

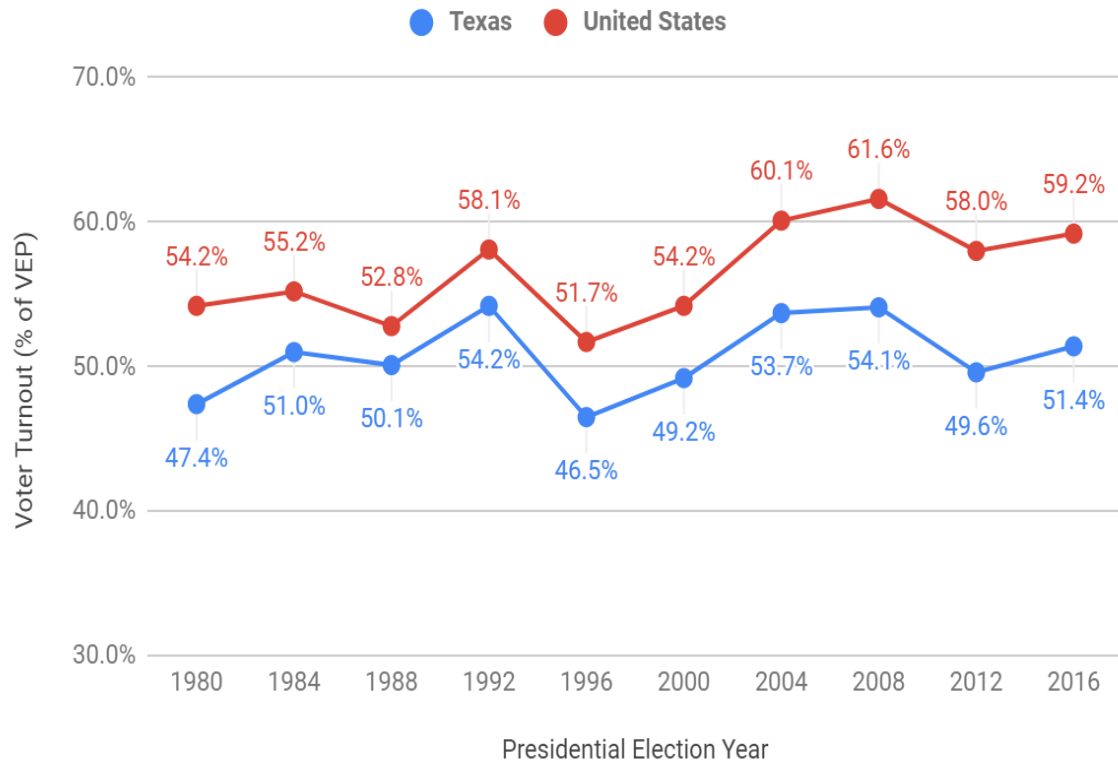
Voter Turnout in Texas: Can it be Higher?

**JAMES MCKENZIE,
MPSA CLASS 2020 &
TEXAS LYCEUM FELLOW**

*THE BUSH SCHOOL OF
GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC
SERVICE*

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

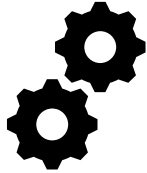
The Takeaway: *Voting reforms* exist that could make *turnout more robust*, thereby increasing the likelihood that the views of more Texans are captured in the election process.



Texas' Voter
Turnout
Consistently
Below National
Average

Source: Author's graphic using data from McDonald, Michael P. (2018). "1980-2014 November General Election State Turnout Rates" United States Elections Project. Date Accessed: May 2019

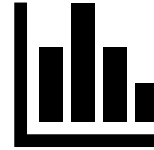
Voter Turnout: Why Does it Matter?



