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Remembering the Alamo: Demographic change and Texas politics

In today's American politics, there may be no place perceived as more "red" (Republican-voting) than the Lone Star State. Texas, the home of the Alamo, the gun rack, and the 72-ounce steak, hasn't voted for a Democratic presidential candidate since before Ronald Reagan; George W. Bush won the state by over 20 percentage points, twice (ANES, 2015). But demographic forces are changing the face of Texas, and it may not be long before its voting hue changes as well. Migration of African-Americans and Hispanics in search of work, and differential birth rates in those populations, have made Texas a majority-minority state, and state population growth is expected to come almost entirely from minority populations. From 2010-2014, Hispanic population rose by 9.4%, African-American by 8.9%, and White non-Hispanic by just 2.6% (U.S. Census, 2015). Despite voter ID laws aimed at disenfranchising minority voters, the trend lines are clear; it is only a matter of time before Texas becomes more likely to vote for a Democrat than a Republican for president. One mitigating factor is that Hispanics typically have low voting rates, but in other border states like Arizona and New Mexico, anti-immigrant rhetoric has helped encourage turnout among Hispanic voters, which could accelerate the transition. The Republicans would be well-advised to remember the Alamo, where poor treatment caused an immigrant population to join the revolution against the ruling party.

How long will it be until Texas turns blue?

Since the 2000 Presidential election between George W. Bush and Al Gore, much of our national political discourses has divided the country into "red" and "blue" states (Republican or Democratic-leaning). During that time, Texas, the South, and most of the Midwest has been solidly "red." I will define a red state as one where the voters prefer the Republican candidate at a significantly greater rate than the national average. That Southern base of red states has allowed the Republican Party to remain competitive in presidential elections, despite having lost the national popular vote in five of the six contests since 1988. But recently there have been signs that the landscape may be shifting. In 2008 and 2012, New Mexico transitioned from being a historical swing state to being solidly blue; the state selected Obama by over 10 points in two nationally-close elections (ANES, 2015). New Mexico's shift may have been driven by demographic changes in the state, which like Texas has received a large influx of Latino migrants.

Like New Mexico, Texas is a majority-minority border state, and its rate of immigration, mostly from Latino and African-American populations, has been even higher than New Mexico's. Texas' population trends have been a subject of study for many years (Hoque, Pecotte, Murdock, Michael, & White, 1997; Hoque et al., 2003); its position as a border state, and its growing economy, have made it a target for migration, both from within the U.S. and from over the border (primarily from Mexico) (Durand, Massey, & Charvet, 2000). Because of migration and differential birth rates, Texans are increasingly Hispanic, with Latinos expected to outnumber whites by 2020; African-American and Asian populations are also growing relative to white populations (Figure 1) (White et al., 2015).

Texas' 38 electoral votes exert significant influence on national elections, A change in Texas' voting patterns would have significant implications for the nation; given current national politics, winning Texas is required for any Republican White House bid. All the migrant populations tend to lean more Democratic than whites (Verba, Schlozman, Brady, & Nie, 1993; Frymer, 2010), a fact which leads many observers to predict a coming sea change in the state's politics (Chinni, 2014; Cohen, 2012; Goldsberry, 2014) due to demographic trends.

Examining previous elections

The question of determining how blue Texas has been in previous elections is complicated by the specifics of those elections. For example, four of the presidential contests since 1980 have involved Texans, and home-state candidates are known to have a sizable advantage (Mixon & Tyrone, 2004). Incumbents also receive a benefit of about 6% of the vote; the 1984, 1992, 1996, 2004, and 2012 elections included an incumbent candidate (Weisberg, 2002). These factors will need to be corrected for in developing trend lines for previous elections.

