



REPORT ON POLITICAL ATTITUDES & ENGAGEMENT



The University of Texas at Austin
Moody College of Communication



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
The ANNETTE STRAUSS INSTITUTE
FOR CIVIC LIFE

The Texas Media & Society Survey report on
**POLITICAL ATTITUDES &
ENGAGEMENT**

Released October 27, 2016

Suggested citation: Texas Media & Society Survey. 2016. *Political Attitudes & Engagement*.

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POLITICAL ATTITUDES & ENGAGEMENT

Texas Media & Society Survey

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Executive Summary

Based on a survey of just over one thousand Americans and just over one thousand Texans, this report provides an overview of their political attitudes and engagement. Here are some highlights from the report:

Voting and Political Efficacy

- Nearly six in ten Texans and Americans disagree with the statement “I don’t know enough to cast an informed vote.” Educated and older respondents are more likely to disagree.
- Just over 50% of Texans and Americans disagree with the statement “My vote doesn’t matter.”
- Around a third of Texans and Americans believe that “sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on” and that “people like me don’t have any say about what the government does.”

Trust in Government

- Fifteen percent of Texans and 15% of Americans trust the government in Washington to do what is right all or most of the time. Forty-five percent of Americans and 42% of Texans hardly ever or never trust the federal government.
- Twenty-nine percent of Texans trust the Texas government to do what is right all or most of the time. Twenty-six percent of Texans hardly ever or never trust the Texas government.
- Partisanship relates to government trust – Republicans trust the federal government less than Democrats and Texas Democrats trust the Texas government less than Texas Republicans.

Electoral Cynicism

- Nearly half of Texans and Americans believe that elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted.
- Two-thirds of Texans and 61% of Americans agree that you have to be wealthy to run for the U.S. Senate.
- Over eighty percent of Texans and Americans believe that politicians will say whatever it takes to get elected.

Political Activities

- For eleven different political activities, from signing a petition to getting involved with a campaign, less than 25% have participated in any one given activity over the past year.
- More educated and older participants are more likely to participate in nearly every activity.

What It Means To Be a Good Citizen

- Around two-thirds of Americans and Texans believe that reporting crime that one witnesses is extremely important for a person to be considered a good citizen.
- Around six in ten Americans and Texans believe that voting in elections is extremely important for a person to be considered a good citizen.

Voting

- Around three-fourths of Americans and Texans say that they are registered to vote.
- Nearly half of Texans believe that they can vote before Election Day via absentee ballot. Twenty-two percent of Texans believe that they can register to vote on Election Day.
- Thirty-four percent of Americans and 24% of Texans say that they vote in local elections all the time. Just over half of Americans and Texans say that they vote in presidential elections all the time.

Introduction

The 2016 presidential campaign is unprecedented in many ways. Chief among them is public interest in the election. The first presidential debate between Democrat Hillary Clinton and Republican Donald Trump, for example, was the most-watched in U.S. history. As Election Day approaches, it is particularly important to understand how Americans and Texans think about their political role and their level of political involvement. This report provides insight into how the U.S. and Texas publics evaluate political leaders, elections, and their role in the democratic process.

The following pages report on the results of a survey conducted with 1,009 Americans and 1,006 Texans. The broad-ranging survey asked about journalism and the media, politics and civic engagement, and discussion networks and communities. In this report, we present the findings with respect to political attitudes and engagement.

A few technical notes about this report are in order. First, we include data from all Americans and all Texans in the tables and charts. In the text, we also statistically compare Texans to those who live outside of the state to see if there are any differences. For these comparisons, we exclude Texans from the U.S. sample.

Second, we analyze how attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, differ across gender, age, education, and partisanship. Due to sample size constraints, we look at race/ethnicity differences for Texans only. We only note those instances in which the differences were statistically meaningful in the text. More details about the methodology and analysis conducted can be found in the Methodology section at the end of this report.

The results show majorities of Texans and Americans believing in their political voice, but reveal deep cynicism about elections. This mixed portrait of efficacy and cynicism poses challenges for those interested in promoting greater participation in the political system. Beliefs that one must be wealthy to get elected and that politicians say whatever it takes do not cohere with the ideals of deliberative and representative democracy. That nearly a third of Texans and Americans believe that they have no say in government adds to the case. Even more, across eleven different forms of political and civic participation, such as signing a petition or working for a campaign, rates of participation did not exceed a quarter. Yet majorities believe that their vote matters and that they know enough to cast an informed vote.

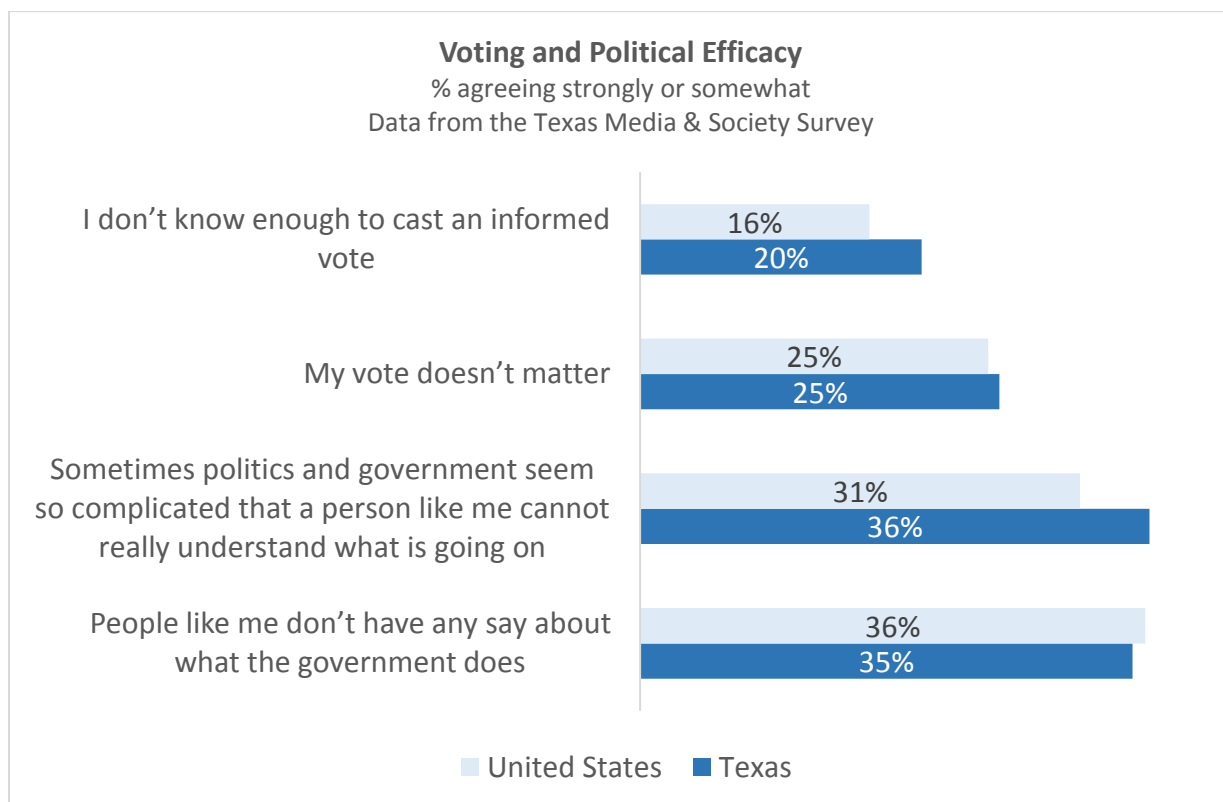
It is our hope that this report will draw additional attention to the public's political attitudes and behaviors in this contentious election season.

