

# Public Opinions of Black Democrats in Texas: An Empirical Investigation

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Received: Dec. 8, 2022    Accepted: Dec. 13, 2022    Online published: Dec. 31, 2022

doi:10.5296/jpag.v12i4.20631

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5296/jpag.v12i4.20631>

## Abstract

On August 25, 1979, a group of African-American leaders met at the Holiday Inn in Duncanville, Texas. Robert Malson, Assistant Director of Domestic Policy for the White House, was the speaker. The vision was enthusiastically embraced by those in attendance. As with most coalitions, the Texas coalition of black Democrats, which exists under the auspices

of the Texas Democratic Party, benefits from certain advantages: with chapters in most counties in Texas, it certainly enjoys a large base of support, networks and connections and projects the image of strength in numbers among its members. In 2018, Black candidates stepped up across the State to lead. In Texas, Black Democrats running for office included: 18 candidates for US Congress, 9 candidates for statewide office, 34 candidates for Texas Legislature, and hundreds more Black Democrats for county & local offices. In 2020, the Coalition surveyed its members to determine what we were thinking as Black Texan Democrats. Therefore, the survey is an attempt to define an agenda to support our aggressive campaigns to serve as strong advocates for our community. The research concluded that in order to continue to be relevant in Texas politics, the coalition must grow and sustain its membership, continue to develop its agenda around issues that are central to the interests of its members as well as the agenda of the Democratic Party including justice, opportunity, equity and economic prosperity.

**Keywords:** Political Coalitions, Texas coalition of Black Democrats, Political participation, African-American

## 1. Introduction

Political Coalitions in politics anywhere in the world are as old as systems of governance have existed on earth. Whether they are constructed to bring together small parties with similar goals or agendas in a political system so as to serve as a counterweight against a dominant party/ parties, or designed to appeal to certain segments of the population in a system, political coalitions will forever constitute an important component of the fabric of every political system. By their very nature, coalitions are combinations or alliances forged between parties, factions or states to achieve a political goal or goals. They are indispensable in political systems of various stripes, because they serve as advocacy groups or voices for those who are incapable of participating in the political process. In essence, they are instrumental in creating the building blocks for organizations and also individuals to share common political goals or interests.

The Texas coalition of Black Democrats fits the definition elaborated above. Its members describe it as “an organization that aims to get black people elected and engaged in the Texas Democratic Party and also acquaint voters and potential voters with party issues, values and candidates”. In that role the coalition “seeks to protect and empower black democratic voters and the officials they elect as well as advance an agenda focused on justice, opportunity, equity and economic prosperity”. Mr. Carroll G. Robinson, Chairman of the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats, asserts that the “reality of racial inequality and inequity has been a driving force in my commitment to using politics to achieve social and economic justice in our nation” He argues that “I want America—and Texas—to live up to the words of the Declaration of Independence that we are all equal. I want a new reality that learns from our history but is clear—Black Americans are entitled to all the rights and privileges of full citizenship in our nation and our state”

As with most coalitions, the Texas coalition of black Democrats (which exists under the auspices of the Texas Democratic Party), and benefits from certain advantages: With chapters

in most counties in Texas, it certainly enjoys a large base of support, networks and connections and projects the image of strength in numbers among its members. It serves as an advocacy group for its members, that it protects in instances when such members need resources and support to operate in hostile or difficult environments; it develops leadership skills among members, facilitates the exchange or dissemination of information, skills or experiences among member; brings together a diverse group of black Americans and provides peer support, encouragement, motivation and recognition to its members. To succeed in achieving its goals, the coalition must guard against those challenges that can spell disaster for its survival or sustainability. It must endeavor to develop and maintain clear objectives; elect, groom and mentor a cadre of ethical and professionally oriented leaders; ensure that the coalition is endowed with adequate resources needed to execute its mission; inculcate attributes of shared governance, accountability and transparency in its practices, and maintain policies and procedures that are designed to foster the effective governance of the coalition.

