

Democratic Party Primary Election (Elección Primaria del Partido Democrático)  
 March 3, 2020 (3 de marzo de 2020)  
**OFFICIAL BALLOT (BOLETA OFICIAL)**  
 Dallas County, Texas (Condado de Dallas, Texas)

**INSTRUCTION NOTE:**

Vote for the candidate/statement of your choice in each race by darkening in the oval (●) provided to the left of the name of that candidate/statement.

**(NOTA DE INSTRUCCIÓN:)**

(Vote sobre el candidato/declaración de su preferencia en cada contienda electoral llenando el óvalo (●) provisto a la izquierda del nombre de ese candidato/declaración.)

"I am a Democrat and understand that I am ineligible to vote or participate in another political party's primary election or convention during this voting year."

("Yo soy Demócrata y comprendo que no estoy elegible para votar o participar en la elección primaria o la convención de algún otro partido político durante este año electoral.")

<p><b>Preference for Presidential Nominee</b>                  You may vote for one presidential candidate whose name appears on the ballot by darkening in the oval provided to the left of the name of the candidate. Make only one Choice.</p> <p><b>(Preferencia para un candidato nombrado para presidente)</b>                  (Usted puede votar por un candidato para presidente cuyo nombre aparece en la boleta llenando completamente el óvalo a la izquierda del nombre de ese candidato. Haga solamente una selección.)</p>	<p><b>United States Representative, District 5</b>                  (Representante de los Estados Unidos, Distrito Núm. 5)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Carolyn Salter</p>	<p><b>Justice, 5th Court of Appeals District, Place 3</b>                  (Juez, Corte de Apelaciones, Distrito Núm. 5 Lugar Núm. 3)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Bonnie Lee Goldstein</p>
	<p><b>Railroad Commissioner</b>                  (Comisionado de Ferrocarriles)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> ...</p>	<p><b>Justice, 5th Court of Appeals District, Place 6</b>                  (Juez, Corte de Apelaciones, Distrito Núm. 5 Lugar Núm. 6)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Craig Smith</p>
		<p><b>Justice, 5th Court of Appeals District, Place 8</b>                  (Juez, Corte de Apelaciones, Distrito Núm. 5, Lugar Núm. 8)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Dennise Garcia</p>
	<p><b>Court ...</b></p> <p><input type="radio"/> Eric V. Moyé</p>	<p><b>District Judge, 14th Judicial District</b>                  (Juez del Distrito, Distrito Judicial Núm. 14)</p>
	<p><b>Place 6,</b></p> <p><b>... Núm. 6</b></p>	<p><b>District Judge, 95th Judicial District</b>                  (Juez del Distrito, Distrito Judicial Núm. 95)</p>

“The Effect of the Loss of Straight Ticket Voting on Texas 2020 Down Ballot Races”

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## Summary

Since 2012, seven states have eliminated straight ticket voting (STV) - only eight states allow for straight ticket voting in some form. Texas ended straight ticket voting in 2020, concurrent with political shifts in the state creating more competitive down ballot races. Eight Republican House candidates won by less than 5% and 6 Democrats House candidates won their seats by less than 5% in 2018.

### What will the impact of the loss of straight ticket voting be for Texas down ballot races?

- Both parties will lose support but the effect will be most prominent for Democratic incumbents.
- Loss of STV will lead to an erosion of the incumbency advantage as candidates can no longer count on an engineered reservoir of support from partisans in their districts.
- The elimination of STV will lead to more ticket splitting and therefore more divided government between the president and Congress, state legislatures and the president, and state legislatures and state governors.
- It takes longer to vote with no STV, so longer lines are likely. Longer lines mean voters drop off - scholarship reports about 3% - 5% reduction in turnout. As big counties move to vote centers, this will be exacerbated.

