



**OCTOBER  
SURPRISE**

**By Miguel Muñoz**

*A Guide to October Surprise*

By Miguel Muñoz

Written and Compiled by Sarah J Baker  
for OpenStage Theatre & Company



## **The Story of *October Surprise***

In the midst of a political crisis at the border, two estranged siblings find themselves running against each other in a crucial Texas Senate election. Maria, a passionate, strong-willed immigration lawyer and political outsider; and her brother Antonio, the new charismatic face of conservatism. But when Maria discovers a life-ruining, campaign-ending secret of her brother's, she is faced with a heart-wrenching moral conflict. "October Surprise" is an emotional, harrowing, and twist-turning new play about family and morality through the lens of American politics, that asks the question- how far are you willing to go for what you believe in?

## About The Author: Miguel Muñoz

Miguel Muñoz is a Peruvian-American playwright, director, and actor hailing from the Pacific Northwest. He graduated from the University of Northern Colorado, with a B.A in Theatre Education. This is his professional directing debut. His satirical play *Lati-NO!* was selected for American Stage's 2023 New Play Festival in St. Petersburg, FL. His political drama *October Surprise* was elected a semifinalist in Orlando Shakespeare Festival's 2023 PlayFest. He was commissioned by American Stage in Florida to write their 2024 TYA musical, titled *Familia de Flamingos*. As an actor, Miguel has appeared professionally in Little Theatre of the Rockies' *The Quest for Don Quixote* as Don Quixote, and OpenStage's 2024 production of *SWEAT* as Oscar. He currently works at Chappelow K-8 Arts Magnet in Greeley as a Theatre/ELL teacher.



## About El Paso, Texas

Sitting on the Rio Grande river, and just across the border from the city of Juárez, the Western Texan city's name "El Paso" directly translates to



"The Pass" in English. El Paso has a population of 682,969 within city limits and 996,009 in the metropolitan area as of 2024 data. The city currently ranks as the 23rd most populated city in The United States, right behind Oklahoma City and Nashville, followed by Washington D.C.. Additionally, El Paso is known as the second-largest majority-Hispanic city in the nation, with 81% of its population identifying as Hispanic.

El Paso, the New Mexican city of Las Cruces, and the two Mexican cities of Juárez and Chihuahua combine to create a larger area referred to as Paso del Norte or the Borderplex. This area has a population of about 2.7 million and the Western Hemisphere's largest bilingual and binational workforce.



El Paso's main economic industries are diverse. They include international trade, military and government jobs, oil and gas, healthcare, and tourism.

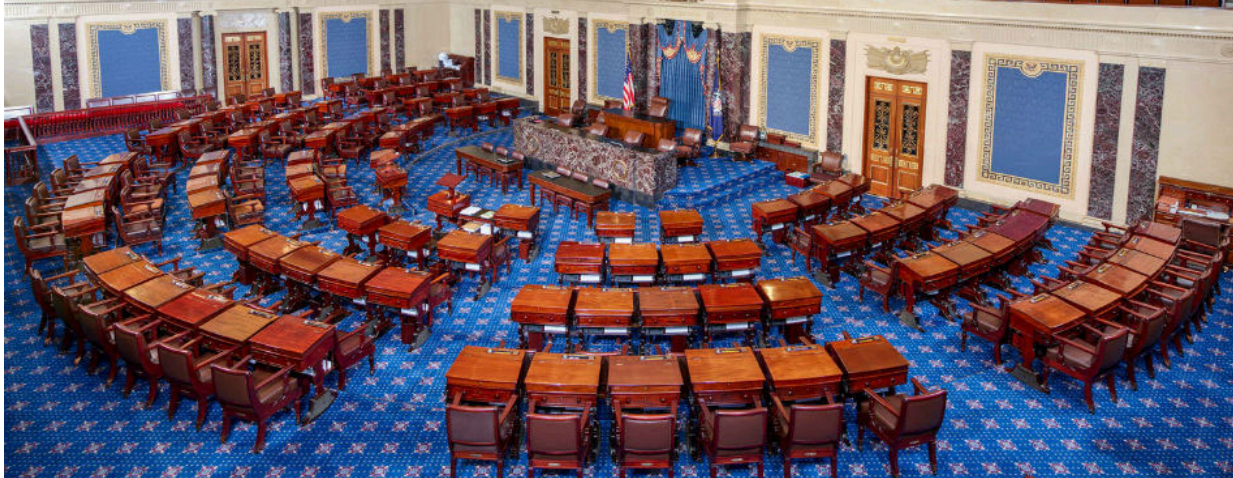
The city is nicknamed “The Sun City” due to its 302 days of sunshine a year and it’s hot desert climate. El Paso has sand and dust storms during its dry season but also experiences snow in the winter months.



