4

Political Parties

Learning Objectives

- **4.1** Evaluate the role of political parties in Texas.
- **4.2** Compare and contrast the different political ideologies found in Texas.
- **4.3** Identify electoral trends in Texas, including realignments and the changing composition of voters.
- **4.4** Trace the evolution of political parties in Texas.
- **4.5** Describe the political party system in Texas.

Image 4.1 Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris campaigning in Houston with Beyoncé for the Democratic Party.



Competency ConnectionCommunication Skills

Republicans have dominated Texas politics for over two decades. Can celebrities, such as Beyoncé, help the Democratic Party of Texas attract new supporters? Why or why not?

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or the past two decades, the Republican Party has dominated Texas elections and politics. No Democratic candidate has been elected to a statewide office since 1994. In addition, every Republican presidential nominee has carried Texas since 1980. Political commentators often refer to red states as those in which the Republican Party is dominant and blue states as those in which the Democratic Party prevails. Democrats believed that they had an opportunity to become competitive after enjoying success in the 2018 Blue Wave election. In that year, they gained seats in the Texas Legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives. In the 2020, 2022, and 2024 election cycles, Texas Democrats were less successful, and Republicans have remained firmly in control of state government. This chapter examines the features of political parties in Texas, their evolution, recent electoral trends, voting coalitions, and the impact of changing demographics.

Role of Political Parties

LO 4.1 Evaluate the role of political parties in Texas.

Although neither the U.S. Constitution nor the Texas Constitution mentions political parties, these organizations are an integral part of the American governmental process. A **political party** can be defined as a combination of people and interests whose primary purpose is to gain control of government by winning elections. Whereas interest groups tend to focus on influencing governmental policies, political parties are chiefly concerned with the recruitment, nomination, and election of citizens to governmental office. (For a discussion of interest groups, refer to Chapter 7, "Interest Groups, Social Movements, and Civic Engagement.")

In Texas, as throughout the United States, the Democratic and Republican parties are the two leading political organizations. When someone refers to themself as a Republican or a Democrat, they are referring to their **party identification**. This is a psychological attachment individuals have with a political party. It is an important concept in understanding political preferences. Party identification can be thought of as a lens that affects how one views issues and politics. The COVID-19 pandemic brought new attention to the role of vaccines and public health. Figure 4.1 presents an analysis of the percentage of Texans who agree vaccines are effective by party identification (Texas Poll, December 2024), and there are clear distinctions between Democrats and Republicans. Sixty-four percent of Republicans agreed vaccines are effective compared to 90 percent of Democrats—a 26-point difference.

State- and county-level elected officials are elected as Democrats or Republicans, and their party affiliations affect how they govern. Parties also have organizations that work to recruit and elect candidates for public office. This is why political scientists consider functioning political parties to be an essential feature of democracy.

As mentioned earlier, Texas has two leading political parties, the Democratic and Republican parties, and this is referred to by political scientists as a two-party

political party

An organization with the purpose of controlling government by recruiting, nominating, and electing candidates to public office. Those who share the same beliefs and values often identify with a specific political party.

party identification

A psychological attachment individuals have with a political party.

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Figure 4.1 Percentage Who Agree Vaccines Are Safe Source: https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/research-data-archive. Figure created by by Party Identification, December 2024 90 Percent agreeing 80 vaccines are safe 70 60 50 Republican Democrat Independent Competency Connection ★ Personal Responsibility ★ Are you surprised there was a difference about whether or not individuals agree vaccines are safe? Do individuals have a personal responsibility to make

system. Americans commonly apply the term **third party** (or minor party) to any political party other than the Democratic or Republican Party. Why does the United States (and Texas) have a two-party system?

judgments about public issues without considering

their party identification? Why or why not?

Nations that have a multiparty system (more than two parties that win elections) typically have a proportional representation (PR) system. This system allocates legislative seats to parties based on percentage of the vote received by a party during the election. In a simplified system with a 100-seat legislature, a party that receives 12 percent of the vote in an election, for instance, wins 12 legislative seats. In the PR system, parties that receive a small percentage of the vote can still win seats. In contrast, Texas uses the single-member district (SMD) plurality system for legislative elections. In SMD plurality systems, candidates run to represent a legislative district. The candidate receiving the most votes (a plurality) wins. Parties with candidates receiving a small percentage of the vote are very unlikely to win any seats in a plurality system. This system, in effect, ensures that a two-party system is maintained.

The influence that electoral systems have on the number of parties is understood with **Duverger's Law**. According to this, governments with SMD plurality systems (used extensively in the United States) favor a two-party system, but PR systems (common in Europe) favor multiparty systems.²

In addition, Texas election laws make it difficult for third parties to qualify for places on the ballot. In order to provide broader third-party ballot access,

third party

A party other than the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. Sometimes called a "minor party" because of limited membership and voter support.

Duverger's Law

Plurality single-member district systems favor a two-party system, and proportional electoral (PR) systems favor multiparty systems.

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✓ 4.1 Learning Check

- True or False: Political parties are specifically mentioned in the U.S. Constitution.
- Is there a difference in the percentages of Republicans and Democrats who agree vaccines are effective?

Answers at the end of this chapter.

the Texas Legislature passed a law in 2019 that lowered the threshold for third parties and their candidates to qualify for the general election ballot. Previously there was a threshold of 5 percent of the vote, by any of the party's statewide candidates, for the party to qualify automatically for the ballot. The new law (HB 2504) lowered the threshold to 2 percent, thus seemingly making it easier for third parties, such as the Green Party, to qualify. However, the law requires third parties that nominate candidates by conventions to also pay filing fees, or gather signatures. This requirement is \$5,000, or 5,000 signatures, for statewide candidates. These are the same fees or number of signatures required by the Democratic and Republican parties for their candidates. The filing fee requirement is being challenged in federal court with a November 2025 trial date.³

■ Political Ideology

LO 4.2 Compare and contrast the different political ideologies found in Texas.

Political ideology can be defined as a collection of beliefs about the appropriate order of society and how to achieve it.⁴ Ideology, traditions, and political culture (discussed in Chapter 1) influence the issues on which political parties align. Demands and expectations change over time, and this leads to political parties evolving to reflect new expectations and issues. Political parties cannot remain static and survive, nor can politicians win elections unless they are in step with the opinions of a large percentage of voters. Although individuals do not need to have an ideological orientation, ideology is an important concept in politics, and it helps with understanding the issues on which political parties align. In fact, political science research has found that, at most, 20 percent of Americans have a consistent understanding of liberalism and conservatism and can correctly place parties and candidates according to ideology.⁵

From the 1930s to the early 2000s, the terms *liberal* and *conservative* have meant more to many Texas voters than have the actual names of political parties. This is because Texas was dominated by a Democratic Party with liberal and conservative factions. The terms *liberal* and *conservative* are difficult to define because each label has varying shades of meaning for different people. Whereas the Republican Party tends to be dominated by right-wing social conservatives, the Democratic Party is influenced (but not dominated) by left-wing liberals. Origins of the terms *left* and *right* to refer to political affiliation can be traced back to the time of the French Revolution (1789–99), when monarchists sat to the right side of the president in the French National Assembly and supporters of a republic sat to his left side. Ideology, in contemporary American politics, is largely defined by the preferred role of government.

political ideology

A collection of beliefs about the appropriate order of society and how to achieve it.

Conservatism

Conservatism today has a belief in a minimal role of government in regulating the economy and business. In addition, conservatism is typically associated with an emphasis on traditional social values. While conservatives generally advocate

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a minimal role for government on economic matters, they tend to favor a more active role for government on social issues. Conservatives have often opposed actions to promote civil rights for racial and ethnic groups and sexual orientation. **Conservatives**, therefore, are generally opposed to government-managed or government-subsidized programs, such as assistance to families with low incomes and dependent children, unemployment insurance, health insurance (such as the Affordable Care Act), environmental regulations, and civil rights legislation. Conservatives are also opposed to laws regulating firearms. Nevertheless, conservatives support a more active role for government, such as restriction of reproductive rights for women and opposition to marriage equality.⁶

There are different subsets of conservatives—fiscal conservatives and social conservatives. Today's fiscal conservatives give the highest priority to reducing taxes and government spending and minimizing government regulations on business. For example, fiscal conservatives oppose raising the minimum wage. Social conservatives (such as those associated with the religious right) stress the importance of traditional family roles, along with opposition to abortion and marriage equality. They support school vouchers that would provide government-funded assistance to parents who choose to send their children to private schools, especially church-affiliated schools.⁷ In addition, social conservatives are influential in Republican Party of Texas leadership and announced they plan to pursue legislation to increase the role of conservative religious views into law.⁸

There is also a type of conservativism referred to as **populist right**. The populist right comprises very conservative individuals with restrictive views of immigration and who are critical of government. The populist right is also critical of large business and the economic system. Many also support higher taxes on large businesses and the wealthy.⁹

Liberalism

Liberals favor an active role for government regulation in economic areas. They claim that government is obligated to aid unemployed people and to alleviate poverty (especially for the benefit of children), and they favor laws to raise the minimum wage. In addition, liberals favor government action to protect the environment, regulate firearms, and guarantee equal rights for racial and ethnic groups, women, and LGBTQ+ people. Liberalism seeks a limited role for government involvement regarding other social issues, especially those related to morality or religion. Liberals are more likely to oppose prayer in public schools, government subsidies for religious institutions, and church involvement in secular politics.¹⁰

Another term, often used interchangeably with liberal, is progressive. According to the Pew Research Center, those in the **progressive left** tend to have very liberal views. In addition, progressives are more likely to believe much more needs to be done by government to ensure equal rights for underrepresented groups. ¹¹ Those in the progressive left also have pro-immigration views, believe in expansion of the government social safety net, and favor increased taxes on businesses and the wealthy.

conservative

A person who advocates minimal intervention by government in economic matters and who gives a high priority to reducing taxes and curbing public spending, while supporting a more active role for government in traditional social issues.

populist right

The populist right comprises very conservative individuals with restrictive views of immigration and who are critical of government, large business, and the economic system.

liberal

A person who advocates government support in social and economic matters and who favors political reforms that extend democracy, achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth, and protect individual freedoms and rights. Liberals tend to favor less government regulation in the private lives of individuals.

progressive left

Those with very liberal views, including increasing the social safety net, increasing taxes on businesses and the wealthy, pro-immigration views, and doing more to ensure equal rights for those from underrepresented groups.



