



**Vote!**  
*IT COUNTS*

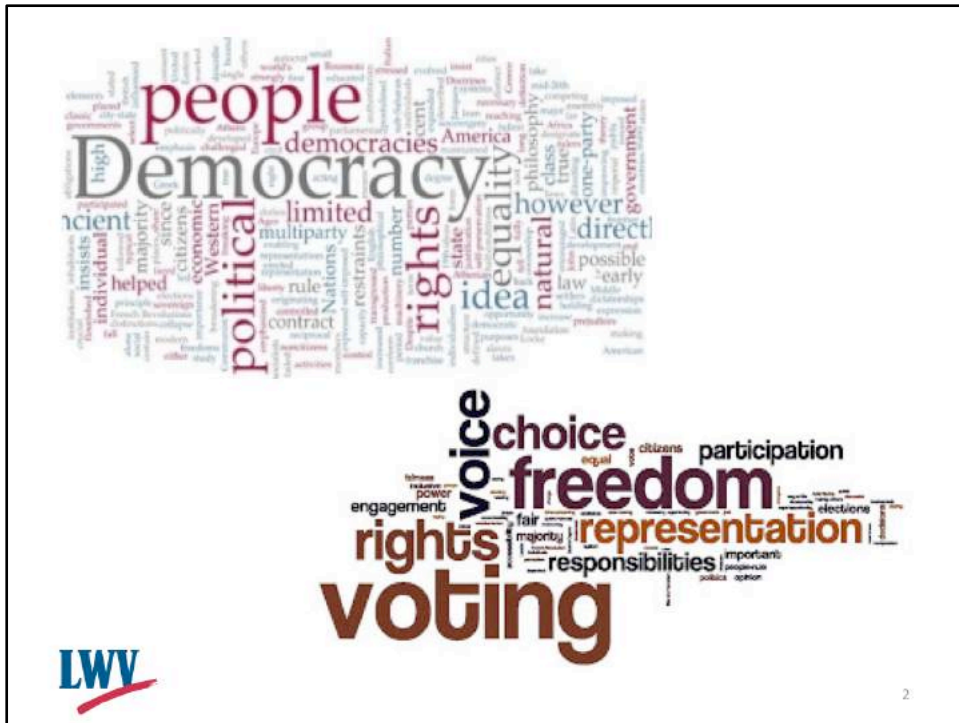
### League of Women Voters – Rio Grande Valley

The LWV is a nonpartisan, political organization that

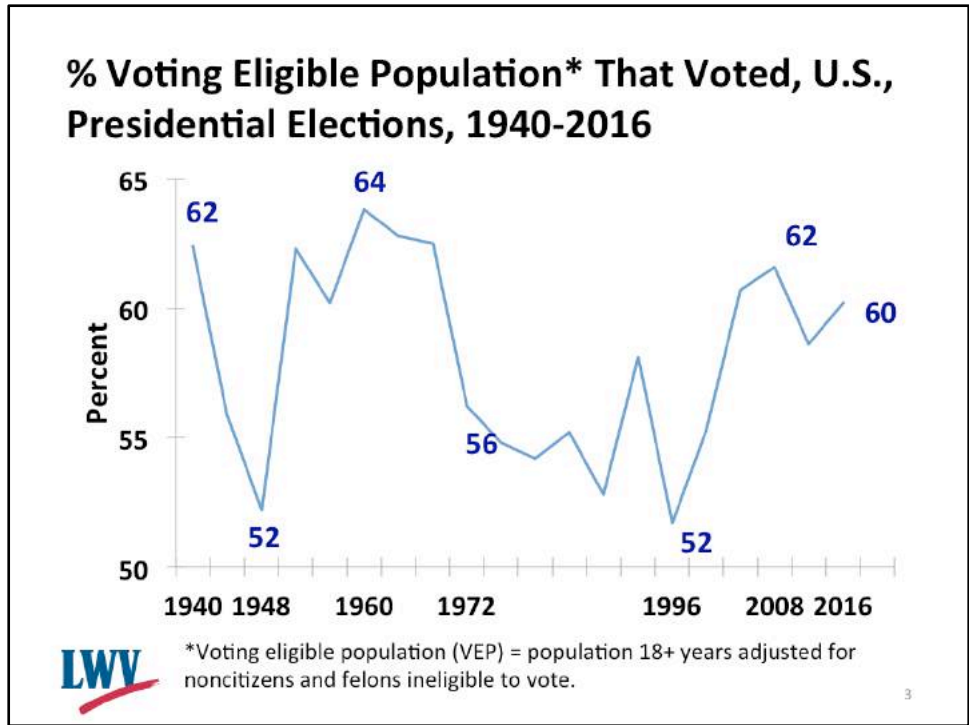
- Encourages informed and active participation in government
- Influences public policy through education and advocacy

