Episode Book

EPISODE #6442

What Happened When Texas Really Flipped

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SYNOPSIS

A sweeping Democratic victory flipped statewide offices across Texas, ending decades of Republican control and sending the state's first Latina governor and first Democratic senator since 1988 into office. Driven by a dramatic collapse in Latino support for the administration, the results expose the difference between lasting realignment and a swift reversion to earlier voting habits. Meanwhile, sudden shifts in Washington threaten to rewrite foreign military aid and reshape congressional oversight.

TRANSCRIPT



Corn

First Latina governor of Texas in the state's history, first Democrat in the chair since Ann Richards, and a Senate seat the Democrats haven't held since nineteen eighty-eight. All in one night. That's what happened yesterday in America.



Herman

And that's what today's episode is about, because we have a rare treat. This one comes from Hannah, not Daniel. She sent it over after the American results came in, and it's a funny one for her, because the prompt is really about a country she grew up in and a country she lives in now, and the gap between how the first one's politics gets reported and what's actually true.



Corn

The heart of it is a phrase. Her Facebook feed, her old arts school friends, everyone celebrating that "Texas went blue," and Hannah wanting to know what that actually means. Governor? Senate? The whole delegation? Because she grew up there in the Ann Richards years, back when people thought Texas might keep drifting that way, and instead it went solidly Republican for most of her adult life. If it's really shifted, that's enormous.



Herman

Then she widens it out. What does a Democratic Congress mean for Israel, how much of the skepticism toward Israel on the American left and right is real policy versus just rhetoric, and the sharpest one, whether any of this feeds back into coalition negotiations here. Could the need for a government that can work with Washington actually shape who partners with whom?



Corn

So let's start with the thing she's actually asking. What does Texas went blue mean.



Herman

Here's the short answer. It means nearly everything. This wasn't one race that flipped on a good night. Gina Hinojosa beat Greg Abbott for governor. James Talarico beat Ken Paxton for the Senate seat. And the Democrats were leading in the other four statewide races too,



Herman (continued)

attorney general, lieutenant governor, the lot. So when her friends post "Texas went blue," they're compressing a genuine statewide sweep into three words, and in this case the compression is honest. It's not a single-race artifact.



Corn

I spent years assuming that phrase, when it finally appeared, would mean some knife-edge gubernatorial win with the rest of the state unchanged. A Democrat holding the governor's mansion while everything else stays red, and everyone arguing about what it signifies.



Herman

That was the smart money for a long time, and it's why this is bigger than people expected. Hinojosa is the first Latina governor in Texas history and the first Democrat in the office since Ann Richards, which is more than thirty years. Talarico is the first Democrat elected to the Senate from Texas since nineteen eighty-eight, which is a year before he was born, which made me feel a certain way about the passage of time.



Corn

He wasn't alive the last time his job came open for his party.



Herman

Right. And the margins weren't squeakers. Talarico finished around fifty-nine percent in the later calls, Hinojosa around fifty-seven. These weren't recounts-and-lawyers results. And Hinojosa did it while being outspent by tens of millions of dollars, against a man who would have become the longest-serving governor in Texas history.



Corn

So the money lost by thirty years. Herman, before we get to why, one thing from the Hannah side of this. She grew up there, she remembers the Richards expectation, and then watched it not happen for decades. Why did it happen now, of all years?



Herman

The Hispanic vote. And I want to be careful here, because the numbers are striking. Trump won a majority of Texas Hispanics in twenty twenty-four. By early October his approval among Latinos in the state had fallen to twenty-four percent. And among Latinos who voted for him in twenty twenty-four, approval was down from ninety-three percent in February of twenty twenty-five to fifty-seven percent.



Corn

Thirty-six points in about eighteen months.



Herman

That's a collapse, not a drift. And you can see it in the turnout mechanics. Early voting in Hidalgo and Cameron counties, the Valley, rose sixty-three percent over the last midterm. NBC called it a sea change, and they weren't being poetic, that's a turnout surge in precisely the counties where the twenty twenty-four Trump gains among Hispanics had been concentrated.