I will analyze Texas' presidential election results since 1980 to determine a baseline of "redness" for the state as of the 2012 election. In four of those nine elections, the Republican candidate happened to hail from Texas, so in charting its past voting history, I will apply home-state corrections of 5.19% for those four elections (1988, 1992, 2000, 2004) based on the model developed by Mixon Jr. and Tyrone (2004). I will also correct for incumbency effects in the elections with an incumbent candidate. After these corrections, I will be able to estimate Texas' political stance (as of 2012) relative to the national average, and thereby estimate what the Democratic voting rate in Texas might have been in a theoretical horse race election that was 50/50 nationally. A Democratic voting rate higher than 50% would

indicate a blue state; lower than 50% would indicate a red state. I expect that the analysis will show that in 2012, Texas was still a red state; Mitt Romney won the state by over 15 percentage points.

Projecting future population growth

Going forward, the Texas Office of the State Demographer (OSD) has developed a sophisticated tool for projecting future population growth by various different factors (including ethnicity) (Potter, 2015a), which can display scenarios with no migration, migration at the rate occurring in the 2000-2010 time frame, or migration at 50% of the 2000-2010 rate. I will develop my model based on that range of scenarios. (The OSD recommends using the 50% rate for projections). The OSD projects that Latinos will outnumber whites by 2024, even if no new migration occurs, due to differential natural population growth rates; they project the natural population growth rate to be highest among Latino populations, which may reflect cultural differences, or may be a result of “catch-up” childbearing for recent immigrants.

At migration rates equivalent to just 50% of the migration rate from 2000-2010, Latinos will become the prevalent ethnicity in Texas by 2020 (Potter, 2015). Texas has one of the fastest-growing economies of any U.S. state, especially in the manufacturing sector; assuming its economic growth continues, there should be continued pressure for in-migration among potential workers. I will use OSD’s projections as my basis for population projections, using 50% of the 2000-2010 migration rate for Latinos as the median projection (per OSD’s recommendation). Texas’ African-American populations also showed growth from in-migration between 2000 and 2010. Part of that growth may have been economic, from individuals looking for work in Gulf Coast industries, but Hurricane Katrina also provided a significant increase. Over 100,000 people fled to Texas from Louisiana and

Mississippi due to Katrina; a large number of those never returned to their former homes, and settled in Texas instead. The effect of Katrina on migration rates will need to be discounted in future population projections; because of the unpredictability of major weather events, it is possible that future hurricanes are as likely to cause out-migration from Texas (especially low-lying areas like Galveston) as in-migration to the state.

Voting trends by race and ethnicity

Voting patterns vary significantly by ethnic group (Gelman, 2009; Hersh & Nall, 2015), so increases in ethnic populations are likely to signify changes in political alignments (Sundquist, 2011). Both African-American and Latino populations vote more “blue” than White populations, but at different levels. African-Americans nationwide affiliate very strongly with the Democratic party; the Democratic presidential candidate has received over 80% of the African-American vote in every election since the enactment of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. For analysis purposes, I will assume that this pattern will hold for African-Americans in Texas in future elections, and therefore that increases in African-American populations will contribute significantly to increases in Democratic voting rate.

I also will make the assumption that voting patterns among white Texans will remain roughly the same as they are today. That assumption arises not from a belief that the political landscape is static (quite the contrary), but from an inability to predict how future changes in the political landscape will affect white voters in Texas.

Latino voter participation has been an active area of study (Oakford & Thursday, 2013; Verba et al., 1993; Collingwood, Barreto, & Garcia-Rios, 2014; Hajnal & Lee, 2011), with Pew Research Center predicting that the Hispanic electorate will grow even more quickly than the Hispanic population, doubling by 2030 (Taylor, Gonzalez-Barrera, Passel, & Lopez, 2012). Disenfranchisement effects have come under recent scrutiny (Alvarez, Atkeson, Hall, &

Sinclair, 2011; Herron & Smith, 2014); more research is likely to be done in this area as more laws and policies are enacted in this space. Studies have found that second and third generation Latino immigrants are less Democratic than recent immigrants, but still more Democratic than the average electorate, with differences based on country of origin (Logan, Darrah, & Oh, 2012; Durand et al., 2000). This may be because of the commonly anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies of the Republican Party, along with the Democratic Party's greater support of social services for low-income residents. There are differences amongst Latinos based on country of origin: Cuban immigrants who fled the Castro regime vote more conservatively than Mexican and other Central American Latino immigrants. (Texas' Latino population is predominantly of Mexican ancestry). Latinos also appear to vote differently based on tenure since immigration; second- and third-generation Latinos are more moderate than recent immigrants, possibly because of cultural assimilation.

