

# A Brief Survey Practicing Texas Politics

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# ★ Practicing Texas Politics ★

## A Brief Survey

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## ★ Preface ★

Two basic principles have guided the authors of *Practicing Texas Politics* through five successful editions. The first principle is that Texas government and politics ought to be portrayed, not as they exist in theory or as we might like them to be, but as they actually operate and affect our lives every day. In addition to learning about how Texas government has developed, the student ought to understand how the state's political system works today, both on the statewide level and at the grassroots.

The second principle is that a textbook on Texas politics ought to be as up-to-date as possible. Texas is a complex state with a volatile political and economic environment, as recent changes in party factionalism and fluctuations in the Texas economy prove. In each edition of our text we have strived to incorporate the newest relevant data and to analyze the most recent significant events.

Both of these principles underlay our preparation of *Practicing Texas Politics: A Brief Survey*. This shorter text is not simply a trimmed-down version of *Practicing Texas Politics*, Fifth Edition. It is instead a new book, as lively and as current as we could make it.

This brief survey is designed for a variety of classroom situations. For example, some instructors like to augment a textbook with readings of their choice. Using a shorter text frees their students to devote more time to those extra readings. In addition, many Texas colleges and universities combine Texas government in one course with American national government. This arrangement often means that Texas government must be covered more quickly than if it were taught separately. Further, most students in these combined courses are not political science majors. Remembering our own experiences as students who wrestled with various required courses, we created a survey of our subject that is concise but also includes all the essential information about how Texas politics is practiced.

In preparing this shorter edition, we focused on reducing detail rather than eliminating topics. Several charts and tables were deleted, as were many photos and cartoons. We eliminated most of the readings contained in the longer edition, retaining those that seemed especially interesting or important. We also retained our system of identifying key terms and concepts, which are italicized where first used in the text and listed at the end of the text section in each chapter. A bibliography at the end of the book lists about two hundred books and articles that can be found in most college and university libraries.

After distilling the content of *Practicing Texas Politics*, Fifth Edition, we updated the book with new developments in Texas government since

that edition went to press in late 1982. Covering events that occurred as late as November 1983, *Practicing Texas Politics: A Brief Survey* includes discussion of important actions of the 68th Legislature, developments in Texas courts and judicial administration, activities of political parties and interest groups, changing voting patterns, campaign financing, the work of Governor Mark White and other state officials, new trends in taxing and spending, and the continuing struggle of cities, counties, and special districts to meet the needs of citizens at the grassroots level. Several readings are new to this edition, including Winston Cavin's "Is the Lone Star State Being De-Texanized?" in Chapter 1 and Geoffrey Rips's "Mexican Americans *Jalaron la Palanca*, Democrats Say *Olé!*" in Chapter 4.

Many individuals assisted us in preparing this text. We are indebted to journalists, editors, government officials, librarians, and professors—especially professors of political science in our own departments. The following reviewers who read all or parts of the manuscript provided many useful comments and suggestions for which we are grateful:

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Last, we dedicate *Practicing Texas Politics: A Brief Survey* to those Texas college and university students who will study it and, we hope, will be the chief beneficiaries of our work.

Eugene W. Jones  
Joe E. Ericson  
Lyle C. Brown  
Robert S. Trotter, Jr.  
Eileen M. Lynch

