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**SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I VOTE? „BETO
AN UNDERDOG” AND HIS MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN**

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ORCID no. 0000-0001-7856-4840**e-mail:** norbert.tomaszewski@uwr.edu.pl**Abstract**

Beto O'Rourke's 2018 Senate bid resulted in one of the most interesting political campaigns of past decade. Even though he was less experienced than his rival and ran as an underdog, O'Rourke managed to attract thousands of donors and almost made a political upset, by losing to Ted Cruz by a small margin. The article focuses on his road to nationwide recognition and the use of new media, which allowed him to reach out to the voters.

Keywords: midterm elections, Texas, underdog, social media, mobilization**Some theoretical approaches: celebrity politics, social media and modern political campaigning**

When Barack Obama made one of this century's biggest political upsets in the United States by overperforming during US Presidential Primaries in 2008, political pundits all over the world realized that a smart use of new media may be the key to attract young voters. Over a decade later, these two factors are one of the major parts that shape modern political campaigning, allowing politicians to increase their outreach and their fans to connect with them. The 2016 presidential primaries proved to be the first fully interactive political campaign, as all candidates used the internet as a fundraising tool. This has been particularly important for the progressives and underdogs such as Bernie Sanders in order to show that their base consists of average voters and contrast him with other candidates, who eagerly used the help of Super PAC's. The split in the Democratic Party, which partially led to Donald Trump's victory, has also shown how divided the supporters are, as the amount of Democratic voters supporting progressive platforms has increased. The primary contest between two main rivals, Sanders and Hillary Clinton, resulted in "*Bernie Bros*" (hardcore Sanders fans) casting their presidential ballots for third-party candidates (especially Jill Stein).

This perfectly shows how pop culture has influenced 21st century political marketing, as the candidate no longer needs to be the party favourite if they are “hip” enough and are able to attract a wide audience, combining core supporters with the undecided ones. In order to create a community that would not only vote for them but also help to run the campaign by becoming a volunteer, politician needs to appeal to the voter by opening up and showing their more personal side. These kind of tactics have been effective ever since the mass media became more accessible.

Although the power of celebrity endorsements has only recently become a topic in academic science, in 1944 Leo Lowenthal described celebrity power when researching biographies of famous people. Custen (2001) further researched Lowenthal’s analysis by stating how the “morality of American citizens has changed and what lessons they would learn from the magazines” as the role of the biographies was to prepare the “average Joe” to accept their place in the social structure by “letting them resign from the unreachable goals”. B.Z. Erdogan (2018) argues that celebrity endorsers are perceived as “dynamics with attractive and likeable qualities”. The value of a celebrity is shifted from their brand towards the product they are recommending, which makes it easier for the customer (that has a relationship with an ascribed celebrity) to purchase (Erdogan, 1999). The approach in cultural studies blends these theories with social science (Tomaszewski, 2018: 162). McCracken’s (1986) “meaning transfer model” contributes to the idea of cultural meaning, which is “located in three places: the culturally constituted world, the consumer good and the individual consumer” and which “moves in a trajectory at two points of transfer: world to good and good to individual”. The value of a famous person can associate them with the product (for example, Chuck Norris and guns), which allows the company to hire the endorser who has the connection with the consumer due to similar interests or background. The customer connects the celebrity to product. Hackley (1999) further explains this theory by adding that the “meaning transfer” are “culturally embedded message codes”. Erica Austin et al. (2008) acknowledged that external celebrities, meaning those who do not personally take part in the electioneering process, who attract the attention of the mass media “influence their followers in thinking positively about political processes, therefore having the potential to reach out and mobilize the apathetic public” (Tomaszewski 2017: 138). This can be particularly important for the engagement of young people who are “more likely to agree with a position when a pop-culture celebrity endorsed it” (Tomaszewski, 2017: 138). The more a person feels connected to a celebrity representing their community, the more they will try to follow the steps of the celebrity who was raised in it (Jackson, 2008). They perceive celebrities as the “chosen ones” (Tomaszewski 2017: 99) who share a similar background to themselves. What makes celebrity endorsements especially important in politics, at least, theoretically, as their support is mostly motivated by their political views. It all obviously depends on the role that the celebrity plays in pop culture. For example, it is easier for Chris Martin to fight for the environmental justice while being a pop-rock star instead of being a heavy metal vocalist (Boykoff, Goodman and Curtis, 2009). The celebrity’s influence on a discourse is “operationalised only in terms of power and position of the audience that has allowed it to circulate” (Marshall, 1997). Political campaigns implement this knowledge in modern campaigns, simply because there is a decrease of trust towards the politicians. As a result, celebrities can easily fulfil the role of being a representative of the ascribed society (Tomaszewski, 2018: 161; 2017: 151).