Additional factors affecting turnout and voting habits

Texas and other border states are attempting to fight the shift in demographic by enacting Voter ID laws and pursuing other forms of disenfranchisement. It seems probable that these tactics will have more impact on recent immigrants, who may have less secure housing, be less likely to have driver's licenses and other forms of ID, and be less mobile to be able to travel to polling locations which may be some distance from where they live. The data model will need to account for disenfranchisement of Latinos, with greater weight on recent immigrants, which is the more Democratic-leaning population (Hershey, 2009).

A counterbalancing effect may be the impact of Republican party rhetoric on Latino voter behavior. The experience of New Mexico, where Republican anti-immigrant rhetoric has been more strident, is that Latino voters have voted for Democrats at a greater rate and in greater numbers than in Texas. Texas Republicans may yet embrace the Latino

population, which might lead to a lower rate of Democratic voting, or they may heighten their rhetoric as New Mexico and Arizona have, which might lead to a higher rate of Latino voter participation and a higher rate of Democratic voting among Latinos. The data model will cover a wide range of possibilities.

The existing literature has explored the potential impact of Texas' demographic trends, but most sources stop short of predicting a date of electoral cross-over. FiveThirtyEight appears to have built a statistical model for generating predictions (Goldsberry, 2014); they have predicted that Texas will still be a red state in 2016, but have not published further predictions. (Their statistical model is proprietary). I will integrate the published research on changing demographic, Latino voter participation, and disenfranchisement effects, and build a predictive statistical model for the Texas electorate.

The largest unknown is the future political direction of Texas and of the country. The demographic shift in Texas, if it results in Texas becoming a blue state, will force a political shift in national politics. The South was solidly Democratic until the Civil Rights Act, and it is now solidly Republican. A change of that magnitude would require a wholesale upheaval of our major political parties, but Texas becoming turning blue could destabilize the Republican party sufficiently to make such a change possible. The question is, how far are we away from the tipping point? Could population pressures turn Texas blue in this decade, or are we a generation or more away?

Texas sings the blues: Predictive model for Texas presidential voting

Analyzing historical data shows that Texas's demographics have changed substantially since 1980. Hispanics are poised to becoming a plurality in the state, which has many implications, not the least of which is in the political realm.

To gather data from demographic as well as voting patterns requires multiple data sources. I derived historical population from the US Census Current Population Survey (CPS) (U.S. Census, 2015). Most voting data was derived from the American National Election Study (ANES), as provided by the Survey Documentation and Analysis (SDA) tool (ANES, 2015). The Pew Hispanic Research Center aggregates and analyzes CPS and ANES data and publishes their own reports on Hispanic voting trends (Taylor et al., 2012). The Texas Office of the State Demographer (OSD) provides a tool for projecting future population trends in the Lone Star State (Potter, 2015).

