High School Voter Registration? Noncompliance of Texas Schools
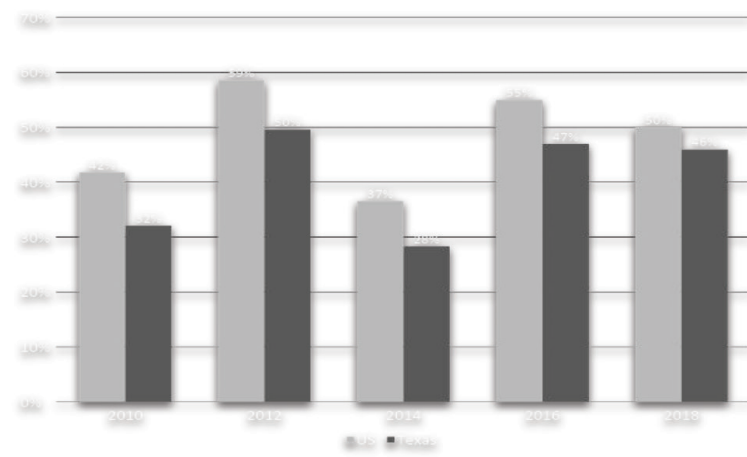
UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON | POLITICAL SCIENCE

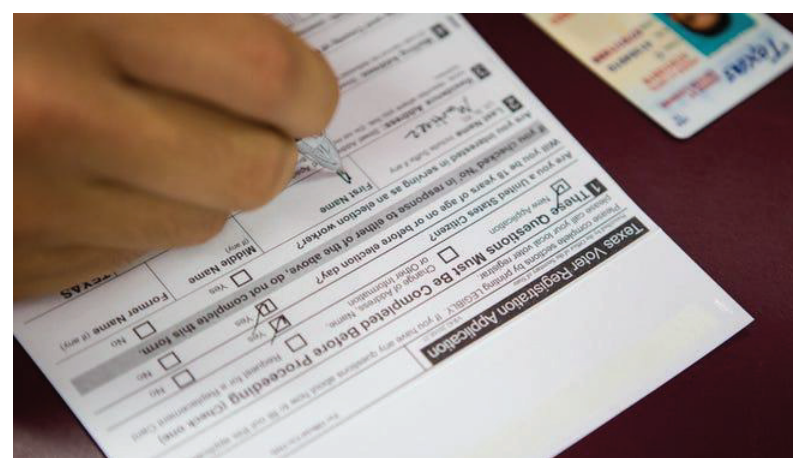Amanda Austin, Dr. Jeronimo Cortina, Syed Naqvi, Naomi Nubin, Dr. Brandon Rottinghaus

INTRODUCTION

Texas voter registration levels have been consistently lower than the national average over the past decade.

TEXAS LAW

- TEX. GOV. Code § 13.031(B) designates the principal of each Texas high school, or the principal's designee, as the high school deputy registrar (HSDR).

- The HSDR must offer voter registration applications to eligible students at least twice per school year, along with a notice explaining how the students may deliver the applications.

- Students may choose to return voter registration forms to the HSDR; then, the HSDR must review the applications for completeness, give assistance upon request, and collect them for delivery to the county voter registrar.

- Alternatively, students may give their voter registration form to a Volunteer Deputy Registrar (VDR) for turning into the county voter registrar.

BARRIERS TO COMPLIANCE

- The Secretary of State does not maintain an updated contact list of school officials to contact with compliance instructions, nor does the Secretary of State track or report high schools' legal compliance.

- Schools must request voter registration forms from the Secretary of State rather than an automatic statewide distribution of forms to school officials.

- School officials and administrators are "overburdened" with responsibilities and instructions to request and receive forms are not always understood.

- Officials do not always request forms in time for an upcoming election.

- Compliance by a school one year does not always translate into compliance the next.

DATA & METHODS

DATA

1. Texas Civil Rights Project (TCRP) public high school dataset with information about high schools gathered by 3 waves of TCRP surveys in 2017 and 2018 and information about voter registration legal compliance derived from public records requests to the Texas Secretary of State.

2. UH follow-up survey to all Texas public high schools in February 2020.

3. National Center for Education Statistics and the Texas Education Agency data on schools' student body composition, expenditures, and performance indicators.

METHODS

We deploy a logit regression model to estimate the variables associated with Texas high school's noncompliance with voter registration legal requirements. We utilize a stepwise algorithm to choose a reduced parameter model by AIC.

RESULTS

We find that noncompliance with voter registration requirements is statistically significantly more likely than compliance at Texas schools with larger percentages of female students and larger percentages of English language learners as students. Compliance - rather than noncompliance - becomes more likely when schools have higher overall A-F performance scores and when average social studies class size increases.

AIC Stepwise Reduced Parameter Logistic Regression Model

	Dependent Variable:	
	High School Voter Registration Legal Compliance	
Schools' Percent Female Students	−0.040***	(0.011)
Schools' A-F Overall Score	0.019**	(0.009)
Schools' Percent English Language Learners	−0.022***	(0.007)
Schools' Average Class Size (Social Studies)	0.066***	(0.011)
Constant	−1.633*	(0.868)
Observations	1,497	
Log Likelihood	−852.056	
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,714.112	
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

We further find that 74.06% of Texas schools fail to comply with voter registration legal requirements.

HS Voter Registration Legal Compliance
- Compliant
- Non-compliant

UH ELECTION LAB