The 'Classical'
theoretical perspective
on turnout



Those who do not
vote, run the risk that
their interests go
unheard

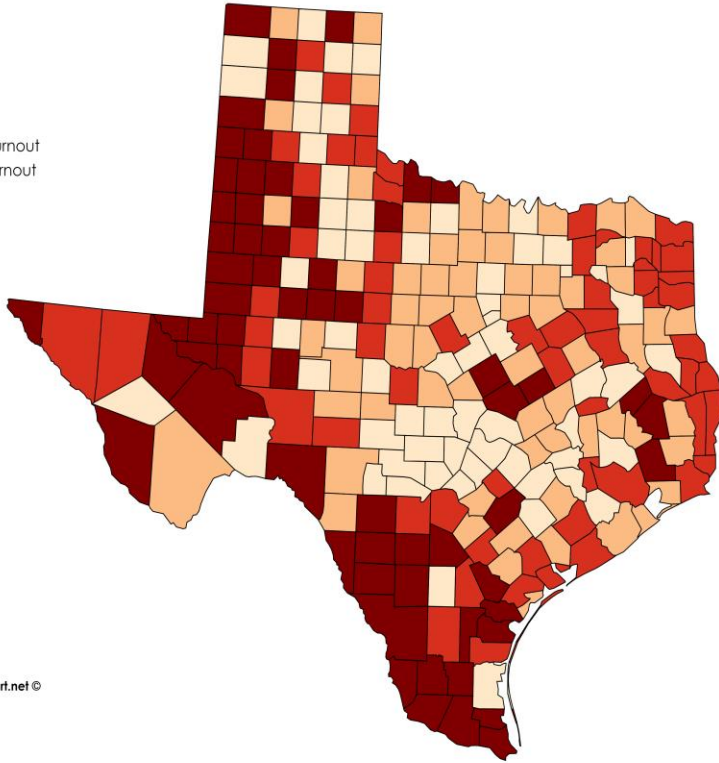


The consequences of low
turnout can be far-
reaching because of the
demographic disparity
between voters and
nonvoters

Disparities In Texas' Voter Turnout Demographics

- GEOPOLITICAL
- EDUCATION
- RACE/ETHNICITY
- INCOME
- AGE

Highest turnout
High-moderate turnout
Low-moderate turnout
Lowest Turnout



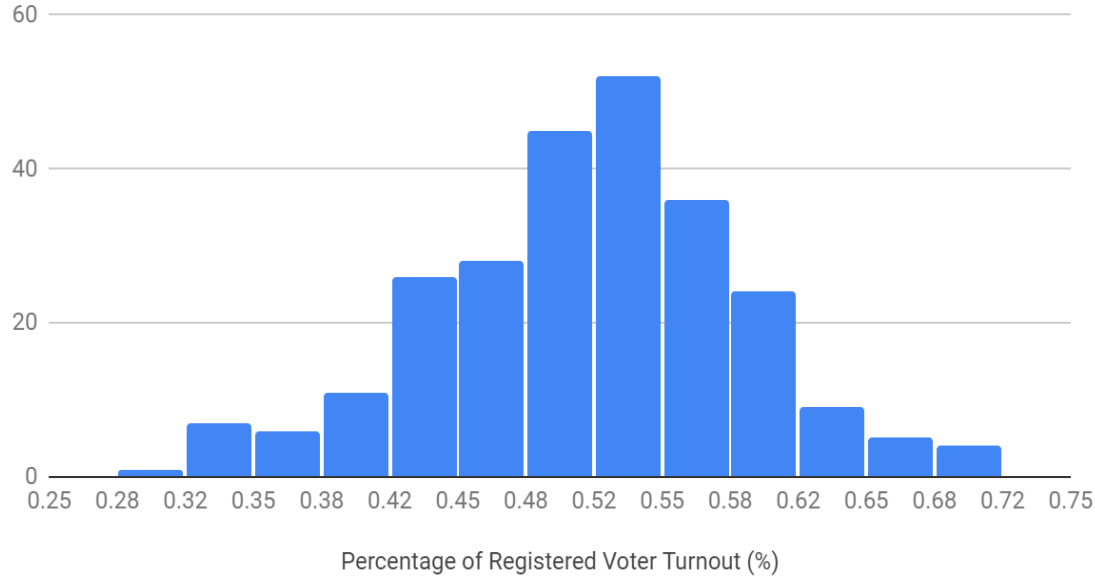
Created with mapchart.net ©

Turning Inward: 2018 Turnout by County

(As a Percentage of
Registered Voters)