June 2017

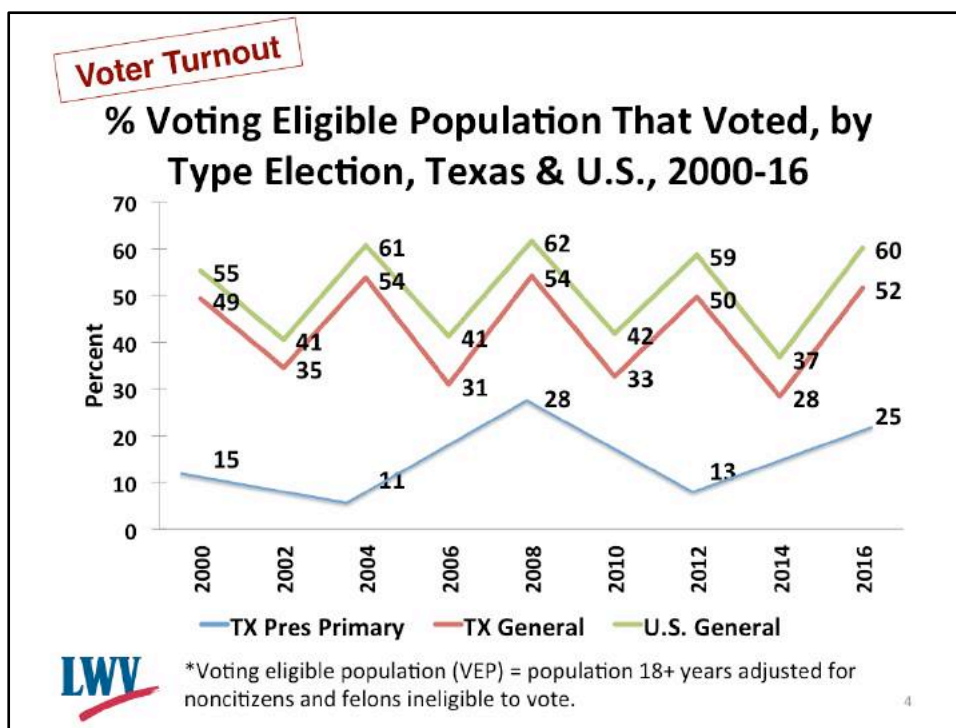
- Hello. I am \_\_\_\_\_, representing \_\_\_\_\_.  
Thank you for inviting me to talk about the League of Women Voters favorite topic—voting!
- The League’s vision is empowered citizens shaping better communities.
- As a nonpartisan organization, the League never endorses or opposes candidates or political parties. But we do advocate for positions on issues that our members have studied and agreed upon.