Voting and Political Efficacy

Whether people believe that their vote matters and that they can understand political affairs is important, at least in part because these beliefs relate to voting and getting involved. On these matters, Texans and those from other states have similar beliefs.

Two in ten Texans and 16% of Americans believe that they don't know enough to cast an informed vote. One fourth of Americans and one fourth of Texans believe that their vote does not matter.

We also asked about the public's sense of efficacy. A personal, internal sense of efficacy is captured by the statement "sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on." Thirty-six percent of Texans and 31% of Americans agree with this view. An external sense of efficacy, or whether people believe that they can make a difference, garners similar levels of agreement. Thirty-five percent of Texans and 36% of Americans agree that people like them do not have a say about what the government does.



In the next several pages, we drill down to examine whether these beliefs differ based on demographics and partisanship.

Don't Know Enough to Cast Informed Vote

Older Americans are more likely to disagree with the view “I don’t know enough to cast an informed vote” than younger Americans. Seventy percent of those age 45 and above disagree compared to 48% of those less than 45 years old. More educated Americans are more likely to disagree than those with less education. Partisan differences also appear; 68% of Republicans believe that they know enough to cast an informed vote compared to 57% of Democrats.

I don't know enough to cast an informed vote

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	16%	21%	59%
18-44	19	27	48
45+	14	16	70
High school or less	19	28	50
Some college	16	18	61
College or more	12	15	72
Republican	15	15	68
Democrat	16	24	57

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Similar age and education findings appear in Texas; older and more educated Texans are more likely to agree that they know enough to cast an informed vote compared to younger and less educated Texans. Two-thirds of white non-Hispanic Texans think that they know enough to cast an informed vote compared to half of Hispanic Texans.

I don't know enough to cast an informed vote

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	20%	20%	59%
18-44	24	24	51
45+	16	16	68
High school or less	24	27	48
Some college	16	16	67
College or more	17	13	69
White non-Hispanic	17	16	66
Hispanic	26	23	50

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

My Vote Doesn't Matter

Age and education are related to the belief that “my vote doesn’t matter.” Older and more educated Americans are more likely to disagree with the statement compared to younger and less educated Americans.

My vote doesn't matter

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	25%	22%	51%
18-44	25	30	39
45+	24	14	61
High school or less	27	26	44
Some college	25	19	52
College or more	22	18	59

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Age also relates to beliefs that one’s vote doesn’t matter in Texas. Sixty-five percent of Texans age 45 and above disagree with the statement “my vote doesn’t matter” compared to 47% of Texans less than 45 years old.

My vote doesn't matter

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	25%	18%	56%
18-44	27	24	47
45+	24	12	65

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Politics and Government Seem Complicated

When asked about their sense of internal efficacy, responses are divided. Older and more educated Americans are more likely to disagree that “sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on” compared to younger and less educated Americans.

Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	31%	23%	43%
18-44	30	30	34
45+	32	18	50
High school or less	37	29	31
Some college	32	19	45
College or more	23	19	57

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Education also relates to beliefs about understanding politics among Texans. Approximately half of Texans with some college or more disagree that “sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.” Thirty-one percent of those with a high school education or less do so.

Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	36%	21%	41%
High school or less	42	26	31
Some college	34	18	48
College or more	30	18	50

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Have No Say about Government

Beliefs about external efficacy, or a person's ability to influence government actions, are similarly divided. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that they do not have a say. More educated Americans think they have a say more than the less educated. Younger respondents are more likely than older Americans to say that they neither agree nor disagree.

People like me don't have any say about what the government does

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	36%	22%	39%
18-44	33	29	32
45+	39	16	45
High school or less	39	24	34
Some college	35	22	39
College or more	32	20	47
Republican	41	19	38
Democrat	33	23	41

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Older and more educated Texans are more likely to disagree that they have no say compared to younger and less educated Texans. White non-Hispanic Texans are more likely to say that they have no say compared to Hispanic Texans.

People like me don't have any say about what the government does

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	35%	22%	42%
18-44	36	27	36
45+	34	17	48
High school or less	37	25	36
Some college	38	18	43
College or more	28	20	51
White non-Hispanic	42	17	41
Hispanic	27	29	43

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

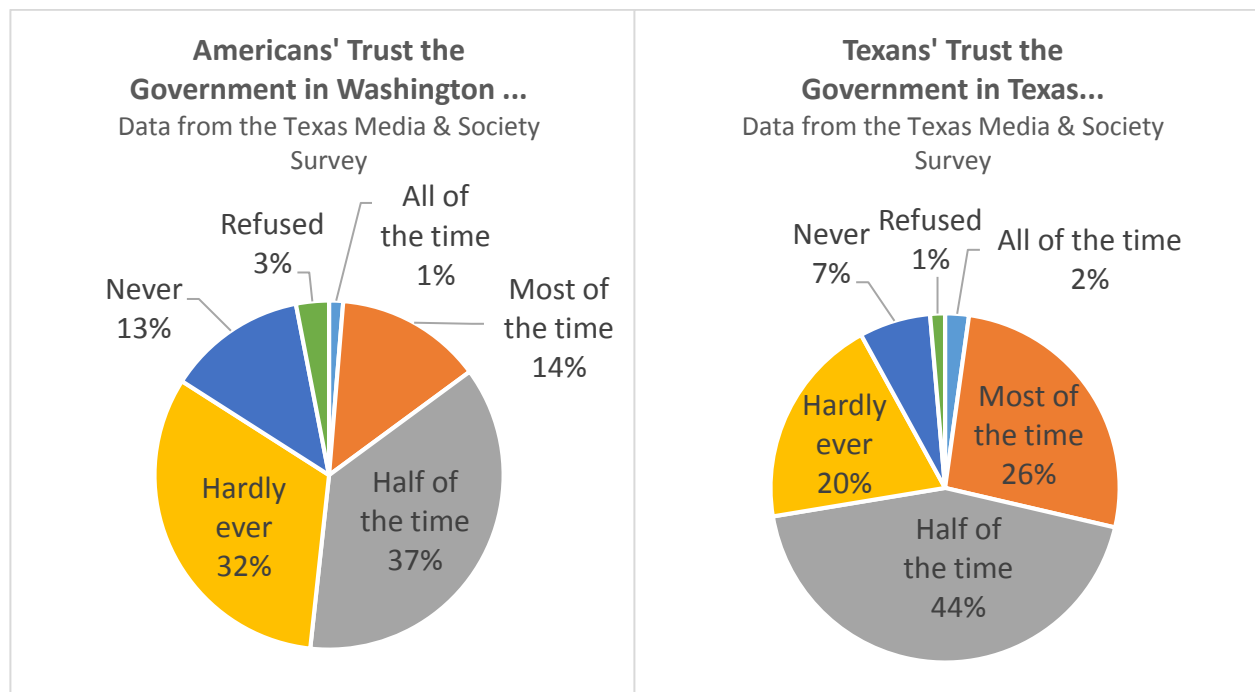
Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Trust in Government