Source: Author's graphic using data from Texas Secretary of State
Office https://elections.sos.state.tx.us/elchist331_race832.htm

Histogram: Number of Texas Counties by Percentage Turnout of Registered Voters



Source: Author's graphic using data from Texas Secretary of State
Office https://elections.sos.state.tx.us/elchist331_race832.htm

2018 Highest Turnout Counties:

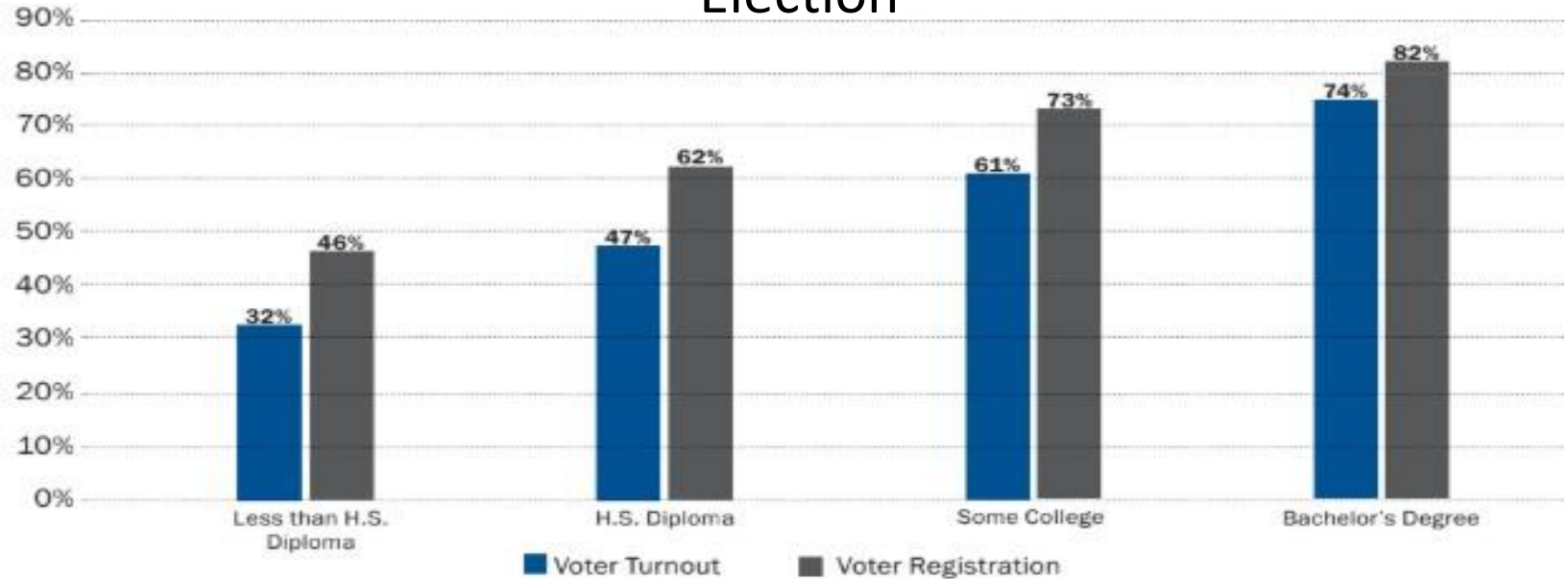
King **71.2%**
Glasscock **70.84%**
Borden **70.29%**