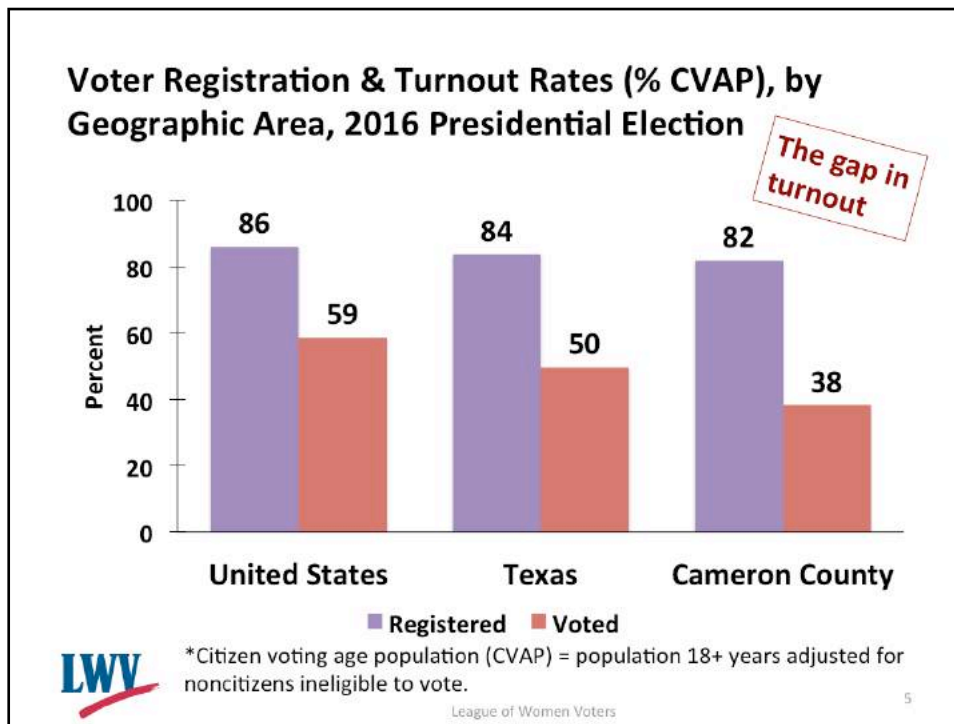
- Last November we elected a new President of the United States as well as a number of state and county officials.
- During that hard fought campaign you heard lots of political rhetoric. And most likely you continue to hear complaints about how bad things are in government. Your best response is to ask, “Are you are a voter?”
- A common perception about representative democracy is that “decisions are made by a majority of the people.”
  - “Of course, that is not true.
  - “Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote—a very different thing.” (Walter H. Judd)



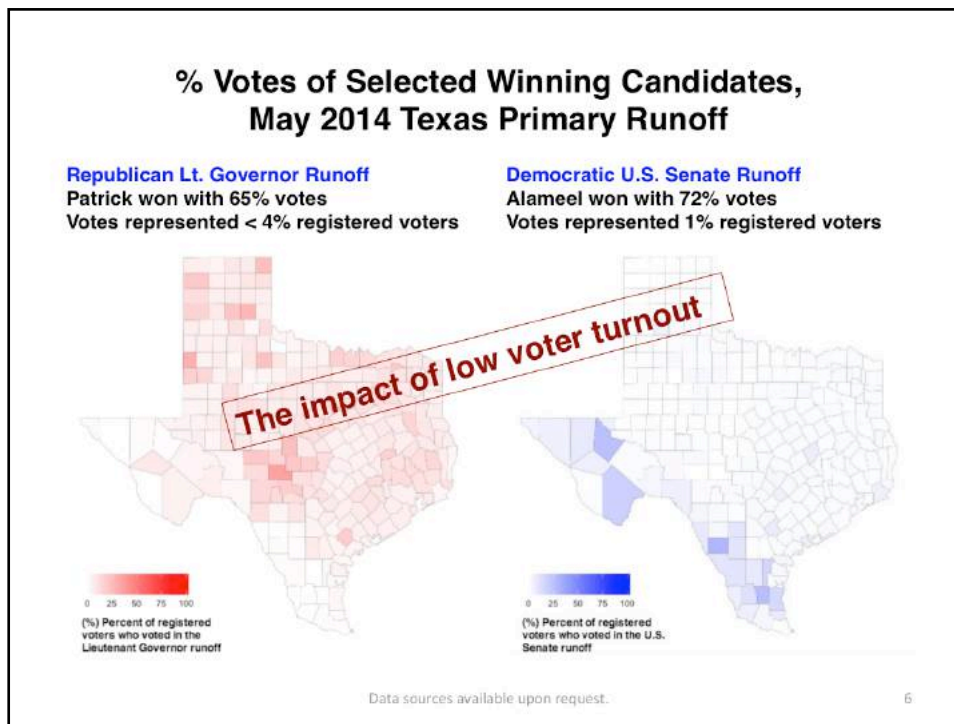
- You may also have heard that voter participation has declined sharply over time. And it is true that voter turnout has its ups and downs.
- But looking at only those eligible to vote, we find that:
  - 2016 voter turnout was higher than it has been since 1972, almost 45 years ago
  - And 8% higher than 20 years ago.
  - This is also true in Texas, where turnout among the voting age population was 6% higher than 20 years ago.