## **2. Birth and Evolution of the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats**

The Texas Coalition of Black Democrats evolved from the collective vision of a group of creative thinkers in January, 1979. It was on that date, in the home of Mrs. Sallye Moore, of Grand Prairie, Texas, that a small group of African American visionaries from Arlington, Dallas, Fort Worth, and Grand Prairie met to discuss the possibility of establishing a network between African Americans in the Metroplex. After follow-up meetings over the next six months, they decided to call a meeting of African American grassroots leaders from across the state to share the idea.

On August 25, 1979, a group of African-American leaders met at the Holiday Inn in Duncanville, Texas. Robert Malson, Assistant Director of Domestic Policy for the White House, was the speaker. The vision was enthusiastically embraced by those in attendance. They decided to convene a statewide meeting in Austin, Texas. Several strategy sessions were needed to plan such a large event that would have such significant impact on Black Texans. These planning sessions occurred in a number of cities including in Austin in October, 1979 and Corsicana in January, 1980. Three hundred fifty-six registered delegates gathered in Austin on February 22-24, 1980, at the first state conference of the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats.

The Coalition has been steadfast in its dedication to electing African-Americans across the State and amplifying issues of concern for African-Americans with local chapters across Texas. The focus of the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats is to stimulate, in African-Americans, an active interest in governmental affairs, to facilitate the participation of African Americans in the Democratic Party, to perpetuate the ideals and principles of the Democratic Party, to help acquaint voters and potential voters with the issues and candidates/elected officials, and to promote the highest degree of governmental response to public need. In 2018, Black candidates stepped up across the State to lead. In Texas, Black Democrats running for office included: 18 candidates for US Congress, 9 candidates for statewide office, 34 candidates for Texas Legislature, and hundreds more Black Democrats for county & local offices. In 2020, the Coalition surveyed its members to determine what we

were thinking as Black Texan Democrats. From the survey, this research will attempt to define an agenda to support our aggressive campaigns to serve as strong advocates for our community.

### 3. Methodology

The respondents were randomly selected in Texas and the surveys will be conducted to gather information regarding the participants’ understanding of an agenda to support our aggressive campaigns to serve as strong advocates for our community in Texas. The respondents were asked a series of questions related to the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats, statewide organization to conduct regular and on-going polling of the opinions of Black Texas Democrats and Black Texans in general up to the 2020 general election that addressed their concerns or objections. This poll is not an endorsement or criticism of any candidate. It is simply a snapshot in time of the opinion of Texas Black Democrats at that moment in time. The percentages in this survey were rounded to the nearest ones. A total of 101 individuals responded to the poll. The margin of error for a sample of this size is approximately +/- 2%. Diversity in Democracy will be working with the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats, statewide organization to conduct regular and on-going polling of the opinions of Black Texas Democrats and Black Texans in general up to the 2020 general election.

#### *Demographics*

Seven percent of the respondents were younger than thirty-five years old. Fifteen percent of the respondents were thirty-five to forty-five years old. Twenty-three percent of the respondents were forty-six to fifty-five years old. Thirty-two percent of the respondents were fifty-six to sixty-five years old and twenty-two percent of the respondents were sixty-six or older. That makes seventy-eight percent of the respondents to the survey were age forty-five or older, while twenty-two percent were younger than age forty-five.