2018 Lowest Turnout Counties:

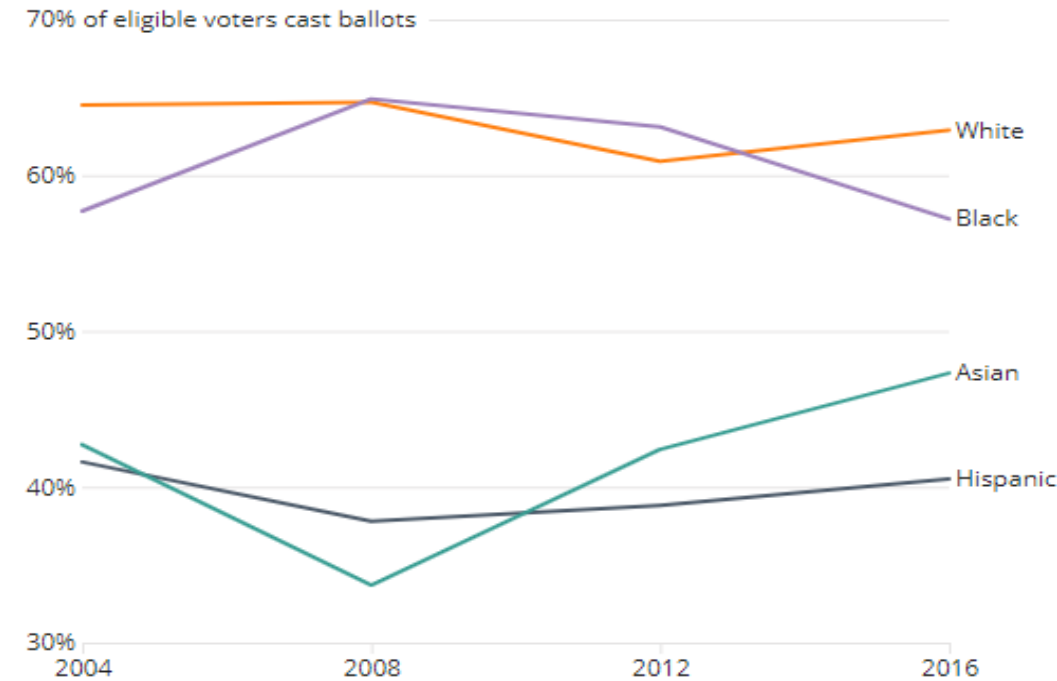
Zapata **29.30%**
Starr **32.57%**
Brooks **32.91%**

2018 Turnout (All Counties)
53.01% Registered Voters

Registration & Turnout by Levels of Education in Texas' 2016 Election



Source: Graphic from Annette Strauss Institute: Texas Civic Health Index (2018) p.5
https://moody.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/2018-Texas_Civic_Health_Index.pdf



Texas Voter Turnout (Voting Eligible) by Race/Ethnicity

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 Community Population Survey](#)

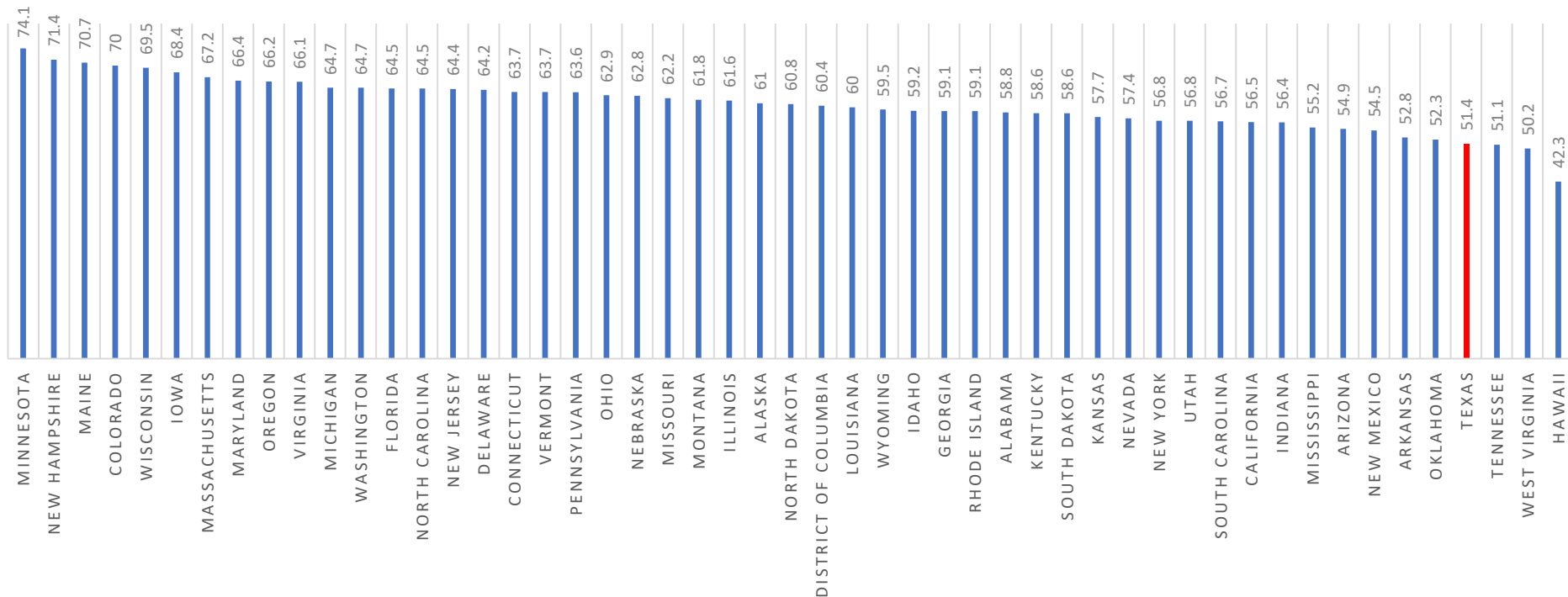
Source: Graphic from Ura, A. & Murphy, R. (2017) "Despite High Expectations for 2016, No Surge in Texas Hispanic Voter Turnout". *The Texas Tribune*. <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/11/hispanic-turnout-2016-election/>

