

“Are South Texas Latino Voters Really Trump Supporters or Is There Something Else Going On Here?--Still Another look at the 2020 Presidential Election Results”

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Introduction

There is good reason that Texas continues to capture the attention of political pundits, the media, demographers and policymakers. The dynamic changes within the demographic and political landscape of Texas makes it fertile ground to examine the political polarization between the Republican-led state government and Democratic urban cities that often takes center stage in the national arena. To begin with, the Texas population grew more than any other state in the country between 2010 and 2020, adding 3.9 million to the population (Texas Demographic Center 2020). Latinos made up the largest share of that increase (49.5%), and now make up 39.3% of the total population, nearly comparable to the Non-Hispanic (NH) White population of 39.7%. And demographers predict the Latino population in Texas will surpass the NH White population in 2022 or 2023. The state's total population now stands at 29 million and as a result, Texas gained two Congressional seats. Moreover, some social scientists believe the population is higher and argue that the state's lack of investment in securing an adequate count for the 2020 Census may have resulted in an undercount, especially among Latinos (Elliott et al. 2021; Poston and Saenz 2021).

The Republican-led state legislature is held in high regard within the national party for its firm stance on immigration control, draconian restrictions on women's reproductive rights and its recent passage of voting restrictions laws, adding another layer of voter suppression in a state where it is already difficult to vote. New voting restrictions in Texas now impose criminal penalties on election officials or other individuals who assist voters, disproportionately affecting individuals with language barriers or who have disabilities, to get help casting their ballots (Brennan Center for Justice 2021). With all of the racial rhetoric espoused by former President Trump that often-placed Latinos in a negative light, many wonder how he was able to secure

Latino votes in Texas during the 2016 campaign and even increase Latino support during the 2020 Presidential election. During the 2016 campaign, Trump came out strong as an anti-immigrant/anti-Mexican racist candidate which kept many in South Texas, especially those living in counties with a high share of recent immigrant populations, from voting for him (Adkisson and Peach 2017). However, he toned down that rhetoric during the 2020 campaign since the COVID pandemic took precedence and managed to secure a higher percentage of the Latino vote in some parts of South Texas than he did in 2016. Garza (2021) states that Latinos took less offense with Trump's past rhetoric and voted based on pocket-book issues like jobs and the economy, healthcare and education in 2020. As a result, media outlets such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Politico* began to sound the alarm that Republicans may be winning the hearts of Latinos in Texas.

But how should we make sense of the voting behavior of Latinos voters in Texas in general and more specifically, voting behavior of Latinos in South Texas and border counties? This paper examines these questions.

Literature Review –“*There’s Something Going on Here; What it is Ain’t Exactly Clear*” (with apologies to Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young)

Texas Latino voting patterns in South Texas and the Latino voting patterns in the recent California Recall election have produced a series of interesting popular periodical explanations. *New York Times* (it was about oil and gas), the *Wall Street Journal* (it’s the economy, stupid!); *Politico* (they are not Latinos; they’re Tejanos); *Texas Monthly* (Why Democrats are losing Tejanos) but perhaps these analyses are much too narrow. Existing literature suggests that Texas Latinos generally lean more Democrat given the more general anti-immigrant and anti-Latino

GOP rhetoric (Barreto and Segura 2014; De La Garza, DeSipio, and Leal 2010; Sanchez 2014; Pedraza and Wilcox-Archuleta, 2017). But, as early as 2008, and probably much earlier, political scientists have been careful in characterizing the Latino or Hispanic vote as a bloc (Garcia and Sanchez 2008). Garcia and Sanchez point to Latino votes from 1984 to 2004 as ranging between 50 to 75 percent Democratic with higher levels in the 1960s and 1970s. They wrote:

Only in 1980, when Latinos were notably supportive of Ronald Reagan, and in 2004, when Hispanics voted about 40 percent for George W. Bush, has the support for the Democratic presidential candidate dipped to less than 60 percent. ...with the average voter percentage that Democratic presidential candidates received from Latino voters ...prior to 2004 is 67 to 68 percent (135).