There has been much discussion about the public distrusting the government, both in the popular press and among scholars. We surveyed respondents about their level of trust in government.

The first chart below shows how Americans respond to the question “How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right?” One percent respond all the time and 14% most of the time. The most common response is half the time, the view of 38% of respondents. A third say hardly ever and 13% indicate that they could never trust the government in Washington. The data for Texans’ trust in the government in Washington (not shown) is similar – less than 1% say all the time, 15% most of the time, 42% half of the time, 32% hardly ever, and 10% never.

The next chart shows Texans trust in the government of Texas. When it comes to the Texas government, 2% of Texans trust it all the time and 26% most of the time. Overall, Texans trust the Texas government more than they do the federal government.



Age, education, and partisanship are related to trust in the federal government. Older, less educated, and Republican Americans are more likely to say that they can hardly ever or never trust the government in Washington to do what's right than their demographic counterparts.

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right

% of Americans

	All or most of the time	Half of the time	Hardly ever or Never
Total	15%	37%	45%
18-44	15	42	37
45+	15	33	52
High school or less	17	30	50
Some college	11	40	45
College or more	16	44	39
Republican	6	31	62
Democrat	22	42	33

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

The same patterns for age and partisanship appear in Texas, where older and Republican Texans place less trust in the federal government than younger Texans and Texas Democrats. White non-Hispanic Texans trust the federal government less than Hispanic Texans.

How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right

% of Texans

	All or most of the time	Half of the time	Hardly ever or Never
Total	15%	42%	42%
18-44	16	47	37
45+	15	38	47
White non-Hispanic	7	36	56
Hispanic	24	48	27
Republican	9	33	57
Democrat	21	49	29

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

When it comes to trusting the Texas government, Republicans report higher levels of trust than Democrats. Differences did not appear for gender, age, education, or race/ethnicity when examining Texans’ trust of the Texas government.

How much of the time do you think you can trust the Texas government to do what is right

% of Texans

	All or most of the time	Half of the time	Hardly ever or Never
Total	29%	44%	26%
Republican	40	44	14
Democrat	19	42	37

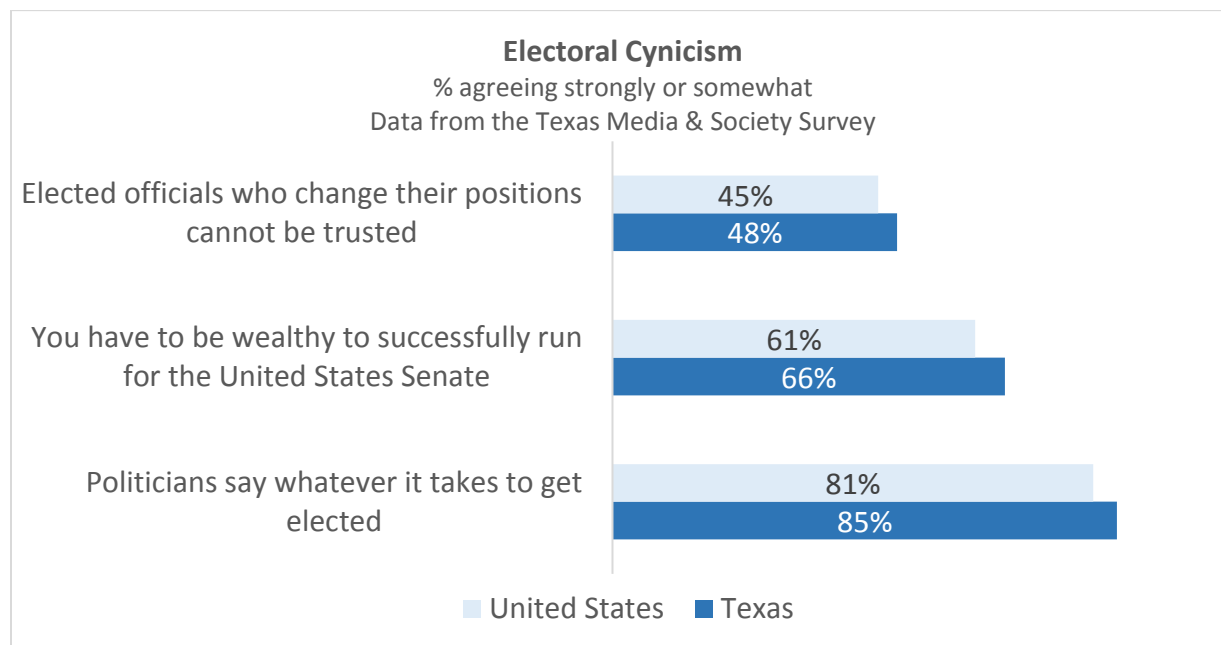
Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Electoral Cynicism

It is easy to find examples of public cynicism about elected officials and campaigning. But how common are these views? Results of the survey show that cynicism about politics is widespread.

Just over eight in ten Americans and Texans believe that “politicians say whatever it takes to get elected.” Two-thirds of Texans and 61% of Americans agree that you have to be wealthy to run for the U.S. Senate. Finally, 45% of Americans and 48% of Texans believe that elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted. Texans and those from other states are no different in their electoral cynicism.



