



The central finding is strikingly consistent: the Rio Grande Valley’s turnout among registered voters has remained roughly 11–13 percentage points below Texas overall in every general election examined. The region experienced the same statewide surges in 2018 and 2020, but never closed the gap—and it slipped slightly further behind in 2024.

Methodology

I defined the RGV as Cameron, Hidalgo, Starr, and Willacy counties and calculated:

- **Turnout:** ballots cast ÷ registered voters.
- **RGV regional turnout:** combined ballots divided by combined registrations—a registration-weighted average, so Hidalgo and Cameron appropriately have more influence than Starr and Willacy.
- **County rankings:** rank among Texas’s 254 counties, with 1 representing the highest turnout.
- **Five-election average:** the simple average of each county’s turnout in 2016, 2018, 2020, 2022, and 2024.

Registration and historical turnout figures come principally from the [Texas Secretary of State’s election data](#), including its [statewide turnout history](#), [county turnout archive](#), and [November 2024 registration report](#).

For the statewide rankings in 2020 and 2024, I divided the certified presidential vote total in each county by the Secretary of State’s registered-voter total. That is a very close turnout proxy but may be slightly lower than total ballots cast because a small number of voters leave the presidential contest blank. For example, Hidalgo County’s election system reports exact 2024 turnout of 48.81%, compared with the 48.67% presidential-vote proxy used for uniform statewide ranking. [Hidalgo County official results](#)

1. Regional trend

Election	Type	Registered voters	Votes/ballots analyzed	RGV turnout	Texas turnout	RGV gap
2016	Presidential	580,658	281,567	48.49%	59.39%	–10.90 pts
2018	Midterm	607,713	248,866	40.95%	53.01%	–12.06 pts
2020	Presidential	657,073	358,284	54.53%	66.73%	–12.20 pts
2022	Midterm	690,465	233,248	33.78%	45.85%	–12.07 pts
2024	Presidential	732,755	355,402	48.50%	61.15%	–12.65 pts



What the trend shows

- **2020 was the Valley's high-water mark:** turnout reached 54.5%, about six points higher than 2016. But Texas turnout increased even more, so the regional gap widened slightly.
- **2022 was a substantial retreat:** Valley turnout fell 7.2 points from the unusually competitive 2018 midterm. Texas fell by approximately the same amount.
- **2024 returned almost exactly to the 2016 rate:** 48.50% versus 48.49%, despite substantial population, registration, campaign, and partisan changes.
- **Registration increased considerably:** the RGV added approximately 152,100 registered voters from 2016 to 2024—an increase of 26.2%.
- **Votes did not keep pace after 2020:** approximately 2,900 fewer presidential votes were recorded in 2024 than in 2020, even though the region had about 75,700 more registered voters.
- **The relative deficit is structural:** the gap with Texas was approximately 11 points in 2016 and between 12 and 13 points in every later election.

The 2024 decline was not unique to the Valley. Texas turnout fell from approximately 66.7% in 2020 to 61.2% in 2024, despite record registration. [Texas Tribune analysis](#)

2. Turnout by RGV county

County	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024	Five-election average
Hidalgo	51.10%	42.69%	56.45%	33.86%	48.67%	46.55%
Cameron	46.43%	39.00%	52.23%	33.86%	48.76%	44.05%
Starr	36.46%	36.22%	51.47%	32.63%	45.09%	40.37%
Willacy	41.30%	35.12%	43.34%	32.74%	47.53%	40.01%
RGV weighted	48.49%	40.95%	54.53%	33.78%	48.50%	45.25%

Important county-level observations:

- **Hidalgo has generally led the region,** although Cameron narrowly surpassed it in 2024.
- **Cameron improved relative to 2016:** its 2024 rate was approximately 2.3 points higher.
- **Starr recorded the largest presidential-cycle improvement:** from 36.5% in 2016 to 45.1% in 2024, though it remained near the bottom statewide.



- **Willacy's 2024 improvement was pronounced:** its estimated rate rose above both its 2016 result and its 2020 result.
- Because Hidalgo and Cameron account for approximately 93% of the region's registered voters, regional turnout strategy will necessarily depend heavily on those two counties.