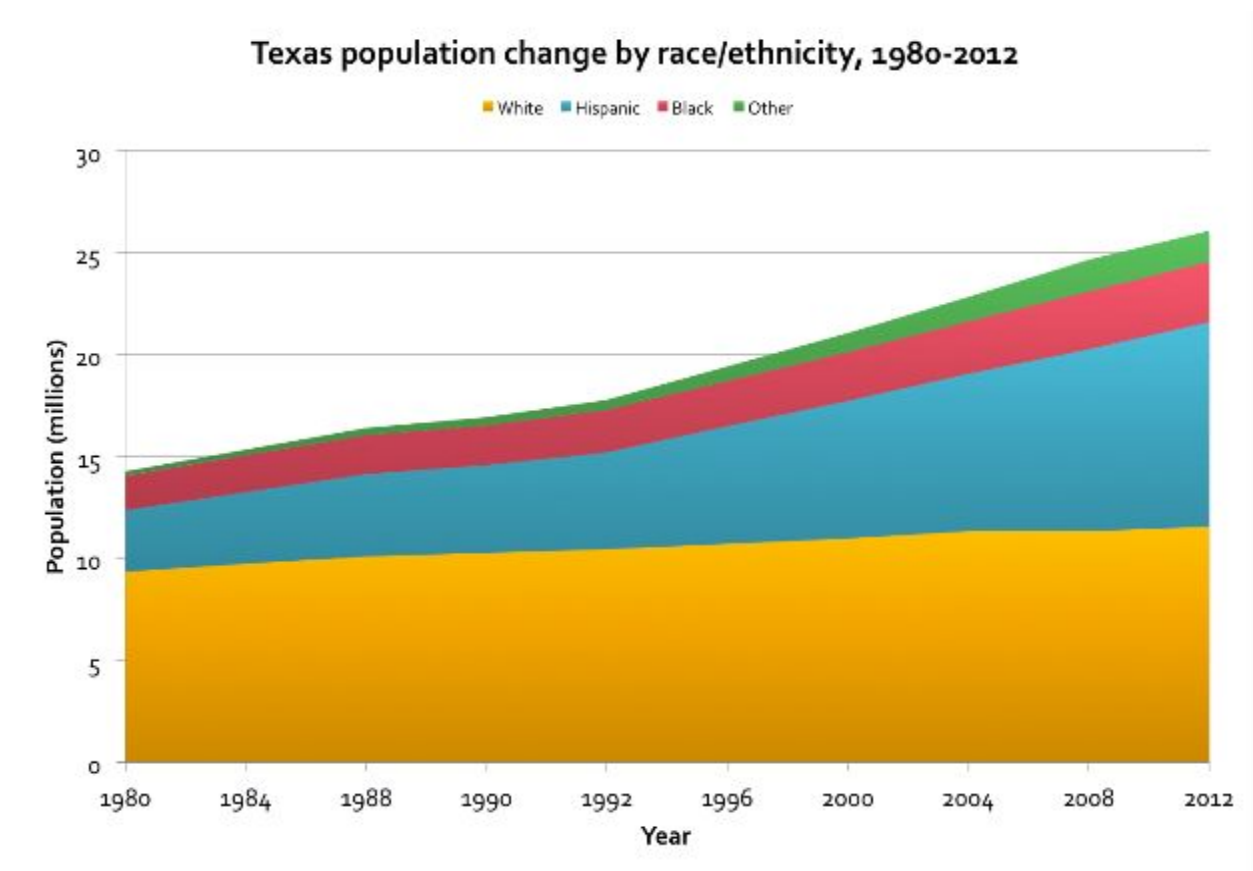


Figure 1. Racial and ethnic composition of Texas residents in election years 1980-2012.
Source: 1980, 1990, and 2000 data from decennial U.S. Census. Years since 2000 from Current Population Survey.

Figure 1 begins in 1980, when Hispanics represented less than a quarter of Texas' population, and continues through 2012, the most recent Presidential election, at which point

Hispanics had nearly equalled whites in population in Texas (though not in voting eligibility—more on that later). Data prior to 2000 is projected based on the decennial U.S. Census; since 2000, annual data is readily available from the CPS.

The Texas OSD, attempting to help cities address rapid migration such as the state experienced from 2000-2010, has developed population projections through 2060, based on three separate scenarios: one in which immigration to the state continues at the same rate as 2000-2010, one in which there is no net migration to the state, and one halfway between the two extremes (described as “0.5 2000-2010”). OSD recommends that cities plan for the 0.5 2000-2010 scenario, but social and economic trends will determine the ultimate fate of migration to Texas (Potter, 2015).

It is worth noting that even in the scenario where Texas receives no net migration, Hispanic populations are projected to become a plurality in the state by 2024, due to differential fertility rates. In the scenarios where migration continues, Hispanics will rapidly become the dominant populations in the state (Table 1).

