



LWVTC September, 2018 Unit Meetings

Topic: Promoting Voting

Why is Texas voter turnout so low? Demographics play a big role

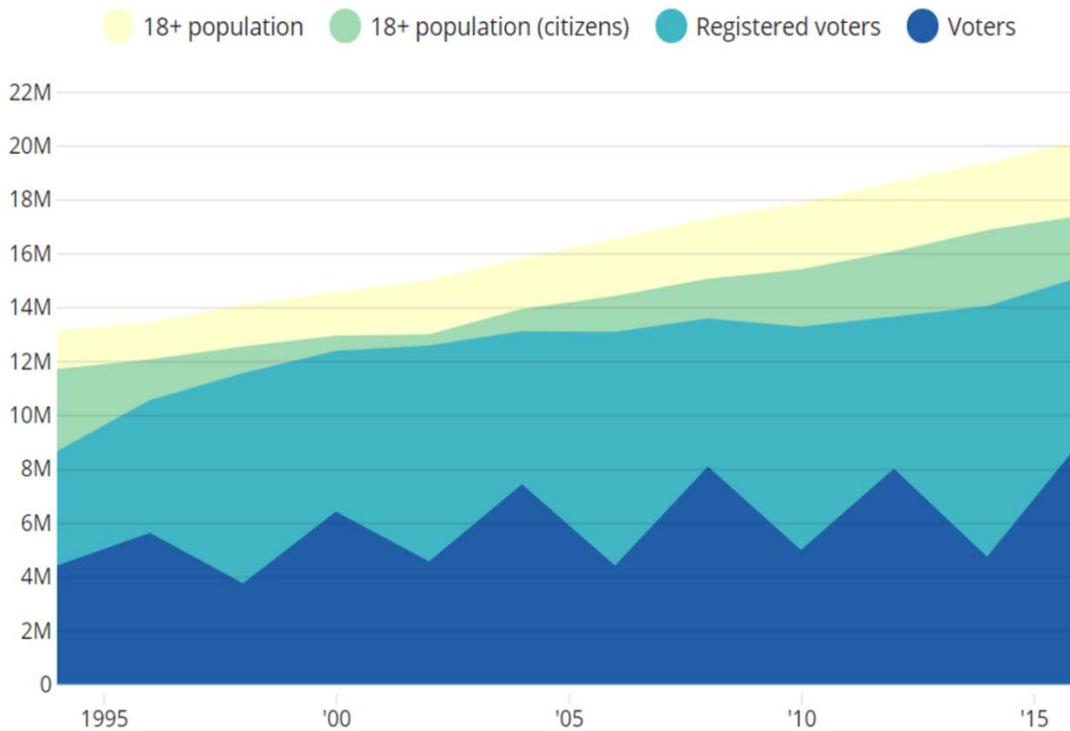
Talk of Texas' dismal voter turnout is a staple of every election cycle. Here's a look at the makeup of the Texas electorate and some of the context for those turnout numbers.

Source: Texas Tribune Article by Alexa Ura and Ryan Murphy, Feb. 23, 2018

It's indisputable that Texas has a depressing voter turnout history. Year after year, the state ranks near the bottom nationally in electoral participation, with turnout dipping even lower during non-presidential elections. Each time, the state's dismal voter turnout is catalogued as a consequence of voter suppression efforts, uncompetitive races, an unmotivated electorate or some combination of those factors.

Texas' history of low voter turnout

Just a small portion of the state's voting-eligible population votes in statewide elections, with turnout dropping even lower during non-presidential elections.