3. Statewide ranking of the RGV counties

County	2020 rank	2022 rank	2024 rank	Rank by five-election average
Hidalgo	219 of 254	241	240	231
Cameron	241	242	239	244
Starr	243	248	248	250
Willacy	254	246	244	253

RGV as a combined region

If the four-county weighted average is inserted into the county distribution as though the RGV were one county:

Measurement	RGV turnout	Comparative statewide position
2020	54.53%	Approximately 230th
2022	33.78%	Approximately 243rd
2024	48.50%	Approximately 242nd
Five-election average	45.25%	Approximately 239th

Thus, both individually and collectively, the RGV sits near the bottom of the Texas county turnout distribution. Hidalgo performs best within the region but is still generally in the bottom 15% statewide.



4. Comparison with major Texas metropolitan counties

The following comparison uses major metro **core counties**, avoiding the potentially misleading effect of combining urban centers with high-turnout suburban counties.

Metro/core county	2020	2022	2024	Five-election average
Dallas–Fort Worth: Collin	75.88%	52.58%	68.86%	65.28%
Dallas–Fort Worth: Denton	73.96%	52.42%	67.90%	63.21%
Austin: Travis	71.42%	51.99%	62.75%	62.56%
Fort Worth: Tarrant	68.84%	46.90%	62.87%	59.59%
Lubbock	65.90%	44.62%	63.41%	57.43%
Dallas	65.97%	44.03%	57.92%	56.61%
Houston: Harris	66.17%	42.92%	57.83%	55.40%
San Antonio: Bexar	64.79%	43.94%	58.53%	54.93%
Corpus Christi: Nueces	60.16%	41.74%	55.62%	51.05%
El Paso	54.70%	32.66%	48.20%	46.09%
RGV weighted	54.53%	33.78%	48.50%	45.25%

The comparison divides into three tiers:

1. **High-turnout suburban and affluent counties:** Collin and Denton consistently outperform both Texas and the urban core counties.
2. **Major urban core counties:** Travis, Tarrant, Dallas, Harris, and Bexar generally outperform the Valley by 7–17 points.
3. **Lower-turnout border metros:** El Paso and the RGV have very similar patterns. The RGV slightly exceeded El Paso in 2022 and 2024, but El Paso’s five-election average remains about one point higher.

5. What likely explains the persistent gap

The data establish the turnout gap, but do not by themselves prove its causes. Several contextual factors are particularly relevant:



- **Registration is part of the problem, but not the entire problem.** A 2022 analysis reported that only about 45% of Hidalgo County’s population was registered in 2020, compared with 58.6% statewide. Even among those registered, Hidalgo turnout was ten points below Texas. [Texas Public Radio](#)
- **The region’s younger and heavily Hispanic population affects baseline turnout.** Texas data show substantially lower participation among adults ages 18–29 than among adults 65 and older, and lower participation among Hispanic than non-Hispanic White voters. [Rice University’s Kinder Institute](#)
- **2018 was an exceptional midterm:** the Cruz–O’Rourke Senate contest substantially increased statewide interest. The lack of an equally mobilizing contest in 2022 contributed to declines across Texas, not only in the Valley.
- **2020 benefited from extraordinary conditions:** intense presidential interest, an expanded three-week early-voting period, and historically high participation. [Texas Tribune 2020 turnout tracker](#)
- **2024 political realignment did not produce higher overall participation.** All four RGV counties moved dramatically toward the Republican presidential candidate, but regional turnout fell approximately six points from 2020. Partisan change and turnout growth are therefore separate phenomena.
- **Registered-voter turnout understates the full participation problem.** The denominator excludes eligible residents who never registered. The RGV’s turnout as a percentage of its citizen voting-age population would consequently be lower than the figures in these tables.

Bottom line

The RGV has demonstrated that it can substantially increase raw participation—particularly in 2020—but it has not improved its position relative to the rest of Texas. Its weighted turnout averaged approximately **45.3% across the five elections**, corresponding to roughly **239th among Texas counties**. In 2024, the region’s estimated 48.5% turnout ranked approximately **242nd**, about **12.7 points below Texas**.

The largest opportunity is not merely adding registrations. It is converting the region’s rapidly expanding registration base into habitual voters, particularly in Hidalgo and Cameron counties and especially during midterm elections. The 2022 performance—only about one-third of registered voters participating—shows where the largest unrealized voting power lies.