Marland and Lalancette (2014: 135) distinguish two types of the external celebrity endorsers: publicists and fundraisers. Publicists focus on attracting media buzz (Tomaszewski, 2017: 100), whereas fundraisers not only support the candidate in the media, but also organize paid campaign events, during which they collect money for them.

However, celebrity politics would not be as important as they are now without the growing influence of new media, defined by Logan (2010) as “those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing”. Beginning in 2004, the Web was reshaped from a system that focuses on providing information to a one that concentrates on the communication between the user and community building (Fuchs, 2012: 3; Tomaszewski, 2020). This is the development of Web 2.0, a term coined by the O’Reilly Media Group (2015) and described as a form of development of standard media that allowed subscribers to change their policies and evaluate their ideas to build a better product. The modern internet user communicates with other users through the exchange of content, which can be identified as a form of cyber-socializing; this is mainly happening through blogs and social media (O’Reilly, 2005).

Elisa Serafinelli (2018: 4), in her work *New Social Communication of Photography*, provides a new approach to new media by arguing that online photo sharing allows users to perform, feel emotions and engage with each other. According to Serafinelli (2018: 6), new social marketing strategies “rely on users’ voyeuristic interests in watching and being watched and it is that which motivates the practice of photo sharing”. This approach to visual practises matches the current approaches of campaign strategists and politicians to show more of the personal sides of candidates by sharing photo content or launching livestreams on their public profiles.

The aim of this research is to focus on which campaign tactics have proven to be the best ones, especially when choosing new media. Furthermore, it tries to acknowledge how a straight, white, male politician can run on an underdog platform and still be reliable to the voter. The methodological approach selected for this article is content analysis of the data collected from the internet. This is particularly crucial in the Instagram section, where O’Rourke’s Instagram posts were split into three different categories, according on their content.

This articles aims to answer the following questions:

- Do the midterm elections allow candidates to shine just like during the presidential bids?
- How to efficiently combine traditional and new forms of political campaigning?
- How to attract the millennial vote and mobilize them to get out the vote?

Beto O’Rourke knew the answer. Finally, yet importantly, Texas demographics are changing, and the research will try to determine whether the state would soon be turning into a swing state (one where both Democrats and Republicans receive strong support) due to the increasing percentage of millennial and Latinx voters.

What is a political underdog, and why was O’Rourke one of them?

Twelve years after 2008 presidential elections, the interest in politics on the internet is thriving, making modern political campaigning without new media tools unimaginable. This article focuses on Democrat Beto O’Rourke’s 2018 Texas senate seat campaign against

Republican incumbent Ted Cruz mainly because of the fact that he emerged, (thanks to his effective usage of social media), from a barely known House of Representatives member towards a political celebrity with a huge pop-cultural value. O'Rourke did not seek to run for re-election in Texas's 16th congressional district. He ran for the U.S. Senate seat against the former 2016 Republican presidential candidate Cruz.

The El Paso native's political career began in 2005 when O'Rourke became a member of the El Paso City Council from the 8th district. O'Rourke in 2012 decided to run for a seat in the US House of Representatives by challenging conservative Democrat Silvestre Reyes, the eight-term incumbent. As he won against all odds, by running a liberal campaign that promised to end the war on drugs, this was the first time that the underdog concept in American politics had helped him. According to K. Trautman (2010: 1), the underdog has a particular appeal to Americans, as "their society is defined by concerned about equality and fairness". It is especially characteristic for Democratic Party candidates, as in this concept the underdogs are combining the liberal and progressive values, such as the fight for fairness (Trautman, 2010: 2). Reyes was an easy target as he was publicly endorsed by Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, allowed O'Rourke to position himself as an anti-party establishment candidate (Aguilar, 2012). The 16th congressional district of Texas is 98.36 percent urban area and around 81 percent of its voters there are of Hispanic descent. The polls were clear that whoever would win the Democratic primary, will win the Congressional seat.

