

New RGV Survey: Political Efficacy

ABOUT 50 % RGV RESIDENTS BELIEVE PEOPLE DO NOT HAVE ANY SAY OVER WHAT GOVERNMENT DOES

A team of UTRGV Political Science Professors, Dr. Natasha Altema-McNeely, Dr. Dongkyu Kim, and Dr. Mi-son Kim, fielded the RGV Our Voice/Nuestra Voz Survey through the UTRGV Center for Survey Research & Policy Analysis (CSRPA) in 2018. The survey found that:

- about 1 in 2 RGV residents believe that people do have any say over what government does.
- about 1 in 2 RGV residents believe that public officials do not care much about what people think.

In response to the question, “Tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: people like me don’t have any say over what the government does,” about 1 in 2 RGV residents—50.3 percent—agreed with the statement. This number is lower than the national average. According to the 2018 General Social Survey conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, the same survey question demonstrated that about 41 percent American citizens shares the same sentiment. Democracy is at bay in America today. The trend seems more severe in the Valley. RGV residents are about 10% more likely than the national average to say that, “people like me don’t have any say over what the government does.” Political efficacy, the public belief that people can influence political affairs, is low among RGV residents.

The cross-tabulations with some demographic factors give us some interesting insights. The result does not seem to be related to gender. The percentage of those who agree with the statement that “people like me do not have any say over what the government does” is about 49% for male and about 51% for female. The difference is not statistically meaningful. Levels of education in the Valley fail to affect the low level of political efficacy. Although an increase in education does reduce the proportion of people who agree with the statement, the difference is not that large. Among RGV residents with a high school diploma, about 53% agree with the statement. Among those who have a Master’s degree and beyond, still about 50% RGV

residents agree with the statement. Age also does not make a significant change to people’s belief about their own influence to the political system.

Table 1.1 Political Efficacy in RGV: Gender & Education

	Male	Female	none	< 9th	9th - 11th	High school	Some college	BA	MA <
Strongly agree	18.75	17.53	0	15.09	15.91	17.48	21.05	21.62	19.44
Agree	30.65	33.77	27.27	32.08	30.68	35.66	31.58	28.83	36.11
Neither	14.58	15.26	9.09	16.98	17.05	14.69	16.54	10.81	11.11
Disagree	29.17	27.27	54.55	32.08	27.27	26.57	23.31	31.53	30.56
Strongly disagree	6.85	6.17	9.09	3.77	9.09	5.59	7.52	7.21	2.78
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Party identification does seem to be associated with Valley residents’ low level of political efficacy. Among those who identify themselves as Republican, about 40% agrees with the statement that “people like me do not have any say over what the government does.” For both Democrats and independent, about 50% agrees with the statement. Accordingly, about 42% of Republicans believe that people can have a say over what government does while only 34% of Democrats believe so.

Table 2.1 Political Efficacy in RGV: Age & Party Identification

	18 - 29	30 - 49	50 - 69	70 - 91	Independent	Dem	GOP
Strongly agree	21.83	22.58	14.37	13.21	20.74	16.67	13.79
Agree	29.58	32.26	33.13	33.96	31.77	34.11	27.59
Neither	14.79	14.52	13.13	11.32	14.72	14.73	16.09
Disagree	31.69	24.19	28.75	32.08	27.42	27.52	33.33
Strongly disagree	2.11	6.45	10.63	9.43	5.35	6.98	9.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

In our survey, respondents were also asked, “Tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: Public officials don’t care much about what people like me think.” Although it is a similar question, it asks how people feel about government officials’ efforts to embrace what people want. We have a very similar result. About 1 in 2 RGV residents agree with the statement. Only 24% RGV residents believe that government officials care about their opinions. In recent decades, the sentiment that democracy is at bay is widely shared. Our survey results reveal that the negative sentiment is stronger on the Mexico-U.S. border in South Texas.

Methodology: In spring 2018, the UTRGV Center for Survey Research & Policy Analysis fielded the 2018 **RGV Our Voice/Nuestra Voz Survey**. Randomly selected RGV residents aged 18 years or older residing in Cameron, Hidalgo and Starr counties were asked about their perceptions of border security, immigration policy, NAFTA, gun control, disaster preparedness and satisfaction with community services. A team of student interviewers administered random-digit dialed telephone surveys in both Spanish and English. The sample of respondents totaled 660 (+/- 4 percent MOE). The 2018

RGV Our Voice/Nuestra Voz survey was funded by the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Student Success, and P-16 Integration *Transforming Our World Strategic Plan*. For more information regarding survey methodology, please contact csr@utrgv.edu.

About the Center for Survey Research & Policy Analysis: The Center for Survey Research & policy Analysis (www.utrgv.edu/center-for-survey-research) at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley was established in 1998 to study and report on issues of local concern in the Rio Grande Valley and to provide training opportunities and research experience to students in survey research methods. Today, the Center continues its mission to provide timely applied research, and technical assistance and consulting services to local and state agencies, non-profit organizations and private business associations throughout the Rio Grande Valley, as well as to the UTRGV community. The Center's capabilities include survey design and administration, public opinion polling, data collection and analysis, program evaluation, needs assessment, technical assistance and policy analysis. For more information or to discuss a potential project contact csr@utrgv.edu.

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