		Migration scenarios for 2032		
	2012	0%	50%	100%
White	11,552,519	11,367,218	11,770,621	12,190,458
Hispanic	10,016,354	12,974,084	15,525,361	18,617,800
Black	2,986,753	3,241,349	3,675,774	4,168,487
Other	1,503,577	1,710,719	2,485,240	3,638,800
Total	26,059,203	29,293,370	33,456,996	38,615,545
Table 1. Texas demographics in 2012, and in three different migration scenarios (0%, 50%, and 100% of 2000-2010 migration rates) by the year 2032. Source: Texas OSD.				

Population and voting trends in border states

The other Mexican border states have also experienced significant increases in Hispanic populations, which have affected their politics. California is omitted from this

analysis because it has long been a blue state, but New Mexico and Arizona are currently being affected by the same trends as Texas. New Mexico was once a red-leaning swing state, and in the past 30 years appears to have become a reliable blue state. Arizona is still a red state, but may soon become a swing state.

We have limited data points to review Presidential elections, and each individual elections is strongly affected by the personalities involved and the economic situation of the country. Therefore, one must be cautious reading too much into the data. However, Texas' data is quite interesting. It shows that in 1988, after correcting for home-state effects, Texas was actually light blue, voting for Michael Dukakis at a rate above the national average. Bill Clinton nearly won the state in 1992, though that was partly due to the presence of H. Ross Perot, another Texan, who received 22% of Texans' votes. Conversely, Texas has been vehemently opposed to Obama, so the trend line for recent elections actually points in the direction of the Republicans (Figure 2).