Corn

So the votes came back. The question the Democrats celebrating on Hannah's feed aren't asking is whether they came back for good.



Herman

That's the realignment versus reversion question, and it's the one I'd want her to sit with. A realignment means the coalition itself has moved, durable, structural. A reversion means the twenty twenty-four Hispanic swing to Trump was the anomaly and this is a snap back to the older baseline. The evidence points toward reversion. There was a Univision YouGov poll in the late summer that found a third of Latino Trump voters expressing doubt or regret about the vote, and when you look at what drove it, it was inflation at eighteen percent, Trump's own conduct at twenty-four, and forty-four percent more concerned about profiling. That's a cost of living and personal fear story.



Corn

Not a conversion story.



Herman

Nobody in the Valley read a policy paper and became a Democrat. Prices went up, deportation fears went up, and the twenty twenty-four experiment got marked down. Which means the sensible read for twenty twenty-eight is that Texas is now competitive rather than safely Republican, but "Texas is a swing state" and "Texas had one weird cycle that corrected" are different claims, and I know which one I'd bet on, but I wouldn't bet the house.



Corn

The Ann Richards thread closing is the poetic part. Hannah's family moved there during the Richards administration. Her friends' parents probably thought this was the direction of travel. Then thirty years of the opposite, and then, on a Tuesday, the original prediction lands anyway, two decades late, for completely different reasons.



Herman

Delayed rather than wrong is a very Texas outcome. Now widen the frame, because Texas was the headline but not the whole story. Nationally the Democrats flipped six Senate seats and more than a dozen House seats. Texas, Kansas and South Carolina all elected Democratic senators for the first time in decades. Trump had won every single one of those states in twenty twenty-four.



Corn

Six seats. The Senate was fifty-three to forty-seven Republican. They needed four.



Herman

They got six, with room to spare. Sherrod Brown back in Ohio, Roy Cooper in North Carolina, Democratic pickups in Iowa, Kansas, South Carolina. And the backdrop was Trump's approval at thirty-two percent in the Reuters Ipsos polling just before the vote, with Democrats up nine on the generic congressional ballot. Two-thirds of voters in the exit polling said his policies had worsened economic conditions, and the same two-thirds said the tariffs hurt.



Corn

The tariff answer is the one that would keep me up if I were a Republican strategist. That's not the voters disliking a candidate. That's the voters naming the policy.



Herman

And here's what divided government actually does, mechanically, because I think people skip this. A Democratic Senate can block Cabinet and judicial nominations outright. House committees get subpoena power. Senior Democrats have already signaled the targets, the Trump family's business dealings, the handling of the Epstein investigation. This is not a Congress that legislates. The Republican agenda is functionally dead for two years. This is a Congress that investigates.



Corn

A two-year hearing with a gavel.



Herman

And the losing side's explanation is the revealing part. Trump came out on election night, said the Democrats "did a good job," said he was "a little surprised," and then blamed the candidates. Called Abbott a RINO. Posted that he "wasn't on the Ballot and if I was, we would have won IN A LANDSLIDE!"



Corn

All caps on "landslide," I assume.



Herman

It's how he punctuates. And notice what the explanation is. It's not "our message was wrong," it's not "the tariffs misfired." It's "the candidates were insufficiently loyal to me." A loyalty argument, not an ideological one. That tells you the Republican internal fight for the next two years is about Trump, not about policy, which is a strange thing for a party that just lost on policy.



Corn

So, summarizing for Hannah's friends. Texas went blue, for real, across the board. The country swung hard against the incumbent. Whether either of those is permanent is open, and the honest answer is that the driver looks like a correction of one anomalous cycle more than a new Democratic Texas.



Herman

That's the American picture. Now here's where it stops being an American story, and this is the part that matters for the household.



Corn

Go.