## Background

Straight ticket voting (sometimes called straight party voting (STV)) allows voters to vote for all candidates of one party for all contests on the ballot. Voters split their tickets consistently from the 1950s to the 2000s, caused in part by absence of competitive congressional races in the United States, leading to a wave of divided government.<sup>1</sup> Such trends were caused by either a desire for “policy balancing” or local, short-term electoral forces. Yet, a wave of political polarization beginning in the 2000s and continuing through today increased the frequency of straight ticket voting as a convenience for party-supporting voters.<sup>2</sup> The correlation between party identification and ideology intensified in this period, leading more voters to choose the straight ticket option.<sup>3</sup>

Recent trends in state voting laws, however, have moved away from allowing voters to vote straight ticket because many critics view it as a top-down scenario where voters deliberately choose partisan outcomes at the top of the ticket but blindly choose the same partisan outcome with little reference or understanding of how that party-aligned choice affects down ballot races.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in the last decade, West Virginia, South Dakota, Rhode Island, North Carolina, and Texas have abolished STV as an option. The argument against STV is that the ballot design encourages only reflexive partisan behavior, nationalizing elections and widening the partisan divisions in American politics. Several studies have documented that voter roll off (voters selecting in races at the top of the ticket but not down ballot) in judicial elections and ballot measures.<sup>5</sup>

Undervoting (stopping voting before a voters' ballot is complete) is likely intentional, resulting from a voter's intent to skip a particular electoral contests. Straight ticket voting reduces the number of unrecorded votes for offices, so eliminating the STV option should increase down ballot roll off. Residual votes (number of ballots cast in a county that fail to record a valid vote for a particular contest) are minimized when localities allow straight ticket voting.<sup>6</sup> Put differently, voters vote in more contests down ballot when straight ticket voting is allowed. If the option is taken away, voters are less likely to vote in contests lower down on the ballot.

### Who Splits Their Ticket?

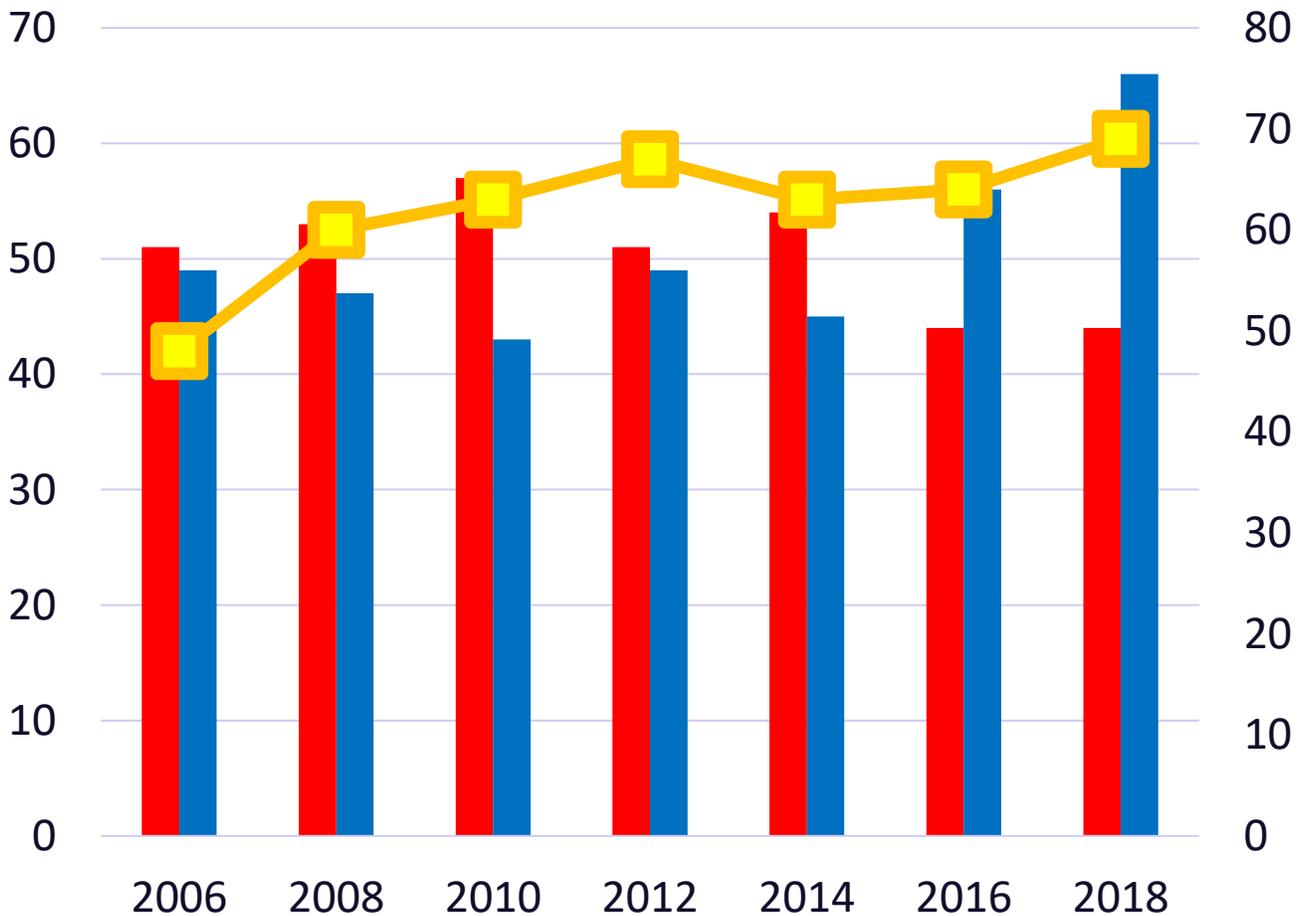
Voters who possess stronger party identification, voters with high motivation, and voters with more knowledge about candidates are more likely to choose the straight ticket voting option. Straight ticket voting allows voters to easily accomplish this mapping of their preferences onto the candidates of the party they prefer.

