

DIVIDED AMERICA

# Texas Hispanic voting bloc largely untapped

By WILL WEISSERT  
Associated Press



AP Photo/Eric Gay

**Ranjana Martinez shows off her buttons supporting Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton during a Democratic National Convention watch party in San Antonio on July 26. According to the 2015 U.S. Census, Texas is home to 19 percent of America's entire Hispanic population.**

be eligible to vote in the 2016 presidential election, but less than half may register and fewer still are likely to cast ballots.

Consider the 2014 midterm elections, when less than 2.3 million Texas Hispanics reported in U.S. Census surveys that they were registered to vote — about 46 percent of the nearly 4.9 million that were eligible and about 300,000 fewer than reported being registered in 2012. Turnout in 2014 was worse than 2012: 22 percent of eligible Texas Hispanics voted compared to 39 percent.

Nationwide, 48 percent of Hispanics reported voting in 2012, which declined to 27 percent in 2014.

That untapped electorate helps explain how, even though a majority of the state's residents will be Hispanic by around 2030, Texas has grown increasingly conservative. No Democrat has won statewide office here since 1994, the country's longest political losing streak.

Some Hispanics support Texas conservative causes, such as religious values and opposing abortion, but overall, Latinos statewide still

lean strongly Democratic, as do their counterparts elsewhere. Higher Latino turnout won't turn this red state blue in November's presidential election, but given how much the Hispanic population is booming, even small improvements could make a big difference in the future. The trick will be pulling that off.

"We should know that demography is not destiny," said Henry Munoz III, a long-time San Antonio community organizer who now serves as the Democratic Party's National Finance Committee

Chair. Hispanic voting habits are like church attendance, said Mario Salinas, Mi Familia Vota's deputy Texas director. "If you grow up in a house where mom and dad go to church, you'll go too as an adult. If they don't, you probably won't," Salinas said. "If parents don't vote, the kids won't."

Texas ranks near the bottom nationally in total voter turnout, due in part to a heavily-under-30 population, which tends to vote less than elder counterparts.

Count Lesley Resendiz, a 20-year-old from Houston, among them. She is registered and said she knows how important it is for Hispanics to embrace voting, but that her work schedule kept her from doing so in the March primary.

"A lot of people I know use social media to talk about politics," Resendiz said. "But they don't vote because it's not as easy as just going online."

Across the country, naturalization applications are up 14 percent in the last six months of 2015 compared with the same period the previous year. That has fueled speculation that many Hispanics are anxious to vote against Donald Trump, fearful of the Republican nominee's harsh immigration rhetoric.

But Alberto Morales, project coordinator for the Advocacy Alliance Center

of Texas, which leads voter registration drives along the Texas-Mexico border, cautions that it might not translate to higher turnout.

"There is frustration," Morales said. "We would just like for more of the population to come out to vote and they're just not."

Because Texas is so solidly Republican, neither Trump nor Democrat Hillary Clinton will focus on it for November's election, meaning there'll likely be little excitement and potentially fewer people at the polls. Still, Crystal Zermeno, the director of special projects for the Democratic field organization Texas Organizing Project, said Hispanic voter outreach hasn't been a top priority for decades.

"Very little is spent on the field, going out there and knocking on doors," Zermeno said. "And you have to have real, authentic conversations with people. Simply showing up isn't enough."

A 2014 Gallup poll found that Texas Hispanics prefer Democrats to Republicans by a 19 percentage-point margin. Nationwide, Democrats enjoy a more comfortable 30 percentage-point advantage.

So, the state Republican Party has staffers focused on boosting minority turnout; Ted Cruz became the first Hispanic elected to the U.S. Senate from Texas in 2012, despite his support for strict immigration policies.

## Clinton admits trust issues, blames GOP

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hillary Clinton acknowledged Friday the challenge she'd face leading a country where most Americans don't trust her, saying she takes "seriously" the work she must do to build confidence in her character.

But the Democratic presidential nominee also claimed that a broad electoral victory over Donald Trump in November would give her the capital needed to push her plans through Congress with Republican support and appeared to blame her political opponents for her low approval ratings.

Clinton pointed to the high ratings she won as secretary of state and as a senator from New York, arguing that voters like her more when she's working than when she's campaigning — something she attributed to campaign attacks on her character.