Herman

On election morning. Not after, not in the victory or defeat analysis. As the polls opened, Trump went on Fox News and said the United States would end roughly four billion dollars in annual military aid to Israel, quote, "at the end of the year," and he claimed Netanyahu had proposed it. Israeli officials reportedly learned about it from the media.



Corn

He announced it while people were still voting.



Herman

While people were literally walking into polling places, yes. Because for him it was an election move. His words were, "Why should we suffer the slings from lunatics like El-Sayed when they don't need it? It's a bad talking point." El-Sayed being Abdul El-Sayed, who was running for Senate in Michigan on the Democratic side. So the aid cut to Israel was announced by the most pro-Israel president in living memory, as a defensive maneuver against his own domestic critics, on election morning.



Corn

The most pro-Israel president in memory cutting Israeli aid because Israel became a bad talking point in Michigan.



Herman

And the numbers underneath. Israel received about three point eight billion dollars in twenty twenty-five as Foreign Military Financing, the F-35s and related hardware, plus about five hundred million for joint missile defense work. Now, one important nuance, because I've seen people get this wrong already in the Israeli commentary. The current memorandum of understanding between the two countries runs through twenty twenty-eight. This announcement doesn't tear that up today. What it does is signal, and Huckabee, the ambassador, has said the successor arrangement would end aid and be trade-based. So the cut is really a statement about what comes after the current agreement expires.



Corn

Which is a very different animal from turning off the tap on January first.



Herman

Well, that's the unresolved part. Whether it literally takes effect at year's end, and whether a Congress that is now controlled by the party that has historically defended the aid would block or reverse a cut announced by a president of the other party, that's open. You could see Democrats in Congress opposing the cut on the merits while having zero appetite to hand Trump a win on anything, which is a lovely little trap.



Corn

Every Democrat who spent a year being called an antisemite for questioning the aid now has to decide whether to fight to preserve it.



Herman

Now take Hannah's question about skepticism on the left versus the right, policy versus rhetoric. The left side is more complicated than it looks, because the fight there is real and internal. The clearest case, two days before the vote, Congresswoman Haley Stevens, a Michigan Democrat, endorsed the Republican, Mike Rogers, for Senate over her own party's nominee, El-Sayed. Her stated reason was an ad linking the cost of living to Israel



Herman (continued)

aid, which she called antisemitic.



Corn

She crossed party lines on Israel aid, in Michigan, two days out.



Herman

A sitting Democrat endorsing the Republican in her own state's Senate race. El-Sayed was leading Rogers by about four in the polling averages, and he won. But that episode tells you the skepticism is not uniform on the left. It's a live intra-party fight with real electoral stakes, and there are Democrats who will pay a price to fight it from inside.



Corn

And the right side?



Herman

On the right, the skepticism came from the top, which is the part nobody had on their bingo card. Trump cut the aid unilaterally. Vance told the New York Times back in June that Israel "can't just kill your way out of solving every single national security problem that you have," and he's accused Israel of trying to sabotage the negotiations with Iran. But then, in the same interview, Trump said of Netanyahu, "If people ever got tired of me in the US, I'll move to Israel and become prime minister."



Corn

So the same administration, in the same interview, is cutting aid and proposing to run the country.



Herman

Which is the whole rhetoric versus policy answer in miniature. The relationship and the rhetoric are not the same thing, and with this White House they barely occupy the same room. The public opinion backdrop matters here too. Quinnipiac in September had



Herman (continued)

forty-eight percent of Americans saying the United States is too supportive of Israel. Roughly half the country. That's the soil all of this grows in, and it's why both parties now have an incentive to signal distance, in different registers, for different audiences.



Corn

That number is the one I'd underline for Hannah. Not what any politician says. Half the country thinks the support is already too much, and every actor we've discussed is performing for that half or against it.