Beyond Liberal and Conservative: Thinking About Ideology

Is a binary liberal/conservative dimension for political ideology reflective of Texas politics? What about individuals who are economically liberal (favor raising the minimum wage) and socially conservative (oppose marriage equality), or those who are economic conservatives (oppose raising the minimum wage) and social liberals (favor marriage equality)? In addition, there are people who prefer to identify as moderate or middle of the road, meaning they take a position between conservative and liberal. The liberal/ conservative dimension may also ignore the experiences of different groups. For example, research on Latino Americans indicate that many are economically liberal and socially conservative. 12 Similarly, analyses of Black Democrats find many identify as moderate and that a sense of group accountability encourages Democratic identification regardless of ideology.¹³ This suggests that the traditional view of political ideology may not be reflective of political reality. While ideology is an essential concept for understanding politics, it is important to remember that it is not necessary for individuals to fit neatly into conservative or liberal categories.

Libertarianism is the ideology for those who believe in a minimal role for government in economic matters and social issues. A libertarian would oppose a government-mandated minimum wage as an intrusion in economic matters. Likewise, libertarians oppose laws making marijuana possession illegal because they believe such restrictions are unnecessary intrusions into private lives. Furthermore, libertarians also profess to be strong advocates of civil liberties and thus would be expected to be skeptical of law enforcement powers that violate individual rights.

A libertarian-minded faction has long been present among Republicans who believe strongly in limited government. These libertarian-leaning Republicans are focused on an agenda with as little government as possible and are not in alignment with social conservatives who advocate a role for government on traditional social issues.¹⁴ Analyses suggest the libertarian faction has weakened and is much less influential than the social conservative faction. 15

4.2 Learning Check

- 1. Do conservatives or liberals favor raising the minimum wage?
- 2. True or False: It is important for individuals to clearly identify as liberals or conservatives?

Answers at the end of this chapter.

Electoral Trends

LO 4.3 Identify electoral trends in Texas, including realignments and the changing composition of voters.

When studying electoral trends in Texas, one notices that parties change over time, and they are changing today. The level of competitiveness, issues they stand for, and their supporters are continuously evolving. During the past 50 years, competition between Texas's Democratic and Republican parties has brought a more diverse group of women, Latino, Black, Asian, Muslim, and LGBTQ+

libertarianism

The concept of advocating minimal government intervention in both economic and social issues.

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Texans into the state's political system. Native American populations in Texas are quite small and thus have not received much attention from either party. Compared with the politics of earlier years, Texas politics today is more partisan (party centered).

Parties change over time because the major issues on which they align tend to evolve. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, economic issues and the role of government in the economy were major alignment issues. The 1960s were an era of civil rights, environmental movements, and antiwar protests. These were salient issues that parties needed to respond to. Responses that parties made have had electoral consequences. Political science research indicates the civil rights movement brought racial issues to the forefront of American (and Texas) politics. The positions that parties took on issues led to a transformation of the parties and the voters that support them.¹⁶

Republican electoral victories throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, in Texas and across the South, demonstrate that there was a regional **realignment** among White voters.¹⁷ Realignments indicate there have been major changes in support of one or the other major political parties. The change in Texas and other southern states from solidly Democratic states to solidly Republican states is evidence of a regional realignment.

Realignment in Texas was gradual, with Republicans making incremental gains beginning in the 1960s, big gains in the 1980s, and then statewide control by 2002. Looking at election trends, Republican candidates carried Texas in 15 of the 19 presidential elections between 1952 and 2024, including all the elections since 1980. Jimmy Carter, in 1976, was the last Democratic presidential candidate to win Texas. Republican candidates also won 9 of 11 gubernatorial elections between 1978 and 2022. Ann Richards, in 1990, was the last Democrat to win a gubernatorial election.

Republican strongholds are in West Texas including the Panhandle–South Plains; some small towns and rural areas in East Texas; and the exurbs (semirural areas beyond suburbs) of Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. With the exception of Democratic El Paso and some U.S./Mexico border counties, West Texas Republicanism is predominant from the Permian Basin (Midland–Odessa) through the Davis Mountains and the Hill Country. This West Texas region, like the Panhandle–South Plains area to the north, is populated primarily by conservative farmers and ranchers, as well as people connected with the oil and gas industry in Midland–Odessa and other parts of the Permian Basin.

The Texas Democratic Party has been unsuccessful in statewide election contests, though it still controls many county offices. Democrats hoped to win statewide offices in 2022 and 2024, but that did not occur. All statewide Democrats, including gubernatorial candidate Beto O'Rourke (2022 for governor) and Colin Allred (2024 for U.S. Senate), were defeated. Democratic voting strength is concentrated in the large metro areas of Texas. Historically, South Texas has been a region of Democratic strength, though Republicans have increased their share of support in the region from 2020 to 2024. In addition, the Democratic Party continues to receive support from Latino and Black Texans, though Latino

realignment

Occurs when there is a major change in the support of political parties.

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support in South Texas may be declining. Asian American Texans, particularly in the Houston area, have also begun emerging as a Democrat-leaning group. Furthermore, there is a growing education divide, as those with higher levels of education are more likely to identify as Democrats than Republicans. LGBTQ+ Texans are also more likely to identify as Democrats.

Straight-ticket voting means voting for all the candidates of one party. Texas general election ballots used to have an option for voters to make one selection to vote straight-ticket. Thus, if a voter selected the straight-ticket Republican option, it meant every Republican candidate on the ballot, from president to county commissioner, received a Republican vote. Republicans benefited from straight-ticket voting from the 1980s into the 2000s. An increase in straight-ticket voting for Democratic candidates from the late 2000s to the late 2010s in the urban counties (such as Harris, Bexar, and Dallas) led to an increase in Democratic victories. In response, a law was passed during the 2017 legislative session to eliminate the option for voters to make one selection to vote straight-ticket. The 2018 general election was the final one with the straight-ticket option. Texas voters can still vote straight-ticket, though they now need to vote for each individual Democratic or Republican candidate instead of selecting the option to vote for all Republicans or all Democrats.

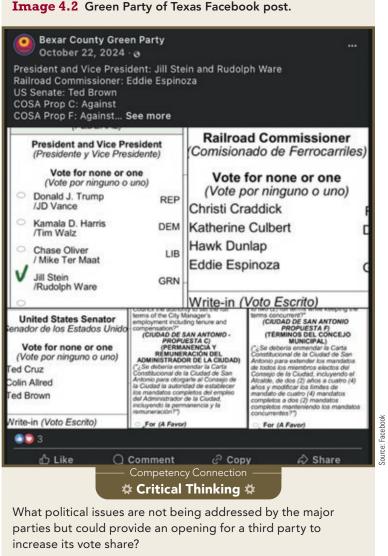
Third Parties

A political party's success is measured by its ability to win elections. By this measure, third parties are unsuccessful. Instead, third parties' successes can be better measured by their ability to make the public aware of their issues, persuade the major parties to adopt preferred positions on issues, or compel the major parties to bring those issues into a coalition (temporary alliance). When judged by these measures, third parties in Texas have enjoyed occasional success. Third parties can also play the role of "spoilers" in elections if they are able to win some votes that may have gone to a major party, and hence potentially change the outcome in the election. In recent elections, the Green Party is thought to potentially take votes from Democrats and the Libertarians from Republicans.

Looking back historically, during the 1890s, the Populist Party successfully promoted agricultural issues and displaced the Republicans as the "second" party in Texas. ¹⁸ In the 1970s, La Raza Unida Party, led by José Angel Gutiérrez, nominated and elected candidates to local offices in South Texas (principally Crystal City, Zavala County, and school board offices) by campaigning to combat the discrimination that the Mexican American community was experiencing. This third-party activity began drawing votes from the Democratic Party. ¹⁹ The dominant conservative faction of the Democratic Party was accused of ignoring Mexican American issues, and La Raza Unida won votes at the expense of the Democrats in the early 1970s. This put pressure on the Democratic party to address issues raised by the La Raza Unida party in order to win back the voters it was losing.

In recent elections, the Libertarian Party and Green Party have nominated candidates for national, state, and local offices throughout Texas. The Libertarian

straight-ticket votingVoting for all the candidates of one party.