Garcia and Sanchez add that the “Hispanic vote varied by the same socioeconomic indicators that affect the non-Hispanic vote” (ibid). Moreover, as Fraga et al. (2006) point out there is long legacy of research that has found not only that Latino group identity is complex but also that “its saliency for political engagement is often situational,” citing the works of John García (1982); Felix Padilla 1986; Michael Jones-Correa and David Leal (1996) (517).

So how does the 2020 presidential differ from these patterns?

One of Texas’ premier magazines, the *Texas Monthly*, had a piece titled “Why Democrats are Losing Tejanos,” where reporter Jack Herrera interviewed many Latinos in South Texas and along the border to inquire about the shift towards the Republican party during the 2020 election. One interviewee, Sylvia Bruni who serves as party chair for the Webb County Democratic Party, stated that Republican candidates and volunteers “were knocking on doors; they were having *asadas* (similar to barbeques); and they were meeting people and talking to them. And we weren’t.” She indicated that the state’s Democratic party leadership prioritized outreach via phone calls, texts, and social media during the pandemic (Herrera 2021). These sentiments were

also expressed in another *Texas Monthly* article, written by Balli, titled “Don’t Call Texas’s Latino Voters the Sleeping Giants.” She and a couple of colleagues interviewed over 100 individuals in South Texas regarding their voting patterns and several interviewees stated that Latinos want someone to take the time to listen to them. One interviewee stated, “You might not even be what they want in a [candidate]. But as long as you listen to them and give them that attention and respect, they’ll respect you just for that. And you might even get their vote” (Balli 2020). Other notable takeaways from Herrera’s conversations with residents of South Texas was that many were turned off by the Democratic party’s rhetoric about defunding police, discouraging fracking, or reducing immigration enforcement that might threaten security and precious jobs. As Jason Villalba, CEO of the Texas Hispanic Policy Foundation, states “Texas Hispanics do not aspire to wear the red or blue of a political jersey. We are interested in kitchen-table issues that positively impact our families and our community” (Villalba 2022).

EquisLabs, a *Latinx* political consulting company partnered with Equis Research to conduct a post-2020 election survey of Latino support and uncovered some interesting shifts in Trump support among Latinos. For example, during the 2016 election, two issues that kept Latinos from supporting Trump were his hardline stance on immigration and their strong Latino identity, which Trump attacked through his public racial rhetoric. In 2020, the issues shifted to the economy and COVID with 77% of Latinos approving of Trump’s stimulus package and 74% for his push of a rapid vaccine development (Equis Research 2021). In short, those Latinos surveyed viewed Trump’s efforts to keep the economy going amidst the on-going pandemic as key in 2020. This was especially important for front-line workers, many who are Latinos and were most affected when the economy took a downturn. An Equis Research interview with a Latina from Brownsville, a Texas city along the border, shared her shift from a non-voter in 2016

to a Trump supporter in 2020. On not voting in 2016: “I was like, my heart doesn’t let me vote for Trump because he’s just saying this about us. It was super taboo. . . if I would have said I was voting for Trump, I would have been lynched.” However, she voted for Trump in 2020 stating “I’m super Mexican, but just the way he wanted to keep jobs here, and the way he wanted to promote the economy, that was something admirable. We were doing something good as a country.” And in Zapata County, where Trump helped the Republican party win for the first time in 100 years, jobs was a critical concern. Zapata resident Roberto Barrera expressed his concern about Biden’s intentions to transition away from fossil fuels. “The way I see it, they’d cut my job,” he said (Ferman 2020). This sentiment was echoed by state Rep. Ryan Guillen of Rio Grande city when he recently announced his switch from the Democratic party to the GOP. He said, “Friends, something is happening in South Texas and many of us are waking up to the fact that the values of those in Washington, D.C., are not our values, not the values of most Texans. The ideology of defunding the police, of destroying the oil and gas industry and the chaos at our border is disastrous for those of us who live here in South Texas” (Svitek 2021).

