

# PROGRESS TEXAS

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### **Texas Media Coverage Lacks Diverse Sources of Political Analysis in 2020 Election Coverage**

*In the U.S. Senate primary in Texas, women and people of color were infrequently quoted, while more than 71% of political sources were white and more than 71% were male.*

#### OVERVIEW

The 2020 election cycle in Texas has seen no shortage of political news coverage. Stories from our state routinely make national headlines: the hotly contested presidential primary, our increasingly competitive political landscape, the political ramifications of the pandemic, and the Black Lives Matter protests are just a few highlights from a busy and headline-grabbing year.

But this coverage doesn't always tell the full story.

During the 2020 primary, we noticed that political sources for many stories lacked racial and gender diversity. One story in particular caught our attention, in which [Politico](#) used a headline based on a quote from a white male source that may not have accurately conveyed the mood of the electorate.

Thus, we began the process of studying the diversity of political commentary in Texas political stories. Specifically, we looked at stories about the U.S. Senate primary race. This wouldn't be our [first rodeo](#) – we conducted a [similar analysis](#) after the 2014 election. However, rather than wait for the aftermath of 2020, this time we decided to take up the issue mid-cycle to encourage diverse sources in the remaining months of the general election.

Overall, we found that coverage still lacks diversity. But we also found signs that media outlets are increasingly aware of the matter and are taking steps to change it.

Our intent with this report is to encourage further diversity in coverage over the remaining three months of the 2020 election cycle.

## BACKGROUND

In 2015, Progress Texas Institute [conducted a study](#) on media diversity in political reporting. We found that although Texas is a large and diverse state, Texas media almost exclusively interviewed the same seven political experts. Quoted hundreds of times, these political scientists were all white, male, and from urban areas of Texas.

Since that time, we have been encouraged by reports from news organizations that have also reflected on their own coverage, in particular these posts from [Austin's NPR affiliate KUT](#), as well as [The Texas Tribune](#).

Five years later, we again analyzed Texas media to find if the sources in political articles have become more diverse. So as to look at a complete portion of the election cycle, we focused our attention on the Texas primary, specifically from the opening of the candidate filing period in November through the days following the primary in March. However, to analyze the volume of news stories surrounding the presidential primary would be an overwhelming task for a small newsroom like ours, and thus we narrowed our focus to study coverage of the 2020 Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate.

During this four month period, our [research](#) shows that the political sources interviewed by Texas media outlets are still overwhelmingly white and male, and that Black, Indigenous, People of Color, (BIPOC) and women-identifying political sources are rarely quoted by large Texas media outlets.

## METHOD

To create a [dataset of relevant articles](#), we used a combination of media tracking software from *Meltwater News* and manual review. We identified 416 unique news articles and 1,351 duplicate pieces from November 9, 2019 to March 8, 2020 that contained keywords relevant to the U.S. Senate primary race in Texas. These included the candidates' names, John Cornyn, Senate, and/or Texas Senate. Our search only included English-language articles.

After reviewing each article, we found 107 unique instances of a quoted political source. Political sources include anyone who works in politics in some way, including, but not limited to, political science professors, political activists, legislators, political consultants, pollsters, and political journalists. We did not include prepared statements, candidates, or those representing a campaign.

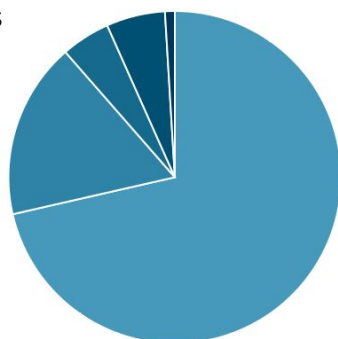
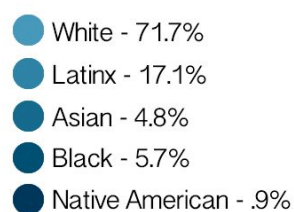
Using data listed on sources like Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and other internet platforms, we identified the race, gender, and approximate age of each person interviewed. Finally, to

confirm the demographics, Progress Texas Institute made an effort to reach out to the sources through email, social media, or organizational websites.

## FINDINGS

Despite Texas' status as one of the most diverse states in the nation, the political sources quoted by Texas media outlets are still overwhelmingly white and male. Within our dataset, 71.7% of unique sources identified as white and 71.7% identified as male. When we include duplicate pieces, or articles published by multiple outlets, 79% of sources were white and 77.1% were male.