Party advocates for minimizing government involvement at all levels while maximizing individual freedom and rights. The Green Party has advocated environmental protection and government reform policies. However, Green and Libertarian candidates rarely received more than 3 percent of the vote. In the 2024 presidential election, Green Party candidate Jill Stein received 0.73 percent of the vote, and Libertarian Chase Oliver received 0.6 percent. A few Libertarian-and Green-affiliated candidates have been elected to nonpartisan local offices.

Lacking the financial resources available to the two major parties to purchase expensive airtime on television or radio stations, third parties and third-party candidates often rely on social media to share their messages. The screenshot shown in Image 4.2 of the Green Party of Bexar County's Facebook post is an example using social media to generate attention for the party at little to no financial cost.

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How Do We Compare...

Which Party Controls the Statehouses in 2025

Most Populous States	Governor/Senate/House	States Bordering Texas	Governor/Senate/House
California	Democrat/Democrat/ Democrat	Arkansas	Republican/Republican/ Republican
Texas	Republican/Republican/ Republican	Louisiana	Republican/Republican/ Republican
Florida	Republican/Republican/ Republican	New Mexico	Democrat/Democrat/ Democrat
New York	Democrat/Democrat/ Democrat	Oklahoma	Republican/Republican/ Republican

Source: https://www.ncsl.org/legislative-leaders/state-legislative-leaders



Most of these states are controlled by one party. What criteria would you use to assess if it is better to have one party, or a unified government, control the governorship and the legislature instead of having divided government, with one party controlling the governorship and the other the legislature?

Independent Candidate

The term **independent candidate** applies to candidates who have no party affiliation. It is difficult for independent candidates to win because they do not have the affiliation of a political party to help with campaigning and fundraising. Also, they do not have the benefit of receiving support from voters based on party affiliation. In addition, independents have difficulty in gaining ballot access. For instance, the Texas Election Code requires independent candidates to file by gathering signatures on a petition. The number of signatures required for a statewide office is "one percent of the total vote received by all candidates for governor in the most recent gubernatorial general election." Based on this criterion, to qualify for statewide ballot access in 2024, an independent candidate was required to gather 81,029 signatures from registered voters who had not voted in either the Democratic or Republican primary elections, or in the primary runoff elections, and who had not signed another candidate's petition for that office that year.²¹

No one has succeeded in winning the governorship without affiliation with one of the two major political parties since Sam Houston was elected governor in 1859. The last time there was a serious challenge by independent candidates was in 2006, when songwriter, author, and humorist Richard S. "Kinky" Friedman and former state comptroller Carole Keeton Rylander Strayhorn ran for governor as independents. Despite Friedman's celebrity status and Strayhorn's previous statewide electoral success as a Republican, their results were the same as those

independent candidate

A candidate who runs in a general election without party endorsement or selection.

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of most independent candidates: they lost. Strayhorn received slightly more than 18 percent of the vote, and Friedman a little more than 14 percent. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Chris Bell got 30 percent, and Governor Rick Perry, the Republican candidate, was reelected with a plurality of 39 percent.

An Overview of Texas Political History

LO 4.4 Trace the evolution of political parties in Texas.

As mentioned, political parties evolve over time in response to political issues. The following section traces the evolution of the party system and addresses the major issues that have impacted the party system. While the party names remained the same over time, the issues and their supporters have changed.

1840s to 1870s: The Origin of the Party System

Before Texas's admission into the Union in 1845, its political parties had not fully developed. Political factions during the years that Texas was an independent republic tended to coalesce around personalities. The two dominant factions were the pro-(Sam) Houston and the anti-Houston groups. One critical issue that divided the groups was whether Texas should secede from the Union. Houston was opposed to secession. Even after the Lone Star State's admission into the Union, these two factions remained. By the 1850s, the pro-Unionist Houston faction began referring to itself as the Jackson Democrats, whereas the anti-Houston faction called themselves the Calhoun Democrats (after South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun, a pro-slavery advocate). Texas seceded from the Union with other southern states. The Democratic Party emerged as pro-slavery, whereas Republicans (Abraham Lincoln's party) were viewed as anti slavery and disloyal to Texas.

During the period of Reconstruction (1865–73) that followed the Civil War, the Republican Party controlled Texas politics. The Reconstruction Acts passed by the U.S. Congress purged all officeholders with a Confederate past. Congress also disenfranchised all Southerners who had ever held a state or federal office before secession and who later supported the Confederacy. Republican governor Edmund J. Davis, a former Union Army general, was elected in 1869 during this period of Reconstruction. The Davis administration quickly became unpopular with Texas's White majority. During his tenure in office, Davis took control of voter registration and appointed more than 8,000 public officials. From Texas Supreme Court justices to state police to city officials, Davis placed Republicans (including some Black Texans) in office throughout the state. Opposed by former Confederates, Davis's administration was condemned by most White Texans for corruption, graft, and high taxation. After Davis's defeat for reelection in 1873 by a newly enfranchised electorate, Texas voters did not elect another Republican governor for more than 100 years.

4.3 Learning Check

- Texas went from a solid Democratic state to a solid Republican state. Why do political parties change over time?
- 2. Which third party affected the Texas Democratic Party in the 1970s?

Answers at the end of this chapter.

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1870s to 1970s: A One-Party Dominant System

From the end of Reconstruction until the 1970s, Texas and other former Confederate states had a one-party identity in which the Democratic Party was dominant. During those years (when a gubernatorial term in Texas was two years), Democratic candidates won 52 consecutive gubernatorial elections, and Democratic presidential nominees carried the state in all but three of the 25 presidential elections. It was the era of the "yellow-dog Democrats." This term has been applied to people whose party loyalty is said to be so strong that they would vote for a yellow dog if it were a Democratic candidate for public office.

Democratic party dominance in the South (including Texas) resulted from the lingering divide in the nation from the Civil War. Texas and Southern Democrats dominated state politics and worked to segregate and disenfranchise Black Americans. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Democrats faced a greater challenge from the Populist Party than they did from the Republicans. The Populist (or People's) Party formed in Texas as an agricultural-based party, winning local elections throughout the state. This party was a response to what many viewed as corruption, too much corporate power, and growing income inequality. From 1892 to 1898, its gubernatorial nominees received more votes than did Republicans. Although its ideas remained influential in Texas (for example, protection of common people by government regulation of railroads and banks), the Populist Party became less important after 1898. In large measure, the Populist Party declined because the Democratic Party adopted Populist issues, such as government regulation of railroads and banks. The Texas Department of Banking, for example, was established in 1905 by the state legislature to provide bank supervision.23 Rural Texans continued to be active in politics, but most farmers and others who had been Populists shifted their support to Democratic candidates.²⁴

In the early twentieth century, the Democratic Party strengthened its control over state politics. Having adopted Populist issues, Democratic candidates faced no opposition from Populist candidates. During the next five decades, two factions emerged within the Democratic Party: conservatives and liberals. Political fighting between these two factions was often as fierce as between two separate political parties. For example, conservative Democrats were considered probusiness and pushed for right-to-work laws (laws that weakened labor unions), whereas liberals were associated with New Deal policies (and the Roosevelt administration), including support for organized labor.²⁵

By the late 1940s and early 1950s, civil rights were emerging as a major issue in American politics; this also impacted Texas, as the national Democratic Party began to advocate for civil rights legislation. During this era, Republican presidential candidates began enjoying greater support from the Texas electorate. With the backing of conservative Democratic governor Alan Shivers, Republican presidential nominee Dwight D. Eisenhower successfully carried Texas in 1952 and 1956. In addition, in 1961, Texas Republican John Tower, a political science professor at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, won election to the U.S. Senate. Tower won a special election to fill the vacancy created when Lyndon Johnson left the Senate to become vice president (later president) of the United States. Johnson was the majority leader in the U.S. Senate and a legendary,

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powerful political leader. Tower was the first Republican to win statewide office

in Texas since 1869, and he won successive elections until his retirement in 1984. During the 1960s, Latino and Black Texans became more active in Texas politics and began having a growing impact on the Democratic Party. They had the

tics and began having a growing impact on the Democratic Party. They had the potential to strengthen the liberal faction of the party. Viva Kennedy Clubs were created in Texas as Latino Texans (primarily Mexican Americans) worked to elect John Kennedy as president during his 1960 election campaign. Overwhelming Latino Texan support (estimates of 85 percent) helped Kennedy win Texas and the presidency.²⁷ During the late 1960s and early 1970s, La Raza Unida Party, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, emerged in South Texas and won some local races, defeating Democratic candidates.²⁸

Former president Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965. Johnson's passage of these laws, after intense lobbying from civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Junior and John Lewis, is credited with increasing Black American support for the Texas Democratic Party. This was a major change because the Democratic Party of Texas and the South had fought against civil rights for Black and Latino Americans. Many Black Americans had historically supported the Republican Party because it was the party of Abraham Lincoln. The Voting Rights Act passed with congressional Republican support. After signing the Civil Rights Act into law, President Johnson is reported to have said to an aide, "We (Democrats) have lost the South for a generation." What Johnson meant was that he understood Texan and southern White Democrats would abandon the Democratic party because of the pro-civil rights issues the party was championing. The next section indicates Johnson was correct.

