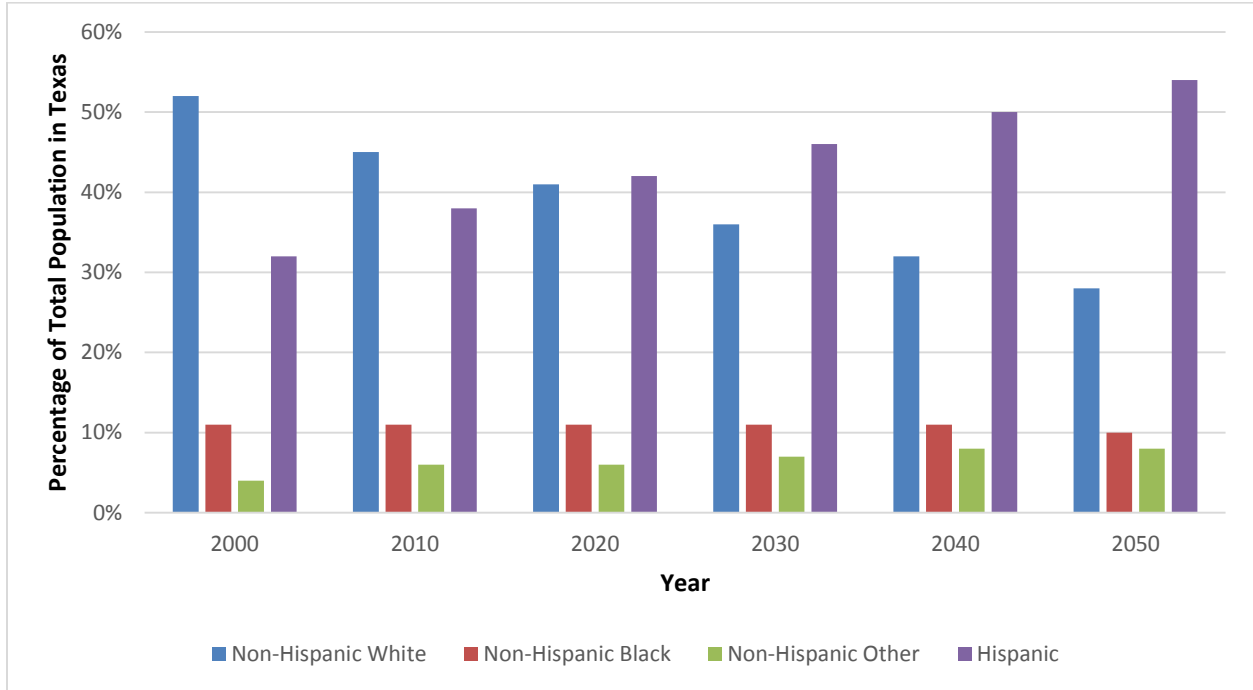
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Figure 1. Percentage of U.S. Population Residing in Texas



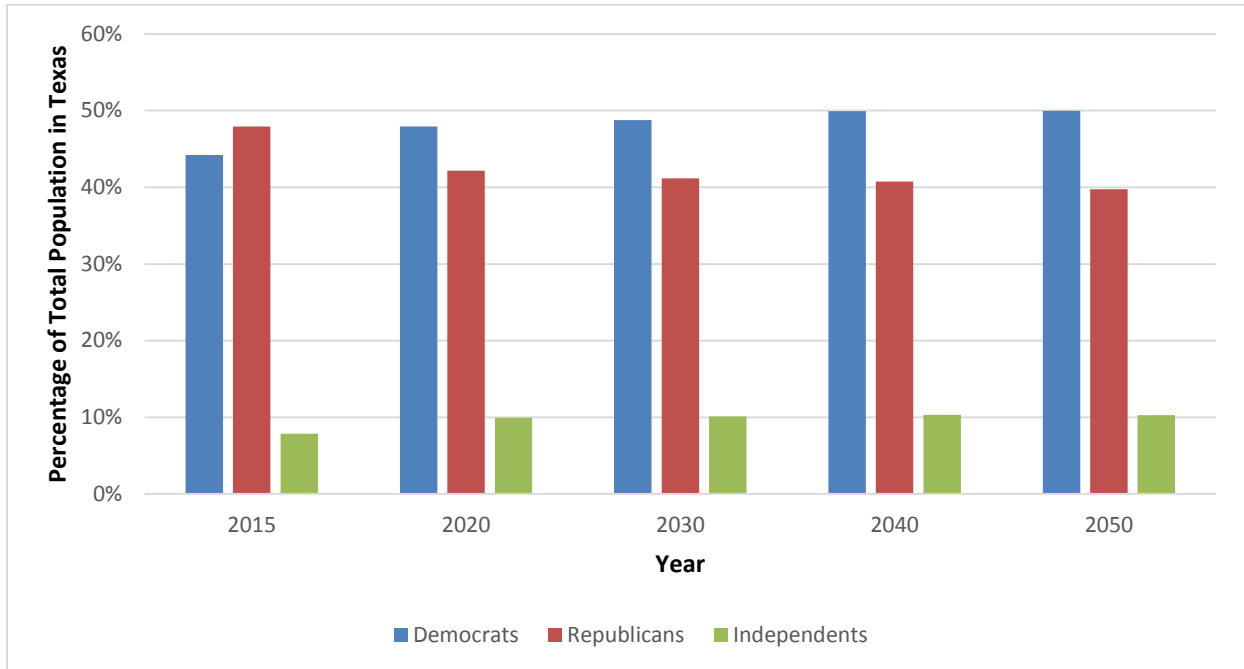
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 2. Texas Population Projection by Race and Ethnicity