Race - Unique Sources



Source: Progress Texas Institute

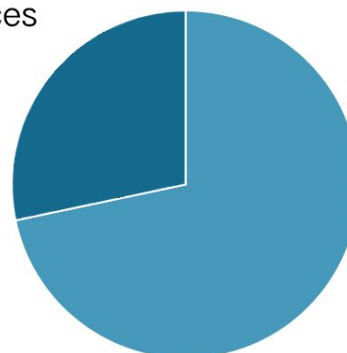
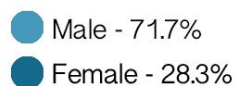
**Among the 107 unique instances of a quoted political source, journalists only interviewed a Black source six times.** Of those six instances, four of them occurred in stories about the same topic: Black Democrats criticizing the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Only one of those six instances occurred in a statewide publication, *The Texas Observer*.

In our dataset, journalists only interviewed an Asian source five times. Abhi Rahman, spokesman for the Texas Democratic Party, made up four of those instances.

While Texas outlets quote Latinx political sources at a higher rate, it still does not reflect the demographic makeup of the state. Latinx sources were quoted only 17.1% of the time, while Texas is nearly 40% Latinx.<sup>1</sup>

The gender makeup of the data also merits room for improvement. In the dataset, males make up 71.7% of sources. In comparison, Texas is 50% female.<sup>2</sup> We did not identify any non-binary sources.

Gender - Unique Sources



Source: Progress Texas Institute

When you expand the dataset to include the duplicate articles republished by other outlets (for example, an *AP News* article or wire service), the numbers are even

more staggering. Out of 1,351 published articles, only 8 of the articles contained a Black source, and only 8 contained an Asian source, totaling .6% each. Native American sources make up 16% of the data, but that is only due to one story (and one source) being republished over 200 times. In comparison, 1,067, or 79% of articles, contained a White source. Female sources were also published less often, totaling 22.9%.

## **CONCLUSION: STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE**

Our study from 2015 identified seven political experts who were almost exclusively interviewed by Texas media outlets. Our 2020 dataset included three of those experts, who were interviewed 11 times in total. While Texas media appears to now have a broader scope of experts, the demographic makeup needs improvement. In short, there is much more work to be done to represent the diversity of Texas in Texas journalism.

Particularly, it is alarming that we only found one Texas media outlet that interviewed a Black political source about the U.S. Senate race. This is even more surprising when one considers that two of the leading four candidates were black. Texas is approximately 13% Black and there is no excuse for excluding Black voices in political journalism. Furthermore, it is essential that journalists do not simply interview Black sources for stories about Black issues, a practice that positions whiteness as the norm.

Texas would also benefit from more Asian and Latinx voices represented in political stories. One in six Texans is an immigrant, originating from Mexico, India, El Salvador, Vietnam, Honduras, and more.<sup>3</sup> We hope to see more people from these communities included in political reporting.

Finally, women should not be underrepresented in political reporting, especially when more women than ever are running for office and leading political organizations.

Texans deserve their diverse viewpoints and backgrounds represented in the news they consume. Young people interested in politics deserve to see role models who look like them. In this 2020 election cycle, it is our hope that Texas journalists make an effort to include more BIPOC, women, and LGBTQIA+ sources in their reporting.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To aid journalists in finding a diversity of political sources to quote in articles, Progress Texas Institute has compiled a (non-comprehensive) list of academics, politicians, and political experts who can speak on a variety of topics. We encourage journalists to use this list as a starting point to find more BIPOC, women, and LGBTQIA+ people to interview in political

reporting. Journalists can also source from the [Women Also Know Stuff](#) and [POC Also Know Stuff](#) databases, which list political experts from underrepresented groups.

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**DOING OUR PART**

Progress Texas Institute is committed to uplifting diverse voices in our community to make ideas, opinions, and analysis heard by the people of Texas. As a nonprofit and nonpartisan organization, we offer media training and media relations support to those working in politics and interested in speaking to journalists on the record.

Similarly, if you are a journalist working on a news story and would like to diversify your sources, we can help. Please feel free to reach out and we will attempt to connect you with an appropriate expert.

And if you are a woman, person of color, or member of the LGBTQIA+ community who is interested in sharing your expertise on the record by working with media (or know someone who would be) and would like to learn more, reach out to us at [info@progresstexas.org](mailto:info@progresstexas.org).

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*This analysis was completed by the Progress Texas Institute, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization providing research, media best practices, and coalition support for progressive issues. Through these services, PTI seeks to promote a long-term communications infrastructure supporting progressive policy measures in Texas.*

<sup>1,2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/TX>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-texas>