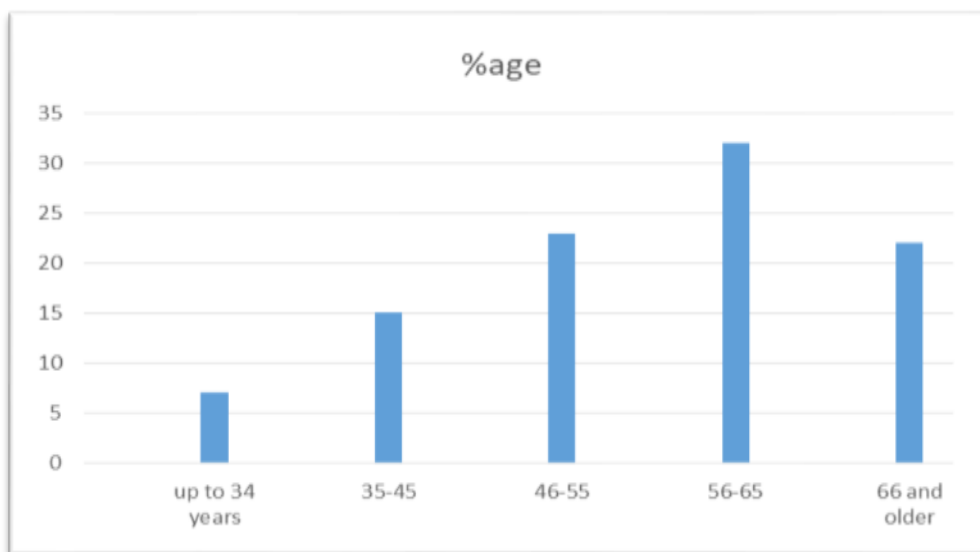


Figure 1. Age

Sixty-one percent of the respondents were women, while thirty-nine percent were men.

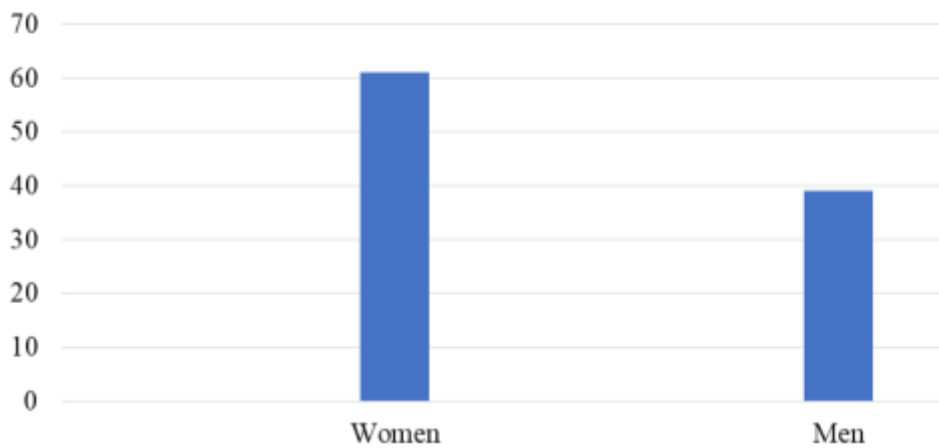


Figure 2. Gender

Twenty-eight percent self-identified as heterosexual, while three percent self-identified as homosexual. A majority of the respondents did not choose to answer the question on sexual orientation as only thirty-one percent responded to the question.<sup>1</sup>