Although support for the Republican party among Latinos in Texas appeared to increase during the 2020 Presidential election, political scientists who have studied Latino voting behavior are not too concerned. Historically, Latinos have voted Democrat and in the 2012 Presidential election, Latinos made history by accounting for one in ten votes cast in a national election. Their support for Obama, at 75 percent, made a direct impact on his margin of victory over Romney (Barreto et al. 2014). And a 2020 Pew Research national poll of Latino registered voters found that 63 percent identify with the Democratic party compared to 34 percent with the Republican party (Noe-Bustamante, Budiman, and Lopez 2020). In Texas, the changing demographics could still shift the state, albeit incrementally, from red to blue. Huerta and

Cuartas (2021) acknowledge that the Texas Republican party has drawn much of its support from the NH-White population, especially those born in 1962 and earlier. However, this population continues to decrease and are being replaced in the electorate by a population that is more ethnically diverse and by a young NH-White population that vote differently than their older counterparts. Their findings suggest that there is a generational and demographic replacement occurring in the Texas, which will likely help Democrats in the long-run. Although you will find many Latinos who may identify themselves as independents, as Villalba purports, a recent Gallup poll asked this group of independents which way they would lean and 32 percent identified as Democrats, while 11 percent identified as Republicans (Newport 2022). Most importantly, the Latino share of the total active Texas electorate (those who cast a ballot) is more than twice the national average; however, Latinos in Texas have turnout rates that rank among the lowest in the country (Barreto, Manzano, and Segura 2015). This is why implementing Latino voter mobilization efforts in Texas communities is so important.

Methods

Thirty-three (33) South Texas Counties, in particular, are examined. Thus, the unit of analysis is counties (see Table 1). The dependent variable of interest is the percent county votes in the 2020 election that went to the incumbent, Republican Donald J. Trump.ⁱ Election return and voter registration data were attained from the Texas Secretary of State Office, Elections Division.ⁱⁱ

The principal independent variables include:

- 1) percent Latino in the county, as a measure of presence/residence in the county;
- 2) percent one-year employment gains/losses in natural resources and mining as a measure of oil and gas industry employment/activity in the countyⁱⁱⁱ;

**Table 1: The 2020 Presidential Election in South Texas Counties
(Majority %Latino Counties in RED) (N=33)**

County	Border County (0=not; 1=Border/Near Border (n=17))	Pop2020	%Latino	%Trump
Atascosa	0	48981	63.65	66.45
Bee	0	31047	62.46	63.76
Brooks	1	7076	88.21	40.18
Calhoun	0	20106	49.03	71.8
Cameron	1	421017	89.47	42.94
Dimmit	1	8615	86.91	37.75
Duval	1	9831	80.99	48.35
Edwards	1	1422	50.49	83.77
Frio	0	18385	77.08	53.48
Gonzales	0	19653	50.36	73.57
Hidalgo	1	870781	91.87	40.98
Jim Hogg	1	4838	88.49	40.91
Jim Well	0	38891	79.29	54.52
Karnes	0	14710	52.58	75.55
Kenedy	1	350	74.57	65.46
Kinney	1	3129	46.98	71.37
Kleberg	0	31040	70.78	50.29
La Salle	1	6664	73.65	55.49
Live Oak	0	11335	42.26	83.08
Maverick	1	57887	94.90	44.84
McMullen	0	600	37.33	89.15
Medina	0	50748	48.19	69.04
Nueces	0	353178	61.46	50.75
Refugio	0	6741	49.04	65.66
San Patricio	0	68755	55.59	63.79
Starr	1	65920	97.68	47.06
Uvalde	1	24564	70.50	59.69
Val Verde	1	47586	80.29	54.21
Webb	1	267114	95.22	37.86
Willacy	0	20164	87.34	43.99
Wilson	0	49753	38.65	73.81
Zapata	1	13889	93.59	52.48
Zavala	1	9690	92.30	34.03
Total Population		2,604,460		

Source: Redistricting Data for Texas Counties, Texas County Population, 2000-2020. [TDC - Redistricting Data for Texas Counties, 2000-2020](#)

3) percent increase in election turnout from November 2016 to November 2020, as a measure of voter mobilization;

4) percent unemployment in county for September 2020, as a measure of economic activity and “pocketbook” sentiments/perspectives in the county^{iv};

5) median household income in county for 2020 also as a measure of economic status;

6) a dichotomized variable for region (1=South Texas; 0=Non-South Texas Counties);

7) a dichotomized border or near border county dichotomized variable; and,

8) county population as a measure of the population size in 2020.