- Now let's concentrate on turnout among voting-eligible Texans. This graph shows two things about turnout:
  - First, Texas turnout is consistently 6-8% below the national average.
  - Second, turnout varies considerably by type of election
    - The highest turnout is for presidential elections
    - Followed by midterm elections in which state officials are elected
    - Turnout for primary elections is very low
      - For the March 2016 Presidential Primary, Texas had over 17 million citizens eligible to vote. 82% were registered to vote.
      - While 30% of Texas registered voters voted for a presidential candidate in the Democrat and Republican primaries, only 25% of the voting eligible population voted.
- While not shown on the graph, turnout for Constitutional amendment and local elections is even lower.
  - Voter-eligible population turnout rates for these elections is not readily available. But we estimate it would be about 9% for the 2015 Constitutional Amendment election, which was had a little higher turnout than usual.
  - Turnout among registered voters for these elections varies from is readily available and varies between 5-11%. However, registered voters do not represent the population of eligible voters and the registered voter turnout rate is higher than that among the eligible population.



- While a large majority of citizens of voting age were registered in 2016, but only a small majority actually voted.
  - And Cameron County citizens register and vote at lower rates than those of Texas as a whole.
  - Loving County in west Texas had the highest rate of voter turnout in the state at 88% with 74 eligible voters.
  - Travis County led the 10 most populous counties with 62% turnout, followed by Collin (57%) and Denton (55%) Counties.
- By the way, Texas ranked 48th among the 50 states in voter turnout.
  - Minnesota ranked #1 with 75% turnout among those eligible to vote. Hawaii was #50 at 43% turnout.
- So nationwide, the problem is voter turnout, not voter registration.
  - At a League luncheon not too long ago to honor Collin County women who had run for office, one former official related that even a close friend who had donated to her campaign and told her that she had voted, did not, in fact, vote according to the election department's list of voters.



- According to the *Texas Tribune*, the two maps shown here "paint ghostly pictures of Texas." You can see that the few dark areas showing high turnout are few and far between.
- While the combined total turnout for the 2014 primaries was 14%, in the runoff, the combined turnout was only 7%.
- But the critical point is that Dan Patrick was elected Lt. Governor in 2014 in spite of the fact that "he earned votes from only 3.5 percent of registered Texas voters" to win the nomination (Hill, 2014).
- In Texas, many state and local partisan races are decided by the primary election or the primary runoff because of the dominance of one party.
- Thus winning candidates' claims of a mandate for their platform is an illusion—they may represent only a small percentage of their constituencies.

**Does your vote count?**

**Vote Difference (No.) by Type Election, Year, Winning Candidate, and Geographic Area**

<i>Election</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Winning Candidate</i>	<i>Votes</i>	<i>Area</i>
Presidential	2000	George W. Bush	537	FL
U.S. Senate	2008	Al Franken	312	MN
State Senate	1948	Lyndon Johnson	87	TX
State Rep. <sup>§</sup>	2016	Rodney Anderson	64	TX
School Dist. <sup>¶</sup>	2016	Anne Sung	7	TX
State Rep. <sup>•</sup>	2010	Donna Howard	4	TX
City Council <sup>♦</sup>	2016	Bettina Jordan	1	TX

<sup>§</sup>District #105, Dallas/Irving/Grand Prairie. <sup>¶</sup>Houston ISD. <sup>•</sup>District #48, Austin. <sup>♦</sup>City of Hutto.



Data sources available upon request.