O'Rourke managed to win the primary despite being attacked numerous by Reyes for his support for the legalization of marijuana. Pundits said that this was the first time that the member of Congress lost his job for "being too tough on the war on drugs" (Grim & Mackey, 2019).

Before proceeding to the United States Senate election in Texas in 2018, the underdog model works in Democratic candidate campaigns needs to be explained. According to Jo Freeman (1986: 327), "Republicans perceive themselves as insiders even when they are out of power and Democrats perceive themselves as outsiders even when they are in power." Trautman (2010: 4) provides two methodological models (Figures 1.1 and 1.2) that explain what determines a candidate as being an underdog. By using biography, ideology, campaign dynamics and public policies of the candidates, he focuses on three aspects:

Process:

Why did everyone expect the candidate to lose? Why were they perceived as an underdog?

Image:

Did the candidate represent themselves as an underdog? Did the media create their image or was it the part of their biography?

Substance:

Were there any particular ideas in their political program that helped them position as an underdog?

This article will try to answer these questions by using the figures proposed in his book.

Figure 1. What makes an underdog?

Source: The Underdog in American Politics: The Democratic Party and Liberal Values by K. Trautman

Figure 2. Relation between the analytical methods and components of the underdog concept

Source: The Underdog in American Politics: The Democratic Party and Liberal Values by K. Trautman

What is more interesting is the fact that O'Rourke is a rather privileged member of American society (white, hetero male with rich parents-in-law) and yet he managed to position himself as a true underdog that young moderates can appeal to. How was O'Rourke able to mobilize young people to vote for him? Was he truly an underdog or a fake one? Does he have enough charisma to continue becoming one of the most important politicians in the Democratic Party, even though he did not win the Senate elections? Was his campaign that good or did the changing demography of Texas help him?

Politician or an indie rock celebrity? The beginning of the campaign

O'Rourke's Senate bid looked like an already lost battle. The last time a Democratic candidate won the Senate seat in Texas was in 1988, when Lloyd Bentsen won his fourth term.

What is more, Texas was a Republican trifecta, with the Republicans holding the governorship, majority in the state Senate and the state House.

It is worth noting that the midterm elections often reflect the approval ratings of the president in charge. This mechanism is more likely to be observed during the second-term midterm of the incumbent POTUS (President of the United States), (for example, in 1950, 1974, 1986 or 2006) (Kilgore 2015: 3). Donald Trump, however, has been such an antagonizing public persona that without a doubt in some cases his decrease in popularity charts could help the Democratic candidate, especially in Texas with Ted Cruz as the Republican opponent, who was crushed by Trump during the primaries.

As he announced that he was running for a Senate seat, O'Rourke from the very beginning stressed how he is running against all odds. He compared his campaign to famous underdog cases and told the El Paso Times that he is a member of the community that "produces winners against all odds" and that it is important to serve "those who feel ignored by government" (Anderson, 2017). His campaign raised less money than Cruz's during the first period of the campaign, and pundits believed that O'Rourke's refusal to use help from Super PAC's combined with a lack of name recognition led to him losing financial support. This situation was quite similar to the one that Bernie Sanders faced during the 2016 Democratic primaries. This allowed O'Rourke to position him as a financial underdog, just like Sanders who, thanks to small donations, could attack Hillary Clinton for receiving financial support from Super PAC's (Tomaszewski, 2017: 145). Following the Sanders path (even though he was not running a progressive campaign), O'Rourke's grassroots campaign started to bring results, as at the last quarter of 2017 he outraised Cruz for the first time. The campaign raised an additional \$2.4 million from 55,000 individual contributions (Hansler, 2018). His name's recognition was still the biggest issue to tackle, as according to an October 2017 survey from the Texas Politics Project, 53 percent of the respondents did not know whether they thought favourably of him or not. At this time in late 2017, his campaign started to generate more buzz in the media, which led to more people learning about his political program and (what is more important) about his past.

According to many experts, his likability was the key to the fundraisers. Even though O'Rourke and Ted Cruz are almost the same age, O'Rourke looks more boy-ish, looking less like a regular politician and more like a cool musician from an old indie band recommended by Pitchfork. Even though his campaign was heavily dependent on Web 2.0 tools, O'Rourke knew that in order to gather funds, he needed to combine these tactics with campaign rallies and door-to-door events. Before getting nationwide attention, O'Rourke was already surprising everyone in Texas with his campaigning style. His refusal to use campaign consultants and pollsters allowed him to present a more human face on the world of politics. The only money spent on consultants was in order to focus on the more technical aspects of the campaign, such as \$24,000 spent on Revolution Messaging, a digital agency that helped Bernie Sanders during the 2016 primaries (Livingston 2017).