Ordinary least squared regression was the primary means of analysis. The voting behavior of several (N=17) Texas counties over the last three presidential elections are examined first for contextual purposes. Next all 254 counties in the State are examined as a summary, followed by attention to 33 counties identified as South Texas and finally an examination of an additional 17 counties to examine the impact of being a county near or on the border.

Results

President Trump defeated the Joe Biden in Texas by five and half percentage points (52 to 46%). Texas has not gone “blue” since the 1976 presidential election where Jimmy Carter (D-GA) defeated Gerald R. Ford (R-MI), the sitting president, who replaced Spiro Agnew (R-MD) as the Vice President and ascended to the presidency in 1974 when Richard Nixon resigned. Context is important in understanding the State of Texas voting behavior and patterns. Texas Democrats in early 2019-20 were hopeful with Beto O’Rourke’s (D) senate run against incumbent Ted Cruz (R) that the State was creeping some tinge of “blue” or at least “purple”. O’Rourke worked hard on mobilizing and exciting his electorate in supporting the bid and came within three (3) percentage points of defeating Cruz.

But Trump's 2020 campaign performance in Texas was, in many ways, very similar to his 2016 performance. In 2016, candidate Trump received 52.2 percent of the Texas vote compared to Hillary Clinton, who received 43.2 percent with the additional four percent divided by some fifteen other candidacies. Clinton, in 2016, garnered 3.8 million votes but Biden picked up 5.3 million votes in 2020 in Texas or a 39.5% increase over Clinton's campaign. By these measures, Democratic Biden outperformed Clinton's effort in Texas 2016. Turnout in the Texas presidential race was also different: in 2016, 59.4% of the Texas registered voters voted; but, by 2020, turnout jumped to 66.7%, which coincides with increase in turnout nation-wide.

Again, Trump in 2020 performed similar to his 2016 effort among a select and diverse set of seventeen Texas counties compared to the Biden and Clinton campaigns (see Table 2 and Figure 1). The seventeen counties used here represent approximately 61% of the state population and 70% of the Texas' Latino population, based on the 2020 U.S. Census. From 2012 to 2020, Democratic presidential candidates garnered 53.3% (Obama 2012), 54.3% (HRCClinton) and 52.8% (Biden). Equally, Republican presidential election performance in these seventeen counties follow a strong and similar pattern: Romney received 45.2% in 2012; Trump 41.5% in 2016 and 46% in 2020 (the correlations in these seventeen counties between Romney12 and Trump16=.98; and between Trump16 and Trump20 is .89 are strong). It is interesting to note that in 2020 Trump received less than a 1 percent increase in these counties than Romney did eight years prior despite the turnout increase. Among these seventeen counties in 2020, however, Biden ran 9 percentage points behind Obama in 2012 and 26 percentage points behind Clinton in 2016. It is in such findings that the voting patterns have garnered popular and partisan interests.

TABLE 2: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN SELECT COUNTIES IN TEXAS OVER TIME ^a

(Majority Latino Counties in red; South Texas Counties in RED)

County	%Obama 2012 ^d	%Clinton 2016 ^d	%Biden 2020	%Biden over %Obama	%Biden over %Clinton
Bexar	52	54	58.1	6.1	4.1
CAMERON	66	65	56.11	-9.89	-8.89
Collin	33	39	47.05	14.05	8.05
Dallas	57	61	65.1	8.1	4.1
EL PASO	66	69	66.78	0.78	-2.22
Fort Bend	46	51	54.7	8.7	3.7
Harris	49	54	55.96	6.96	1.96
HIDALGO	70	69	58.04	-11.96	-10.96
JIM HOGG	78	77	58.79	-19.21	-18.21
Lubbock	29	28	33.12	4.12	5.12
Potter	27	27	29.76	2.76	2.76
Presidio	70	66	65.99	-4.01	-0.01
Randall	15	15	19.79	4.79	4.79
Tarrant	41	43	49.31	8.31	6.31
Travis	60	66	71.62	11.62	5.62
WEBB	77	74	61.14	-15.86	-12.86
ZAPATA	71	66	47.13	-23.87	-18.87
Σ				-9	-26
Correlation	0.98 (%Obama to %HRC)	0.88 (%HRC to %Biden)			