Addressing the Issue

Understanding the
Breakdown of Texas'
Turnout Numbers

Where Does Texas Stand?

Voter Turnout by State: 2016 Presidential Election (Voting Eligible Population for highest office)



Source: Author's graphic using data from McDonald, Michael P. (2018). "2016 November General Election Turnout Rates" United States Elections Project

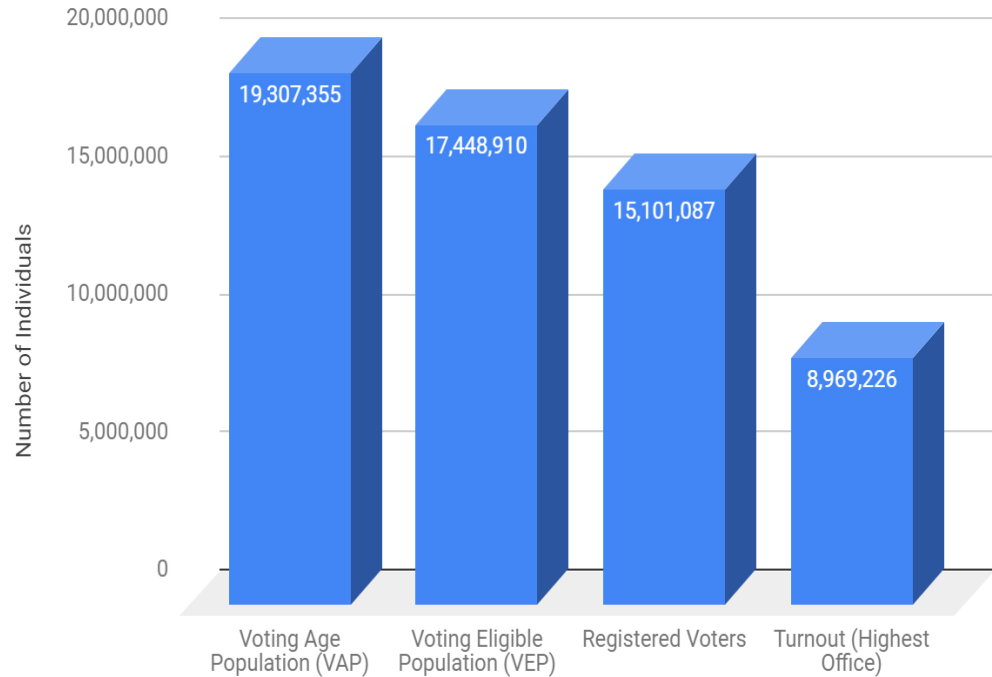
Ways to Report Turnout

*% of Voting Age
Population*

*% of Voting Eligible
Population*

% of Registered Voters