His campaign was announced through Facebook Live and it began with him talking to the camera while going to an event full of his supporters. The video perfectly explains how his phenomena works as his public image deeply relies on earnestness (Hooks 2017). O'Rourke is handsome, looks vital and has a calm voice, which is why he can post as much content on the internet as he could. This is contrary to Ted Cruz, who is perceived as unsympathetic and his presidential bid was heavily damaged by the memes on social media (Tomaszewski, 2017: 110). By experimenting with new media by livestreaming his

daily activities on Facebook or Instagram, O'Rourke was creating a new, remarkable, DIY-style of campaigning. His indie/punk rock past was only helping his case, as more and more people were learning that he used to be in the band with the founder of The Mars Volta, Cedric Bixler-Zavala. The "indie cred" is another important factor that adds to the Beto-as-an-underdog persona, as it attracted many millennials who were raised on alternative music and pop cultural media outlets such as BuzzFeed or the Huffington Post. His first rise in popularity in an independent community could be acknowledged back in 2016 as he posted a video on YouTube showing how border crossings work in El Paso while listening to *Alien Lanes* by Guided by Voices. The screenshot of him showing the album was shared by the band and received around 1.4 thousand reactions by April 2019. A 2017 Texas Observer article covered how O'Rourke's experience as a member of DIY indie community helped him with his grassroots campaign. Julie Napolin, a former band member with O'Rourke, stressed that "punk meant working with what you have, and community, and making things happen together" (Hooks, 2017). As his generation did not yet have full access to internet tools and could only dream of a fully functioning social media, O'Rourke "knew what it's like to build a community around face-to-face contact around cafes, bookstores and record stores" (2017). The author of the article argues that this experience was somehow a political training for O'Rourke.

At the beginning of 2018, O'Rourke's senate campaign started to gain nationwide traction. Much to everyone's surprise, O'Rourke announced that he raised \$6.7 million during the first quarter of 2018, more than any candidate nationwide. The anti-PAC tactics started to pay off, combined with his so-called "I'm here" strategy. By travelling all over Texas, the politician from El Paso was demonstrating that he cared not only for his mostly urban voters in El Paso but also for moderate GOP supporters across Texas who were concerned about the "radicalization" of the Republican party (Benson 2018). O'Rourke and his campaign stressed how he wanted to represent everyone and that politics is not about representing the party interests, but people's interests. Fundraising statistics showed that his campaign was not influenced by the national Democratic Party, as 49.99 percent of his donations were coming from Texas (Cilizza, 2018).

Do Texan voters care about the identity politics?

In March 2018, Ted Cruz's radio ad attacked O'Rourke for using a Spanish-sounding nickname, Beto, to appeal to Latinx voters. Beto is a Mexican nickname for Roberto, and O'Rourke's family has used it ever since O'Rourke was young to distinguish him from his grandfather Robert. As a response, O'Rourke's Twitter account posted a picture of him as a child in a "Beto" sweater. Running for Congress with a short, Latin-sounding nickname helped him to perform well within the Hispanic community (remembering that he had unseated a Latinx representative), especially in Texas, where according to the latest census 38.4 percent of voters are Latinx. What is important is the fact that the politician is also popular within this community because he speaks Spanish fluently, as opposed to Ted Cruz, who is just of Hispanic origin. The outcome of this news was interesting, as some people started to share the news that Ted Cruz was listed as Rafael "Ted" Cruz in his Harvard yearbook. In this debate about identity, Tara Golshan (2018) explained that O'Rourke was abandoning his white identity to side with the immigrant culture, while Cruz was doing the opposite. O'Rourke had the Spanish language advantage over Cruz,

which his campaign staff wanted to use. O'Rourke invited Cruz to participate in six debates, from which two of them were supposed to be in Spanish. Cruz had to admit in front of journalists that his Spanish is not good and he would not be able to participate in such debates, even though he accepts the invitation to take part in the debates all over Texas (Svitek, 2018).