"Were 67 percent of the people in New York wrong? Were 66 percent of the American public wrong?" Clinton said. "Just maybe, when I'm actually running for a job, there is a real benefit to those on the other side with trying to stir up as much trouble as possible."

Clinton's trustworthiness has emerged as her biggest weakness in the fall campaign, one worsened by her responses to questions about her use of private email servers as secretary of state and her reluctance to take regular questions from



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

**Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton speaks at a rally at Adams City High School in Commerce City, Colo. on Wednesday.**

journalists. The questions-and-answer session Friday at a joint meeting of the National Association of Black Journalists and National Association of Hispanic Journalists marked the first time she's talked about how that political problem could impact her future administration.

Clinton attempted to "clarify and explain" a recent statement on "Fox News Sunday" that FBI Director James Comey had said her answers about her email practices were "truthful."

"I may have short-circuited and for that I will try to clarify," she said. Comey was speaking solely about her responses in a closed-door FBI interview, and not her public comments on the issue, which have included inconsistencies.

Clinton has claimed she never sent or received anything marked classified. In reviewing the FBI's investigation, Comey said seven e-mail chains dealt with matters that were "that were classified at the Top Secret/Special Access Program level when they were sent and received."

During the short question-and-answer session, Clinton also detailed some of her plans should she win the White House, promising to make an overhaul of America's immigration system a "clear, high priority."

She argued that a broad victory, one that included Democrats winning control of the Senate and tightening their margin in the House, would put pressure on Republicans to come along.

"There's nothing like winning to change minds," she said. "I view the political landscape as increasingly favorable to us making this happen."

That logic would depend on Republicans changing the political calculus they've made over the past eight years. Even when President Barack Obama held majorities in both the Senate and House during his first term, he was still unable to find widespread Republican support for his plans.

## Trump attacks Clinton to build support

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Donald Trump faced an all-too-clear sign of GOP divisions Friday in Midwestern battlegrounds, embraced by party leaders in one state but ignored in another. He unleashed a scathing attack on Hillary Clinton's character as he tried to overcome deepening concerns about his presidential candidacy.

Iowa's Republican Gov. Terry Branstad appeared with the celebrity businessman at an afternoon rally, his third appearance in the swing state over the past two weeks. But in neighboring Wisconsin, a state Trump insists he can win, the state's best-known Republicans said they were too busy to attend an evening event.

House Speaker Paul Ryan cited a scheduling conflict, while Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker said he'd attend an all-you-can-eat spaghetti dinner instead of appearing with his party's standard bearer.

"Welcome to Wisconsin, Mr. Trump, but let's get something straight," Wisconsin's Assembly Speaker Robin Vos wrote in an open letter to his GOP colleagues ahead of Trump's arrival. "We are Ryan Republicans here in Wisconsin, not Trump Republicans."



AP Photo/Evan Vuoci

**Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at Jacksonville Veterans Memorial Arena, Wednesday in Jacksonville, Fla.**

The tale of two states underscores Trump's mounting challenges during one of the most tumultuous weeks of his unorthodox campaign. He has skipped from one misstep to the next, sparking a fresh wave of Republican defections among longtime party loyalists who refuse to support their presidential nominee — including some who even publicly support for Democrat Clinton.

Eager to change their minds, Trump unleashed a slew of insults at Clinton during his Iowa rally.

"If Hillary Clinton becomes president," he said,

"you will have really, in my opinion, the destruction of this country from within."

Trump called his Democratic opponent "a dangerous liar," "an unbalanced person," "pretty close to unhinged," "totally unfit to lead," and lacking "the judgment, temperament and moral character to lead the country."

Yet Trump's own gaffes have largely overshadowed Clinton's problems as the Democrats work to recover from a bruising primary election season.

Complicating the Republican Party's 2016 challenge are fresh signs the nation's economy is strengthening under a Democratic president.

The Labor Department reported Friday that U.S. employers added a healthy 255,000 jobs in July, a sign of confidence that could point to a resilient economy.

Trump's approach to national security came under fire Friday as well, with former CIA Director Michael Morell contending the Republican nominee would make "a poor, even dangerous commander in chief."

Morell, outlining his views in The New York Times, also questioned Trump's unusual praise of Russian President Vladimir Putin

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