Source: Office of the Texas State Demographer (Potter & Hoque, 2013)

Figure 3. Projection of Partisan Identification for Texas



Source: Office of the Texas State Demographer (Potter & Hoque, 2013) and the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas/*Texas Tribune*, February 6-16, 2015 Poll

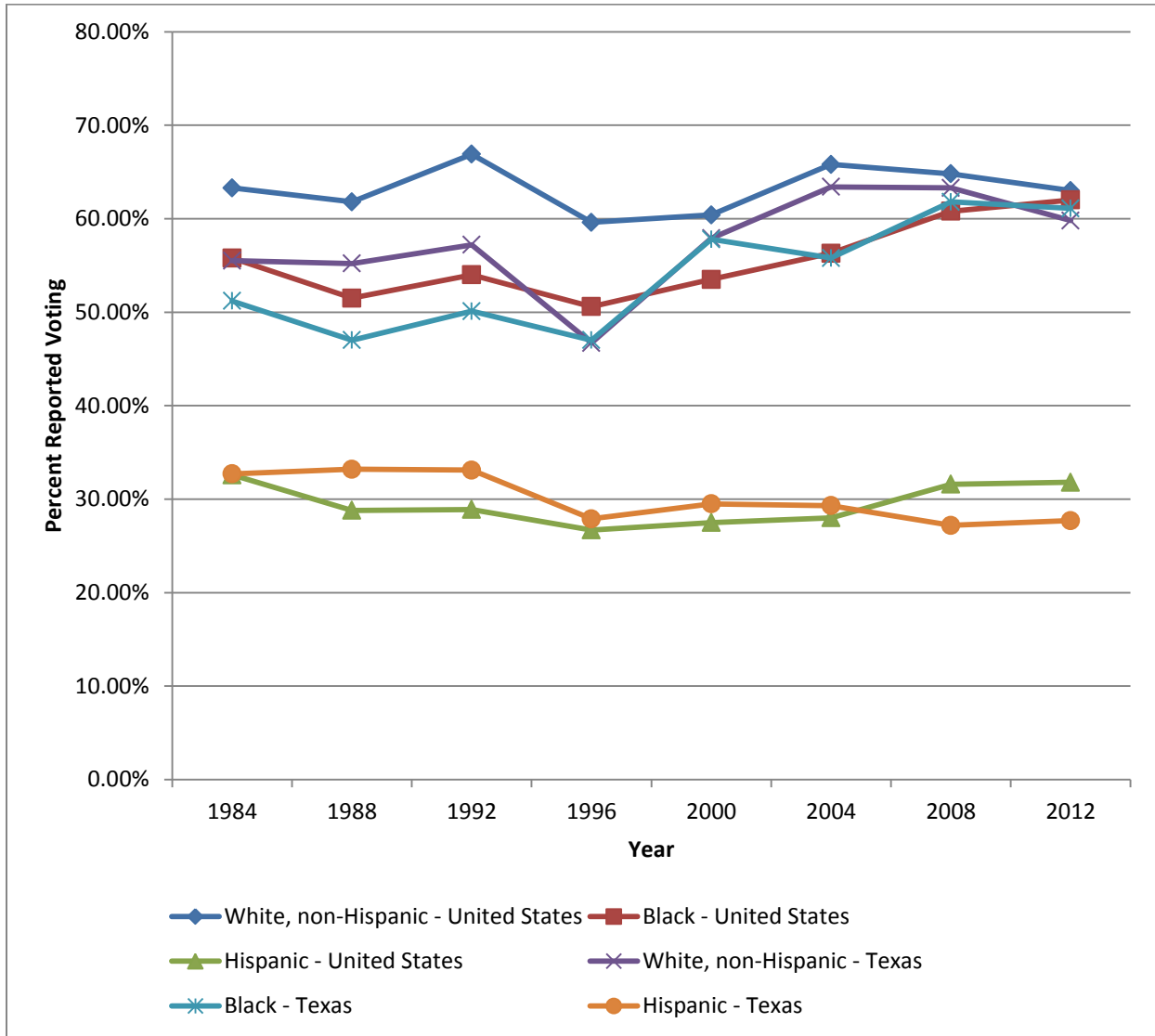
Table 1. Projection of Partisan Identification for Texas by Race and Ethnicity