1970s to 1990s: An Emerging Two-Party System

Mexican American (Latino) political activism increased into the 1970s and continued to have an impact on the Democratic Party, particularly the liberal faction of the party. In 1972, Ramsey Muñiz was nominated as La Raza Unida Party's (LRUP) gubernatorial candidate. Muñiz won 6 percent of the vote and denied the winner of the election, Democrat Dolph Briscoe, a majority of votes (Briscoe won with a plurality of votes). Briscoe's election marked the first time in the twentieth century that the winner of a gubernatorial election did not win a majority of votes. The last statewide general election contested by LRUP was in 1978.

With passage of the Voting Rights Act, Black Texan political participation increased. In 1972, Democrat Barbara Jordan, of Houston, was the first Black woman from a southern state elected to the U.S. Congress. Jordan rose to national prominence in 1974 as a member of the House Judiciary Committee during the Nixon impeachment hearings. She also delivered the keynote address at the 1976 Democratic National Convention, and she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1994.³⁰

The year 1978 was a watershed year for Republican success in Texas elections. When William P. "Bill" Clements was elected governor of the Lone Star State that year, he became the first Republican to hold this office since Reconstruction. In the 1980s, voters elected growing numbers of Republican candidates to the U.S.

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Congress, the Texas Legislature, and county offices. Moreover, Republican-elected officials began to dominate local politics in suburban areas around the state.

During the 1980s, Latino, Black, female, and liberal faction candidates began to have more success in the Democratic Party and won several statewide elections. In 1986, Democrat Raul Gonzalez was elected to the Texas Supreme Court, becoming the first Latino Texan (Mexican American) to win a statewide election in Texas. Democrat Dan Morales was elected as attorney general in 1990 and reelected in 1994. Democrat Ann Richards became the second woman elected governor in 1990, defeating Clayton Williams for an open seat. Democrat Morris Overstreet was elected to the Court of Criminal Appeals, becoming the first Black Texan to win a statewide office. The conservative Democratic faction was in decline.

Texas Republicans continued to make substantial gains throughout the 1990s. The Republican victory of U.S. senatorial candidate Kay Bailey Hutchison in 1993 signaled a series of "firsts" for the Texas Republican Party: the first woman to represent Texas in the U.S. Senate and the first representation of Texas by two Republican U.S. senators since Reconstruction.

The election of 1994 was a preview of future elections. This election was the last one in which any Democrat won a statewide office. Republican George W. Bush defeated Ann Richards, and Rick Perry was reelected agriculture commissioner. Democrats won four executive offices: lieutenant governor, attorney general, comptroller of public accounts, and commissioner of the general land office. All other statewide positions were won by Republicans.

2000 to 2016: Republican Dominance

Realignment of conservative White Texans was completed in the early 2000s. As the Republican Party emerged as a viable conservative option, it began to attract support from conservative Texans, and eventually their historic ties to the Democratic Party were cut. Recall that conservative Democrats had been in the party with liberal Democrats. Now with the conservative Democrats gone, the Democratic Party became more liberal than it had been compared to the party of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Today's Republican Party is dominated by conservatives.

In the closest presidential election of modern times, former Texas governor George W. Bush defeated Democratic nominee Al Gore by four electoral votes (271 to 267) in 2000, even though Gore won the national popular vote (by around 500,000 votes). After Bush's election as president, he was succeeded as governor by Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry. For the third straight election, all statewide Republican candidates won.

In 2002, Democrats selected what was dubbed the "dream team" for the three highest statewide offices: Laredo businessman Tony Sanchez Jr., a Mexican American, for governor; former Dallas mayor Ron Kirk, a Black Texan for U.S. senator; and former state comptroller John Sharp (White Texan) for lieutenant governor. The expectation was that a multiracial Democratic ticket would encourage higher levels of voter participation by people of color. Texas Democrats ran with a full slate of

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Political Involvement on Campus

Growing up in Lago Vista, TX, Jameson Tidwell wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and join the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves (USMCR). James joined the reserves after graduating from high school and worked as an artillery mechanic and traveled to locations in the Pacific, such as Hawaii and Japan. James learned that working in the USMCR and going to school at the same time was difficult. After completing 5 years of service with the USMCR, James decided to attend Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC), majoring in political science, because he knew another student attending the university.

James was looking to join a political group on campus and chose the College Republicans. He liked that they are an active organization on campus and, as a Republican, thought it was a good organization for him to join. He enjoyed getting to meet other students and attending College Republican events that had candidates and elected officials as guests. The opportunity to interact and visit with local candidates and officials is something James particularly appreciates about being part of the College Republicans at TAMU-CC. He learned about politics and how to get involved.

In addition to his work with the College Republicans, James works with non partisan student organizations at TAMU-CC to register students to vote. He did this to help the campus community because many students do not understand how to register to vote, or that they need to register if they want to vote in upcoming elections. James considers his work registering students to vote as important public service. To James, partisanship is a label, and registering to vote is a non partisan act.



James Tidwell

James' advice for students looking to get involved with a political party is to check with the student activities office on campus and then join. Seek out opportunities to join communities, whether they are partisan or non partisan political organizations. You can't get involved if you do not take actions to join organizations.

After graduation, James plans to pursue a career in public service and is seeking a public management job in local government.

Competency Connection

± Personal Responsibility **±**

If you want to get politically involved on campus, would you join a political party student organization or a non-partisan political organization?

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candidates for other statewide offices. On election night, however, the Republicans swept all statewide races. The 2002 election increased Republican control over the Texas Senate from a one-seat majority to a seven-seat majority (19 to 12). For the first time since Reconstruction, Republicans gained control of the Texas House of Representatives, winning 88 of 150 seats. Thus, the stage was set to elect a Republican speaker of the Texas House in the 78th regular legislative session in January 2003.

Because of redistricting efforts in 2003 that redrew districts to be more favorable for election of Republicans, the Texas congressional delegation has been majority Republican since 2005. In addition to gaining a majority of Texas congressional seats in the 2004 general election, Republicans won all statewide elections, maintained control of the Texas Senate and the Texas House, and picked up approximately 200 more county-and district-level offices. Benefiting many of the Republican candidates was the fact that at the top of the ballot, then-president George W. Bush carried the state with more than 61 percent of the popular vote, compared with Senator John Kerry's 38 percent. Bush's strong showing benefited Republicans running for other races down the ballot.

In the presidential election of 2008, Barack Obama became the second Democratic presidential candidate in history to be elected without winning Texas (Bill Clinton was the first). Republican nominee John McCain carried the state with almost one million more popular votes than Obama (4,479,328 to 3,528,633). Although Obama did not win the state, Democrats could point to gains in several areas. The 2008 election marked the first presidential election in more than a quarter of a century in which the Democratic nominee carried at least four of the state's five most populous counties. One reason Obama fared so well in these counties was the support he received from Latino, Black, and young Texans. In addition, for the third straight general election cycle, Democrats gained seats in the Texas House of Representatives.

In the 2010 Republican primary, incumbent Rick Perry's victory over U.S. Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Debra Medina set up a general election showdown with popular three-term Houston mayor and former Texas Democratic Party chair Bill White. Many believed White to be the most viable Democratic gubernatorial nominee since Ann Richards in 1990. In the general election, however, White lost to Perry, receiving 42 percent of the vote to Perry's 55 percent. In 2010, Republican candidates were once again elected to all statewide offices and gained additional seats in the Texas delegation to the U.S. House of Representatives. The Republican Party continued to maintain its majority in the Texas Senate (19 Republicans to 12 Democrats) and extended its majority in the Texas House of Representatives, winning 99 seats (to the Democrats' 51 seats). The Republican Party increased its membership in the Texas House of Representatives to 101, when two Democratic state representatives switched to the Republican Party after the November election.

In the presidential election of 2012, Barack Obama was reelected president without carrying the Lone Star State. Republican nominee Mitt Romney won Texas by 57 percent to Obama's 41 percent and received over 1.2 million votes more than the president (4,569,843 to 3,308,124). Although then-president Obama received fewer votes in 2012 than he had in 2008, he again carried four of the state's five most populous counties (Harris, Dallas, Bexar, and Travis). Following the 2012 general election, the Republican Party remained firmly in control of all three branches of state government (Table 4.1).

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Table 4.1 Number of Selected Republican Officeholders, 1974–2024

1974 1 0 1976 1 0 1978 1 1 1980 1 1 1982 1 0 1984 1 0 1986 1 1	2 2 4 5 5 10 10 8 8 9	3 3 4 7 5 6 6 8	16 19 22 35 36 52 56 57		22 25 32 49 47 69 74 84
1978 1 1 1980 1 1 1982 1 0 1984 1 0	4 5 5 10 10 8 8	4 7 5 6 6 8	22 35 36 52 56 57		32 49 47 69 74
1980 1 1 1982 1 0 1984 1 0	5 5 10 10 8 8	7 5 6 6 8	35 36 52 56 57		49 47 69 74
1982 1 0 1984 1 0	5 10 10 8 8	5 6 6 8	36 52 56 57		47 69 74
1984 1 0	10 10 8 8	6 6 8	52 56 57		69 74
	10 8 8	6	56 57		74
1986 1 1	8	8	57		
	8				84
1988 1 5		8	57		
1990 1 6	9		37	5	85
1992 1 8	_	13	58	5	94
1994 2 13	11	14	61	8	109
1996 2 18	13	17	68	9	127
1998 2 27	13	16	72	9	137
2000 2 27	13	16	72	10	140
2002 2 27	15	19	88	10	161
2004 2 27	21	19	87	10	166**
2006 2 27	21	20	79	10	159***
2008 2 27	20	19	77	10	155***
2010 2 27	20	19	77	10	155***
2012 2 27	23	19	101	10	182***
2014 2 27	25	20	98	10	182***
2016 2 27	25	20	94	10	179***
2018 2 27	23	19	83	10	164***
2020 2 27	23	18	83	9	162***
2022 2 27	25	19	86	10	169***
2024 2 27	25	20	88	10	172***

^{*}State Board of Education.