Trust in Elected Officials Changing Positions

Women and those less than 45 years old are more likely to neither agree nor disagree with the claim “elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted” compared to men and those age 45 and older. More educated Americans are more likely to disagree with this statement than those with lower levels of education.

Elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	45%	35%	17%
Male	47	31	19
Female	43	39	16
18-44	41	40	12
45+	48	30	22
High school or less	49	35	13
Some college	45	36	16
College or more	38	35	26

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Among Texans, women and those with lower levels of education are more likely to agree that elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted. A quarter of white non-Hispanic Texans disagree compared to 15% of Hispanic Texans.

Elected officials who change their positions cannot be trusted

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	48%	31%	20%
Male	43	32	25
Female	52	30	16
High school or less	53	31	15
Some college	43	37	20
College or more	45	26	29
White non-Hispanic	46	29	25
Hispanic	50	33	15

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Have to be Wealthy to Successfully Run for U.S. Senate

Older and more educated respondents are more likely to agree that you have to be wealthy to successfully run for the United States Senate compared to younger and less educated Americans.

You have to be wealthy to successfully run for the United States Senate *% of Americans*

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	61%	24%	12%
18-44	56	27	11
45+	65	21	13
High school or less	54	27	14
Some college	63	24	9
College or more	68	18	13

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Education differences appear in the Texas data as well, where those with higher levels of education are more likely to believe that you have to be wealthy to successfully run for the United States Senate compared to those with less education. Nearly three-fourths of white non-Hispanic Texans agree that you have to be wealthy compared to 56% of Hispanic Texans.

You have to be wealthy to successfully run for the United States Senate *% of Texans*

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	66%	21%	13%
High school or less	58	28	13
Some college	69	17	14
College or more	74	14	11
White non-Hispanic	74	15	11
Hispanic	56	27	15

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Politicians Say Whatever it Takes

Over seven in ten Americans across all demographic groups believe that politicians say whatever it takes to get elected. These views are particularly pronounced among older Americans and Republicans.

Politicians say whatever it takes to get elected

% of Americans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	81%	14%	3%
18-44	72	20	3
45+	89	9	2
Republican	89	9	2
Democrat	78	16	3

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Educated, white non-Hispanic, and Republican Texans are more likely to agree with the view that “politicians say whatever it takes to get elected” compared to less educated Texans, Hispanic Texans, and Texas Democrats.

Politicians say whatever it takes to get elected

% of Texans

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
Total	85%	13%	2%
High school or less	81	15	3
Some college	85	15	<1
College or more	91	7	2
White non-Hispanic	92	6	2
Hispanic	76	19	3
Republican	87	10	3
Democrat	84	14	1

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: Those who strongly or somewhat agree, those who neither agree nor disagree, and those who strongly or somewhat disagree.

Rows do not total to 100% due to non-response and rounding.

Political Activities

People can participate in politics in a wide variety of ways. Of the eleven possible ways of getting involved in politics that were included on the survey, the highest percentage of Texans and Americans report having signed a petition in the last 12 months – a fourth of Americans and 19% of Texans had done so. Other political activities done by ten to fifteen percent of Americans and Texans include contacting a politician or local government official, boycotting or purposefully purchasing products, and donating money. Less than 10 percent engaged in any of the other activities included on the survey.

The most common response, however, is people saying that they have not done any of the activities in the last 12 months. Fifty-six percent of Americans and 62% of Texans have not participated in any of the political activities.

Percent Engaging in Political Activity in Last 12 Months		
	US	TX
Signed a petition	25%	19%
Contacted a politician or a local government official	14	13
Boycotted (i.e. not bought) certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons	13	14
Deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons	11	10
Donated money to a political, ethical, or environmental organization or group	11	11
Participated in political activities over the internet	6	6
Taken part in a lawful public demonstration	3	2
Worked in a political party or action group	3	2
Worked for the campaign of a candidate for office	2	2
Written a letter to a newspaper editor or called into a public affairs radio talk show	2	2
Called other people to raise funds for a political organization	1	1
I have not done any of these activities in the last 12 months	56	62

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Comparing Texans to those from other states, two significant differences appear. First, Texans are less likely to have signed a petition in the last 12 months compared to non-Texans. Second, a higher percentage of Texans report that they have not done any of the activities listed in the previous table compared to those from other states.

We analyzed the demographic and partisan make-up of those participating in the top six political activities.

Education is related to involvement across all six activities. More educated Americans are more likely to participate than the less educated.

For five of the six activities, older Americans are more likely to get involved than younger Americans. The only exception is buying products for political, ethical, and environmental reasons, where there are no statistically meaningful differences based on age.

Democrats participate in political activities over the Internet at a higher rate than do Republicans. In no instance did gender differences emerge.

In no instance did rates of participation in any demographic subgroup exceed one third.

Percent Engaging in Political Activity in Last 12 Months

% of Americans

	Sign petition	Contact gov't	Boycott	Bought product	Donate money	Internet partic
Total	25%	14%	13%	11%	11%	6%
18-44	21	8	9	--	6	4
45+	28	20	17	--	16	8
High school or less	18	6	8	6	5	4
Some college	31	17	15	12	10	7
College or more	27	23	20	17	22	9
Republican	--	--	--	--	--	4
Democrat	--	--	--	--	--	8

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

We also present the data in another way. In the two tables below, we look at the demographic breakdown of who participates in each activity and who does not. For example, of those who have not signed a petition, 49% are below the age of 45 and 51% are age 45 and above. This shows the discrepancies in participation across demographic categories. Those signing petitions, contacting government, and boycotting are older and more educated compared to those who do not engage in these activities.

Attributes of Those Who Do, and Do Not, Engage in Political Activity

% of Americans

	Sign petition		Contact gov't		Boycott	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
18-44	49	39	50	25	49	33
45+	51	61	50	75	51	67
High school or less	45	31	46	19	44	25
Some college	26	35	27	34	28	31
College or more	29	33	27	48	28	44
Republican	--	--	--	--	--	--
Democrat	--	--	--	--	--	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

Those who donate money and participate in politics online also are older and more educated compared to those who do not. Those buying products for political reasons also tend to be more educated than those who do not do so. Finally, those participating on politics over the Internet identify as Democrats more than those who do not.

Attributes of Those Who Do, and Do Not, Engage in Political Activity

% of Americans

	Bought product		Donate money		Internet partic	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
18-44	--	--	49	22	48	28
45+	--	--	51	77	52	72
High school or less	44	21	45	17	43	24
Some college	28	32	29	26	28	33
College or more	28	47	26	56	29	42
Republican	--	--	--	--	42	26
Democrat	--	--	--	--	58	74

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

In Texas, educational differences again relate to participating in political activities. More educated Texans are more likely to participate in each of the six activities highlighted in the table below.