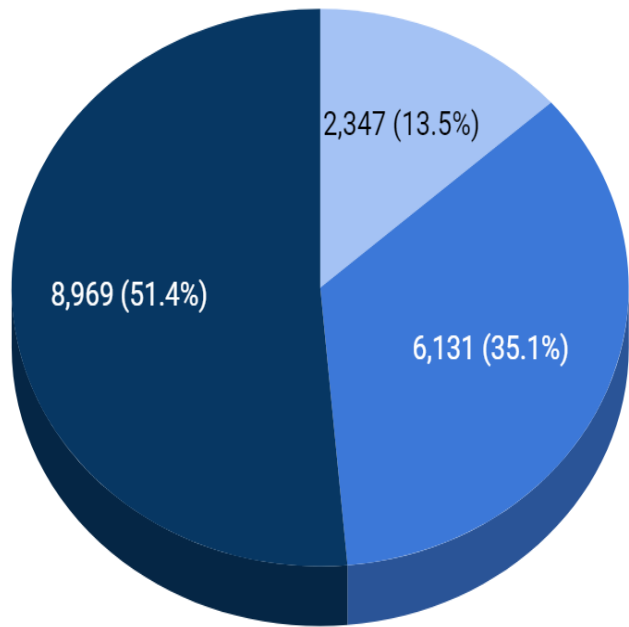
Approximately Half (51.4%) of Texas' Eligible Voters Turned Out In 2016



Source: Author's graphic using data from McDonald, Michael P. (2018). "2016 November General Election Turnout Rates" United States Elections Project & Texas Secretary of State

**Turnout reported in
thousands*

- Nonregistered
- Registered, Nonvoters
- Turnout (Highest Office)



Texas' 2016 VEP Turnout

Two Drop Off Points to
Address:

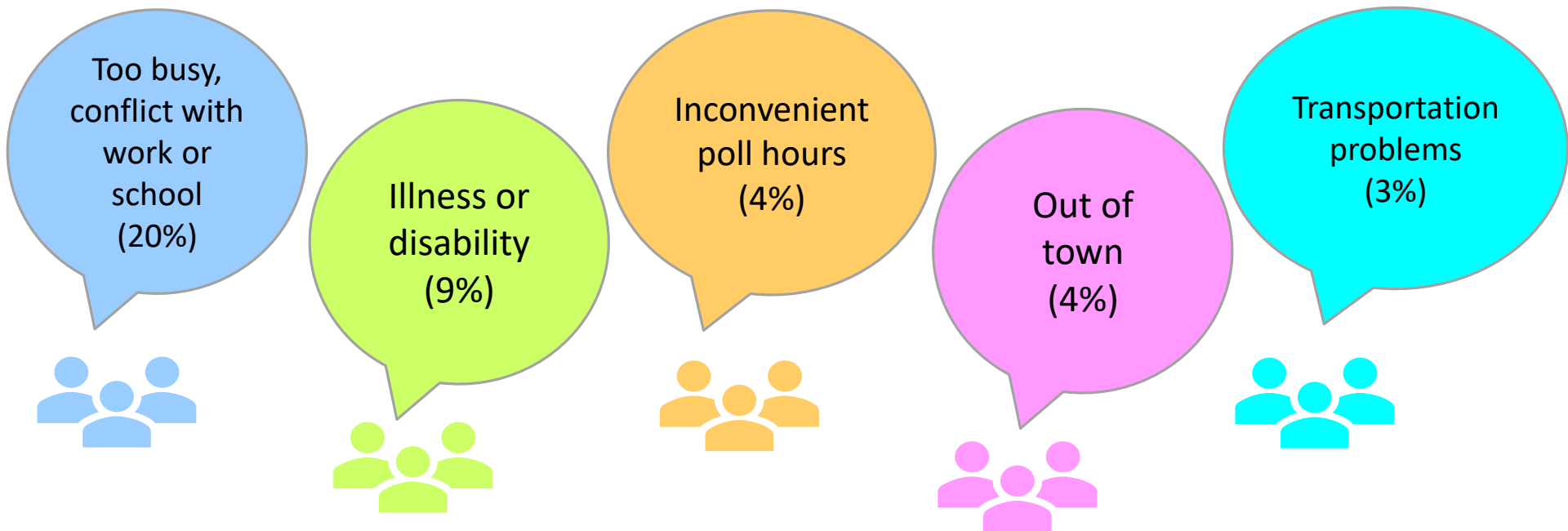
*2.3 Million Eligible Voters
Never Registered*