During the second quarter of 2018, O'Rourke's campaign managed to raise \$10.4 million, raising the number of individual contributions from 141,000 to 215,714. Seventy percent of these donations were coming from Texas and the average contribution was \$33 (Svitek, 2018). At that time, O'Rourke has already visited each of the 254 counties in Texas, which was quite unusual as most candidates focus on urban areas, especially Democratic areas. According to Colin Strother (Yaffe-Bellany, 2018), a Democratic strategist in Texas, candidates tend to visit Houston, Dallas, Austin and San Antonio, with one trip to El Paso.

Despite O'Rourke's Senate campaign being Latinx friendly, it did underperform in southern counties located by the US-Mexico border. Having raised that much money, it should have been easy for him to win there against Democratic opponent Sema Hernandez, but she managed to earn more votes. This may be because of the fact that the demographic data shows that these counties have a high percentage of Latinx-American population. For instance, 95.2 percent of people in Webb County are of Latinx descent with similar demographics in Maverick County (95 percent). During the 2018 municipal elections in Laredo, Webb County, all of the candidates were Hispanic. O'Rourke did not have much chance winning these counties against the Latinx rival, even though he was popular amongst this community, as he lost Webb County by 1,649 votes (Murphy and Najmabadi, 2018).

O'Rourke's approach and political program contained progressive ideas related to his stances on healthcare, abortion and gun control. One of his most important policies, however, was to abolish the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This was one of his most controversial stances, one which politicians usually avoided in order to be perceived as a supporter of bipartisanship. O'Rourke later dismissed this policy by stating that abolishing ICE would not solve the issue of immigrant family separations at the border. Furthermore, he said that a thoughtful policy that would unite people from both parties would help tackle the problem of deportations (Ramirez, 2018). This shows perfectly how O'Rourke's campaign avoided controversial subjects in order not to offend any potential voters. This pattern was repeated during the moment that elevated his campaign, when in August 2018 O'Rourke was asked about American football player Colin Kaepernick's kneeling protest. His response and support on how important non-violent protests such as Kaepernick's became viral (O'Rourke 2018). A few days later, he admitted that he does not have any problem with the Nike boycott linked to Kaepernick signing a deal with the company, by stressing that any form of non-violent protest is important for democracy in the US (TMZ, 2018).

Building a path to success with digital advertising

In October 2018, O'Rourke announced that he raised \$38 million and started to irritate party officials, as he was still losing at the polls and such money could help other Democratic candidates. The average contribution during this quarter was around \$47 (Whitney, 2018). The amount O'Rourke's campaign spent on digital advertising was remarkable. By

mid-October 2018, his staff spent \$12 million on digital advertising, around 30 percent of all campaign spending. According to a Google Transparency Report, he spent more money than any other midterm candidate on Google Ads, (\$1,944,000 on 220 adverts). Between May 2018 and October 2018, around \$5.3 million had been spent on Facebook adverts; by October 16, 2018, around 5,300 ad variations had been launched on his fan page (Whitney, 2018). This digital fundraising success was heavily influenced by O'Rourke's attitude on social media, as he not only livestreamed campaign events but also everyday situations. For example, in a video while filling his car with gas, O'Rourke explained how the money spent on gas for a Dodge Caravan (\$49.46) would help him meet with voters. During this livestream video, O'Rourke showed how small contributions could help his campaign (O'Rourke 2018). Another livestream video from the campaign showed O'Rourke buying donuts and driving towards his next campaign event (O'Rourke, 2018).

It is worth noting though that his social media activity tactics were different on particular platforms. Facebook was O'Rourke's first choice for livestreaming and talking about political issues, knowing that this is the main tool that will allow him to fundraise. The more content he shared, the more buzz he created around his profile, regardless of the fact of whether he was livestreaming a political event or talking to cats. O'Rourke wanted to overturn the low turnout of aged 18–29 voters, as in 2014 midterms only 13 percent of this age group voted (Guynn et al., 2018). If he was serious about unseating Cruz, his campaign staff needed to make a big “get out the vote” campaign within the youth and Latinx voters, and there are not any tools more effective for performance among millennials than Facebook. The content on his profile page was a mix of issue-oriented politics with the pieces that had the potential to go viral, such as him hugging kittens or riding a skateboard after debates with Ted Cruz. These kind of videos portrayed O'Rourke as someone relatable to young voters. The closer it got to election day (November 6), the more money O'Rourke spent on Facebook ads. Between 22–26 October, O'Rourke's campaign spent around \$1 million on 90 ads that were viewed around 32 million times. The ads focused on getting out the vote efforts, and some were presented in Spanish. On average, senate campaign staffs spent around 10 percent of funds on digital advertising, whereas O'Rourke spent around 30 percent (Guynn et al., 2018).