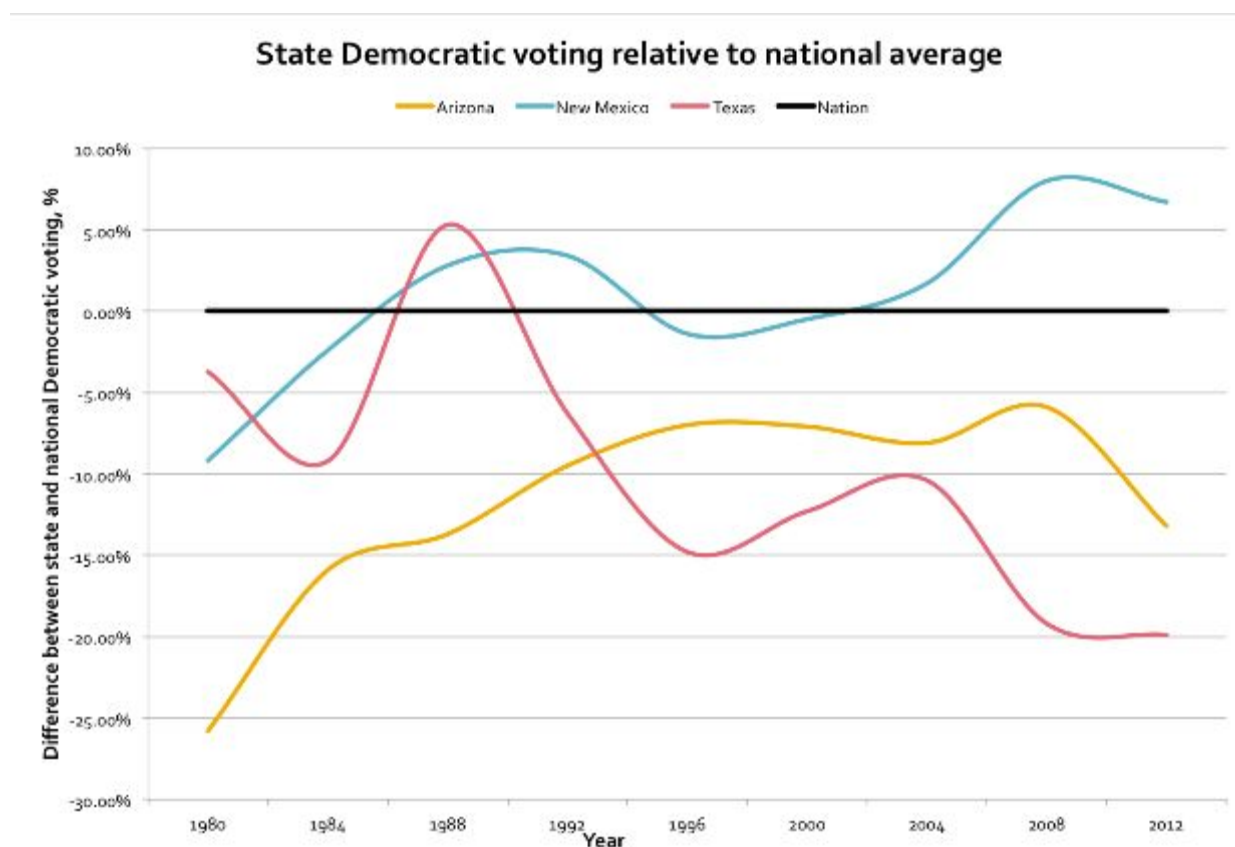


Figure 2. Presidential election results in border states relative to national averages, 1980-2012. Corrections applied for home state and incumbency. Source: ANES 2012 November supplement, and 1980-2004 Cumulative Data File. Retrieved from <http://sda.berkeley.edu/>

My supposition is that Texas' results in 2008 and 2012 are the anomalies, not its results in 1988 and 1992. Hispanics still voted overwhelmingly for Obama in Texas (over 70% among those who voted), but due to low turnout, the voting by Texas Whites for Romney (nearly 70%) outweighed the effects of the Hispanic vote (Collingwood et al., 2014). A large portion of the Hispanic population was not eligible to vote, either because they lack citizenship, or because they were under 18 in 2012. Many of Texas' Hispanic families have children born in the U.S., and those U.S.-born Hispanics are the biggest source of impending changes in the electorate (Taylor et al., 2012).

Even Hispanics who are eligible to vote tend to have low participation rates. In Texas and in the nation at large, less than 50% of Hispanics vote in Presidential elections. The

percentage is slightly higher among naturalized citizens compared to native-born Hispanics (53% to 47%, Table 2) (Collingwood et al., 2014).

	2004	2008	2012	Mean
U.S.-born	45.6	48.4	46.1	46.7
Naturalized citizen	52.2	54.2	53.6	53.3

Table 2. National voter turnout rates among eligible Hispanic voters, by nativity status. Native-born Hispanics lag naturalized citizens by over six percentage points. (Pew Research Center)

The bluing of Texas

I built a statistical model in R to simulate future Texas elections based on the demographic projections from the Texas OSD. The model uses OSD's population projections to set the range of possibilities for number of Hispanic, white, and black residents. Asian and "Other" residents are not included in the model. OSD has recently reported that Asian immigration to Texas is increasing; a future iteration of this model may include Asian populations (Potter, 2015b).

Using data from the U.S. Census, the Hispanic population is split into native-born and naturalized citizen populations. Naturalized citizens are a much smaller population (today, approximately 826 thousand, vs. 7.3 million native-born Hispanics), but their behavior is different enough to warrant separating the population. They turn out to vote in higher numbers (~53% to ~47%), and they are more blue: 73% voted for Obama in 2012, compared with 63% of native-born Texan Hispanics.

Texas has enacted strong Voter ID laws requiring voters to present photo ID before voting. Voter ID laws have been found to reduce voter turnout, especially among minority populations (Hershey, 2009). The size of disenfranchisement effects requires further study, and there is some evidence that voter ID laws in New Mexico helped mobilize local Hispanic voter populations. For the purposes of the model, we will use a 1% discount for the effects

of disenfranchisement on minority (Hispanic and Black) populations. Voting rates for each racial and ethnic population are based on the average of election results in Texas since 1980, with 2012 given more weight due to recency (ANES, 2015).