*6.1 Million Registered
Voters Did Not Turn Out*

Source: Author's graphic using data from McDonald, Michael P. (2018). "2016 November General Election Turnout Rates" United States Elections Project & Texas Secretary of State

Why Aren't Texans Voting?

Reasons Cited by Registered
Voters



Reasons Registered Texans Did Not Vote

Source: Annette Strauss Institute: Texas Civic Health Index (2018) p.7 https://moody.utexas.edu/sites/default/files/2018-Texas_Civic_Health_Index.pdf

The Takeaway: *Voting reforms* exist that could make *turnout more robust*, thereby increasing the likelihood that the views of more Texans are captured in the election process.



Policy Recommendations

Address both drop off points in voter turnout:

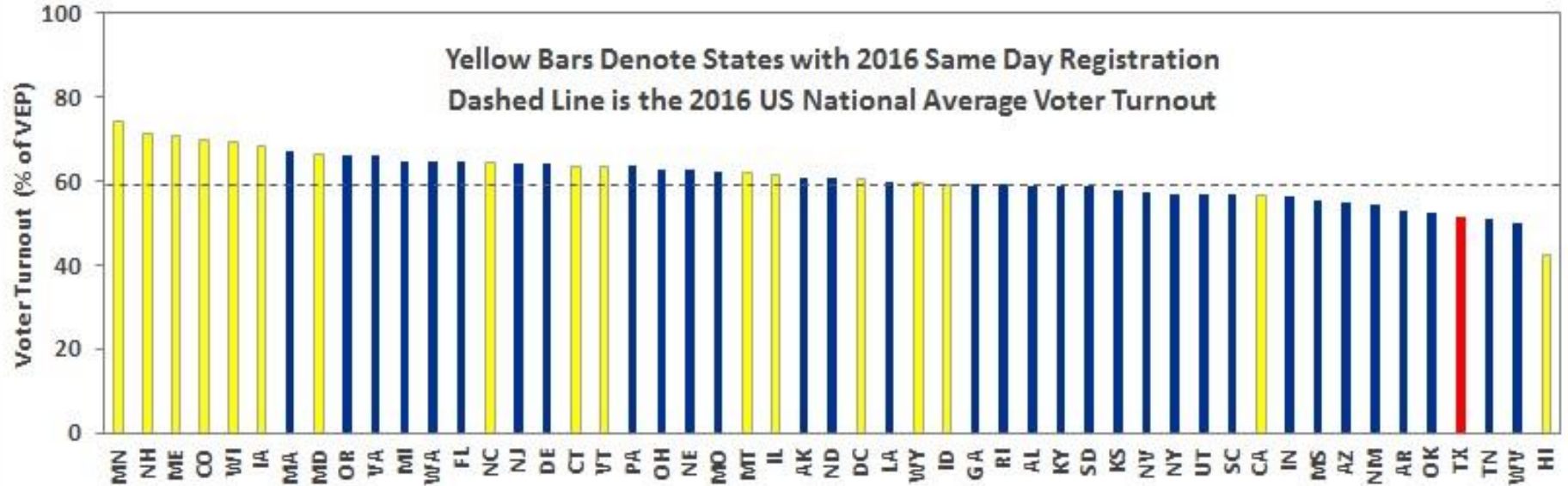
1) Get more eligible voters registered

*Election Day registration &
Automatic voter registration*

**2) Get more registered voters to turn out
on election day**

*Expanded early voting options &
Countywide Polling Place Program*

Election Day Registration Opportunities



Source: Author's graphic using data from McDonald, Michael P. (2018). "2016 November General Election Turnout Rates" United States Elections Project & National Conference of State Legislatures (2019) <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/same-day-registration.aspx>