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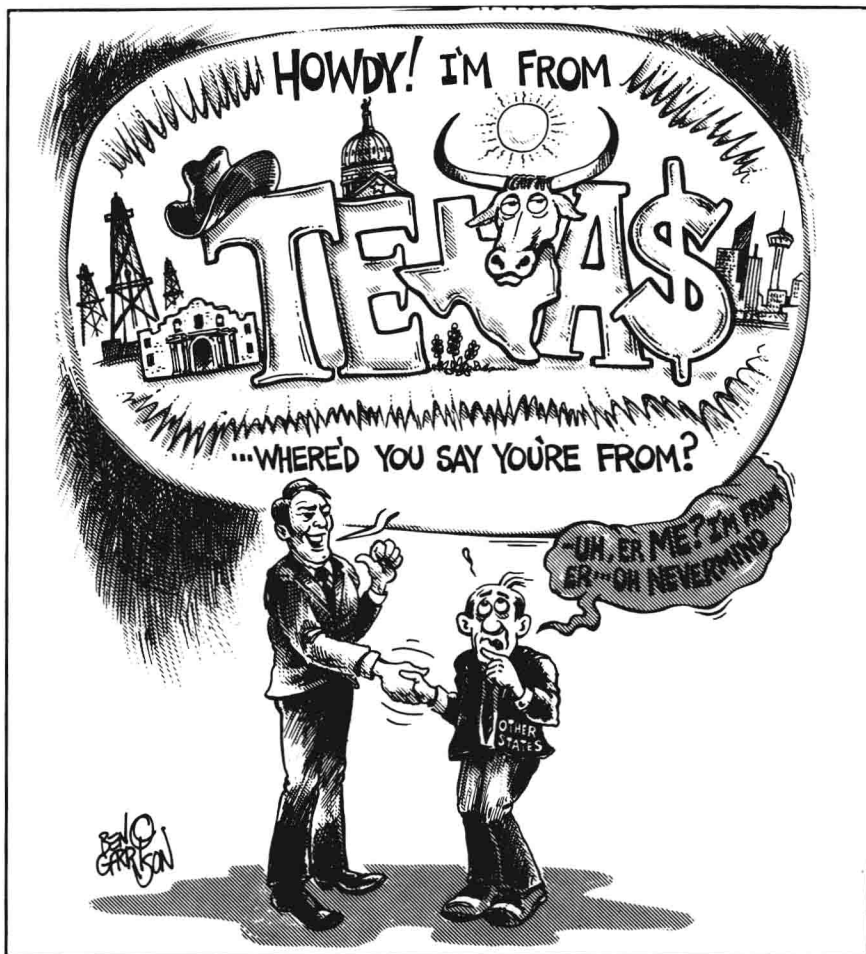


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# ★ Chapter One ★

BEN GARRISON, SAN ANGELO STANDARD-TIMES



## ★ The Environment of Texas Politics ★

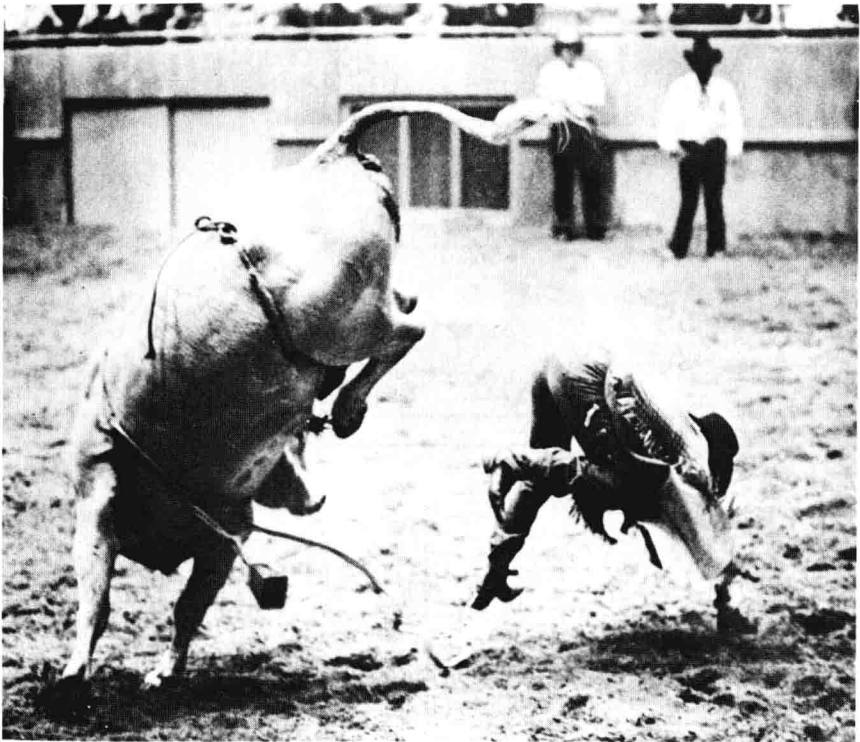
TEXAS POLITICS IN THE 1980s is a product of history, geography, cultural development, and economic and social environments. Because of these influences, political life in the Lone Star State is different from that of California, New York, or any other state.

## Texas and Texans: The Land and People

Texas's political foundations were laid during the state's development under six flags. These foundations are products of Texas geography and of efforts by people who came to be known as Texans.