Competency Connection →Critical Thinking ❖

Looking at these data, when would you argue that Texas became a Republican state? Has Republican control of the state legislature peaked?

More than 4.7 million Texas voters cast their ballots in the 2014 general election. There was an open seat for governor in 2014 because then-governor Rick Perry announced he was not seeking reelection so he could pursue the Republican nomination for president in 2016. This turnout represented approximately 35 percent of the 14 million registered voters at that time. Following the election, the

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^{**}Data for 1974–2004 reprinted by permission of the Republican Party of Texas.

^{***}Data for 2006–2024 were compiled by the authors and reflect totals following the 2024 November General Elections.



Republican Party retained control of all three branches of government. Republican nominee Greg Abbott defeated Democratic nominee Wendy Davis by more than 950,000 votes (2,790,227 to 1,832,254). Abbott won 59 percent of the vote compared to Davis's 39 percent. Republicans held on to all 27 statewide offices (plus two U.S. Senate positions). Of the 36 U.S. congressional seats, Republicans won 25, and Democrats won 11. In legislative races, the Republican Party extended its margin of control in the Texas Senate by picking up a seat previously held by a Democrat and holding 20 out of 31 seats. In Texas House contests, Republicans won 98 seats and Democrats 52.

As mentioned earlier, a realignment occurred primarily among White Texans that led to Republican dominance in Texas. How did the realignment of White Texans happen? Did individuals switch their party identification from Democrat to Republican, or is there another explanation? One explanation for understanding how Texas realigned is to consider impressionable years and generational change.³² Party identification is formed during the young adult period, which is referred to as the impressionable years. After individuals move out of the impressionable years and identify with a party, it becomes less likely their party identification will change. Generations that went through their impressionable years prior to the civil rights movement developed their party identification in an era when issues of race did not divide the parties like they do today. They became Democrats because that was the dominant party in Texas. Generations that experienced their impressionable years during and after the civil rights movement had a very different experience. In this era, racial issues came to divide the parties. The Democratic Party moved in a liberal direction, particularly on civil rights, while the Republican Party moved in a conservative direction. Research examining the southern realignment finds that from 1960 to 2008, southern White people who went through their impressionable years during and after the civil rights movement were more likely to identify as Republican than those who had their impressionable years prior to the civil rights movement. In addition, all White southerner age cohorts experienced declines in Democratic Party identification over this time period. These patterns explain how Republicans made gradual gains in Texas—over time, the older generations of White Democrats were replaced by younger generations that were more Republican.³³ Southern Black and Latino voters remained Democratic. By 2002, the realignment was complete.

2016 to 2020: Democratic Optimism

In the 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump won Texas over Hillary Clinton by 9.5 percent of the vote and Democrats continued to make gains in the state's metro areas. While this was a loss, it was a better than expected result for Democrats and an improvement over 2012 and 2014, and provided some hope for Democrats that demographic changes among Texas voters presented an opportunity to make Texas competitive. Texas was one of the few states that voted more Democratic in the 2016 presidential election compared to 2012.

The 2018 midterm election brought national attention to Texas as Beto O'Rourke mounted a strong challenge to incumbent Senator Ted Cruz. Nevertheless, Cruz wound up winning reelection by a margin of 2.5 percent, a much narrower margin compared to past elections that saw Republicans winning by large

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margins. Several other statewide races also had close margins, though Governor Greg Abbott easily defeated Democrat Lupe Valdez by a large margin in the gubernatorial contest. The Republican Party won all statewide elections and retained control of the state legislature. Democrats gained two seats in the Texas Senate, 12 seats in the Texas House, and two seats in the U.S. House. At the same time, Republicans maintained their areas of strength throughout the state. Democrats did particularly well in the counties of the state's largest cities with their more diverse populations. An analysis of Latino voters found that voter mobilization efforts in

Democrats went into the 2020 election with expectations of building on the gains from 2018 and winning control of the Texas house, additional congressional seats, and maybe, even a statewide win by Joe Biden in the presidential election. Instead, the statewide losing streak continued. Joe Biden closed the gap with Donald Trump (Trump won by 5.6 percent) and Democrats held onto the gains from 2018, yet there were signs that Democratic mobilization efforts were ineffective as Donald Trump did better than expected in heavily Democratic counties in the Rio Grande Valley.

Texas were not as effective compared to other states with large Latino populations.³⁴

2022 to Today: Republicans Reassert Dominance

While the elections from 2016 to 2020 provided optimism for Democrats, the 2022 general election was a setback. Republicans again won all statewide elections, highlighted by Governor Abbott's defeat of Beto O'Rourke, 54.8 percent to 43.9 percent. Republicans also maintained majorities in the Texas Legislature. The 2022 results were a big win for Texas Republicans.

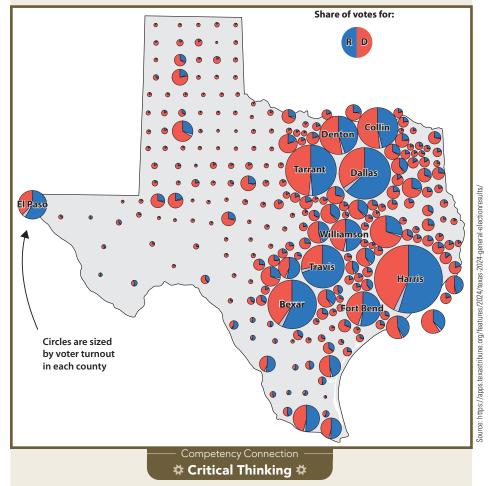
Democrats were hopeful that Colin Allred, a U.S. House Representative from the Dallas area, could unseat Senator Ted Cruz in the 2024 U.S. Senate election. Allred was viewed as a formidable candidate with the resources to run a competitive statewide campaign. On election night, Cruz was easily reelected with 53.05 percent of the vote to 44.56 percent for Allred (Figure 4.2). Former president Donald Trump won Texas with 56.14 percent of the vote versus 42.46 percent for Vice President Kamala Harris. Republicans also gained two seats in the Texas House and one in the Texas Senate.

Furthermore, Republicans made historic gains in the heavily Latino Rio Grande Valley (RGV) region of Texas. Republican Donald Trump won 12 of the 14 counties along the U.S./Mexico border. Starr County, which is 98 percent Latino and had not voted Republican for president in more than 100 years, voted 58 percent for Trump. In 2012, Democrat Barack Obama won 73 percent of the vote in Starr County.³⁵ These gains in the heavily Latino RGV led to speculation that all Latinos had moved Republican. Nonetheless, heavily Latino Bexar and El Paso counties remained Democratic. Texas Democratic Party Chair Gilberto Hinojosa resigned his position as a result of the party's losses in the 2024 general election.³⁶

According to political strategist Molly Beth Rogers, future Democratic gains will require mobilization of Latino and Asian American voters, retaining support of Black voters, and an increase in support from White voters. Texas Democrats have been unsuccessful in mobilizing Latino voters while Republicans have made gains. Rogers argues that Democrats need to win at least 35 percent of White voters to be competitive. Wendy Davis, 2014 Democratic gubernatorial candidate, received 25 percent support from White voters, while Kamala Harris received 33 percent in 2024.³⁷ The

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Figure 4.2 Texas Counties Won by Colin Allred (in blue) and by Ted Cruz (in red) in the 2024 U.S. Senate Election



Ted Cruz continued the Republican winning streak in Texas U.S. Senate elections. Looking at the circles on the map, is there a pattern to the colors of the circles and their size?

results from 2024 suggest that one reason for the Democrats' failures to build on success of 2018 is the erosion of support from Latinos, especially those in the RGV.

Are the results for Democrats from 2016 to 2020 indicators of a resurgence for the party, or do the 2022 and 2024 results indicate it was a mirage? Political science research offers some clues. Analyses of Texas public opinion survey evidence from 2009 to 2023 (Figure 4.3) indicates there are generational and demographic changes occurring in Texas that provided an opportunity for Democrats among younger Texans and people of color (POC).³⁸ The *x*-axis of the bar graphs represents the year when the survey was administered. The *y*-axis measures Democratic **macropartisanship**, which is measured as the percentage who identify as Democrats.³⁹ For this analysis, POC includes those who did not identify as

macropartisanshipParty identification

Party identification measured at the aggregate level.