For three of the six activities – signing petitions, contacting government, and donating money – Americans 45 years of age and older and men are more likely to engage in the activity than those less than 45 years old and women.

For all of the activities except Internet participation, white non-Hispanic Texans are more likely to participate than Hispanic Texans.

Partisanship relates to political activity in only one instance; Republicans in Texas boycott at higher rates than Texas Democrats.

Percent Engaging in Political Activity in Last 12 Months

% of Texans

	Sign petition	Boycott	Contact gov't	Donate money	Bought product	Internet partic
Total	19%	14%	13%	11%	10%	6%
Male	23	--	16	14	--	--
Female	16	--	10	8	--	--
18-44	16	--	7	8	--	--
45+	22	--	19	13	--	--
High school or less	12	7	6	5	4	2
Some college	20	14	14	8	10	6
College or more	31	26	22	22	18	11
White non-Hispanic	26	23	18	17	14	--
Hispanic	12	5	6	3	5	--
Republican	--	18	--	--	--	--
Democrat	--	12	--	--	--	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

As we did with the U.S. data, we also present the Texas data in another form by looking at the demographic attributes of those who do, and who do not, engage in each of the six most common political activities.

Those signing petitions, contacting government, and boycotting political products have completed more years of schooling than those not doing these activities.

A higher percentage of white non-Hispanics also make up the pool of those signing petitions, contacting government, and boycotting in Texas compared to Hispanics.

In Texas, those signing petitions and contacting government are older and more male than those not doing these activities.

Finally, those boycotting consist of a higher percentage of Republicans than those not boycotting.

Attributes of Those Who Do, and Do Not, Engage in Political Activity

% of Texans

	Sign petition		Boycott		Contact gov't	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Male	46%	56%	--	--	46%	60%
Female	54	44	--	--	54	40
18-44	52	43	--	--	54	27
45+	48	57	--	--	46	73
High school or less	48	26	47	22	47	21
Some college	28	30	29	28	28	31
College or more	24	44	24	51	25	47
White non-Hispanic	54	74	52	86	54	80
Hispanic	46	26	48	14	46	20
Republican	--	--	44	57	--	--
Democrat	--	--	56	43	--	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey
Columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

In Texas, those buying products for political reasons, donating money, and participating in politics online are more educated than those not engaging in these activities.

Those buying products and donating money also consist of a higher percentage of white non-Hispanics than those not engaging in these activities.

Those donating money are more male and older compared to those not doing so.

Attributes of Those Who Do, and Do Not, Engage in Political Activity

% of Texans

	Donate money		Bought product		Internet partic	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Male	46%	62%	--	--	--	--
Female	54	38	--	--	--	--
18-44	52	39	--	--	--	--
45+	48	61	--	--	--	--
High school or less	46	20	46	18	45	18
Some college	30	21	29	29	29	30
College or more	24	59	25	52	26	52
White non-Hispanic	54	88	55	79	--	--
Hispanic	46	12	45	21	--	--
Republican	--	--	--	--	--	--
Democrat	--	--	--	--	--	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Columns do not add to 100% due to rounding.

What It Means To Be a Good Citizen

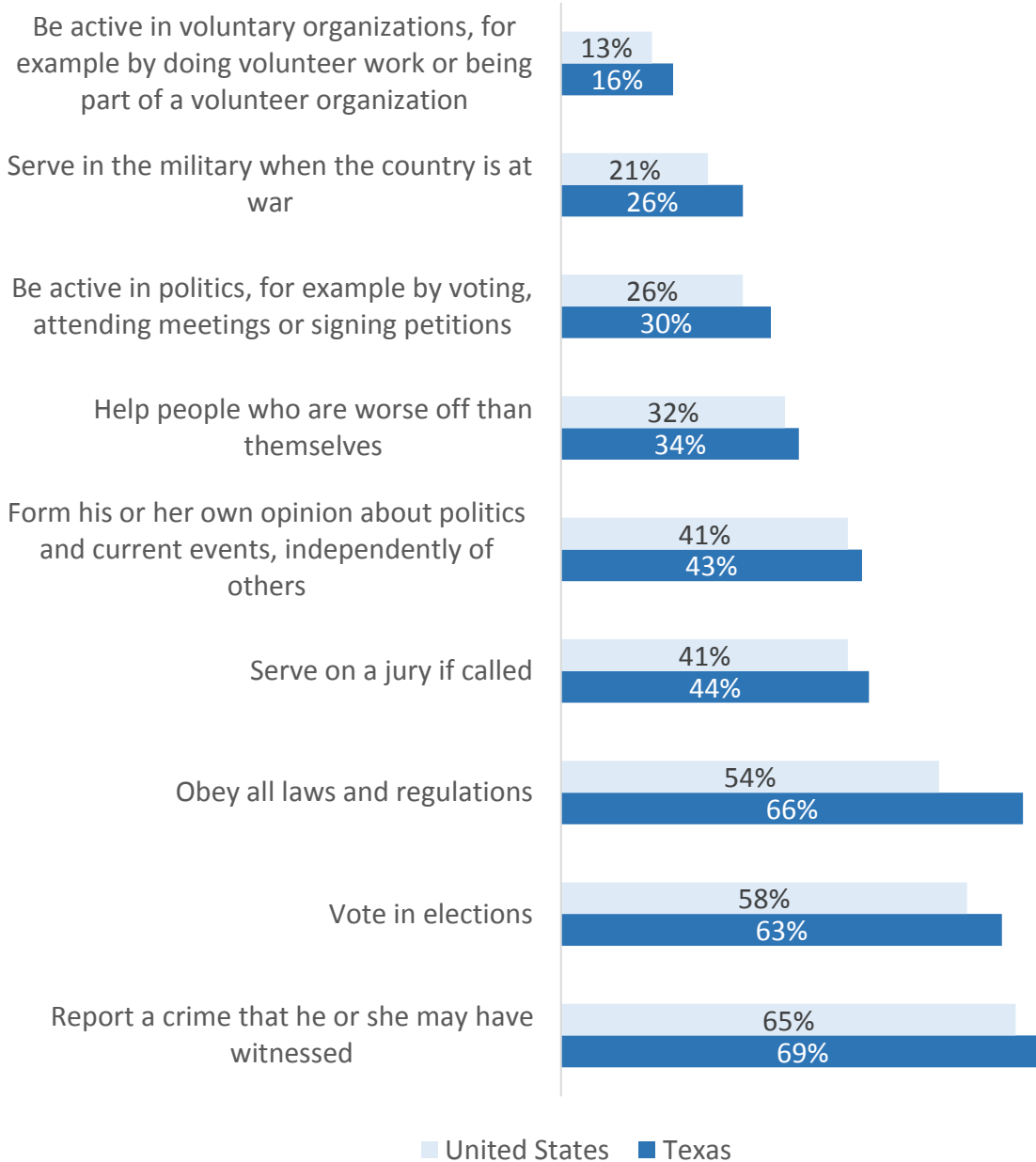
In the survey, we asked people, “To be a good citizen, how important would you say it is for a person to ...” and then gave them nine different options, such as “vote in elections” and “obey all laws and regulations.” For each of the nine options, respondents were asked to rate how important the activity was. In the charts and tables that follow, we report on the percentage of respondents answering “extremely important.”