Sources:

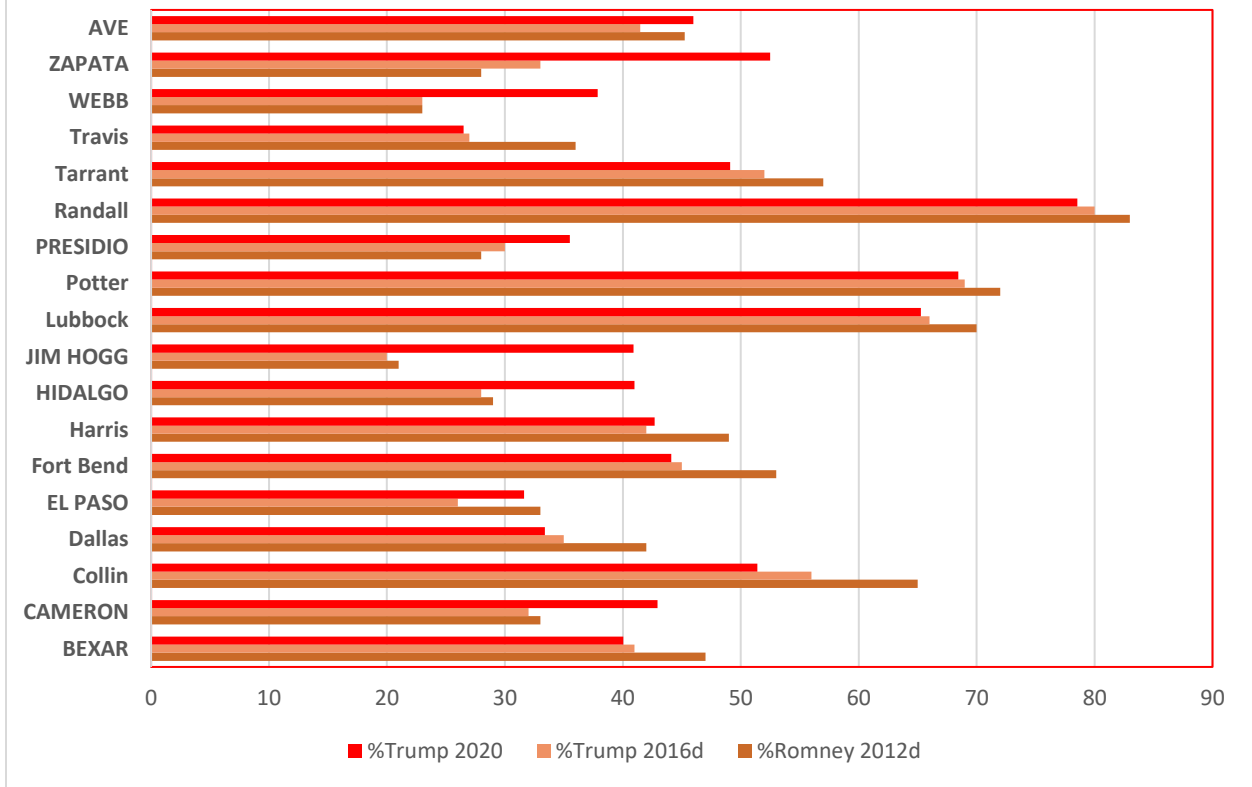
^a U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census P.L. 94-171 Redistricting Data; <https://demographics.texas.gov/InteractiveTools/2021/CBRedistrictingCounty>

^b Population density data available at: <https://www.census.gov/2010census/>

^c Calculated by authors using the United States Census 2010 data compiled by the Research Center

^d From the State of Texas, Office of the Secretary of State, available at <http://elections.sos.state.tx.us/index.htm>