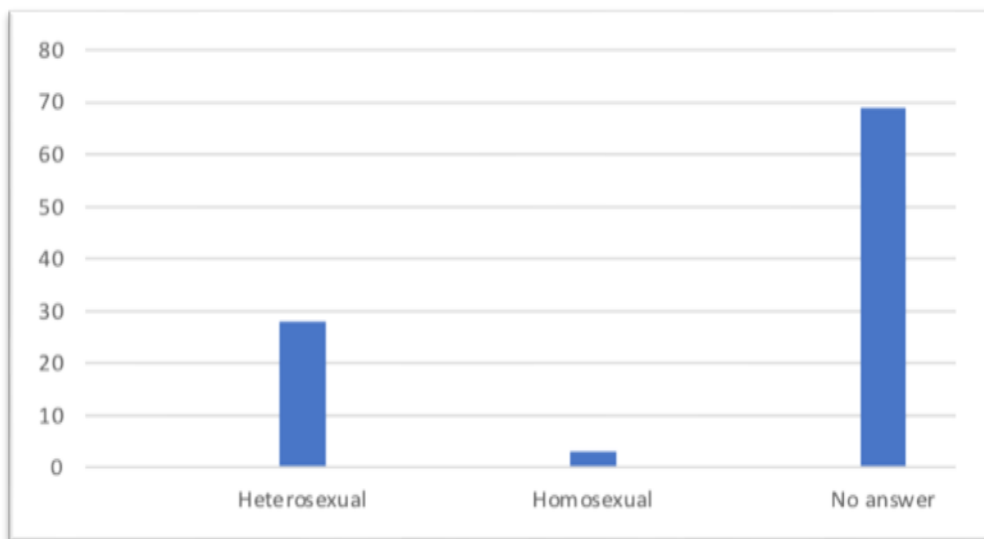


Figure 3. Sexual Orientation

When asked what their Texas home zip code is, forty-five percent of the respondents were from Houston, nine percent were from Killeen, five percent were from Beaumont, four percent were from Dallas, three percent were from Fresno, two percent each were from Austin, Lovelady, Spring, Stafford, and Missouri City; all other zip code representations were equal to one percent with only one respondent answering each of the remaining zip codes. When looking at the data set over half of the respondents were from the Greater Houston

<sup>1</sup> The gender and sexual orientation were asked in one question giving an accurate accounting of how many people chose not to answer that part of the question because they answered the gender part of the question.

Metropolitan area.

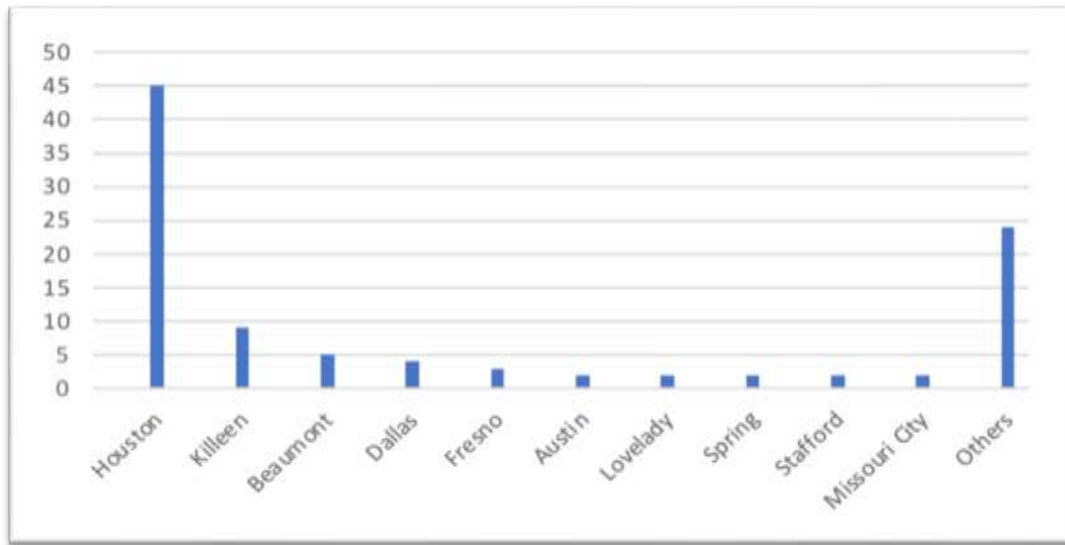


Figure 4. Zip Codes

*Will you be voting in the July 14<sup>th</sup> Texas Democratic Party Statewide Run-Off election?*

In Texas a runoff election is triggered when no candidate exceeds fifty percent of the total vote. The candidates that place first and second will be in the runoff thereby ensuring that one candidate will receive over fifty percent of the total vote.<sup>2</sup> Voter turnout is especially important in runoff elections because turnout tends to drop, at times significantly, between the primary and runoff elections.<sup>3</sup>

Ninety-seven percent of the respondents to the survey expressed their intentions to vote in the run-off elections. Three percent of the respondents to the survey expressed they did not intend to vote in the run-off election.