The most important activities for good citizens, according to Texans and Americans, are reporting crimes one witnesses, voting in elections, and obeying all laws and regulations. The least important activities for good citizens are serving in the military during wartime and being active in voluntary organizations.

To be a good citizen, how important would you say it is for a person to ...

% saying extremely important

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey



Comparing Texans to non-Texans, the difference in saying that each activity is “extremely important” to being a good citizen is statistically meaningful only for obeying all laws and regulations and serving in the military when the country is at war. In both instances, Texans are more likely to say that the activity is extremely important compared to non-Texans.

For each activity, we look at whether demographics or partisanship relate to saying that the activity is extremely important for a person to be a good citizen.

For all of the activities, older Americans are more likely to say that each is more important to being a good citizen compared to younger Americans.

For four of the nine activities – reporting crime, obeying laws, forming opinions, and helping the worse off – women are more likely than men to say it is extremely important.

More highly educated Americans are more likely to say that serving on juries and forming opinions are extremely important for a person to be a good citizen than those with less education. Those with less education, however, are more likely to say that serving in the military is extremely important for a person to be a good citizen compared to those with more education.

Republicans are more likely to say that reporting crime and serving in the military are important indications of good citizenship than Democrats. Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say that helping those who are worse off is important.

Percent Saying “Extremely Important” For a Person To Be a Good Citizen

% of Americans

	Report crime	Vote in elections	Obey laws	Serve jury	Form opinion	Help worse off
Total	65%	58%	54%	41%	41%	32%
Male	58	--	47	--	36	28
Female	71	--	61	--	45	36
18-44	49	42	42	32	32	24
45+	78	72	65	49	48	39
High school or less	--	--	--	34	35	--
Some college	--	--	--	42	44	--
College or more	--	--	--	50	46	--
Republican	71	--	--	--	--	27
Democrat	62	--	--	--	--	36

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

-- indicates that there were not statistically significant differences

Percent Saying “Extremely Important” For a Person To Be a Good Citizen

% of Americans

	Be active in politics	Serve military	Volunteer
Total	26%	21%	13%
Male	--	--	--
Female	--	--	--
18-44	16	12	8
45+	35	30	17
High school or less	--	26	--
Some college	--	21	--
College or more	--	15	--
Republican	--	28	--
Democrat	--	17	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

-- indicates that there were not statistically significant differences

Older Texans are more likely to say that seven of the nine activities are extremely important for a person to be a good citizen compared to younger Texans. The two exceptions are helping those worse off and volunteering, where there are no statistically meaningful differences by age.

Texas women see obeying laws, helping those worse off, being active in politics, and volunteering as more important for being a good citizen than Texas men.

White non-Hispanic Texans are more likely than Texas Hispanics to say that reporting crime, voting in elections, serving on juries, and forming opinions are extremely important for a person to be a good citizen.

In three instances – voting in elections, serving on juries, and forming opinions – more educated Texans see the activity as more important for a person to be a good citizen than less educated Texans.

Partisan differences appear for five of the nine activities. Texas Republicans place more importance than Texas Democrats on obeying laws, voting in elections, serving on a jury, and serving in the military as indicators of good citizenship. Texas Democrats are more likely than Texas Republicans to say that helping the worse off is an extremely important activity for a good citizen.

Percent Saying “Extremely Important” For a Person To Be a Good Citizen

% of Texans

	Report crime	Obey laws	Vote in elections	Serve jury	Form opinion	Help worse off
Total	69%	66%	63%	44%	43%	34%
Male	--	62	--	--	--	28
Female	--	69	--	--	--	40
18-44	64	61	52	33	35	--
45+	74	70	73	55	50	--
High school or less	--	--	55	34	37	--
Some college	--	--	65	47	45	--
College or more	--	--	72	56	50	--
White non-Hispanic	75	--	67	52	51	--
Hispanic	63	--	53	33	32	--
Republican	--	71	69	51	--	27
Democrat	--	62	59	39	--	39

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

-- indicates that there were not statistically significant differences

Percent Saying “Extremely Important” For a Person To Be a Good Citizen

% of Texans

	Be active in politics	Serve military	Volunteer
Total	30%	26%	16%
Male	27	--	13
Female	34	--	19
18-44	24	16	--
45+	37	37	--
High school or less	--	--	--
Some college	--	--	--
College or more	--	--	--
White non-Hispanic	--	--	--
Hispanic	--	--	--
Republican	--	31	--
Democrat	--	24	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

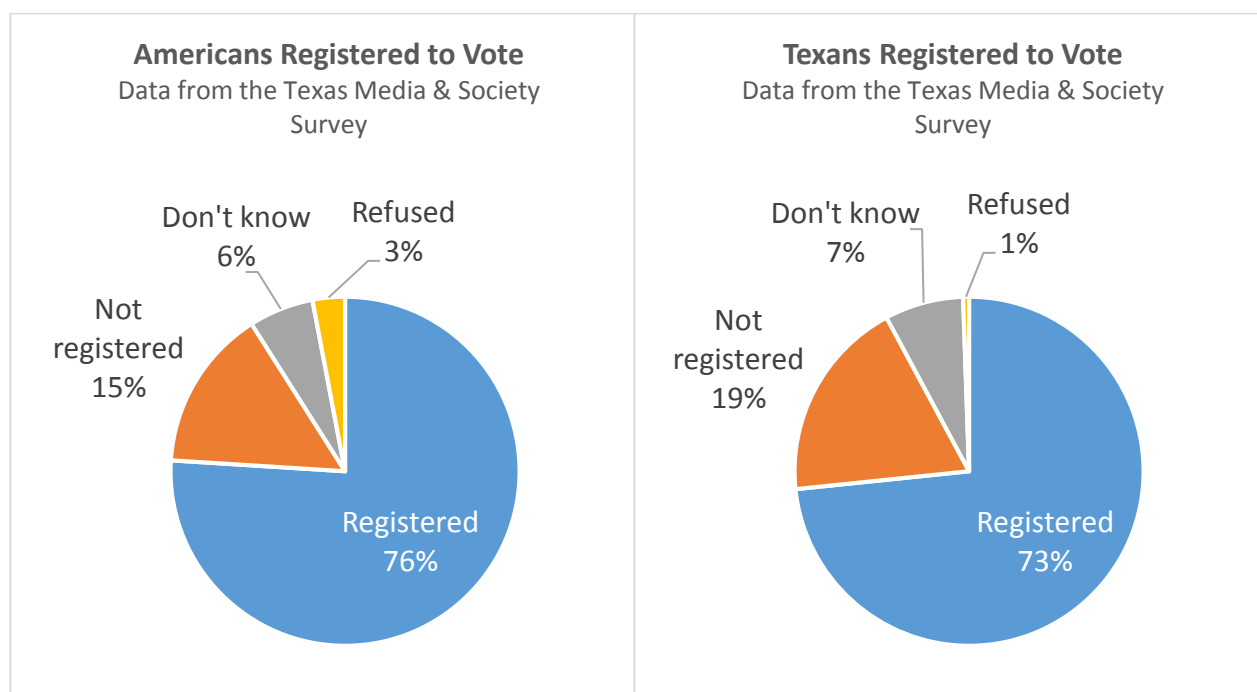
-- indicates that there were not statistically significant differences