A frequent earner of the All-America City Award, El Paso has brought home the title five times, in 1969, 2010, 2018, 2020, and 2021. It was consistently ranked among the top three safest large cities in the U.S. by Congressional Quarterly from 1997 to 2014, claiming the title of safest city from 2011 to 2014.

El Paso hosts major military bases like Fort Bliss and facilities including Biggs Army Airfield and William Beaumont Army Medical Center. It’s also home to federal agencies like the Drug Enforcement Administration's Division 7, the El Paso Intelligence Center, and the U.S. Border Patrol El Paso Sector, including the Special Operations Group.

## Senate Elections and Term Limits



Senate elections happen every two years in the United States, but not every seat is voted on each election. In 12 states Senators serve two year terms. Another 30 states have Senators serve four years. The other 8 states, including Texas, have their Senators sometimes serve two year terms and sometimes serve four year terms. This approach is called the 2-4-4 system.

There is currently no term limit for Senators in 35 states. As long as a candidate can continue to win elections they can stay in office as long as they would like. Some Senators have served for decades, such as Robert Byrd (Democrat- West Virginia) who served for 51 years, Daniel Inouye (Democrat- Hawaii) who served for 49 years, Strom Thurmond (Republican- South Carolina) who served for 48 years, and many more.

There are 15 states with term limits for senators, but exact details vary. Some of the states impose a lifetime limit on terms for Senators, while others have a limit of the number of consecutive terms a Senator can serve.

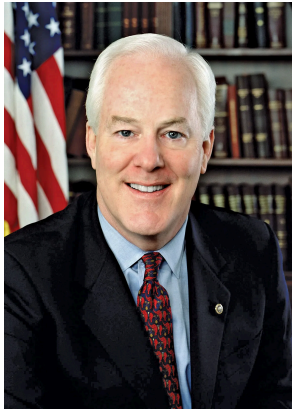


## Prominent Texan Senators and Senatorial Candidates

### Ted Cruz

Republican, In Office: 2013–Present

Cruz is known for his conservative stance and vocal advocacy on issues like limited government, tax reform, and constitutional rights. He ran for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016.



### John Cornyn

Republican, In Office: 2002–Present

Serving as a senator since 2002, Cornyn has been a key figure in Republican leadership and has focused on issues such as border security, healthcare reform, and veterans' affairs.

### Beto O'Rourke

Democrat, Ran for Office in 2018

O'Rourke, born and raised in El Paso, gained national attention during his Senate campaign against Ted Cruz in 2018. He is known for his progressive platform, particularly on issues like gun control, healthcare, and immigration reform.





## **Kay Bailey Hutchison**

Republican, In Office: 1993–2013

Hutchison was the first woman to represent Texas in the U.S. Senate and served from 1993 to 2013. She was known for her work on education reform and defense issues during her tenure.



## Immigration and El Paso

The El Paso–Juárez area is one of the busiest border crossing areas on the Mexico–United States border. It sees high volumes of asylum seekers and crossings, both legal and illegal.



Due to its high amounts of immigrants and asylum seekers, El Paso has many organizations and facilities dedicated to working with these people. Processing centers do interviews and general processing for asylum seekers.



Annunciation House, Opportunity Center, and El Paso Immigration Coalition, along with other non-profit organizations and groups provide key services to asylum seekers. These can include short-term shelter, medical care, food, and legal assistance.

The city of El Paso sees the economic and social effects of the immigration that takes place there. Socially there is a challenge for immigrants to become integrated into the community. Economically the city benefits from immigrant workers that can help fill labor shortages. Immigrants who pursue entrepreneurship also add a positive effect to the community by adding to the local economy, creating jobs, and adding unique products and services to the area.