### Historical and Cultural Influences on Texas Politics

*Political culture* may be defined as the attitudes, values, customs, habits, institutions, and general behavior patterns that shape an area's politics. These culture patterns are products of the history and geography of a region



A Texas culture pattern (Courtesy San Angelo Standard-Times)

and its people. Although political culture is always developing, with change occurring constantly, nevertheless, characteristic influences continue over long periods of time. The culture shapes events and is in turn shaped by events. Culture largely determines what a people believes government should and should not do. The aggregate of patterns that today gives the state of Texas its unique political tone stems from the past and recent experiences of its people.

Although the recent influx into Texas of people from other states is broadening the origins of the state's population, a large percentage of today's Texans are descendants of migrants from the traditionalistic Old South. Not only did these immigrants bring slavery and cotton to Texas but they brought also the idea of one-party factionalism, as well as conservatism and elitism. Many Texans inherited southern racist attitudes that for decades were reflected in state laws that discriminated against blacks in voter registration, party membership, and voting.

These characteristics are largely a *legacy of the Old South*, but also may be related to Texas's one-time status as a sovereign republic. Attitudes stemming from traditionalistic and individualistic culture traits include a distrust of policy makers in Washington, a dislike of national influences, and a feeling of pride in residing in a state that was once independent.

Nearly a hundred years before the pilgrims landed in New England, Spanish explorers moved northward into Texas from Mexico. Therefore, Texas did not have to await the arrival of a westward-moving Anglo frontier to get its first taste of a Europeanized civilization. "By the time North Americans entered Texas," wrote Professor Joe B. Frantz of the University of Texas at Austin, "the Mexicans had long since established reasonably sophisticated political, social, and religious organizations and had even made educational progress."<sup>1</sup> Thus when Anglo-Americans entered Texas early in the nineteenth century, they found another culture already there. Either unwilling or unable to adapt to this Spanish-Mexican culture, the Anglos opted to create their own. Following a victorious struggle for independence, they chose statehood in the United States; but the pains of the Civil War and Reconstruction and the taming of their own raw frontier lasted another half century.

Unlike their Spanish predecessors, Anglos entering Texas in the 1820s were looking for land instead of wealth in the form of gold and silver. Anglo-Texans had to earn their meager livelihood from farming and ranching. Pushing the frontier ahead was slow: by 1870 no more than a third of the huge land mass of Texas was settled.

Hard soil and a dry climate limited agricultural production but were not alone responsible for the snail's-pace conquest of the Texas frontier by Anglo settlers. Violent and bloody warfare added to the burden of home building. After independence was proclaimed in 1836, Mexico continued to threaten the lives and safety of Texas farmers and ranchers, at times supporting the

Indian tribes in their struggle against the determined Texans. Thousands of Anglos and Indians—men, women, and children—perished on the Texas frontier from 1836 to the time of the Civil War; and settlers and Indians continued to die at each other's hands until the mid-1870s. This period of *frontier warfare* lasted longer than that experienced by any other state.

After the Texas frontier was secured, there remained the task of bringing law and order to the relatively lawless land. Range wars, cattle rustling, and other forms of violence continued to menace law-abiding citizens. As a result of all these experiences, Texans, perhaps more than people in any other state, grew accustomed to the use of force in settling disputes and in struggling for survival. For four decades, war and other forms of violence were a way of life for Texas families. This hardship and suffering of two generations on the Texas frontier has had its effect on succeeding generations. As a result, Texans may be more independent and self-reliant today than most Americans, and more prone to rely on their own initiative rather than on government assistance. In short, if Texans strongly symbolize the individualistic political culture, this may be attributed in large measure to the influence of their *frontier heritage*.

### Texas: The Politics of Geography

Larger in area than most countries of the world, Texas occupies about 7 percent (over 267,000 square miles) of the total land and water area of the United States. The state could squeeze within its borders all of New England, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. Or, within the perimeter of its 3,800-mile boundary line, Texas could hold all of the original thirteen states except Georgia. Traveling in a straight line between Brownsville on the Mexican border and the Oklahoma boundary in the Panhandle region, one may cover 800 miles, and the distance between the Louisiana border and El Paso is almost as great. In fact, Texarkana is closer to Chicago than to El Paso. Four Texas counties (Bexar, Harris, Tarrant, and Dallas, with a total of 5,815,773 residents) have a larger combined population than that of four New England states (Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Rhode Island, with a combined population of 3,503,880).