Voting

Voting is the important culmination of the campaign season. We analyzed whether people are registered and tend to vote in presidential and local elections. We also report on Texans thoughts about voting procedures in the state.

Registration

Approximately three-fourths of Americans and Texans report being registered to vote.



In the U.S. and Texas data, older, more educated, and Republican respondents reported higher registration levels than their demographic counterparts. In the Texas data, where we had sufficient sample size to analyze race/ethnicity, white non-Hispanic Texans are registered at higher rates than Hispanic Texans.

Registered to Vote

% saying that they are registered

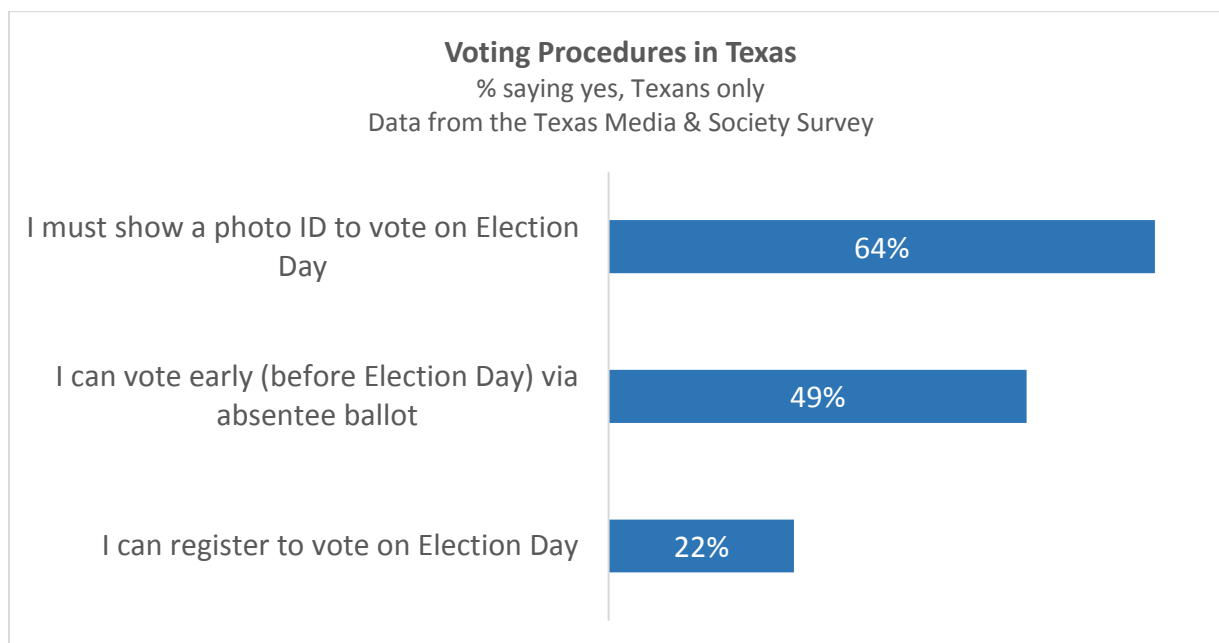
	US	TX
Total	76%	73%
18-44	65	64
45+	86	83
High school or less	67	61
Some college	80	79
College or more	85	87
White non-Hispanic	n/a	88
Hispanic	n/a	52
Republican	83	80
Democrat	75	71

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Voting Procedures in Texas

We asked respondents to share their thoughts about three statements regarding voting procedures. Nearly three-fourths of Texans said that they needed to show a photo ID to vote on Election Day. We note that in July of 2016, after this survey had been fielded, a federal appeals court ruled that the Texas voter identification law violated the Voting Rights Act and there are now alternatives to showing a photo ID for the November 2016 election.

Just under half of Texans say that they can vote before Election Day via absentee ballot. Twenty-two percent of Texans believe that they can register to vote on Election Day.



More educated Texans are more likely to say that you need a photo ID, that you can vote absentee, and that you can register on Election Day compared to their demographic counterparts. Texas women and white non-Hispanic Texans also report that you need a photo ID at higher rates than Texas men and Hispanic Texans. Older and white non-Hispanic Texans say that you can vote absentee at higher rates than younger and Hispanic Texans. Younger Texans, however, are more likely than older Texans to say that you can register on Election Day.

Percent Saying Yes to Voting Procedures

% of Texans

	Photo ID	Vote absentee	Register on Election Day
Total	64%	49%	22%
Male	69	--	--
Female	60	--	--
18-44	--	45	30
45+	--	53	13
High school or less	51	36	17
Some college	74	54	25
College or more	74	64	27
White non-Hispanic	76	64	--
Hispanic	46	33	--
Republican	--	--	--
Democrat	--	--	--

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Voting in Local and Presidential Elections

Measuring voter turnout in surveys is notoriously difficult because of the social desirability of saying one voted. We used the following survey question to measure whether people voted in local elections: “Only around one-quarter of those eligible vote in local elections, such as for the mayor and City Council. How often do you vote in local elections?” Just over one-third of Americans and just under a quarter of Texans say they vote in local elections all the time.

Voting in Local Elections

	US	TX
All the time	34%	24%
Most of the time	19	25
Half the time	10	12
Hardly ever	10	10
Never	16	19
Not eligible	8	10

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Texans are less likely to report voting in local elections relative to those living outside of Texas.