In the model, votes are simulated based on the above factors, and 1,000,000 Monte Carlo election simulations are run for each migration scenario for each year. Data are presented as the probability that more than half of Texas votes for major-party candidates will be for the Democrat. (Third parties are not included in the model).

Results of the simulation for elections from 1980-2048 are shown in Figures 3 and 4. 1980-2012 demographic data is based on actual population. Figure 3 shows the proportion of Democratic votes in 1,000,000 election scenarios for each tested election year. Figure 4 shows the win probability for Democrats based on that proportion. Note that the S-shaped probability curve in Figure 4 is as expected; a relatively small change in the predicted voting population will make a significant difference in win probability, so if one party is predicted to get 60% or more of the votes, they have a near 100% chance of winning the election.

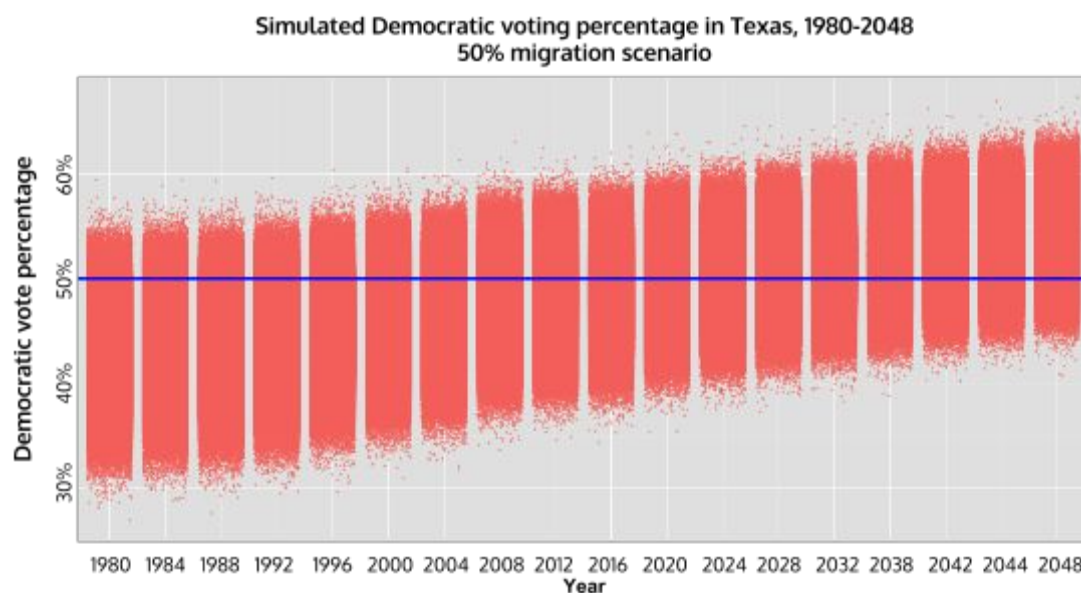


Figure 3: Results of Texas election simulation at 50% of 2000-2010 net migration rates. Blue line is 50/50 voting. In this scenario, Democrats become likely to win Texas by 2028.