Relatedly, voters may be choosing to *split* their tickets on purpose to balance political power across the institutions by dividing power and balancing policy outcomes and out of a desire for moderate policy outputs.<sup>7</sup>

Scholars have shown Democratic constituencies are more likely to vote straight ticket than other groups.<sup>8</sup> Studies from selected elections show that Democrats are advantaged more than Republicans by straight party voting in vote share.<sup>9</sup>

## Straight Ticket Texas

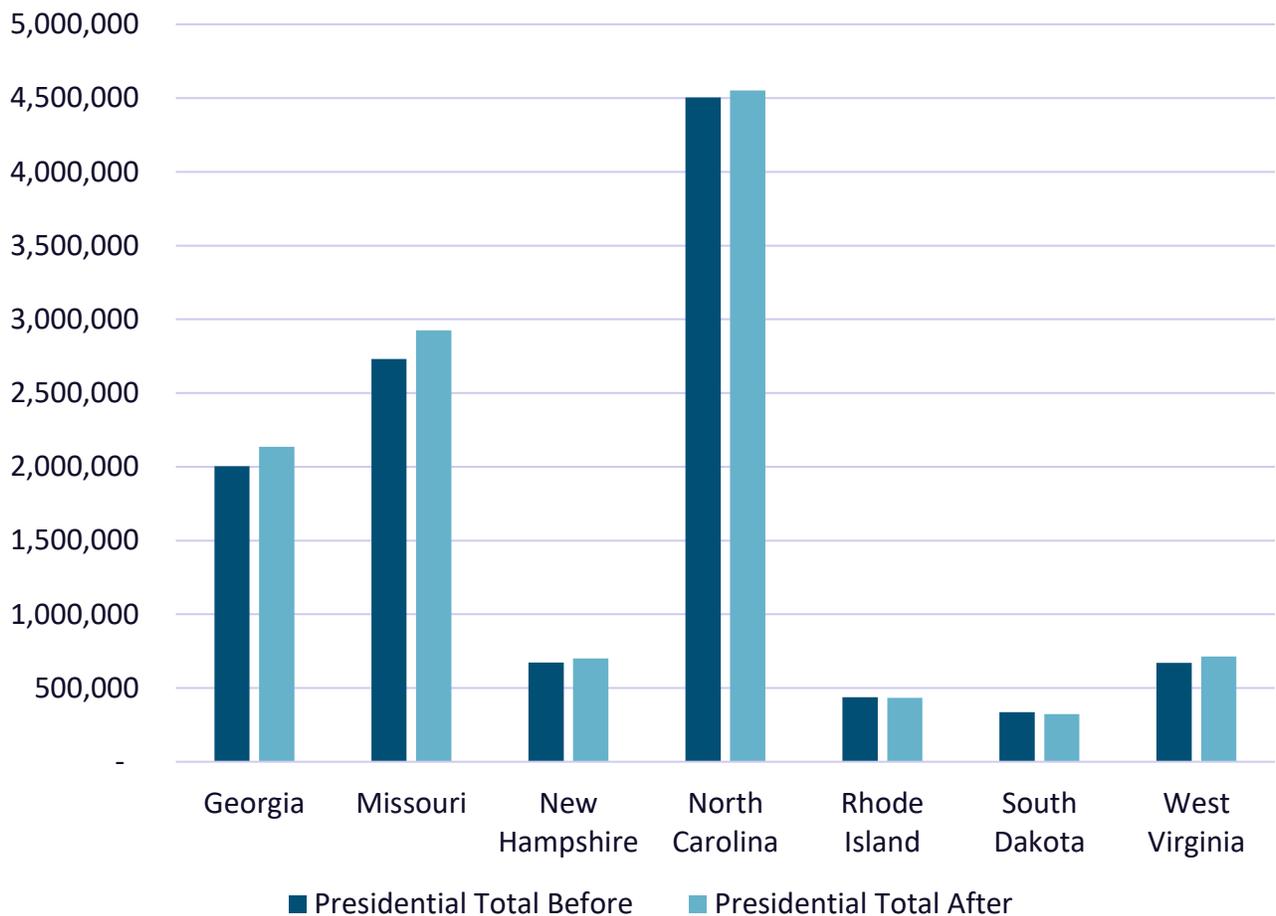
The Texas legislature passed legislation, then signed by the Governor, in 2017 to eliminate straight ticket voting starting with the 2020 election. Texans relied heavily on straight ticket voting for more than a decade. For instance, in 2016, straight ticket voting was the choice of about 64% of voters in Texas' ten largest counties<sup>10</sup>, reaching record levels of straight ticket voting.<sup>11</sup> The table below shows more than 70% of Texans voted straight ticket in 2018 (right axis).



From 2006 to 2014, Republican straight ticket voters made up more than half the total straight ticket votes in Texas (left axis shows the total percentage of straight ticket voting divided by down by party). By 2016, Democrats voting straight ticket made up an increasingly large share of the total universe of straight ticket voting in Texas. Republicans candidates in several down ballot partisan races in 2018 pointed to a spike in Democratic straight ticket voting as the cause of close losses in large urban counties.<sup>12</sup>

## Effect of Changing STV

The figure below shows the total turnout in a presidential year for several states before and after they eliminated straight ticket voting. In competitive states like Georgia, Missouri, and North Carolina, the vote total increased after removing STV as an option for at least that span of time. However, given population growth in the states over the four year period is likely partially the reason. There was very little total effect on turnout in New Hampshire, Rhode Island, or South Dakota.