**Figure 1: Presidential Election Select Texas Counties Over Time
(LATINO COUNTIES in CAPS)**



In the eight top Texas majority Latino counties from this list, the portrait of Biden’s performance worsens. In these counties, the average percent Latino was 85.2% with an entire population of 4.4 million or 15.3 percent of the State’s population but also represent nearly four in ten (39%) of the entire Latino population in Texas. Here, Biden, on average, performed less well than Obama in 2012 by 9.7 percentage points and Hillary Clinton in 2016 by 8.5 percentage points. Equally and cumulatively, in these counties, Trump, on average, in 2016 outpaced Romney in 2012 by 10 percentage points and in 2020 outpaced his own 2016 performance in these counties by 11 percentage points. An interesting observation to add here is that among these counties, border counties and later in South Texas border counties, the Trump campaign

exceeded their 2016 effort. In South Texas border counties (n=9), the outperformance averaged 15 points.

A straightforward OLS regression including all 254 counties in Texas and using percent votes for Trump as a dependent variable and the independent variables of percent Latino, median household income, percent unemployment, percent increase in voter turnout from 2016 to 2020, percent one-year employment gains/losses in natural resources and mining, and county population, yields an explanatory model with an adjusted-RSquare value of .52 (see Table 3). Here only percent Latino (Beta=-.44) and percent unemployment (Beta= -.21) are substantially contributing to the model^v. Interestingly all the standardized beta coefficients are negative with county population also contributing to the model and the loss of natural resource/mining positions and increase in voter turnout having the smallest impacts. Urban counties with high Latino presence and high unemployment viewed Trump's reelection less favorably. This fits the traditional urban, ethnic, pocketbook explanations of voting behavior.

A second OLS regression but this time using only 33 South Texas counties is illuminating (see Table 4). Again, percent county votes for Trump is a dependent variable and the independent variables of percent Latino, percent unemployment, percent increase in voter turnout from 2016 to 2020, percent one-year employment gains/losses in natural resources and mining, and county population yield an explanatory model with an adjusted-RSq value of .82.^{vi} Here only percent Latino (Beta= -.84), county population (beta= -.13) and high increases in voter turnout since 2016 (beta=-.10) are substantially adding to the model. So, here, in large Latino and large populated South Texas counties and increased voter turnout (mobilization) counties favored Trump's reelection less than their smaller Latino and less populated South Texas county counterparts. This model rules out the influence of oil and gas employment as an explanation.

Table 3: OLS Regression All Texas Counties (N=254)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Constant)	98.24	4.004		24.53	0.000
% Latino	-0.27	0.031	-0.44	-8.658	0.000
Median Household Income	-4356E-05	.000	0.04	-.835	.405
% Unemployt sept 2020	-1.139	0.274	-0.21	-4.152	0.000
% increase in turnout 2016 to 2020	-21.745	10.390	-0.09	-2.093	0.037
%Natural Resources and Mining One-Year Employment Gain/Loss	-0.041	0.031	-0.06	-1.300	0.195
County Population	-1.408E-05	0.000	-0.42	-9.089	0.000

Dependent Variable: Percent Trump 2020
 F-test=43.78; prob.=000; Adj R-Sq=.52

Table 4: OLS Regression South Texas Counties only (N=33)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Constant)	109.470	4.937		22.174	0.000
%Latino	-0.665	0.088	-0.845	-7.581	0.000
%Unemployt sept 2020	-0.115	0.475	-0.029	-0.242	0.811
%Increase in turnout 2016 to 2020	-15.429	13.591	-0.100	-1.135	0.267
%Natural Resources and Mining One-Year Employment Gain/Loss	-0.029	0.061	-0.037	-0.477	0.638
County population	-1.104E-05	0.000	-0.132	-1.620	0.118

Dependent Variable: Percent Trump 2020
 F-test=28.1; prob.=000; Adj R-Sq=.82

A third and final OLS regression model examined only the 33 counties of South Texas (see Table 5). Given the multicollinearity issues associated with percent Latino and border counties, an interactive “Latino Border county” variable was utilized by combining the dichotomized variable of border or near border county and percent Latino in the county. In this regression model (see Table 5), unemployment has the largest and negative impact (beta=-41), followed by a Latino Border County variable (beta=-.283), and then by county population (beta =-.25). Notably, median household income impact is small but positive (beta =.15). In this model, the higher unemployment, the higher the Latino presence in a border county, the larger the county population, the less support that Trump candidacy received. Again, this model confirms the persistent voting patterns in presidential elections over the last decade and the role of unemployment and geographic location on the border. It also signals the impact of county population as sloping away from percent Trump in the county--a key point.