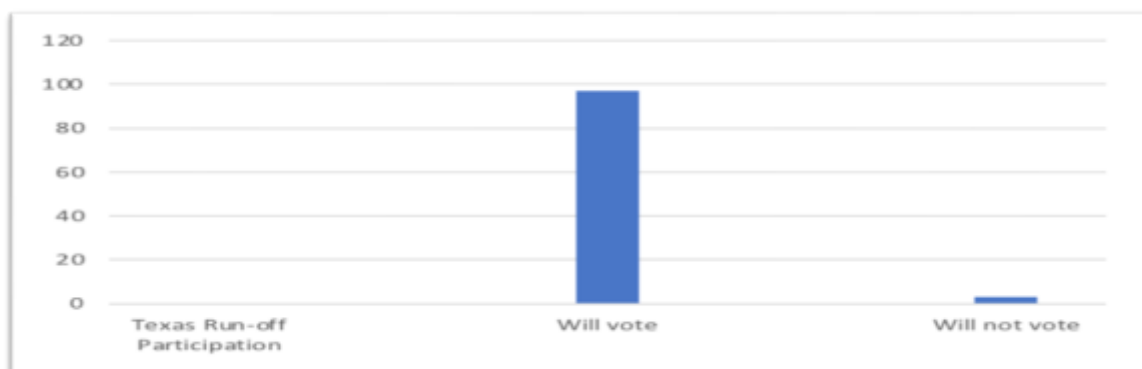


Figure 5. Statewide Runoff Voting Participation

<sup>2</sup> Carla Astudillo, Here's your Texas 2020 July runoff ballot, The Texas Tribune, retrieved from <https://apps.texastribune.org/features/2020/texas-runoff-election-ballot/>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen G. Wright, Voter Turnout in Runoff Elections, retrieved from <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.2307/2131348?journalCode=jop>

*Have you participated in a George Floyd protest march?*

On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020 George Floyd Jr. died in police custody after being arrested for allegedly passing a counterfeit \$20 bill at a convenient store in Minneapolis, Minnesota. After being arrested at the store where the owner called the police about the \$20 bill, Floyd was murdered outside beside a police cruiser after one the four arresting officers held his knee on Floyd's neck for over 8 minutes, with over two of those minutes on an unresponsive Floyd. The video of the interaction between Floyd and the arresting officers was filmed by innocent bystanders and disseminated through social media platforms and news outlets causing outrage across the nation, and eventually the world. His death, resulting in indictments for murder as well as lesser included offenses by the DA's office in Minneapolis, caused a protest movement that has triggered a new global civil rights movement.

When asked if they have participated in a George Floyd protest march, sixty-two percent of respondents responded they had not participated in a protest march, while thirty-eight percent responded they had participated in a protest march.