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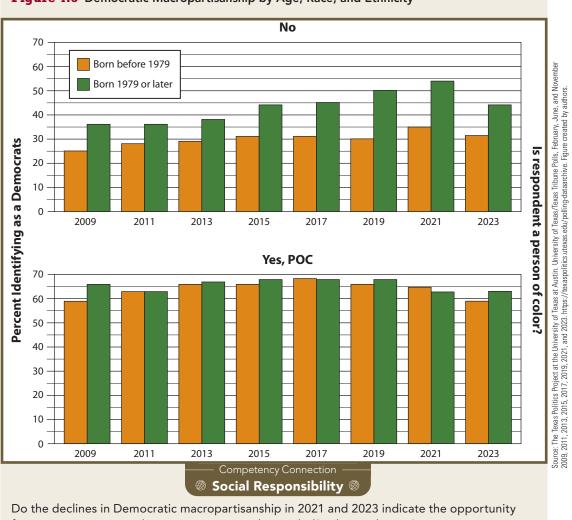


Figure 4.3 Democratic Macropartisanship by Age, Race, and Ethnicity

for Texas Democrats to become competitive has ended? Why or why not?

non-Hispanic White, with the three largest groups being Latino, Black, and Asian American people. Figure 4.3 has two panels—one with findings for POC and one for non-Hispanic White Texans—and it indicates younger White Texans (those born 1979 or later) are more likely to identify as Democrats than older White Texans (born before 1979), peaking in 2021. However, there is a decline in the percentage in 2023. Findings in Figure 4.3 indicate that POC consistently identify as Democrats at rates of 60 percent or higher, and there are only small differences between the two age categories. However, a decline in macropartisanship is evident in 2021 and 2023.

Implications of findings presented in Figure 4.3 suggest conditions may have been present for party change in Texas as a result of generational replacement. Those most likely to identify as Republican are older White voters. The younger

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cohort replacing them in the electorate is less likely to identify as Republican. With each passing year, the cohort of White voters born before 1979 becomes a smaller percentage of the Texas electorate. Those born 1979 and later had their impressionable years during the Iraq War, Great Recession, 2008 election of President Obama, and the President Trump eras. They also experienced change on social issues such as marriage equality, LGBTQ+ rights, civil rights, immigration, the MeToo movement (against sexual abuse and harassment committed by men against women), and the Black Lives Matter movement. Finally, the U.S. Supreme Court rulings about reproductive rights may have a lasting impact for young adult populations and their evaluations of political parties. However, 2023 Democratic macropartisanship among younger non-Hispanic Whites declined to 2015 levels. Is this a temporary drop, or does it indicate a return to Republican identification?

In addition, POC are growing as a percentage of the state's population (and electorate) and are more likely to identify as Democrats than any generation cohort of White voters. Thus, as older Texans are replaced in the electorate by younger Texans who are less Republican, it seemed plausible that the thresholds to be a competitive political party could be met by the Democratic party. Nonetheless, change is not inevitable, and the increase in support Donald Trump received in the RGV Democratic stronghold provides a strong reminder that mobilization and outreach matter. The 2021 and 2023 POC results indicate a decline in Democratic macropartisanship from 2019, and Republican statewide candidates dominated in 2022 and 2024. Texas may be following the path of Florida, which has moved in a Republican direction, instead of the paths of Arizona, Nevada, and New Mexico, which have moved in a Democratic direction.

✓ 4.4 Learning Check

- 1. Is there a generational difference in macropartisanship compared to those born before 1979 and those born 1979 and later?
- 2. What has been the impact of Latino and Black support in urban counties?

Answers at the end of this chapter.

№ Party Structure

LO 4.5 Describe the political party system in Texas.

American political parties exist on four levels: national, state, county, and precinct (the division of an area into smaller units within which voters cast their ballots at the same location). In part, these levels correspond to the organization of the U.S. federal system of government. As mandated by the Texas Election Code, Texas's two major parties are alike in structure. Each has permanent and temporary organizational structures (Figure 4.4).

Temporary Party Organization

The **temporary party organization** consists of primaries and conventions. These events are temporary because they are not ongoing party activities. Through primaries, members of the major political parties participate in elections to select candidates for public office and local party officers. Primary election voting may involve a runoff primary. For a discussion of party primaries and runoff primaries, refer to Chapter 5, "Elections and Voter Participation."

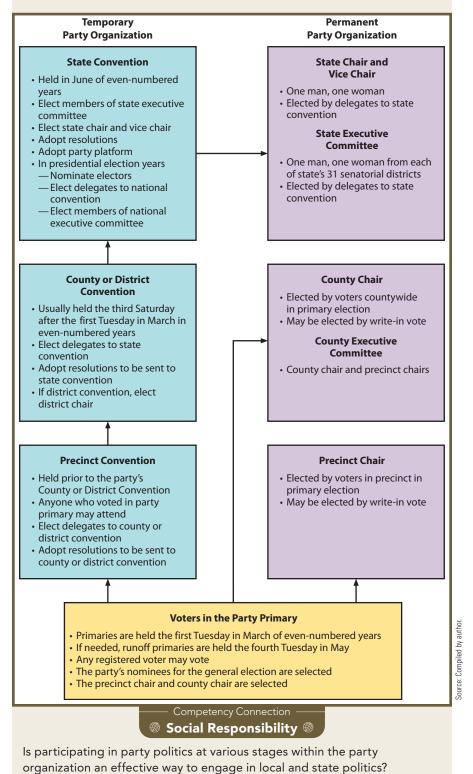
Conventions elect state-level and senate-district party officers; and conventions can be scheduled at precinct, county, state senatorial district, and state levels. Each convention lasts a limited time, from less than an hour to one or two days.

temporary party organization

Primaries and conventions that function briefly to nominate candidates, adopt resolutions, adopt a party platform, and select delegates to party conventions at higher levels.

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Figure 4.4 Texas Political Party Organization



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► Point/Counterpoint

What Are the Positions of the Two Major Political Parties on Key Issues?

The Issue The two major parties, as identified in their platforms, differ substantially on many social and economic issues. The following excerpts, taken from each party's 2024 platform, illustrate several of these different points of view. The complete texts of the parties' platforms are available on their websites.

Democratic Platform

- Voting Rights: "Protect voting rights by enforcing the Texas Voting Rights Act and the federal Voting Rights Act with restored preclearance provisions."
- 2. Marriage Equality: "Protect the U.S Supreme Court decisions which guaranteed the rights to . . . marriage equality, and the full benefits of marriage to all couples."
- 3. Affordable Care Act: "Protect and improve the Affordable Care Act to further reduce disparities in health coverage and outcomes, as we move toward universal healthcare."
- Minimum Wage: "All Texas workers should receive a living wage indexed to inflation, including tipped workers."

Republican Platform

- **1. Voting Rights:** "We urge that the Voting Rights Act of 1965, codified and updated in 1973, be repealed and not reauthorized."
- 2. Marriage Equality: "We oppose homosexual marriage, regardless of state of origin."
- Affordable Care Act: "We demand the immediate repeal of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, which we believe to be unconstitutional."
- **4. Minimum Wage:** "Repeal Minimum Wage Law and Prevailing Wage laws."

Sources: Texas Democratic Party 2024 Platform, https://www.texasdemocrats.org/platform; 2024 Platform and Resolutions of the Republican Party of Texas, https://texasgop.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-RPT-Platform.pdf.

Competency Connection

Personal Responsibility

We often hear that there is no difference between the Democrats and Republicans. After reading these platform excerpts, do you believe that statement is true? Why or why not?

platform

A document that sets forth a political party's position on public policy issues, such as income tax, school vouchers, or the environment. At the state level, conventions select party leaders chosen by delegates elected at the local level. Rules of the Texas Democratic and Republican parties mandate that party policy be determined at their conventions. These policy decisions are evidenced by resolutions that are adopted in both local and state conventions, and by party platforms adopted at the state conventions. A **platform** is a document that sets forth the party's position on current issues. State parties and national parties each draft and approve their own platforms. Party platforms are adopted by party activists and do not necessarily represent the views of most voters or candidates who align with a particular party. Also, political parties cannot require candidates who run under their party to follow the platform.

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In presidential election years, state-level conventions select delegates who attend a party's national convention. In addition, state delegates nominate a slate of electors to vote in the electoral college if their party's presidential candidate wins a plurality of the general election vote. At a national party convention, candidates are officially chosen to run for president and vice president of the United States. All Texas political conventions must be open to the media, according to state law.

Precinct Conventions In Texas, **precinct conventions** have traditionally occurred every even-numbered year on the first Tuesday in March, which is the day of the primary. The state executive committee of each party establishes rules governing the determination of the time and place for precinct conventions and whether the party will hold precinct conventions separate from county and senatorial district conventions. If a political party decides to conduct separate precinct conventions, this event serves as the lowest level of temporary political party organization. There, participants adopt resolutions and select delegates to a county (or senate district) convention. In recent years, only the Republican Party has chosen to conduct separate precinct conventions, while Democrats have been hosting precinct meetings on the same day as the county/senate district conventions.

By state law, if a political party decides to conduct precinct conventions, any citizen who voted in the party primary or has completed an oath of affiliation with a political party is permitted to attend and participate in that party's precinct convention as a delegate (Figure 4.4). For the Republican Party, each county organization chooses the date and location of the precinct convention. The main business of the Republican precinct convention is to elect delegates to the county or district convention (one for each 25 votes cast in the precinct for the most recent Republican gubernatorial nominee). Delegates to the Republican precinct convention are also allowed to submit and debate resolutions. These resolutions express the positions of precinct convention participants on any number of issues, ranging from immigration and abortion to the national debt. If adopted, a resolution will be submitted to a county or district convention for consideration.