Even though Facebook livestreams and Instagram stories were the most important part of his campaign on this platform, O'Rourke also focused on minority voters when posting content. Astead W. Herndon (2018), a reporter from the New York Times, wrote on Twitter that O'Rourke's Instagram success relies on the fact that he is using social media as if he was an influencer rather than a politician. From the beginning of 2018 until the end of the campaign, his Instagram account posted around 830 pictures and short videos, with 288 of them posted during the final month of campaigning.

The content of O'Rourke's Instagram posts can be split into three groups:

- **Pictures with fans representing minorities:** Knowing that he was performing well with white millennials, O'Rourke needed to attract ethnic minority voters. He often posed in photos with African-American, Latinx and Asian-American supporters. He was also shown in Instagram photos supporters with disabilities, which coped well with his policies for public healthcare.
- **Campaign rally content:** These contained pictures of O'Rourke performing, invitations to events and general press information.

- **Beto-as-an-influencer content/so-called “dadcore” content:** This group consists of all the other campaign material that shows O’Rourke’s personal side, such as of him sporting a Metallica hoodie, his JFK mural, or of him playing with his children, a recreation of the Beatles’ Abbey Road album cover with friends, funny dogs, and of his children sleeping on the back of the car.

What draws most attention, however, are the pictures of O’Rourke wearing sweaty shirts (usually blue or light grey ones to increase the visibility of the sweat). This became a “Beto thing” with social media users admiring his hard-working attitude and it allowed him to target Texas voters. His supporters perceived these kinds of photos as proof that he is campaigning to win over every voter (Petersen, 2018). Additionally, some on social media commented that Ted Cruz was not sweating that much, meaning that he is not working that hard. One Instagram post is particularly interesting: on 19 October, 2018, O’Rourke’s Instagram account posted a picture of him sweating through a blue shirt, holding grain and a small frog, things that could be perceived as hard-working essentials. By the end of the campaign, O’Rourke’s account had around 550,000 followers.

The “shirt case” also shows how his campaign staff focused on digital advertising and social media content, as through new media they were showing traditional ways of canvassing, which were crucial, especially for such large state. A sweaty shirt is not a standard dress code for a politician (Sugar, 2018), and that is why people were attracted to O’Rourke—as if he was a local hard-working activist, far from being a Washington insider. Getting out the vote was the key to even thinking of winning against Cruz. According to the University of Texas at Austin, in 2016 Texas ranked 47th in the US in voter turnout and 44th in voter registration. Donating and volunteering was also not important for Texans, as it ranked 40th in donating and 39th in volunteering (Jennings & Bhandari, 2018). In order to win, O’Rourke needed to mobilize young Democrats. The volunteer network created by O’Rourke’s campaign staff knocked on 2.8 million doors, sent more than 10 million texts and made 20 million phone calls (Miller, 2018). On the final Saturday before Election Day, the campaign knocked on 225,000 doors (Miller, 2018). O’Rourke focused on campaign videos with first of them being shot entirely with an iPhone (Cunningham, 2018). He did not forget though about the traditional media as he spent \$9.9 million on TV ads during third-quarter spending. The ads ran both in English and Spanish.

Celebrity endorsers: key to getting out the vote?

O’Rourke’s mobilization campaign relied heavily on celebrity endorsements. The amount of A-list celebrities that fell in love with O’Rourke’s charisma is extensive. He was supported by Amy Schumer, Paul Rudd, Aubrey Plaza, Jake Gyllenhaal and Jim Carrey. Some of his celebrity endorsers held more influence than others. For instance, NBA star LeBron James shared O’Rourke’s message regarding the kneeling protest, and this allowed O’Rourke to reach out to James’ 41 million followers. The video that he shared from “Now This” news had 12.8 million views until August 23, 2018 (Wright, 2018). Later, James wore a “Beto” hat to an NBA game in San Antonio, Texas. Houston-born rapper Travis Scott appeared at the campaign rally in his hometown with O’Rourke. Scott directed his message to the younger audience, telling them that they can go out and vote once they are eighteen years old (Gray, 2018). Scott also shared a picture from the rally, which attracted 800,000