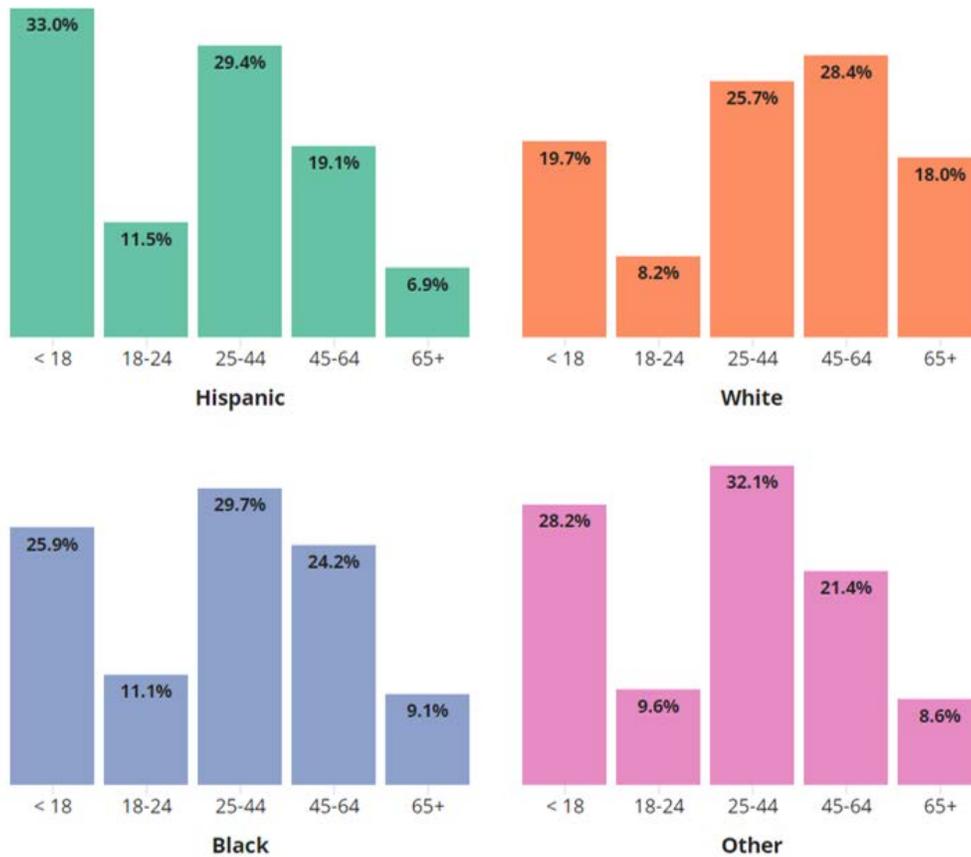


Source: [Texas Secretary of State](#), [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Many make the case that state lawmakers can do more to make it easier to vote, and the turnout figures leave little room for doubt that voter apathy seems to play a role in low turnout rates, particularly in primary elections. But before the blame game begins this election cycle, here's something to keep in mind: Low turnout in Texas is also tied to demographics. With early voting underway, here's a closer look at the makeup of the Texas electorate and some context for those turnout numbers.

A third of the state's Hispanic population isn't of voting age

Texas is a young state overall, but the Hispanic population trends much younger than the state's white and black populations.

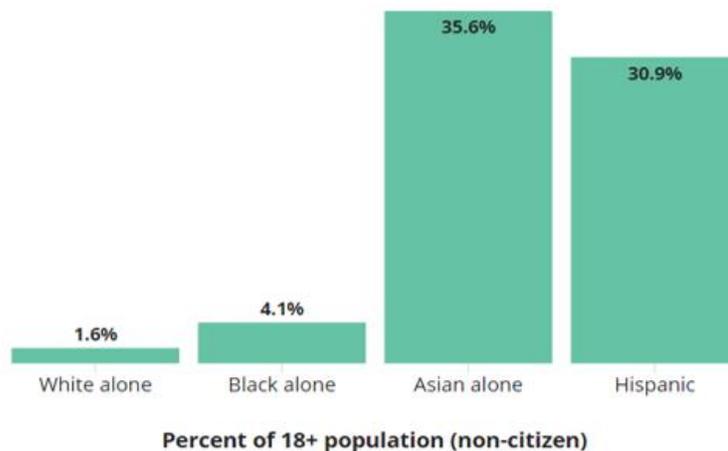


Hopes for a swell in voter turnout often hinge on the state’s burgeoning Hispanic population. But a breakdown of the population by age shows a third of Texas Hispanics aren’t even of voting age. In fact, those under 18 make up the state's largest Hispanic age group. Meanwhile, those aged 45 to 64 make up the biggest age group of white Texans.

To be clear, Hispanic adults participate in elections at lower rates than their white and black counterparts overall, which makes them an easy target for voter mobilization efforts. But when it comes to convincing Hispanic voters to play a bigger role in elections, it doesn’t help that they’re already starting from behind.

Texas’ immigrant population cuts into voter pool

Immigrants make up a much larger share of the state’s Hispanic and Asian adult populations compared to their white and black counterparts.



Note: "White" includes individuals only categorized by the U.S. Census as non-Hispanic. "Hispanic" includes individuals of any race.

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

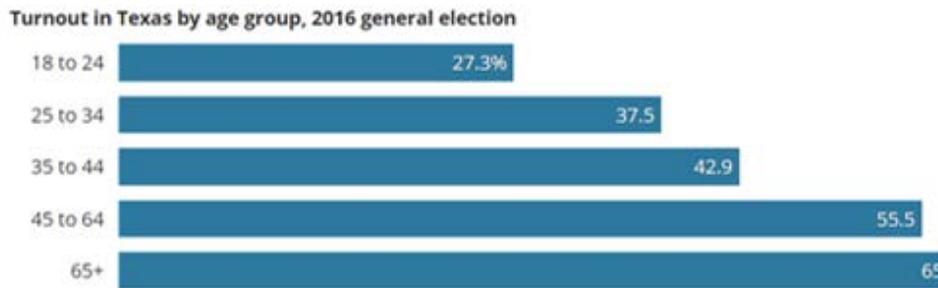
Hispanics make up an even smaller share of the Texas electorate when you account for the state’s sizable immigrant population.