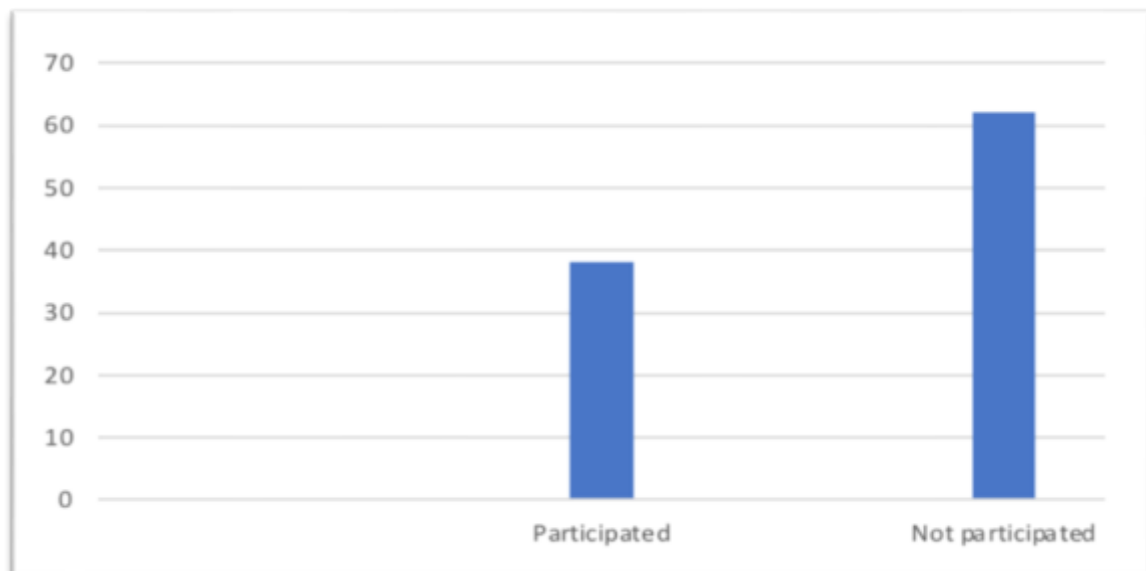


Figure 6. Protest March Participation

*Who should Joe Biden pick as his Vice Presidential running mate?*

In the beginning of 2020, in the midst of a jam packed democratic presidential nomination campaign, former Vice President Joe Biden's presidential campaign looked all but dead in the water. Heading into the South Carolina primary Biden was coming off a fourth place finish in Iowa and a fifth place finish in New Hampshire. While other candidate's campaigns looked to be surging (especially Bernie Sanders), Biden's campaign appeared on life support. The tides began to change in Nevada with Biden's second place finish to Sanders.

*The South Carolina Primary – a turning point<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>4</sup> Isabella Gruillon Paz and Matt Stevens, From fifth place to Here, NY Times, April 21, 2020 retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/08/us/politics/joe-biden-2020-presidential-campaign.html>

With the support and endorsement of James Clyburn, longtime Congressman from South Carolina, Biden had a commanding victory in that state garnering nearly 50% of the votes (roughly 48%). From this commanding victory Biden never looked back, first, with a Super Tuesday victory and then more to come. The ride to the democratic nomination looked promising for Biden even as Sanders steadfastly remained in the race; many posit, in order to make sure his ideals would be heard and to impact the party platform. Then Covid-19 stepped in dramatically changing campaigning, and upon Sanders's ending his own campaign, leaving Biden the presumptive nominee by late March of 2020. No one will be officially the Democratic nominee until the Democratic Convention convenes later this year.

With Biden as the presumptive democratic nominee, the focus became selecting his running mate who would help win against the presumptive Republican nominee and current President Donald Trump. In a March debate with Bernie Sanders, Joe Biden stated that if elected as the democratic nominee he would “pick a woman to be my vice president”.<sup>5</sup>

Since then, there has been speculation about whom Biden will select as his vice presidential candidate. In the wake of the George Floyd homicide investigation, the call for Biden to select an African American woman as his running mate increased. Senator Amy Klobuchar, thought to be a leading vice presidential contender withdrew her name from consideration and expressed her desire that Biden select a woman of color.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Results and Analysis

Of the total 92 respondents, 52 selected a candidate that was an African American woman/woman of color. (It should be noted that this question was not a (multiple) choice question but rather a write in response question). The favorite choice was Senator Kamala Harris with 18 percent of the respondents choosing her, followed by Congresswoman Val Demings with 11 percent. Ten percent of the respondents believe that that Vice President Joe Biden should choose a black female, regardless of who the actual candidate is for his Vice Presidential nominee. The rest of the results were Stacey Abrams with 8 percent of respondents selection, Senator Elizabeth Warren and Former First Lady Michelle Obama with 5 percent of respondents selection, Susan Rice and Any Black Candidate with 3 percent of the respondents selection, President Barack Obama, Carroll G. Robinson and Senator Bernie Sanders with 2 percent of the respondents selection, and Judge Harris and Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms with 1 percent of the respondents selection.