	2015	2020	2030	2040	2050
Non-Hispanic White - Democrat	22%	14%	12%	11%	9%
Non-Hispanic White - Republican	38%	24%	21%	19%	16%
Non-Hispanic White - Independent	5%	3%	3%	3%	2%
Non-Hispanic Black - Democrat	10%	9%	9%	9%	8%
Non-Hispanic Black - Republican	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%
Non-Hispanic Black - Independent	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Non-Hispanic Other - Democrat	1%	2%	2%	3%	3%
Non-Hispanic Other - Republican	2%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Non-Hispanic Other - Independent	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Hispanic - Democrat	11%	23%	25%	28%	30%
Hispanic - Republican	7%	14%	16%	17%	19%
Hispanic - Independent	1%	4%	5%	5%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	101%*	100%

* Does not add up to 100% due to rounding error.

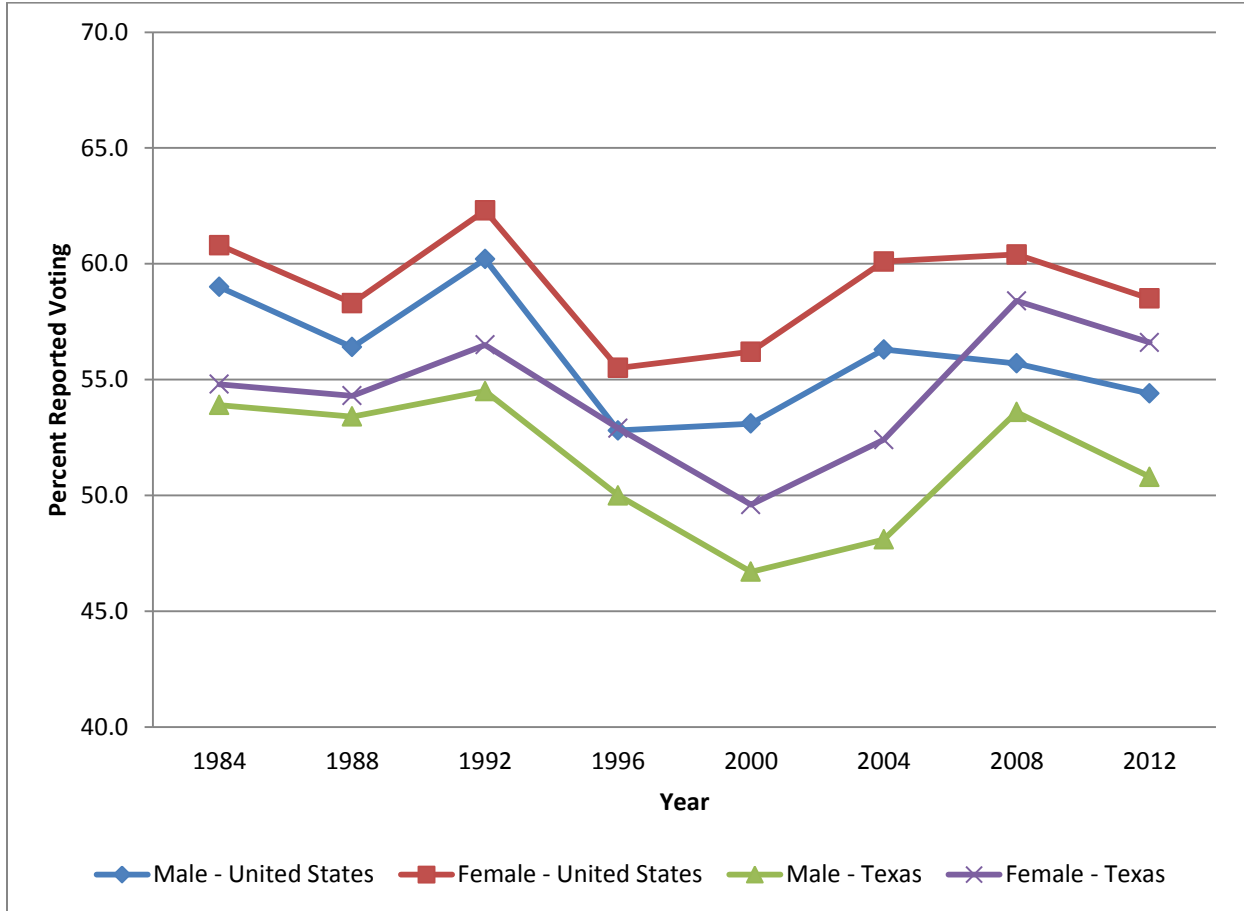
Source: Office of the Texas State Demographer (Potter & Hoque, 2013) and the University of Texas/*Texas Tribune* Poll, February 6-16, 2015

Figure 4. Reported Vote for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, for Texas and the United States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Figure 5. Reported Vote by Gender, for Texas and the United States



Source: U.S. Census Bureau