Home to 4.7 million immigrants, Texas ranks seventh among states with the biggest shares of residents who were born in other countries. It’s estimated that more than a third of those individuals are naturalized citizens who are eligible to vote. The rest are non-citizens — legal permanent residents, undocumented immigrants or immigrants with another form of legal status — who can’t participate in elections.

While a majority of immigrants living in Texas come from Latin American countries, the Asian population also sees a sizable drop in the count of eligible voters when you consider immigration status.

Texas voter turnout varies by age

Older Texans are much more likely to participate in Texas elections, with the 65+ population claiming the highest turnout rate.



Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Electorally speaking, age is more than a number. It’s an indicator of how likely someone is to cast a ballot.

Texas as a whole is a young state, claiming the third-lowest median age in the country. But older Texans are more likely to turn out for both presidential and gubernatorial elections. Voters who are 65 or older boast the highest turnout rates in the state, followed by voters aged 45 to 64.

It’s fairly easy to grasp why their turnout rates are so high.

Those voters, demographers and political scientists say, are more likely to have stable housing, be married and have children. And they probably pay closer attention to issues that may draw voters to the polls — the quality of schools, property taxes or the conditions of the roads on which they drive. They are also more likely to have a voting history that will help them show up on voter lists that campaigns target.

Those factors go a long way in perpetuating the gap in turnout based on race because those individuals are also much more likely to be white. Almost two out of every three adults older than 65 are white, and half of voters aged 45 to 64 are white.

Put another way: White Texans outnumber voters of other races in the age groups that most consistently turn out to vote.

Perhaps it goes without saying — but producing quality journalism isn't cheap. At a time when newsroom resources and revenue across the country are declining, The Texas Tribune remains committed to sustaining our mission: creating a more engaged and informed Texas with every story we cover, every event we convene and every newsletter we send. As a nonprofit newsroom, we rely on members to help keep our stories free and our events open to the public. Do you value our journalism? Show us with your support.

What the League is doing:

Preventing Election Day Barriers

In the lead-up to Election Day 2016, League volunteers worked around the clock to protect the rights of voters. They staffed English and Spanish language hotlines answering voters’ questions and troubleshooting for them. They set up poll observing programs, worked as poll workers and reported challenges to the national Election Protection Coalition. All of this was carried out with the goal of

ensuring votes were successfully cast and counted. In states where restrictive photo ID laws had passed and were implemented, the League actively sought out individuals who could have difficulty getting the required ID for voting purposes to provide assistance. Assistance included education about the requirements, transportation to DMVs, and help in obtaining, and in some instances paying for underlying documentation (e.g. birth certificates). As part of this effort LWV printed tens of thousands of state-specific voter education materials in the lead-up to Election Day 2014. In 2016 alone, the League's work to protect and mobilize voters was featured in more than 35,000 news stories.

Leagues also regularly met with elections officials to encourage Election Day preparedness, poll worker training (especially in states where changes had been made), and fair distribution of resources so that all polling places are staffed and prepared for voters. Across the country hundreds of League volunteers staffed hotlines and worked as election observers to ensure voters' rights were protected on Election Day itself. When possible, Leagues also worked to improve voter registration database matching criteria, students' right to vote using their campus address, increasing the effectiveness of public assistance office voter registration, and fair and equitable implementation of early voting and vote cent. Since 2013, LWVUS has promoted five key proactive election reform priorities:

- Secure online voter registration
- Permanent and portable statewide voter registration
- Expansion of early voting
- Improvement of polling place management
- Electronic streamlining of election processes.

Other Resources

- **U.S. trails most developed countries in voter turnout** by Drew Desilver, Pew Research Center <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/>
- **Why is Voter Turnout So Low In Texas?** By Travis Bubenik Marfa Public Radio, October 28, 2016 <http://www.keranews.org/post/why-voter-turnout-so-low-texas>
- **Big as Texas? Lone Star election turnout is minuscule** <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/opinion/editorials/article/Big-as-Texas-Lone-Star-election-turnout-is-12474905.php>

Finally, please review the material that the LWVTX has put together on the “Get Out The Vote” page of their website:

<https://my.lwv.org/texas/get-out-vote-0>

Questions for discussion regarding the information presented on the webpage:

1. Does the information on the state league's webpage cover promotion of voting adequately and effectively?
2. If yes, how? If not, what else is needed or could be better presented?
3. How can local LWV members, as individuals, best use this information to promote voting locally?
4. What should LWV Tarrant do as an organization to promote voting locally? The Board is taking suggestions so please give as many as you can think of. With each suggestion, list who / group(s) of people the suggestion would target.