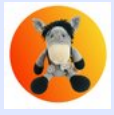
Herman

And here is a voicemail from Percy, one of our regular listeners.
Percy: Hi Corn, hi Herman, this is Percy calling from the back of my brother's maxi taxi, we are parked up in Curepe waiting on a fare and I have the show playing through the phone speaker, so forgive the noise. I think today you all are talking about the American election and that Texas went blue, which I have to say confuses me too because my cousin in Houston keeps saying it like it is one thing and not a whole set of races. My question is this, and I mean it sincerely, when a place like Texas turns blue after all that time, does that change how the people there actually vote the next time, or is it more like Carnival Monday, where everybody comes out for the big day and then Tuesday morning it is back to normal?



Corn

Percy, the Carnival Monday question is exactly the realignment versus reversion question, and you've asked it better than half the American coverage.



Herman

He has. And our answer is, honestly, nobody knows yet, but the evidence leans Tuesday morning. The driver was a swing back after one unusual cycle, not a new habit. The next midterm, when nobody's excited, is the test.



Corn

Tell your cousin in Houston it's a whole set of races, and they went nearly all one way. Now, the coalition question, because that's Hannah's sharpest one and the most open.



Herman

Sequence it carefully with me, because the order is everything. Netanyahu's party lost its Knesset majority in late October. The Israeli election was the twenty-seventh. The American election was yesterday, the third. The aid announcement came on the morning of the third. So the American signal arrived after the Israeli votes were counted, while coalition negotiations were already underway. It arrives mid-negotiation, not as a cause of the situation.



Corn

So the U.S. didn't produce this crisis. It walked into one.



Herman

It walked into one carrying a four billion dollar sign. And the opposition weaponized it within hours. Eisenkot, on learning that the security establishment was finding out about a change in the strategic relationship through the media, said that Netanyahu's conduct "poses a genuine danger," that "we can no longer rely on him and must replace him." Golan said "a responsible prime minister would have fought to increase American aid, not dismantle it."



Corn

Notice neither of them said the cut itself was the catastrophe. They said the manner of it proves something about the man.



Herman

That's the conversion in real time. A Washington event becomes Israeli coalition ammunition, not as an argument about policy but as an argument about competence and standing with the Americans. Which is a very old currency in Israeli politics. " electability with Washington" has decided more than one leadership race.



Corn

The old alignment argument. Every Israeli party that ever wanted the center has run on being the one the Americans will take the phone call from.



Herman

Exactly the frame. Now the straight answer to Hannah's actual question, though. Is there any reporting that Herzog's consultations are explicitly weighing U.S. relations in choosing who gets first shot at forming a government? I haven't seen it. The coverage ties the aid cut to opposition rhetoric about Netanyahu, not to documented considerations inside the President's office. So I'd put it this way. International factors are shaping the argument around the coalition, the atmosphere, the campaign within the negotiation. But the parliamentary math still governs the outcome. Sixty-one seats is sixty-one seats, and no American headline changes the arithmetic.



Corn

Though it can change the price of joining. If I'm a small party leader sitting across from two bloc leaders, one of whom is being painted daily as the man who lost American aid, my asking price just moved.



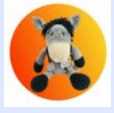
Herman

That's a fair distinction, and I'd go a bit further. It's a consideration for the parties, and honestly, Corn, I keep thinking about how you described the electorate's seriousness in that episode we did around the Israeli vote. Participation there wasn't frivolous, and coalition mathematics isn't either. A party leader weighing Washington isn't being romantic, they're pricing insurance. The question is whether the American signal is durable enough to price in, and since it arrived five days ago from a president who changes positions between breakfast and lunch...



Corn

You'd be a fool to price it at face value.



Herman

Though the Democrats now controlling Congress is a slower-moving fact than anything Trump says on Fox, and that one does affect Israel in concrete ways. A Democratic House means hearings on the conduct of the war. It means the aid conversations happen in a chamber where forty-eight percent of the public already thinks the support is too much. The pressure isn't the cut. The pressure is the direction of travel of American opinion, and both parties in Washington have now noticed which way it points.