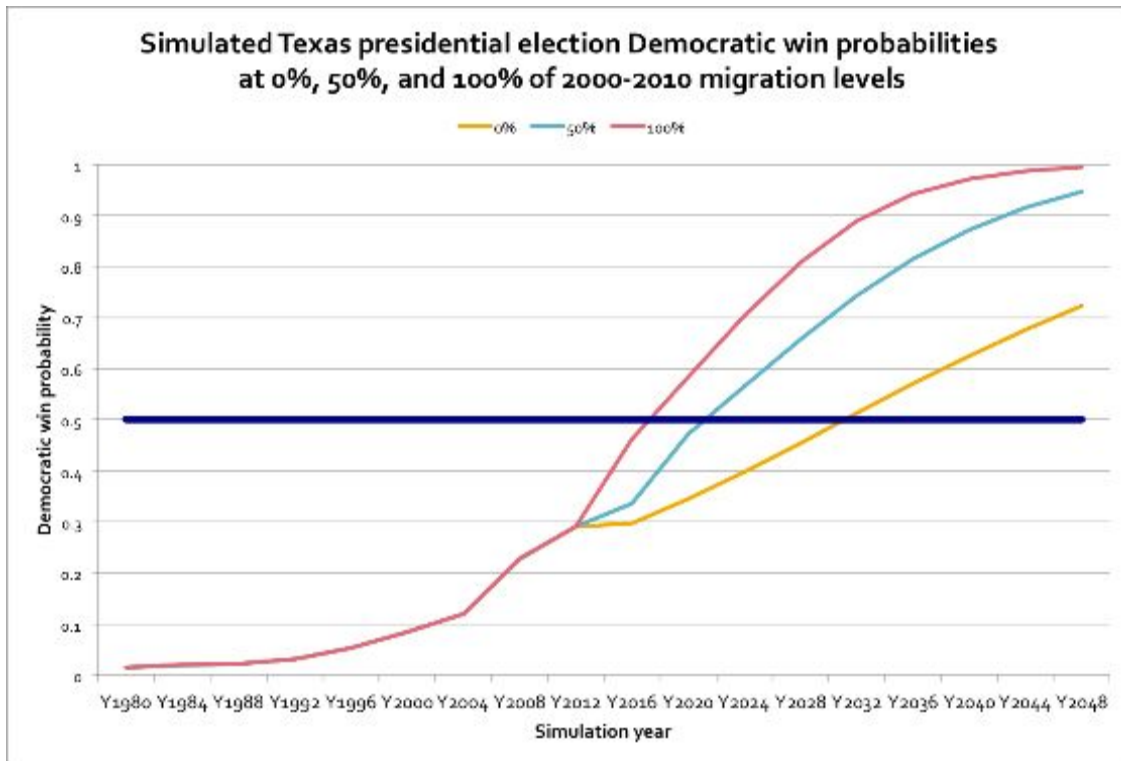


Figure 4: Predicted Democratic win probability. Results of 1,000,000 Monte Carlo runs of simulation model in R. Source: Population data from the U.S. Census and the Texas Office of the State Demographer. Election data from ANES 2012, and 1980-2004 cumulative data file.

According to the assumptions of the model, the 100% 2000-2010 migration scenario proposed by the Texas OSD would result in Democrats having nearly a 50% probability of winning Texas even in 2016, with Texas becoming solidly blue by 2024. The 50% migration scenario results in Texas being a toss-up by 2020, and becoming fully blue by 2032. In the 0% migration scenario, it would be 2032 before Texas would achieve toss-up status.

Findings: Change is coming

The demographic trends affecting U.S. border states are have powerful political implications. Given today's political alignments, Republicans cannot win national elections without the state of Texas, and if today's political affiliations hold, Republicans cannot carry Texas if there are 18 million Latinos living there. However, demographic predictions are not inevitable, and political predictions are even less so. The idea of a permanent Republican

majority was as naive in 1970 as the idea of a permanent Democracy majority would be today. Texas and the South once voted solidly Democratic, and now they vote solidly Republican, and our political system has not come crashing down. Political parties will adapt, new alliances will be formed, and the dance will go on.

The simulation is incomplete without the “other” ethnic category; it would be useful for a future version of the model to include those voters; Asian populations have also been rising in Texas. In addressing only Presidential elections, this study did not look into the issues of gerrymandering which appear to be problematic in Texas and elsewhere; it would be productive to review House and state election impacts of gerrymandered districts. And it would be useful to extend the model to other states.

The key finding is that the power of the Latino demographic will inevitably change American politics. Current noisy Republican party rhetoric about immigration is unlikely to entice many Latinos to switch parties, and Texas Republicans appear to be treading lightly around the subject. Angering the Latino population enough that they go to the polls in greater numbers would turn out about as well as the Texas Revolution turned out for Santa Anna.

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