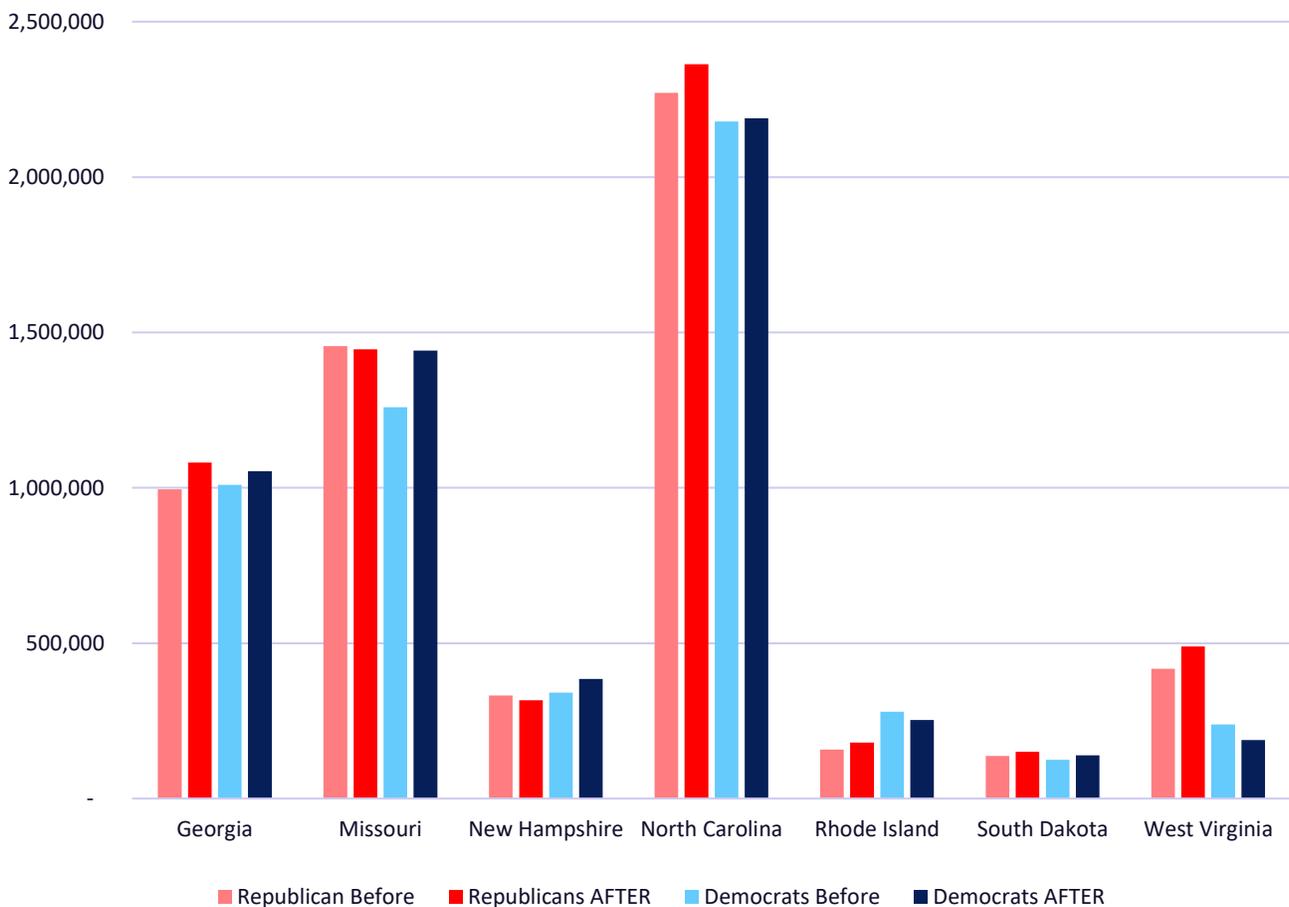


**Does one party benefit from moving away from straight ticket voting?** The results are mixed for a handful of states who have moved away from STV. The figure below shows that some states saw an increase in support for Democratic presidential candidates (Missouri and New Hampshire) while others showed a decrease in support for the Democratic presidential candidate (Rhode Island and West Virginia). States like North Carolina and

West Virginia, and to a lesser extent Rhode Island and South Dakota, also saw increase in support for Republicans.

Georgia and North Carolina have become swing states, so both parties increased their vote totals following the removal of STV, not yielding significant advantages for either. States trending Republican like West Virginia and South Dakota saw little effect for either party following a removal of STV. A strong presidential year for Democrats in 2008 in Missouri led to a boost in support for Barack Obama (but not a victory - John McCain won by only a few thousand votes).

**Ultimately at the state level in a presidential year, no one party seems to benefit unless it is a top target for the party.**



### Down Ballot Races?

Using an ordinary least squares panel regression (with fixed effects for states and several control variables) to estimate vote totals for candidates for state

legislative positions in each party from 2006 to 2016, the results in the table below show moving away from straight ticket voting lowers support for state legislative candidates from both parties. Positive numbers indicate how many votes candidates can count on when straight ticket voting is in effect. Removing the option would reduce the vote totals for each candidate by approximately the amount indicated.