What then is driving the popular and even partisan perspective that Texas Latino voters are fleeing the Democratic party? Jason Villalba, a Republican and former Texas State House of Representative, who now serves on the board of the Texas Hispanic Policy Foundation, writes “They point to small shifts among Hispanics in *isolated* counties around the country, including the RGV (Rio Grande Valley), as a harbinger of a Republican swell that is surely coming” (emphasis ours). Part of the explanation certainly lies in the decline of Biden support over the support that Obama and Clinton presidential campaigns accomplished. Not a small matter as an indication of mobilization. Again, somewhat understandable. Texas was not a swing state electorally. Strategically, the campaign likely pulled what minimal resources it had put in Texas by late summer 2020 to concentrate on “swing” and competitive electorally weighted states.

Table 5: OLS Regression Percent Trump by South Texas Border Counties Dummy Variable (N=33)

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Constant)	66.490	19.7		3.36	.003
Latinobcounty	-.096	.053	-.283	-1.82	.081
Unemployt Sept 2020	-1.634	.735	-.408	-2.22	.036
Percent Increase In Turnout 2016 To 2020	.241	22.3	.002	.011	.991
Natural Resources And Mining One-Year Employment Gain/Loss (Percent)	-.003	.103	-.004	-.034	.973
Median Household Income	.000	.000	.154	.874	.391
County Population	-2.132E-5	.000	-.252	-1.86	.075

Dependent Variable: Percent Trump 2020

F-test=5.991; prob.=001; Adj R-Sq=.50

Moreover, a closer look at these counties, as Villalba suggests, is also revealing. Of seventeen border counties in South Texas, seven had voting majorities, ranging from 52% in Zapata County to 84% in Edwards County that supported President Trump in the 2020 election. But these counties are small. Edwards County is a near border county has a 51% Latino population but only a total population of 1,422. Val Verde County, home to Del Rio, Texas, its county seat, has population of 48,000 and support Trump with 54% of its vote. Cumulatively, these seven counties had less than 98,000 in population or .4% of Texas' population.

Conclusion

Where does this leave us?

Statewide in Texas the Trump campaign in 2020 was nearly identical to its effort in 2016 (2016: 52.2%; 2020: 52.1%). In contrast, the Biden campaign did better overall in Texas than the Hillary Clinton campaign in 2016 (2020 46.5; 2016 43.2). On the other, like nation-wide,

there was a significant increase in voter turnout in the state since the last presidential election (2020: 66.7% ; 2016: 59%).

Of the seventeen Texas counties (see Table 2 and Figure 1) used here to represent approximately 61% of the state population and 70% of the Texas' Latino population (8 majority Latino counties), the Trump campaign in 2020 performed better over their 2016 effort in only nearly half (eight) of these counties. Of the eight majority Latino counties of these 17, the Trump campaign did better in six of seven than 2016 but in only one of these counties, Zapata (pop=<15k) did the Trump campaign win a majority. It is certainly reasonable to yield to incumbency and a pandemic and the economic uncertainty factors of 2019 and 2020 as possible explanations for the increases in the Trump voter turnout in 2020 from 2016. Certainly a reasonable explanation.

When examining only the South Texas counties (N=33), regression analysis (Table 4) yields coefficients that fit the typical pattern of voting behavior in these counties. Here, percent Latino in the county had the largest and negative impact on percent Trump (beta=-.845), followed by county population size (the larger the South Texas county the less willing to support Trump) and increase percent voter turnout (e.g., mobilization) also having a negative impact (South Texas counties with higher voter turnouts in 2020 over 2016 were less supportive of Trump). But here unemployment and the gains or losses in employment in natural resources or mineral (e.g., oil and gas) were not important.