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Timm and Dareh Gregorian, Biden commits to picking a woman as his vice president, March 15, 2020, NBC News, retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/biden-says-he-will-pick-woman-runningmate-sanders-likely-d-o-n1159936>

<sup>6</sup> Paul LeBlanc and Jasmine Wright, Amy Klobuchar drops out of Biden VP contention and says he should choose a woman of color, CNN Politics, June 19, 2020, retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/06/18/politics/biden-vice-president-amy-klobuchar/index.html>



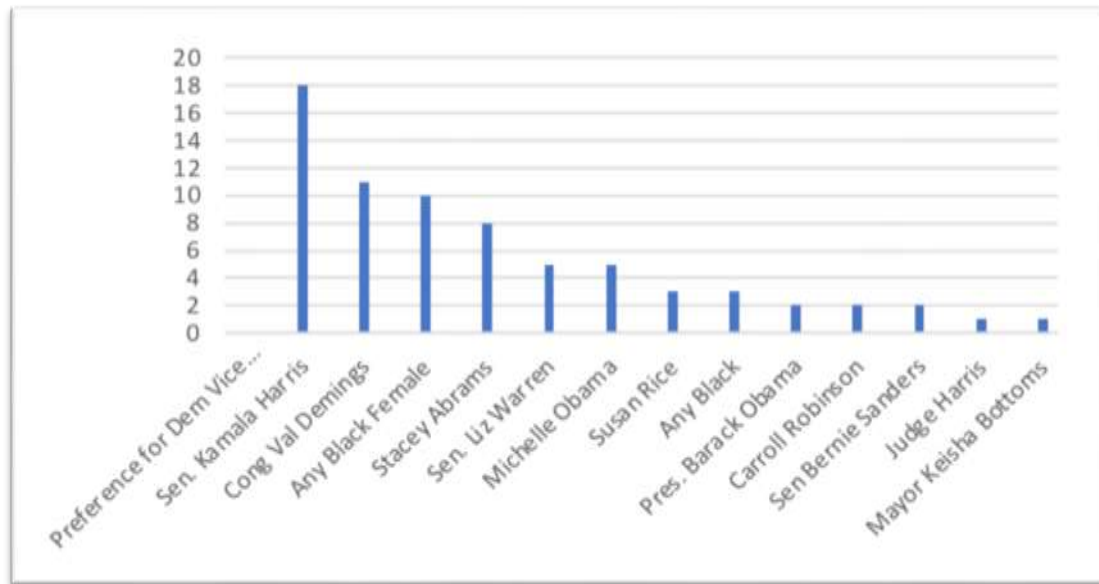


Figure 7. Democratic Vic Presidential Candidates

*Besides criminal justice reform and/or defunding the police, what other public policy changes do you want to see implemented to help achieve justice and equity in America?*

The survey respondents were asked besides criminal justice reform and/or defunding the police, what other public policy changes do you want to see implemented to help achieve justice and equity in America. One of the demands that stemmed from the protest and marches after the death of George Floyd was reforming the criminal justice system which has been a repeat offender of racial injustices toward people of color. Another call was for defunding police departments across the nation, forcing the President and Congress to take action on the matter of police reform. This question was a write-in question where rather than selecting from an answer bank of choices, the respondents could identify any policy issue.

When asked besides criminal justice reform and/or defunding the police, what other public policy changes do you want to see implemented to help achieve justice and equity in America, twenty-five percent selected education reform, nine percent selected voting reform, eight percent healthcare reform, seven percent selected job creation. All the other options were at or below five percent.