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- One of the biggest myths to overcome is that it makes little sense to vote because the odds of you casting the deciding vote in an election are minuscule.
- Logically, in local elections like school board or city council, the odds of a single vote making a difference go up considerably because there are fewer total votes.
- There are several examples in addition to the 2000 presidential election where the count has been very, very close, including a number in Texas.
- In the May 2016 Hutto city council election, one vote out of 509 decided the winner. In the Irving local election that same month, “A single provisional ballot made the difference in helping the city avoid a \$70,000 runoff election. A second provisional ballot that could have sent the race to a runoff wasn’t delivered to the Dallas County Elections Department” in time to be counted. (Brumfield, 2016)
- Widespread belief that "my vote won't make a difference" leads "to circumstances in which one vote may make all the difference” (UT-A, 2014).



Why vote? Because it counts in so many ways!

- Most importantly, voters elect officials who make significant decisions that effect our lives, such as
  - Taxes, roads, minimum wage, teacher pay, social security, health care—you name it
- Politicians listen to the people who vote—and they have access to the list of people who vote and where they live.
  - Voting highlights the power of your neighborhood, city and state. The number of people voting from where you live affects the resources allocated to where you live. For example:
  - Senior citizens in this country have great government programs like Social Security and Medicare. That's because seniors as a group have a high turnout rate. So elected officials are very responsive to their needs. Young people on the other hand have a low turnout rate, so politicians are less in tune with their needs.
  - At the local level, have you ever wondered why the streets may be better in some parts of town than in others? If you look into it, you will almost always find that the areas with good streets are where voter turnout is high, and the areas with lots of pot holes are where voter turnout is low. The elected officials responsible for maintaining streets are more sensitive to areas where everybody votes and people talk to them.
- Some of you may not like the choices on the ballot or the fact that your preferred candidate in the last election lost.
  - But in fact, usually half the voters (more or less) win and the rest lose.
  - Close elections encourage elected officials to listen to diverse opinions on an issue.
  - In the upcoming election, we need to vote and make the best choice we can among those running to keep our government functioning.
- Being a voter empowers us to work toward solutions to problems in our community and our nation.
- The only time your vote doesn't count is when you don't vote.



## Dates to Remember

### Last day to

- Register to vote or update your info
  - Oct 10 (Tues)
- Request a mail ballot
  - Oct 27 (Fri)
    - Application must be received on Oct 27

### Vote

- Early voting
  - Oct 23 – Nov 3 (Mon-Tues)
- Election Day
  - Nov 7 (Tues)



## Voter Information Websites

**VOTE411.org**

Election Information You Need  
Enter your address to get  
personalized election information

**VoteTexas.gov**

Texas Secretary of State  
1-800-252-VOTE  
Who – When – Where - How - What

**Co.Cameron.tx.us/election**

Cameron County Elections Department  
956-544-0809  
for polling places & sample ballots

**LWVTexas.org**

A nonpartisan resource  
for voting & public policy issues



League of Women Voters

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These four websites are very helpful to you in becoming an informed voter.

- VOTE411
  - Has all races that will be on your ballot.
  - Enter your address and see races one by one, side by side comparison of candidates as well as voting locations
- VoteTexas.org
  - Comprehensive voter information. Menu at top of page and the “What do you want to know about voting” drop-down menu are most useful to find voter information.
- Cameron County Elections Department
  - Has locations & hours for voting during Early Voting & on Election Day
  - Sample ballots for each precinct can be viewed and printed
- The LWV-Texas website is the easiest place to find:
  - Voter information (easier than the VoteTexas.gov site)
  - Printable voters guide for statewide races

## Plan to be a voter ...

How difficult will it be for you to be a voter in the upcoming election?

**Vote!**  
IT COUNTS~



Cartoon from <http://raesidecartoon.com/vault/voting-3/>

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- We have basically two choices if we are dissatisfied with politics
  - The easy option is to check out of political discourse and public life in favor of purely personal concerns and relationships.
  - The more difficult option is voice, i.e., talking, listening, and working on public, and yes, political issues.
  - Voting is a small part of increasing voice. And not just your voice but also the voice of your community.
- The challenges we face in getting out to vote are minimal compared to voters in other parts of the world.
  - We can vote early or vote on election day
  - Take your voter registration card and your driver's license or other voter ID
  - But by all means, Vote! It Counts~

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