Finally, when examining South Texas counties with the additional dichotomized variable for Latino Border county, interesting results emerge (Table 5). Here percent unemployment in South Texas counties is the dominant impact (beta= -.41), followed by Latino Border county (-.28) and county population (-.25). Here, the larger the unemployment, the larger the percent

Latino in border counties, and the larger population in county, the larger the negative impact on percent Trump in these counties. On the other hand, not overly surprising, as the median household income in the counties increase, a small but positive impact corresponded with increase for percent Trump in the county.

One additional point seems relevant. South Texas Border counties make up 1.8 million people and 94% (1.64 million) of this population resides in 5 counties (Hidalgo, Cameron, Webb, Starr and Maverick). These five counties supported Trump on average by 43% but also represented counties that gained population from 2010 to 2020. The remaining 12 Texas border counties had an average of 54% support for Trump but were also counties that lost population from 2010 to 2020, which aligns with analysis that rural Americans tend to support Trump.

So, yes, there were shifts among South Texas counties. Of the 33 South Texas Counties, 29 are majority Latino populated counties, ranging from marginally Latino (51% Refugio County) to nearly completely Latino (96.3% Starr County). Of these 29 Latino Counties, 18 or 62% supported Trump in 2020 with a majority of its voters. On the other hand, the total population of these 18 counties is slightly over 800 thousand or approximately 2.7% the entire State population and the correlation between percent Latino in these counties and percent Trump in 2020 was a $-.90$.

So is this “much to do about nothing?” First, could the Biden campaign have mobilized more South Texas voters? Did voters view lack of mobilization efforts in their communities as a sign that the Democratic party was taking their vote for granted, while Republican operatives were knocking on their doors? Could these factors reasonably explain the increase in Trump support during the 2020 campaign in South Texas? Certainly! But understandably, given the importance of large electoral swing states still in play, it is not surprising that the Biden

campaign did not expend a considerable amount of resources in South Texas as compared to other places.

A message throughout is that personal, grassroots outreach is critical in Latino communities and the Republican party has taken note. As a result, the party has opened up three outreach centers in South Texas in preparation for the 2022 congressional races in hopes of gaining control of the House. But as Michael Rodriguez, resident of the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas states, "You can really lose any community just simply by not being present. And I'll give you a for instance. In 2016, Cameron County had voted for Trump, 31% of their vote. In 2020, 42%. In Hidalgo County was 27% in 2016, and in 2020 was 40%. There is a rising sentiment. But just like the Democrats, [if] the Republicans are not present in both policy and also in simply just reaching out to the people, they can just as well lose this area" (Chakrabarti and Kotsonis 2021).

Ultimately, to say "something's happening here" a further examination of the down ballot congressional races in 2022 and state-wide races in 2024 and beyond is necessary before claiming a voter, much less, a Latino voter partisan realignment toward the Republican party in South Texas has occurred. One data point or election does not make a pattern.

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Endnotes

ⁱ [From the State of Texas, Office of the Secretary of State, available at http://elections.sos.state.tx.us/index.htm](http://elections.sos.state.tx.us/index.htm)

ⁱⁱ [About the Elections Division \(state.tx.us\)](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, Third Quarter, Natural Resources and Mining; [QCEW State and County Map Application: Texas, US: 12 month percent change in employment, Natural Resources and Mining Private Sep 2019-Sep 2020 : U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics \(bls.gov\)](#); accessed June 2021.

^{iv} Federal Reserve Economic Data, FRED; an online database consisting of of economic data time series of national, international, public, and private sources. [Counties | FRED | St. Louis Fed \(stlouisfed.org\)](#); Unemployment data for September 2020, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/TXZAVA7URN>

^v T-tests and their associated probabilities are reported in tables as heuristics not as measure of statistical significance. Given the population is Texas counties or South Texas counties or even Texas border counties, tests of statistical significance would be in appropriate.

^{vi} Given the high correlation between percent unemployment and percent Latino in these counties ($r=.66$), and median household income and percent Latino ($-.68$), percent unemployment and median household income were dropped from this model to avoid issues of multicollinearity. Substituting percent unemployment, for example, for percent Latino in the model reduced the efficacy of the model by half (adjusted R-Sq =.40) and adding it to the equation did not substantively changed the model outcome (adjusted R-Sq=.82 to .81).