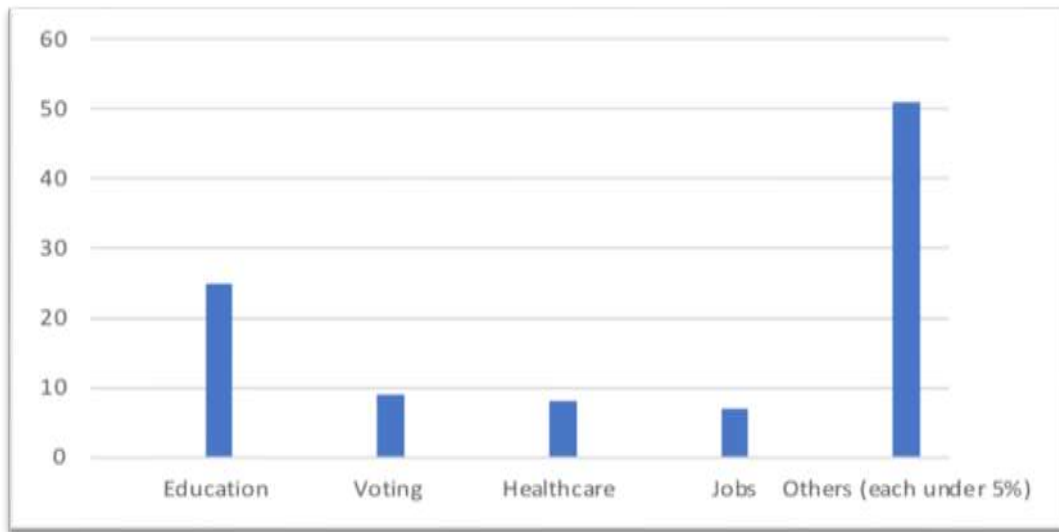


Figure 8. Public Policy Changes

In June of 2020, the Statewide Texas Coalition of Black Democrats conducted its third in a series of on-line surveys leading up to the presidential election in November of 2020 of the opinions of Texas Black Democrats. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents to the survey were age forty-five or older, while twenty-two percent were younger than age forty-five. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were women, while thirty-nine percent were men. Twenty-eight percent self-identified as heterosexual, while three percent self-identified as homosexual.

When asked what their home zip code is. Forty-five percent of the respondents were from Houston, Nine percent were from Killeen, Five percent were from Beaumont, Four percent were from Dallas, Three percent were from Fresno, Two percent each were from Austin, Lovelady, Spring, Stafford, and Missouri City; all other zip code representations were equal to one percent with only one respondent answering that zip code.

When asked if they intended to vote in the July 14<sup>th</sup> Texas Democratic primary run-off elections. Ninety-seven percent of the respondents to the survey expressed their intentions to vote in the run-off elections. Three percent of the respondents to the survey expressed they did not intend to vote in the run-off election.

When asked if they have participated in a George Floyd protest march, sixty-two percent of respondents responded they had not participated in a protest march, while thirty-eight percent responded they had participated in a protest march.

When asked who the presumptive Democratic Presidential nominee Joe Biden should select as his Vice Presidential running mate, twenty-seven percent of the respondents were unsure who Former Vice President Joe Biden should select as a running mate, while eighteen percent supported Senator Kamala Harris as a running mate, ten percent supported Congresswoman Val Demings as a running mate, and an African American woman received ten percent support. Each of the other choices was below ten percent.

When asked besides criminal justice reform and/or defunding the police, what other public policy changes do you want to see implemented to help achieve justice and equity in America, twenty-five percent selected education reform, nine percent selected voting reform, eight percent healthcare reform, seven percent selected job creation. All the other candidates were at or below five percent.

This poll is not an endorsement or criticism of any candidate. It is simply a snapshot in time of the opinion of Texas Black Democrats at that moment in time. The percentages in this survey were rounded to the nearest ones. A total of 101 individuals responded to the poll. The margin of error for a sample of this size is approximately +/- 2%. Diversity in Democracy will be working with the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats, statewide organization to conduct regular and on-going polling of the opinions of Black Texas Democrats and Black Texans in general up to the 2020 general election.

## 5. Conclusion

In an election as important as the November 2020 Presidential election, it is clear from the discussion above that the Texas Coalition of Black Democrats, has contributed in shaping and addressing some of the key issues that impact its members and black Texans as a whole, so that they can make informed decisions about which candidates to cast their votes for during the November 2020 Presidential election. In order to continue to be relevant in Texas politics, the coalition must grow and sustain its membership, continue to develop its agenda around issues that are central to the interests of its members as well as the agenda of the democratic party including justice, opportunity, equity and economic prosperity. The coalition must also continue to embrace best practices in coalition building or coalition politics, develop a leader structure that ensures that its leaders are respected for their leadership skills and supported for their abilities to sustain the growth and relevance of the organization in Texas politics.

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