likes. Actress Eva Longoria not only tweeted support for O'Rourke and encouraged eligible voters to register, but she also highlighted his most important policies. Longoria, who was the super celebrity (the most important endorser) during Obama's presidential bid in 2012, posted her support for O'Rourke in both English and Spanish. What is more, because of the fact that she comes from Corpus Christi, Texas, she was able to use her roots to appeal to Latinx Texans. She used hashtags *#betofortexas* and *#VotaXBeto* in her posts (Martinez, 2018). O'Rourke launched a Facebook Live stream from Dallas, during which he and his wife had a video conversation with Longoria, who was wearing a "Beto" t-shirt with other volunteers in Corpus Christi. Finally, on 5 November, two videos were posted on Facebook, targeting the Latinx community in English and Spanish, with Eva Longoria and actress Zoe Saldana encouraging supporters to get out the vote. The video was paid for by People For the American Way and was not authorized by O'Rourke's committee.

Musician Willie Nelson also supported O'Rourke during this campaign, which suited well with the "country Beto" persona. Nelson performed during O'Rourke's rallies in Austin. At the July 4 Picnic in Austin, O'Rourke sang and played guitar with Nelson (Hudak, 2018). Nelson performed with O'Rourke at another Austin campaign rally in September. This was quite unusual for a country star to support a Democratic candidate; Nelson's fans were very disappointed with this outcome.

The final endorsement that gave O'Rourke nationwide recognition and proved how important the timing of endorsements are came from pop singer Beyonce. Beyonce shared a picture on Instagram of her wearing a "Beto for Senate" hat on 6 November, just few hours before the polls closed (Avins, 2018). Although the post received over 1.3 million likes, many fans believed that she should have posted her endorsement earlier to increase voter registration among young people. Would this have really help?

Conclusions: Was it ever possible to win in Texas?

Without any doubt, Beto O'Rourke's campaign was spectacular. His rose from a relatively unknown Congressman to one of the most recognizable politicians in the US and a pop star among politicians that could only be predicted by a few people who followed him earlier in media outlets. The title of this article alludes to O'Rourke referencing The Clash during the debate with Ted Cruz, when he said that the Texan Senator is "working for the clampdown" (Yoo, 2018). *Clampdown* is a song from The Clash's classic album "London Calling" and this speech was one of the last instances of O'Rourke utilizing pop-cultural references to attract voters. Even though O'Rourke finally lost his senatorial bid, no one was surprised and his supporters did not really expect him to win. Of course, everyone in the Democratic party was hoping for an upset, especially after the amount of funds raised during the campaign. His result, however, was spectacular, as he lost by a 2.6 percent margin, which is slightly less than 215,000 votes. No other Democratic candidate was so close to winning in Texas in last 20 years. How was that possible, and what can we learn about the changing demographics in Texas?

O'Rourke was this election's underdog. According to polls posted on Ballotpedia, during the last month of the campaign, only the Emerson poll forecasted O'Rourke losing to Cruz by less than a 4 percent margin. O'Rourke only once was predicted to win over Cruz, according to a 6–14 September poll made by Reuters/Ipsos/UVA Center for Politics (Kahn, 2018). Although some magazines believed that O'Rourke blew the chance to make

a historic win (Alberta, 2018), only a compulsive gambler would expect him to unseat Ted Cruz. Although he was not a representative from any minority or excluded group, his tactic was to represent minority voices (African-American, Latinx, women voters) who felt left behind during Trump and the Republican Party's administration. That was particularly the case in Texas, where Ted Cruz is hated by GOP moderates. Deemed "the most hated man in Washington", Cruz is perceived by many Texans as a person that did not really care about his surroundings and used his senatorial career to start a failed presidential campaign. Furthermore, Cruz is seen as unsympathetic, and this was a reason why some moderate Republican voters thought that they might just give O'Rourke a chance, as he campaigned even in the smallest red constituencies (Cox, 2018; Galen, 2018; Ratcliffe, 2018). Some pundits believed that if it was any other Republican candidate, O'Rourke would never have chance to even think about winning.

The contributions helped build his underdog image and his "indie persona" allowed him to transfer his cultural values to politics. Just like the DIY community, with his digital advertising and small donors, O'Rourke was able to create a group of fans (like a music artist) that followed him and supported his bid. Celebrities started to recognize that by sharing Beto-related news, they would not only attract new buzz for themselves, but also construct a Kennedy'esque value, which both politician and the endorser would be benefited. On the other hand, most celebrities have liberal and rather progressive political views, so it is easier for the Democrats to bring celebrity endorsers to their ticket.