Source: Graphic from NYU School of Law, Brennan Center for Justice (2019) <https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration>

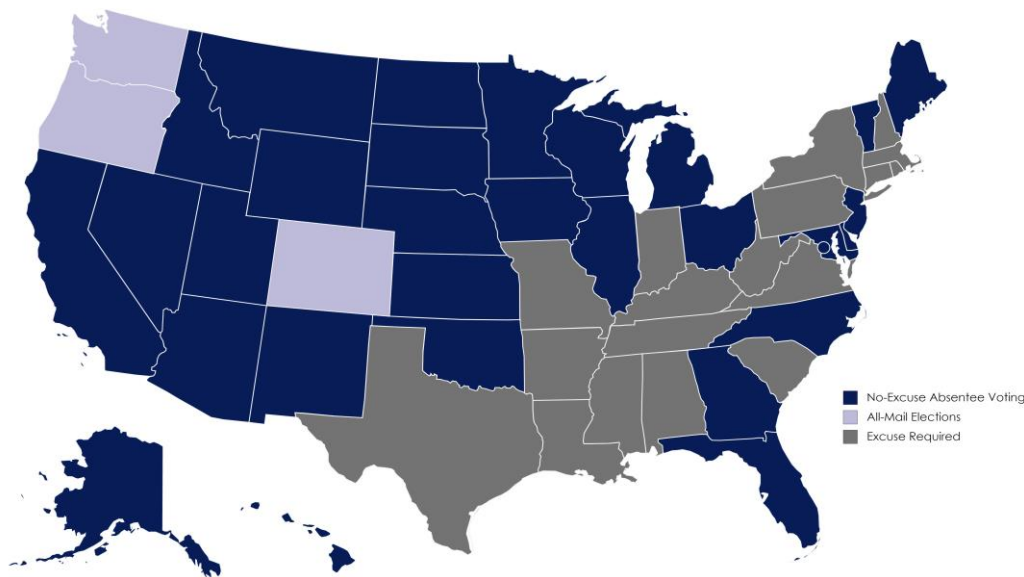
Automatic Voter Registration

In Oregon, 2016 monthly registration rates at the Department of Motor Vehicles *nearly quadrupled after AVR was passed* compared to 2012 rates.

In 2012, Oregon's DMV registered 4,163 new voters per month (on average).

In 2016, Oregon's DMV registered 15,375 new voters per month (on average).

States That Have Approved No-Excuse Absentee Voting (or All Mail-In Elections)



Expand Early Voting Options: Mail-in Ballots

To vote early by mail in Texas, an individual must submit a form documenting eligibility status as either:

- 1) 65 years of age and up
- 2) Disabled
- 3) Out of the county on election day (and during early voting period)
- 4) Confined in jail (non-felony charges)

Alternatively, a majority (28 states and Washington D.C.) permit any eligible voter for obtaining a mail-in ballot without offering an excuse.

Get More Registered Voters to Turn Out: *Countywide Polling Places (CWPP)*



In November 2018 General Election 56 counties participated in the CWPP program offered by the state.

Summative Report to the 86th Legislature:

“Positive feedback from voters, election officials, and party chairs, along with the turnout percentages, suggests countywide election polling places offer a way to ensure that voters who plan to vote in the election have an increased opportunity to do so much as with early voting.”

The Takeaway: *Voting reforms* exist that could make *turnout more robust*, thereby increasing the likelihood that the views of more Texans are captured in the election process.

James McKenzie, MPSA Class of 2020
Texas Lyceum Fellow

The Bush School of Government and Public Service
Texas A&M University

Contact mckenzij@tamu.edu

WITH GRATITUDE TO:
THE TEXAS LYCEUM &
DR. ANN BOWMAN, FACULTY SUPERVISOR