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NEWS AND POLITICS

Beto O'Rourke Won With Texas's Black Women Because We Are Still the Moral Compass of United States Politics

In this op-ed, writer Taylor Crumpton looks at voting discrepancies between Black and white women in the 2018 Texas Senate race, breaking down what the marquee midterms contest tells us about the role Black women play in U.S. politics.

By **Taylor Crumpton**

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On November 6, [94% of Black women in Texas](#) voted for Beto O'Rourke to represent the state of Texas in the United States Senate. Their votes represent their efforts to reduce the discriminatory policies enacted by the Republican Party throughout the state to silence their voices in policy-making decisions. Throughout the state, Black women organized, canvassed, and worked at the

polls to ensure their community was represented in a historic election that had the potential to change the state's politics. For the first time in 30 years, Texas had a real opportunity to elect a Democrat to the U.S. Senate, and I believed that my home state had a chance to change its own narrative.

As a third-generation Texan, I've lived through the tenures of governors George W. Bush and Rick Perry and witnessed the damages inflicted upon communities of color throughout the state by wealthy white men in power who [cut funding to social services](#) for low-income residents and passed [one of the country's strictest voter ID laws](#) while [considering shutting down driver's license offices](#) in [communities of color](#) throughout the state.

Although liberation is not achieved through America's two-party electoral system, Black women continued to advocate for their rights and communities because of their historical disenfranchisement by Texas's political system. They organized with the belief that building people's political power would grant them access and language over a political system that shapes their lives. Black women in Texas are going to hold Ted Cruz accountable; I only wish that white women and men would do the same, because it's not all of us, but if the recent wave of political elections have displayed anything, it is that Black women are the moral compass of this nation.

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On November 6, Ted Cruz was reelected to represent the state of Texas in the United States Senate, retaining a seat he has held for six years.

The 2018 midterms election race between was a fierce competition between Cruz and [Democratic candidate Beto O'Rourke](#). O'Rourke's progressive [platform](#) prioritizing education, a humane immigration system, and health care garnered him national attention as a rising star in the Democratic Party.

Cruz ultimately won by [three](#) percentage points, an [unusually close contest in the red state of Texas](#). In fact, prior voting in the [2014 gubernatorial race](#) and the [2016 presidential election](#) demonstrates how much bluer Texas appears to have become in just a few short years.

[O'Rourke](#), a Democratic congressman from El Paso, has served as a U.S. representative for the state's 16th congressional district since 2013. His candidacy made waves as he refused financial donations from political action committees and corporations throughout his senatorial campaign, called for an [end to family separations at the southern border](#), and hosted town halls at [Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#) to engage young Black students, who are ignored in statewide politics.

Cruz, the incumbent senator from Texas, ran political [ads](#) to persuade voters of Beto's liberalism and [described](#) the challenger as a "Triple Meat Whataburger liberal who is out of touch with Texas values." During the final days of campaigning, Cruz [accused](#) O'Rourke of providing financial support to a caravan of immigrants seeking refuge in the United States.

In my view, what set O'Rourke apart from Cruz was his willingness to engage and connect with voters to better understand the lived experiences of Black, brown, and other minority residents in the Lone Star State.

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After the outcome of the Texas Senate election was called, data revealed that [94%](#) of Black women who voted in the

state chose O'Rourke. The number is reminiscent of the 2016 presidential election, in which [94%](#) of Black women voted for Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton in an effort to guard themselves and their communities against then candidate Donald Trump. It mirrors Texas voters' demographic trends in the [2014 governor's race](#), which saw Black women vote overwhelmingly for Democrats while the majority of white women voted for Republicans.

The support from Black women isn't surprising, given O'Rourke's campaign rhetoric. At one campaign stop, O'Rourke [spoke](#) about how he can impact Black women's lives in Texas, discussing how Black women in Texas have [double the maternal mortality rate of women in the state overall](#), the [school-to-prison pipeline](#) that targets Black youth once they enter kindergarten, and the need for progressive leadership in the state to enact equitable conditions for those marginalized by the system. Black women like me were called in to save Texas from reelecting Cruz, whose conservative politics include a stance against [transgender rights](#) and a vote [against](#) the Violence Against Women Act.

On the campaign trail this year, Cruz's attempt to attack O'Rourke over issues of police brutality virally backfired, as Cruz's campaign [tweeted a video](#) of O'Rourke discussing the injustice of Botham Jean's killing. Jean, a black man, was in his own apartment when he was [killed by an off-duty police officer who had entered the man's home believing it was hers](#); she was his neighbor in the same building.



As Jamil Smith [wrote for *Rolling Stone*](#), “On its face, the clip is a brazen appeal to outright racism and little else.” As Cruz was in the middle of a debate question about the Jean killing, Smith notes, “his campaign was promoting a message that a white politician talking about the value of black lives is a bad thing.”

Still, Cruz won the election, receiving 51% of the overall vote. [Sixty percent](#) of white women who voted in the state cast a ballot for Cruz. As the state’s [demographics](#) shift toward people of color, and young people begin to participate in higher rates of civic and voter engagement, O’Rourke’s campaign displayed to the next generation of Texas voters that they have the potential to shape the state’s political system into one that benefits their emerging communities.

I hope that my home state continues to change. I know that Black women will continue to lead that charge. And I hope that white women will step up to join us in our endeavor.

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