Democratic Party precinct conventions are held the day of the county or senatorial district convention. The precinct convention is used to begin the process of selecting delegates to the state convention. Each precinct nominates delegates for the state convention, but precincts with only a few voters are combined.⁴¹

County and Senatorial District Conventions State law requires that **county conventions** and **senatorial district conventions** occur on the date selected by the party's state executive committee. A senatorial district convention is held when there are two or more state senatorial districts in a county. These conventions are held after precinct conventions. The main business of county and district conventions is to elect delegates to the state convention. Delegates attending a county or district convention also consider and adopt resolutions. These resolutions then go to the party's state convention for consideration.

Under the rules for each party, county and district conventions select delegates to their respective state conventions. Both Republicans and Democrats may select one delegate to the state convention for every 300 votes cast in the county or district for the party's gubernatorial nominee in the most recent general

precinct convention

A convention, held at the voting precinct level, to adopt resolutions and to select delegates to the party's county or senatorial district convention.

county convention

A party meeting of delegates held in evennumbered years on a date and at a time and place prescribed by the party's state executive committee to adopt resolutions and to select delegates to the party's state convention.

senatorial district convention

Held in even-numbered years on a date and at a time and place prescribed by the party's state executive committee in counties that have more than one state senatorial district. Participants select delegates to the party's state convention.

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election. In addition, in selecting delegates at all levels, rules of the Democratic Party require delegations to reasonably reflect presidential preferences (in presidential years), to include young people and people with disabilities, and to reflect diversity in race, sex, gender identity, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

State Conventions In accordance with the Texas Election Code, in evennumbered years, each political party must hold a biennial **state convention** to conduct party business. State conventions occur during a two-day period. Delegates conduct the following tasks:

- Certify to the secretary of state the names of party members nominated in the primaries for Texas elective offices (or by convention if no primary was held)⁴²
- Write the rules that will govern the party
- Draft and adopt a party platform
- Adopt resolutions that express the official position of the party
- Select members of the party's state executive committee

In presidential election years, state convention delegates also perform the following three functions:

- Elect delegates to the national presidential nominating convention (the total number for Texas is calculated under national party rules)
- Elect members from Texas to serve on the party's national committee
- Elect a slate of potential presidential electors to cast Texas's electoral votes if the party's ticket wins a plurality of the state's popular presidential vote

Texas cast 40 electoral votes in 2024. A state's electoral vote equals the total of its senators and representatives in the U.S. Congress. Each state has two senators, and Texas had 38 representatives apportioned according to the state's population based on the 2020 census. However, in accordance with Article II, Section 1, of the U.S. Constitution, "no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector."

The 2024 Texas Democratic Convention was held June 6–8 in El Paso. The Texas Republican Party of Texas held their 2024 convention in San Antonio on May 23–25. At the Republican convention, a rule was passed that would prevent candidates from the primary ballot for two years after they had been censured by the state party.⁴³ This rule, if enforceable, is an effort to compel Republican elected officials to comply with the preferences of the state party.

Selection of National Convention Delegates

Selection of delegates to a national party convention depends on the delegates' support of particular candidates for the party's presidential nomination. In a **presidential preference primary**, individual party members can vote directly for the presidential candidates of their choice. Delegates to the party's national convention are chosen according to the results of the primary vote. The respective national conventions nominate the parties' candidates for president and vice president.

state convention

Convenes every evennumbered year to make rules for a political party, adopt a party platform and resolutions, and select members of the state executive committee; in a presidential election year, it elects delegates to the national convention, names members to serve on the national committee, and elects potential electors to vote if the party's presidential candidate receives a plurality of the popular vote in the general election.

presidential preference primary

A primary in which the voters indicate their preference for a person seeking nomination as the party's presidential candidate.

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Image 4.3 Texas Republicans at the 2024 National Republican Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



Communication Skills

National conventions help political parties communicate their messages for upcoming elections. What kinds of communications skills are needed for a convention to be considered successful?

Texas uses primaries; but in some states, such as Iowa, parties select delegates to a national convention in **caucuses**. Party members assemble in caucuses (meetings) at the respective precinct, county, and state levels. Here, they choose national convention delegates who either are pledged to support a particular presidential candidate or are uncommitted.

Democratic Selection Presidential candidates are awarded delegates to local and state conventions in proportion to the number of their supporters in attendance. In Texas, national delegates are selected based on primary election results. These delegates are selected by state senatorial districts and on an at-large basis at the state convention. In 2024, Texas sent 264 (out of a total of 3,949) pledged delegates to the Democratic National Convention (DNC) supporting Joe Biden.⁴⁴ There were also 747 **automatic delegates** (unpledged party and elected officials, often referred to as superdelegates). Automatic delegates are state party leaders and elected officials who are automatically seated at the party's national convention. Unlike other delegates, they are not required to pledge their support for a particular candidate and may support any candidate for the party's presidential nomination. Hence, there were a total of 4,696 delegates, and to win the nomination, a candidate needed the support of at least 1,975 pledged delegates.

On July 21, 2024, President Biden announced he was no longer seeking renomination as the Democratic Party presidential candidate and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris. Since the Democrats had not yet held their national convention (August 19–22, 2024) and officially renominated Joe Biden, there was

caucus

A meeting at which members of a political party assemble to select delegates and to make policy recommendations at the precinct, county, or state senatorial district, and state levels.

automatic delegate

An unpledged party official or elected official who serves as a delegate to a party's national convention.

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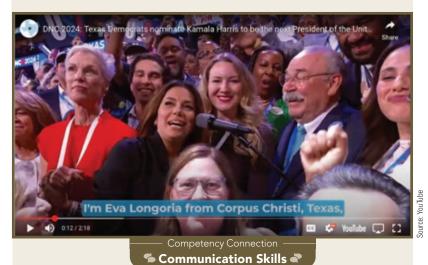
time for the party to nominate Kamala Harris. The delegates who were pledged to support President Biden were free to support another candidate (because he dropped out), and 263 of the 264 delegates Texas sent to the DNC supported Vice President Harris's nomination as the Democratic Party presidential candidate. Harris secured the nomination by winning 4,563 of the 4,696 delegates.⁴⁵

Republican Selection The Republican Party selects national delegates proportionally from the results of the presidential preference primary for those candidates who finish above 20 percent of the vote statewide. Three delegates are awarded in each congressional district (total of 38 districts in 2024). A candidate wins all three delegates if they clear 50 percent of the vote in the district. If no candidate exceeds 50 percent per district, the first-place candidate receives two delegates and the second-place finisher receives one.⁴⁶ Others are chosen on an at-large basis by the entire convention (47 in 2024). A nominating committee selects all at-large delegates, and state convention delegates approve all national delegates. In 2024, Texas sent 161 (out of a total of 2,429) delegates to the Republican National Convention. All delegates were pledged for Donald Trump.⁴⁷

Permanent Party Organization

In Texas, the precinct chairs, together with the county, district, and state executive committees, make up the permanent organization of the state parties. The role of the **permanent party organization** is to recruit candidates, devise strategies,

Image 4.4 Eva Longoria assisting with the announcement of how Texas delegates cast their votes at the 2024 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois.



permanent party organization

In Texas, the precinct chairs, county and senatorial district executive committees, and the state executive committee form the permanent organization of a political party.

Texas Democrats shared this YouTube video of Eva Longoria at the Democratic National Convention. Has YouTube become a more effective means for parties to communicate with young adult voters than traditional TV news?

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raise funds, distribute candidate literature and information, register voters, and turn out voters on Election Day.

Precinct Chair In Texas, the basic party official is the **precinct chair**, who is elected for a two-year term by precinct voters in the party primaries. A party precinct chair's duties and responsibilities include registering and persuading voters within the precinct on behalf of the party and its candidates and getting people to vote. A precinct chair is an unpaid party official who also arranges for the precinct convention (in the Republican Party) and serves on the county executive committee.

County and District Executive Committees A **county executive committee** comprises all the precinct chairs and the county chair, who are elected by county party members in the primaries. The county chair heads the party's countywide organization. County executive committees conduct primaries and arrange for county conventions. At the local level, the **county chair** is the key party official and serves as the party's chief strategist within that county. Duties of the county chair include recruiting local candidates for office, raising funds, establishing and staffing the party's campaign headquarters within the county, and serving as the local spokesperson for the party.

A **senatorial district executive committee** consists of precinct chairs who reside within the senatorial district. Senatorial district committees may be called upon to select a nominee for a vacancy in a districtwide office. Committee members also perform any other statutory or party responsibilities that may be required of them.

State Executive Committee For each major political party, the highest permanent party organization in the state is the **state executive committee**. As mandated by Texas law, an executive committee is composed of one man and one woman from each of the 31 state senatorial districts, plus a chair and a vice chair, one of whom must be a woman and the other a man. For both the Democratic and Republican Parties, a state executive committee with 64 members is elected at the party's state convention. The party's state chair serves as its key strategist and chief spokesperson. In addition to the 64 statutory members of the party's state executive committee, party rules may allow "add-on" members. An add-on member may represent House and Senate caucus chairs, as well as recognized statewide auxiliary organizations, such as women's groups, racial and ethnic groups, and youth groups (Texas Young Democrats, Texas College Republicans).

The party's state chair works with the party's state executive committee to recruit candidates for statewide and district offices, plan statewide strategies, and raise funds for the party at the state level. The state executive committee of each party must also canvass (or count) statewide primary returns and certify the nomination of party candidates. It also conducts the state convention, promotes party unity and strength, maintains relations with the party's national committee, and raises some campaign money for party candidates (though most campaign funds are raised by the candidates themselves).

