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## An Open Letter to Texas Democrats: If You Want to Unseat Abbott, Beto is Not Your Man

BY SAM MILLS ON MARCH 1, 2022 • ( 1 COMMENT )



Credit: Gage Skidmore

On November 15, 2021, former U.S. Congressman (TX-16) Beto O'Rourke **announced** (<https://www.texastribune.org/2021/11/15/beto-orourke-texas-governor-2022/>) his candidacy for Governor of Texas. O'Rourke's statement was received much as one would expect: his Democratic supporters reacted with delight and

optimism while his detractors greeted the news with a mixture of scorn and mockful amusement. In many respects, the spectrum of opinions on O'Rourke is a microcosm of Texan political culture: a clash between the state's traditionally unwavering commitment to the Republican Party (and right-of-center politics more generally) and a rising tide of modern liberalism championed by a **growing chunk of Texans** (<https://apnews.com/article/health-texas-coronavirus-pandemic-race-and-ethnicity-gun-politics-7fc96749dd93d45ff0f2f9bab1fd7b40>) who are more likely to be young, non-White, or born outside the Lone Star State.

When O'Rourke challenged incumbent U.S. Senator Ted Cruz for his seat during the 2018 midterm elections, his success connecting with this budding base of Texas voters transformed the state's politics and the hopes of liberals across the country. In a state where a Democratic candidate for Governor was last victorious in 1990 (<https://www.nga.org/former-governors/texas/>) and a Democratic U.S. Senator was last elected in 1988 (<https://www.texastribune.org/2018/11/05/heres-how-texas-voted-every-us-senate-election-1961/>), O'Rourke defied the odds despite his defeat, coming within three percentage points of an upset. His campaign raised some **\$80 million** (<https://www.texastribune.org/2018/12/07/Beto-ORourke-80-million-raised/>) in funds, nearly twice as much as Cruz's. Regardless of his loss, Texas Democrats had reason to be optimistic about their future electoral prospects, and they had a strong contender in O'Rourke to lead them.

Or so they thought.

After his accomplishments during the 2018 electoral cycle, O'Rourke launched a dreadful presidential campaign that has snowballed into a major political liability. Since his failed bid for the White House, he has spent most of his time in the political wilderness, courting grassroots support for causes such as voting rights and ERCOT reform. But for as much as his supporters reference his recent activities as evidence of his sincerity and passion, he has to do more if he wants to be an agent of change from the Governor's Mansion – he needs to overhaul his image as a candidate. However, in this brutal political ecosystem where perception is everything, O'Rourke likely doesn't stand a chance of doing so.

O'Rourke has a history of making statements that can easily be understood as disconnected from Texas and its people. Perhaps the most damning of these came during a September 2019 debate in Houston where he **remarked** (<https://youtu.be/7vEnTjs2RV0>), "Hell yes, we're going to take your AR-15, your AK-47" to a crowd that subsequently drowned him in applause. That rapture – which ironically probably delighted O'Rourke at that moment – can effortlessly be touted by Republicans as evidence of hordes of tyrannical liberals cheering on the destruction of quintessentially Texan traditions and values. Even though **many Texans**

([http://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/archive/html/poll/features/gun\\_control\\_feature/slide6.html](http://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/archive/html/poll/features/gun_control_feature/slide6.html)) support stricter gun control, O'Rourke's choice of words made his position woefully distinct from that of the average voter. His statement did not call for

more common-sense firearms regulations while reaffirming the importance of the Second Amendment. Instead, his diction bluntly endorsed a government-led seizure of civilian weaponry.

That audience was foolish to cheer such a gaffe. Now, the GOP not only has evidence to claim that Democratic politicians want to disarm citizens, but the party can also demonize liberal voters as advocates for tyranny, strengthening its (generally very successful) strategy of appealing to voters on culture war issues in the process. O'Rourke, to his credit, has recognized his mistake and **attempted to rectify it** (<https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/593735-orourke-on-past-remarks-about-taking-away-guns-im-not-interested-in-taking>) by walking back his 2019 comments and defending Texans' Second Amendment rights. However, the specter of his words is likely too powerful for him to escape. Even if he were to distance himself from his remarks successfully, Republicans could simply attack him on the grounds that he "flip-flopped" on his positions – just as every other callous liberal elite does.

