



Politics Council hosts Bob Stein of Rice University to discuss Houston voter participation and polling analysis

The Partnership held its quarterly Politics Council on August 18 in the Partnership board room. Partnership Public Policy Manager Ted Geer welcomed Bob Stein, Urban Politics Fellow at the Baker Institute for Public Policy and Professor of Political Science at Rice University, as the Council speaker. Stein presented on voter participation in the City of Houston and his polling analysis on 2015 Houston municipal election.

According to Stein, voter turnout in Harris County is around 20 percent. However, runoff elections tend to be lower. The Hispanic population has more than doubled, yet they are the most underperforming group at the polls. The largest increase is Hispanic millennials (18-34 years old). "One thing we know about millennials is that they vote," said Stein.

Stein had three primary conclusions. First, voter participation has declined in both general and runoff city elections since 1979. Second, the change in the length of time between general and runoff elections, number of candidate and non-candidate contests on the runoff ballot, Saturday run-off elections and the adoption of term limits are unrelated to voter turnout for either general or runoff elections. And lastly, the decline in turnout over time may be attributed to the change in the composition of City of Houston electorate, specifically the growth of Hispanic eligible voting age population and the aging of Anglo and African-American voting age population.

As far as policy issues, over half of all respondents cited traffic and transportation as the most important problem facing the city. There is also little support for raising either sales or property taxes to address any of the most important problems facing the City cited by survey respondents. Most voters support the current three two-year terms for elected city officeholders; while likely voters are slightly more receptive to changing the current law.

The next Politics Council is Wednesday, November 4.