Local resources and services can be impacted by the high levels of immigration in El Paso, which can require adaptation and flexibility.

Healthcare services see an increase in demand from immigrants and asylum seekers and their general health needs. Local school systems also require increased services to accommodate immigrants joining the community. These services can include bilingual programs, counseling services, and other programs to help new students get adjusted.

**Read More**

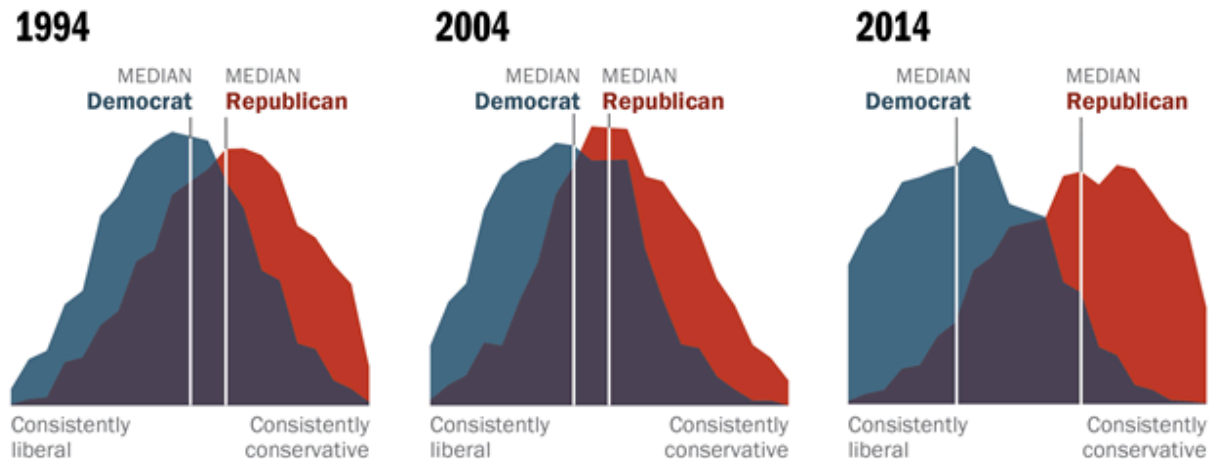
**Migrant Crisis**



# The Polarization of Modern American Politics

## Democrats and Republicans More Ideologically Divided than in the Past

*Distribution of Democrats and Republicans on a 10-item scale of political values*



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Ideological consistency based on a scale of 10 political values questions (see Appendix A). The blue area in this chart represents the ideological distribution of Democrats; the red area of Republicans. The overlap of these two distributions is shaded purple. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

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In recent decades, Americans have grown further apart politically than ever before. Since the 1990s, members of both the Republican and Democratic parties have moved further from the median and have begun to more consistently side with one party over the other.

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace's Rachel Kleinfeld notes that Americans are not nearly as divided on individual issues as they think they are, "most partisans hold major misbeliefs about the other party's preferences that lead them to think there is far less shared policy belief." She states that there is a reason for these inaccurate perceptions, which comes down to more ideologically extreme candidates running for office. "One reason that the most highly politically engaged Americans may misunderstand the other side is that they correctly estimate the extreme ideological polarization among politicians...more ideologically extreme politicians have been running for office since the 1980s."