For Democrats, removing the STV option decreases vote totals by about 5,000 votes in presidential years overall and up to 12,000 in state senate races in presidential election years. The effect for Republican house candidates demonstrated a loss of about 1,000 total votes in a presidential election year and about 9,000 votes in a Senate race if the state moved away from STV.

Top of the ticket presidential politics drives much of the vote choice in presidential election years with straight ticket voting facilitating more party-aligned voting. The undervote is generally less pronounced in presidential elections, but the elimination of the straight ticket voting option which attenuates this option could have a larger effect on vote share in presidential elections than other elections.

**Table 1 - Effect of Straight Ticket Voting on Vote Share**

	(1) Total Votes	(2) Democratic (House)	(3) Republican (House)	(4) Democratic (Senate)	(5) Republican (Senate)
Straight Ticket	2,433.0** (1,095.0)	2,295.8*** (392.7)	1,066.1* (444.1)	1,357.3 (1314.4)	-1,919.9 (1424.0)
Presidential Year	11,277.3*** (345.1)	5,084.9*** (122.1)	3,566.3*** (138.1)	11,943.3*** (445.7)	9,321.0*** (482.9)
Constant	24,954.5*** (358.1)	9,364.6*** (130.8)	10,253.7*** (147.9)	20,589.7*** (404.5)	22,327.3*** (438.2)
N	20,558	16,053	16,053	4,505	4,505
R-sq	0.115	0.143	0.169	0.186	0.220
Groups (States)	50	50	50	50	50
Rho	.574	.759	.686	.791	.744
Pr(u <sub>i</sub> =0) (Prob > F)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

NOTE: Dependent variable is total votes by party candidate. Standard errors (clustered) in parentheses, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Additional control variables not listed in table.

The average Democratic candidate receives just over 10,500 votes in state House legislative races in the time period examined, 14,600 for incumbents, making this figure substantively impactful. Put another way, the average difference between the Democratic and Republican candidate during the period for lower chamber races is 6,700 votes, so 2,200 votes would be more than 30% of that total.

## Impacts and Implications

Beyond the direct political impacts, shifting away from STV will change Texas voting process and, eventually, the balance of power. There are three primary ways the loss of STV will affect the state:

**Erosion of Incumbency Advantage.** By nature, this will lead to an erosion of the incumbency advantage as candidates can no longer count on an engineered reservoir of support from partisans in their districts. The effect will be most prominent for Democratic incumbents who stand to absorb the brunt of the electoral effect of the change.

**More Divided Government.** One implication to these changes is that, if STV leads to more unified government, the elimination of straight ticket voting will lead to more ticket splitting and therefore more divided government between the president and Congress, state legislatures and the president, and state legislatures and state governors.

**Longer Lines to Vote.** Without the ability to quickly vote straight ticket, voting will necessarily take longer for most voters. This will lead to longer lines for voters which scholars indicate will reduce turnout for the current election (as voters may not have time to wait) and in subsequent elections.<sup>13</sup> The effect of wait times is more pronounced in minority precincts as scholars show that residents of entirely-Black neighborhoods waited 29% longer to vote and were 74% more likely to spend more than 30 minutes at their polling place.



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- <sup>2</sup> Sievert, Joel, and Seth C. McKee. 2019. "Nationalization of U.S. Senate and Gubernatorial Elections." *American Politics Research* 47 (5): 1055-1080.
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- <sup>8</sup> Feig, Douglas. 2009. "Another Look at Race, Roll Off, and the Straight Ticket Option." *Politics & Policy* 37 (3): 529-544.
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- <sup>12</sup> Platoff, Emma. 2018. "Straight Ticket Voting Ends in 2020. For Some Down-Ballot Republicans, That Wasn't Soon Enough." *Texas Tribune*, November 16.
- <sup>13</sup> Pettigrew, Stephen. 2020. "The Downstream Consequences of Long Waits." Forthcoming at *Electoral Studies*.