Corn

So the answer to Hannah is layered. The Texas sweep is real, the Congress is Democratic, the aid cut is a signal about twenty twenty-eight more than a rupture of the current agreement, the skepticism on both sides is partly rhetoric but the polling underneath it isn't, and the coalition question is open. The American signal can shape who partners with whom here, but probably not whether Netanyahu is replaced. The math governs, the signal colors.



Hilbert

The county commission race in Kleberg County is the one I'd want Hannah's friends to look at before they put "went blue" on a T-shirt. Corn, you said nobody knows whether it's realignment or reversion. There's a number that settles at least part of it and nobody prints it. In eighty-eight I wrote to the county records office in Kingsville asking for the precinct tallies from the Richards race, because I'd been keeping a tally of Texas statewide results in a notebook and I wanted the down-ballot ones, which the papers didn't carry. A clerk named Dolores Herrera answered me eleven months later. Eleven months, and the letter began with an apology about a filing cabinet. I've kept the notebook going since. I have it here. It's the blue book. The Kleberg county commission seat that year went Democratic by fewer than two hundred votes, and the statewide races carried it by thousands, and that gap is what a sweep hides. You can sweep six offices on one Tuesday and still be a county-commission-margin state underneath.



Corn

You've been keeping Texas results by hand since before Richards took office.



Hilbert

Since eighty-eight, yes. Dolores sent the precinct sheets in a padded envelope and I copied them in pencil, because pen through the page. I had to use a clip to hold the pages flat, being built the way I am, a clip meant for drapes, but it held. I wrote back to thank her and got no reply, which I took as the proper conclusion of the correspondence. She did include a butterscotch, which I did not eat, and which is still in the envelope, because you don't throw away something a person put in the post for you. The notebook's at my mother's now, the whole shelf of it, because forty years of Texas results takes up more room than any sensible person would give it. I brought the one volume. It doesn't tell you twenty twenty-eight. It tells you the gap is always there. Those clerks in the county offices do the tally at three in the morning, and they get it right, and nobody ever says so.



Herman

The pencil detail is the part I believe completely. Archival grade, honestly.



Corn

The butterscotch being in the envelope after nearly forty years is the most Hilbert sentence ever committed to tape, and I mean that respectfully. The gap point stands, though. A sweep is six offices. Underneath it, county by county, the margins are thinner, and that's where the next cycle gets decided.



Herman

The blue book should be cited somewhere official, honestly.



Corn

So where does that leave the whole thing, brother?



Herman

Open, mostly, and I'm comfortable with that. Whether the aid cut actually happens is unresolved. Whether Congress blocks it, whether the next memorandum really is trade-based, whether Huckabee's letter meant what it said, all live questions. And on the American side, whether Texas reverts again in twenty twenty-eight or holds, that answer is four years out and it will tell us whether this week was a realignment or a correction.



Corn

Here is a voicemail from Percy, one of our regular listeners.



Herman

Percy's Carnival Monday framing is the one I'd keep. Everybody comes out for the big day. Tuesday morning tells you who lives there.



Corn

The one thing I'd leave with, and it's really the sequencing point again but it's the one that matters here. The American signal arrived after the Israeli votes were counted, so it can shape who partners with whom, but not whether Netanyahu is replaced. The arithmetic governs, and the arithmetic was set before Washington said a word. Watch the negotiations through that lens and half the alarm on both sides sorts itself out.



Herman

Producer this episode, as ever, Hilbert Flumingtop. If you want more of this, try episode fourteen oh eight, Israel Wartime Readiness Field Guide; episode sixty ninety-three, Check Out Our First Hebrew Episodes (Plus Mandarin); and episode sixty seventy-three, Israel Votes, Part four. This has been My Weird Prompts, with me, Herman Poppleberry...



Corn

And me, Corn. If you enjoyed this one, the review button takes four seconds and it helps. See you tomorrow, Herman.



Herman

See you tomorrow.

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