How did his mobilization campaign help the Democratic Party? By creating an enormous registration operation all over the Texas, O'Rourke helped flip two seats in the House of Representatives that had first been won over by Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election: in TX-7 district and in TX-32, a suburban area of Dallas. Without this down-ballot effect, Democrats would not have been able to receive around 47 percent of votes in House of the Representatives elections in Texas. Five districts (10, 21, 22, 23 and 24) were won by a Republican by less than a 5 percent margin. Three of the districts were 78 percent urban and two being over 90 percent urban. In 2018, 3.7 million more Texans voted during the midterm elections and most of them came from urban areas. The biggest increase in voter registration can be observed in Houston (around 500,000), Fort Worth, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin (around 200,000 each) (Goldsberry, 2018). Additionally, O'Rourke outperformed Clinton's 2016 result in key counties by around 5.7 percent (Goldsberry, 2018). All counties where the Democrat vote increased were the ones where more people registered. The 2020 Senate elections in Texas will be definitely one to watch. back in 2014, John Cornyn received 2.9 million votes. During the 2018 midterms, Cruz received 4.2 million votes and only won by a 2.6 percent margin. In 2020, there should be around 10 million voters in Texas. Is the political behaviour in The Lone Star State changing?

The key groups that would decide how soon Texas would be turning into a swing state are migrants and the Latinx community. Additionally, the southern part of United States has become a more and more attractive destination for Americans in northerner states as a place to find a better job and warmer weather. According to Wendell Cox (2009), the 2000s was the demographic "decade of the South", as a majority of Americans that were moving to another state, have chosen the southern ones. According to the latest data by Census Bureau (Miller, 2018), Texas is the second most popular state that millennials are moving to, with a net migration of 33,650 in 2018. From 25 cities that the millennials are

most likely to move to, three of them are in Texas, with Houston being 22nd, having a 12.2 percent increase in millennial population, a 3.1 percent increase in median wages and -33.5 percent decrease in unemployment rate. Dallas is 10th with a 9.4 percent increase in millennial population, 14.8 percent increase in median wages and -42.3 percent decrease in unemployment rate. Austin is the 3rd most popular city with a 17.5 percent increase in millennial population, 21.7 percent increase in median wages and -45.1 percent decrease in unemployment rate (Hoffower, 2019). Historically, millennials do not perform well in regards to voter registration, but they are more likely to focus on social issues such as immigration. According to the Washington Post (Medenica et al., 2018), 66 percent of millennials were planning to vote for the Democratic candidate in the midterm elections, whereas only 27 percent declared voting for the Republican candidate.

The last important factor that may overturn the elections in Texas is the growing Latinx community. The issue, however, is that right now one-third of the state's Latinx population is not of voting age (Ura & Murphy, 2018). Eighteen percent of white Texans are over 65 years old, compared to only 6.9 percent of Latinx citizens and 9.1 percent of black citizens. What does it mean? Taking into consideration the fact that the urban areas are more popular within the black and Latinx community, whereas the suburbs and smaller counties are more homogenous, the voting numbers in the midterm election was staggering for Democrats. O'Rourke won in Harris County by over 200,000 votes, Dallas County by over 240,000 votes and Travis County by 240,000. Senior Texans are more likely to go to voting stations; two out of three adults older than 65 are white and half of the voters aged 45–64 are white (Ura & Murphy, 2018).

To conclude, it is worth agreeing with Kirk Goldsberry (2008) that the results in Texas were equally influenced by the demographic changes and O'Rourke's charisma. It is worth noting, though, that O'Rourke's 2020 presidential bid, which was supposed to acknowledge his buzz in national politics, lasted only five months. Although at the very beginning he managed to attract fundraisers, he struggled at the polls. A higher than usual amount of Democratic primary candidates, with some of them attracting similar moderate bases (such as Pete Buttigieg or Amy Klobuchar), did not allow him to transfer his momentum from stateside to national politics. Recently, O'Rourke began to canvass for candidates in state elections and do what he does best: meet with voters and connect with them through Instagram and Facebook livestreams. Taking into consideration the changing demographics and his likability among young moderates, as he gains more experience, O'Rourke may soon help turn Texas into a swing state.

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