Even less fortunate for O'Rourke and his allies is that yet another of his weaknesses lies beyond his control. Many of the tens of millions of dollars pledged to his 2018 Senate campaign came from donors outside Texas. Although **some evidence** (<https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/16/politics/beto-orourke-contributions-where-was-money-from/index.html>) suggests a clear majority of donations to his campaign came from Texas ZIP codes, the extent to which out-of-state contributors supported O'Rourke in 2018 **worried even many Democrats** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/12/us/politics/ted-cruz-beto-orourke-poll.html>), who sought to retake control of the Senate by winning other close races across the country. Meanwhile, Republicans **have argued** (<https://apnews.com/article/hollywood-california-archive-texas-ted-cruz-bd72228fcc6f482ea2d5552c66191571>) that the large sums of campaign money originating from outside Texas, particularly states like California and New York, are additional evidence of O'Rourke's detachment from Texans and their interests. Despite the damage caused to his image by these accusations of occupying the ranks of "coastal liberal elites" and serving their interests rather than those of Texans, O'Rourke and his campaign have said little in response, perhaps rendering the GOP's claims correct by default in the eyes of many voters.

Put simply, O'Rourke has failed to tailor his campaign to Texas' distinctive culture and values. As Texans, we pride ourselves on our uniqueness and distinct identity. We were once an independent country, vanquishing superior Mexican forces in battles that remain legendary points of statewide pride. We possess a sense of belonging here that non-Texans cannot feel. We are defined by a culture that is truly sui generis: one that is part Southern, part Western, and part Southwestern, but fully Texan. Of the fifty stars on the American flag, ours is the one that stands out the most – enough to make us deserving of the moniker "The Lone Star State." Sure, this sense of "Texas exceptionalism" (<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/spiritoftexas175th/article/Texas-is-an-idea-as-much-as-a-state-of-the-union-15772673.php>) is arguably weaker today than it ever has been, but that

doesn't mean that Texans don't remain proud of their lack of conformity with the rest of the United States. And it certainly doesn't mean that Texans don't want to elect a Governor who embodies the spirit of our state and fights for Texas and Texas alone.

Above all, this is the element O'Rourke is missing in his quest to win this year's gubernatorial election. Sure, he's an El Paso native and has dedicated years of public service to Texas, but he could be just as fitting a candidate for office in California, New York, or Massachusetts. After seemingly receiving as much fanfare from liberal Californians as from Texas Democrats in 2018, his credentials as a crusader for Texas and Texans were already questionable. Following a disastrous campaign for President, any semblance of that image has altogether disintegrated. Incumbent Republican Governor Greg Abbott comfortably leads O'Rourke

(<https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/2022/governor/tx/texas-governor-abbott-vs-orourke-7376.html>) in the polls not because O'Rourke is a lousy candidate per se, but because he is a lousy candidate for *Texas* and *Texans*. Texans want a leader who is decisively committed to them, their state, and their values. To put it bluntly, O'Rourke is not authentic enough to meet these standards.

So, Texas Democrats, if you are serious about taking the Governor's Mansion, do not settle for Beto O'Rourke. Republicans continue to succeed in a state that should be more politically competitive because they know how to present themselves as "true Texans." Why not take that page from their playbook? If you want to stand a chance of victory this November (and in the future, for that matter), commit to a candidate who can show they're Texan through and through.



## Published by Sam Mills

Sam Mills is a second-year student from Dallas, Texas, majoring in International Relations and Asian Studies and pursuing a certificate in Security Studies as a member of the Liberal Arts Honors Program. His interests include foreign policy, political economy, political culture, history, philosophy, and theology. When not consumed by his studies or incessant thinking about these matters, Sam enjoys running, reading, watching documentaries, and spending time with his close friends and family. [View all posts by Sam Mills](#)

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hey genius

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how about suggesting someone who could unseat the extremists, if not a more sensible moderate like Beto ? Or are all Texans doomed to the radical fringe called the Republican Party?



([https://thetexasorator.com/2022/03/01/an-open-letter-to-texas-democrats-if-you-want-to-unseat-abbott-beto-is-not-your-man/?like\\_comment=52744&\\_wpnonce=b3c5d8cb59](https://thetexasorator.com/2022/03/01/an-open-letter-to-texas-democrats-if-you-want-to-unseat-abbott-beto-is-not-your-man/?like_comment=52744&_wpnonce=b3c5d8cb59))

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