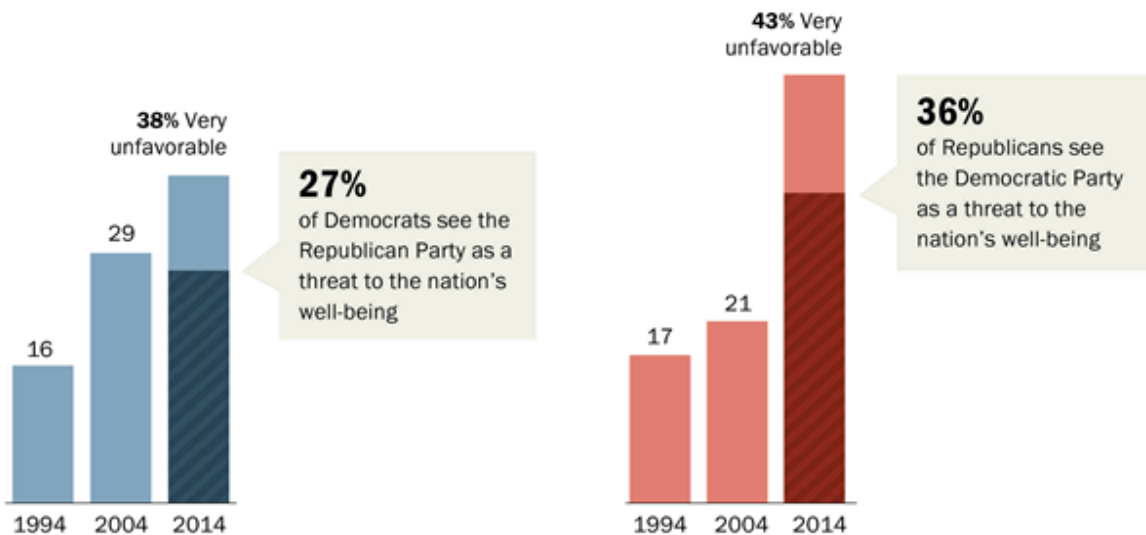
Kleinfeld discusses that the more extreme polarization that has been happening within American politics is emotional, rather than ideological. Members of both parties have begun to dislike the other party much more than was seen in previous decades.

According to Kleinfeld, “While social media is often blamed for this phenomenon, affective polarization started growing before the internet: its onset more closely correlates with the rise of cable news and radio talk shows.<sup>11</sup> It is also growing most swiftly among Americans over sixty-five years old, a demographic that uses the internet less, but watches television and listens to talk radio far more, than younger age groups who are less polarized.<sup>12</sup> These findings and other studies about the effects of social media suggest that all media, not just social media, may be playing a role.”

### Beyond Dislike: Viewing the Other Party as a ‘Threat to the Nation’s Well-Being’

Democratic attitudes about the Republican Party

Republican attitudes about the Democratic Party



Source: 2014 Political Polarization in the American Public

Notes: Questions about whether the Republican and Democratic Parties are a threat to the nation's well being asked only in 2014. Republicans include Republican-leaning independents; Democrats include Democratic-leaning independents (see Appendix B).

## **Themes**

### **Family**

Maria and Antonio both grapple with their complicated relationship as siblings, as well as their vastly different relationships with their mother and their uncle. They wrestle with what it means to be a sibling, and how to deal with the way they trigger each other. Ultimately, they must decide what family means to them, all while going through a public election and rehashing their childhoods.

### **The Past**

Despite growing up in the same household, Maria and Antonio had distinct upbringings. They were viewed very differently by their mother and uncle and grew into people who do not have much in common. They both experienced unique trauma in their household that the other does not entirely understand, likely contributing to them becoming adults who are ideologically very contrasting.

### **The Greater Good**

Maria in particular explores the balance between family and the greater good throughout the story of *October Surprise*. She has to weigh what is most important, and how she needs to go about facing her brother in a public election.

## Discussion Questions

### Before the Show

- ★ Do you have vastly different political beliefs from your close family members? How do you think you came to view the world so differently than they do?
- ★ How do you handle it when people you know have opposing political views? Do you avoid discussing politics? Are you able to be civil when talking about political topics? Or do arguments begin?
- ★ In what ways did you and your siblings experience different sides of your parents? In what ways were you treated differently?
- ★ Think of a job you would be good at that you would hate to do. Do you think you would be willing to do that job if it were for the greater good? Why or why not?

### After the Show

- ★ Did you relate more to Maria or Antonio? In what ways could you connect with each character?
- ★ How would it go if you had to debate your sibling(s) on a televised debate? Would it be civil and calm? Would there be chaos? Who do you think would win? Why?
- ★ Were you rooting more for Antonio or Maria to win? Why do you think you favored that person?
- ★ In what ways did the polarization of modern American politics cause this sibling rivalry to escalate?

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