We used similar phrasing to understand voting behavior in presidential elections: “We know that most people don’t vote in all elections. Usually around one-half of those eligible actually come out to vote in presidential elections. How often do you vote in presidential elections?” Just over half of Texans and Americans say they vote in presidential elections all the time.

Voting in Presidential Elections

	US	TX
All the time	56%	53%
Most of the time	13	14
Half the time	6	6
Hardly ever	5	5
Never	9	12
Not eligible	8	9

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Age and education are related to saying that one votes all the time in local and presidential elections. In both Texas and the U.S., older and more educated respondents are more likely to say that they vote in local and presidential elections all the time than younger and less educated respondents. In Texas, where we are able to compare Hispanic and white non-Hispanic voting reports, white non-Hispanic Texans are more likely to say that they vote all the time in presidential elections compared to Hispanic Texans. Partisan divides, where Republicans report voting all the time at a higher rate than Democrats, are found in both the U.S. and Texas for voting in presidential elections and are found only in the U.S. for voting in local elections.

Voting in Local and Presidential Elections

% saying all the time

	Local		Presidential	
	US	TX	US	TX
Total	34%	24%	56%	53%
18-44	17	15	36	39
45+	49	33	73	67
High school or less	29	18	46	34
Some college	34	27	56	59
College or more	40	28	69	76
White non-Hispanic	n/a	--	n/a	69
Hispanic	n/a	--	n/a	31
Republican	43	--	65	63
Democrat	30	--	53	47

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Conclusion

As the 2016 election approaches, this report provides a snapshot of Americans and Texans political views and behaviors. The results show significant cynicism about politics and elections. At the same time, majorities believe their vote matters and that they know enough to cast an informed vote. Although majorities of Texans and Americans say that they always vote in presidential elections, fewer turn out regularly in local elections. And at most a quarter participate in any given political activity like signing petitions or volunteering for a campaign.

We analyzed the data for divides based on gender, age, education, partisanship, and in Texas, race/ethnicity. Few differences between Texans and Americans appear in the data. Rather, the most persistent differences appear for age and education. Older and more educated Americans and Texans are more involved in politics and report more efficacious attitudes. They also are more cynical about candidates and elections. The divides revealed in this report show that care must be taken in inferring public opinion from participatory acts like contacting a government official. Those who engage in these political activities are demographically distinct from those who do not.

The Texas Media & Society Survey analyzed public attitudes, opinion, and behaviors about the news media and journalism, politics and civic participation, and their discussion networks and communities. This report focuses on political attitudes and engagement and provides insight into how Texans and Americans orient toward politics in 2016.

About the Institute and the Survey

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life exists to cultivate informed voters and active citizens. As an Organized Research Unit housed in the Moody College of Communication at the University of Texas at Austin, the Institute sponsors research, education, and outreach programs focused on three key pillars: civic discovery, young people, and civil dialogue. In 2000, the Institute was founded on the belief that informed voters and active citizens are made, not born, and that democracy and society benefit when citizens participate and take action to improve their communities.

The Texas Media & Society Survey seeks to capture the voice of Texans and Americans on the media, civic engagement, and politics over time. Launched in 2015 as an endeavor of the Moody College of Communication, the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, and the School of Journalism, the survey reveals the attitudes of Texans and Americans on media and politics, measures habits of news consumption, and offers insight into how people become informed in the digital age. The release of annual survey results coincides with the annual Denius Symposium on News Integrity that invites students to engage in public dialogue and to explore the survey results.

For more information, or to request access to the survey data, visit TXMediaAndSociety.org

Acknowledgments

This report was made possible by the Cain Foundation, the Denius Chair for Press Integrity, the Moody Endowment for Excellence in Communication, and the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life.

Assistant Director of Research at the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life and Associate Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin Natalie Jomini Stroud oversaw the development of the survey and this report.

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Thanks to Jeff Gottfried and Paul Lavrakas for providing feedback on the survey instrument.

Thanks to Roderick Hart, Founding Director of the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life and Professor of Communication Studies, for his vision in founding this survey and securing funding for its execution. Thanks also to Regina Lawrence, former Director of the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, for her leadership in founding this survey.

Methodology

The Texas Media & Society Survey was created by the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life at the University of Texas at Austin. The survey was fielded by GfK Group (formerly Knowledge Networks). GfK employs a probability-based sampling strategy to recruit panelists to participate in surveys. They originally used random digit dialing to recruit panelists until 2009 when they moved to address based sampling methods. Those without Internet access are provided with a web-enabled device and free Internet service so that they can complete surveys online.

For this particular study, 3,743 were sampled for participation and 2,015 completed the survey. Non-responders were sent email reminders on day 3, 7, and 10 of the field period. Surveys were available in both English and Spanish. Taking into account all phases of obtaining respondents, the response rate for the U.S. sample is 4.6% and for the Texas sample, 3.7%. Data collection took place between May 24, 2016 and June 14, 2016. Respondents had to be over the age of 18 to participate.

The sample sizes and margins of error are shown in the table below. These calculations include the design effect. In theory, in 19 out of 20 cases, results for all American adults, for instance, will differ by no more than 3.3 percentage points, up or down, from the results of this survey. The margin of error does not include other sources of error, such as the question wording, question order, and the translation of survey questions.

Unweighted Sample Sizes and Margins of Error

	U.S.		TX	
	Sample size	Margin of Error	Sample size	Margin of Error
Total	1,009	3.3	1,006	3.8
Male	492	4.7	490	5.4
Female	517	4.6	516	5.3
18-44	389	5.3	322	6.7
45+	620	4.2	684	4.6
High school or less	371	5.5	376	6.2
Some college	274	6.3	283	7.2
College or more	364	5.5	347	6.5
White non-Hispanic	--		522	5.3
Hispanic	--		320	6.7
Republican	422	5.1	478	5.5
Democrat	530	4.3	480	5.5

Data from the Texas Media & Society Survey

Note: We do not report race/ethnicity data for the United States throughout this report because of the sample size.

The data reported here are weighted. The weights for the U.S. take into account gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, education, household income, household with Internet access, and primary language. For the Texas data, the weights take into account gender, age, race/ethnicity, metropolitan status, education, household income, and primary language.

For this report, we computed cross-tabulations comparing the question of interest with the above demographic variables and partisanship. Note that for partisanship, we include leaners as partisans in the data and exclude those who do not have any party leaning from the analysis. When the Rao-Scott chi-square statistic was statistically significant ($p < .05$), we report the data in text, otherwise we do not.

The full questionnaire and additional information about the survey are available at TXMediaAndSociety.org