4.5 Learning Check

- What role does a party's temporary organization have with the presidential nomination system?
- True or False: A political party platform refers to the stage and podium that candidates use while giving speeches at a political convention.

Answers at the end of this chapter.

precinct chair

The party official responsible for the interests and activities of a political party in a voting district.

county executive committee

Composed of a party's precinct chairs and the elected county chair.

county chair

Elected by county party members in the primaries, this key party official heads the county executive committee.

senatorial district executive committee

Composed of a party's precinct chairs who reside within a senatorial district.

state executive committee

Composed of a chair, vice chair, and two members from each senatorial district, this body is part of a party's permanent organization.

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Keeping Current

Prospects for the Parties in the 2026 Midterm Elections

Texas Republicans remained in control of Texas government following the 2024 general election. Democratic party hopes that a growing Latino population and generational change among young White Texans were providing a window of opportunity to become competitive in 2024 were doomed as both groups trended Republican.

Political science research can help us to understand if the Republicans will remain in control or if the Democrats can make gains. The president's party typically suffers losses in midterm elections. The previous midterm election with a Republican incumbent president was the Blue Wave election of 2018 when Democrats made gains. Political science offers the thermostatic model to help understand why the president's party typically suffers losses. If one is in a room and is cold, they will then go adjust the thermostat to make the room warmer. Later, as the room gets too warm, they will go and adjust the thermostat to cool the room. The electorate behaves similarly, and votes for change when they express disapproval with a president (adjust the thermostat). After the election, and a new administration begins pursuing their agenda, the public may respond by disapproving of the job the new president is doing (adjusting the thermostat again). At the mid-point of 2025, what signals are voters sending and how may they help us understand prospects for Texas political parties?

May 3, 2025, was an election day in Texas for many cities and local governments, such as school boards. These are non-partisan, though the past few years political parties have sought to influence these elections, especially school boards, by identifying which candidates are members of their party, and in some cases endorsing candidates. In addition, social conservative organizations have provided support and endorsements for candidates to influence school boards to take social conservative positions. Voters in the May 2025, elections in the Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth areas largely rejected the Republican and conservative endorsed candidates. Do these

results suggest there is pushback (thermostatic adjustment) to the Republican and conservative agenda or are these local elections that are not suitable indicators for the 2026 midterms?

In addition to these local elections, there is also evidence President Trump's job approval is declining in border communities. Democratic hopes of gains were thwarted by Republican gains in the traditionally Democratic counties along the U.S./ Mexico border. President Trump's tariff policies with Mexico, cuts to social programs, and deportation policies are attributed for this decline in support. Should Democrats restore their support along the U.S./Mexico border, and with Latinos across the state, this may help Democrats to become more competitive. Thus, there are some possibilities for Democratic optimism.

Nonetheless, Republicans enter the 2026 midterm elections with many advantages and are likely to remain in control of state government in Texas. Congressional and legislative districts are drawn to favor Republican candidates. For statewide races, Republicans have an enormous numerical advantage in Republican voters over Democrats, making it difficult for a Democratic candidate to win.

There will be at least one open statewide office in 2026. Attorney General Ken Paxton announce he will seek the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate currently help by Senator John Cornyn (and he is seeking reelection). The Republican nomination for U.S. Senate is expected to be contentious. With no incumbent Attorney General, both parties will compete for the office, and the Republican candidate is likely to be favored.

Sources: Elizabeth Sander, "Houston-are Voters Reject Right-Wing School Board Candidates. Vouchers may be to Blame," Houston Chronicle, May 12, 2025; Gromer Jeffer, Jr., "Issues Win Out at Polls," Dallas Morning News, May 12, 2025; "Support for Trump Wavers among Border Communities: Tariffs, Social Program Cuts, Border Policies Concern some in Region." El Paso Times, May 4, 2025. Alexander Kustov, "Good to Know: The Public is a Thermostat," Good Authority, January 3, 2025, https://goodauthority.org/news/good-to-know-thermostatic-politics-public-opinion/.

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Conclusion

Texas politics has been characterized by prolonged periods of one-party domination—first the Democrats and later the Republicans. Party identification has become more important in Texas politics. With changing demographic and generational patterns, however, the nature of partisan politics in Texas and the struggle for control of public office by political parties continue to evolve. Shifts in voting alignments will change how both parties develop campaign strategies and target groups of voters. The results from the 2022 and 2024 general elections left the Republican Party firmly in control at the state level and have dashed, for now, the hopes that the Democratic Party of Texas would become competitive again in statewide elections.

Chapter Summary

LO 4.1 Evaluate the role of political parties in Texas. Political parties are considered an integral part of the American governmental process and are defined as a combination of people and interests whose primary purpose is to gain control of government by winning elections. In Texas, and across the United States, the Democratic and Republican parties are the two leading parties, thus creating a two-party system. Nations that have two-party systems tend to have single-member district plurality electoral systems (the type used in the United States), whereas nations with multiparty systems typically have proportional representation systems. Party identification is an attachment individuals have with a political party, and it has a major impact on how individuals evaluate politics and in making voting decisions.

LO 4.2 Compare and contrast the different political ideologies found in Texas. Texas voters and political parties represent various political ideologies, including conservatism and liberalism. Conservatives believe in a minimal role of government in regulating the economy and business, while emphasizing traditional social values and an active role for government on social issues. However, they are further divided between fiscal conservatives and social conservatives. Fiscal conservatives tend to give the highest priority to reduced taxing and spending. Social conservatives support greater government intervention in social issues (for example, laws against abortion and marriage equality) to support their family values. In addition, there is the populist right characterized by opposition to immigration and is critical of government and the economic system. Liberals generally favor government regulation of the economy to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth and favor a limited role for government in social issues. The progressive left is made up of persons with very liberal views, including increasing the social safety net, increasing taxes on businesses and the wealthy, pro-immigration, and doing more to ensure equal rights for those from underrepresented groups

LO 4.3 Identify electoral trends in Texas, including realignments and the changing composition of voters. Beginning in the late 1970s, competition between Texas's Democratic and Republican parties has brought more women, Latino, Black, Asian American, and LGBTQ+ voters into the state's political system. As a result, party politics has become increasingly competitive and tied to national trends. Compared with the politics of earlier

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years, Texas politics today is more partisan (party centered). However, both the Democratic and the Republican parties experience internal factions among competing groups. Political scientists assert that the success of the Republican Party throughout the 1990s and into the twenty-first century demonstrates that many White Texans who were previously Democrats have switched their political affiliation and loyalty to the Republican Party in a realignment of voters. Minor (or third) parties and independents have never enjoyed the same success as the two principal parties. Their victories are generally limited to their ability to make the public aware of their issues or persuade the major parties to adopt those issues.

LO 4.4 Trace the evolution of political parties in Texas. Before Texas's admission into the Union in 1845, its political parties had not fully developed, and political factions tended to form around personalities. During the Civil War, as Texas seceded from the Union, politics became firmly aligned with the Democratic Party. However, during the period of Reconstruction (1865–73) after the Civil War, the Republican Party controlled Texas politics. From the end of Reconstruction until the 1970s, Texas was dominated primarily by one political party: the Democratic Party. In the 1970s and 1980s, Texas moved toward a competitive two-party structure. By the 1990s and into the twenty-first century, the Lone Star State had seemingly become a one-party state with the Republican Party in control. As Texas voters become younger and more racially and ethnically diverse, the Democratic Party may become more competitive. Beto O'Rourke's 2018 Senate race and gains Democrats made in the legislature and U.S. House have raised the possibility that Texas could become a competitive state. However, results from the 2022 and 2024 elections demonstrated that Texas remains a Republican state.

LO 4.5 Describe the political party system in Texas. The temporary party organization consists of primaries and conventions. Through primaries, members of the major political parties participate in elections to select candidates for public office and local party officers. Conventions elect state-level and senate-district party officers and are scheduled at precinct, county/state senatorial district, and state levels. At the state level, conventions also write party rules, adopt party platforms, and (in presidential election years) select delegates to national conventions and presidential electors.

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Learning Check Answers



- **1.** False. Political parties are not mentioned in the U.S. Constitution, even though they are now considered essential in democracies.
- **2.** Yes, there are differences between Republicans and Democrats in the percentage who agree vaccines are safe.
- **✓** 4.2
- **1.** Liberals favor raising the minimum wage. Conservatives oppose it because it is an example of government regulation of the economy.
- **2.** False. While it is important that individuals understand ideology, it is not necessary for individuals to fit neatly into conservative or liberal categories.
- **✓** 4.3
- **1.** The major issues of political parties align or evolve over time. New issues emerge, and other issues become less relevant, and this can affect party support.
- 2. The La Raza Unida Party affected the Democratic Party in the 1970s by winning votes that would have traditionally gone to the Democrats, and thus leading Democrats to become more responsive to Mexican American concerns in order to win back the votes.
- **✓** 4.4
- 1. Yes, there is a generational difference among White Texans, with those born in 1979 or later more likely to identify as Democrats compared to those born before 1979. Among people of color, there is not a generational difference.
- 2. In several urban counties, such as Harris, Bexar, and Dallas, strong support from Black and Latino Texans has led to Democratic Party victories in those counties.
- **✓** 4.5
- **1.** The temporary party organization consists of primaries and conventions in which delegates for presidential candidates are selected.
- **2.** False. The party platform is a document that sets forth a political party's position on public policy and political issues.

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