From the start, size has helped to shape Texas political thought. Chiefly because of the state's vast area and regional diversity, Texans early came to see its five major regions—North, South, East, West, and Central—as five potentially separate states. In fact, the congressional resolution by which Texas was admitted to the Union in 1845 authorizes a five-state plan. Since the Texas Revolution, the long Texas-Mexican boundary line has been the source of a so-called *Mexican problem* in Texas politics. The control of illegal immigration of Mexicans to Texas is exceptionally difficult and complex because of the long border and the intermix between the Mexican and

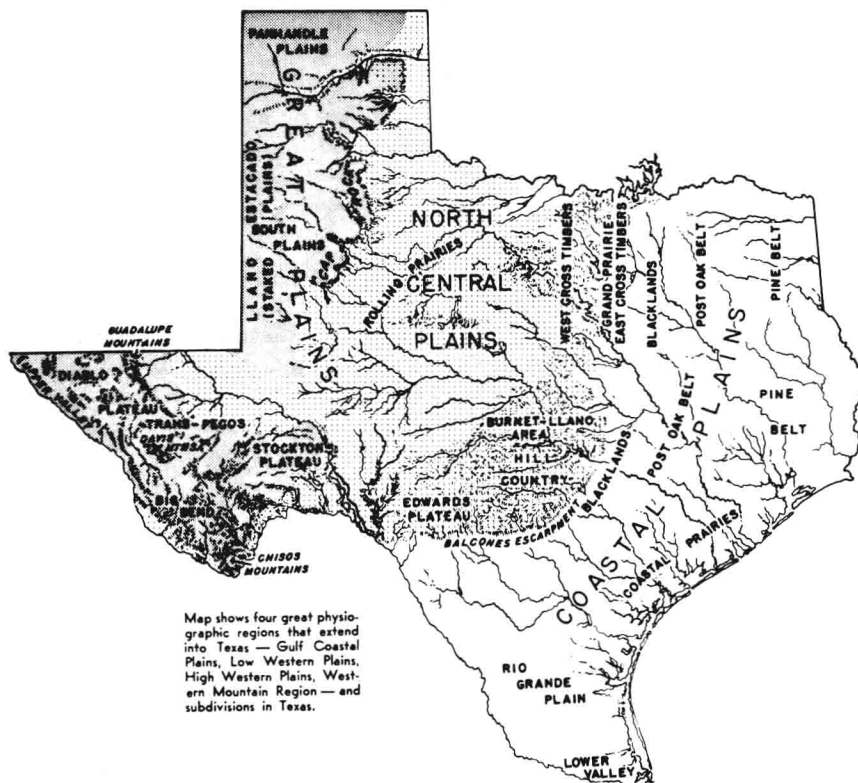
American cultures along that border. Size has also contributed to the rise of political issues concerning road building in Texas and compliance with a nationwide speed limit, and for decades, the state's size influenced the politics of cattle and later of oil.

The origin of the Texas cattle industry can be traced to Francisco Vázquez de Coronado, who brought cattle into Texas in the mid-sixteenth century. Adapting themselves to the vast open range of Texas, the Spanish cattle developed into the now famous Texas Longhorns. Plentiful land and the relative absence of government interference encouraged establishment of huge cattle empires by far-sighted men like Henry Lawrence Kinney, Richard King, and George W. Littlefield. By 1876, an estimated 5 million cattle ranged over Texas's nearly 160 million acres of land. As the cattle business expanded, Texas governors and legislators became aware of the industry as a source of tax revenue. They did what they could to keep the range open, and when fences were built, judges rarely convicted fence-cutters.

Early in the twentieth century, cotton and oil replaced cattle as the leading sources of wealth and political influence in Texas. By 1928, Texas was the leading oil-producing state in the nation. After major discoveries occurring first in East Texas, oil wells spread westward to the Permian Basin and then into the tidelands and offshore regions of the Gulf of Mexico. By 1956, the *oil industry* was the greatest in the state. With large oil tax revenues flowing into its treasury, Texas government could hardly escape that industry's influence, especially when issues arose involving petroleum and natural gas interests. In 1947, the chairman of the Texas State Democratic Executive Committee could state, "It may not be a wholesome thing to say, but the oil industry today is in complete control of state politics and state government."<sup>2</sup> Given regulatory jurisdiction over the oil industry, the popularly elected, three-member Texas Railroad Commission has been accused of protecting the industry it regulates at the expense of the consuming public. Texas has now had sixty years of oil tax revenue. But in the mid-1980s, Texas's once vast underground oil deposits are diminishing. As production declines, so will government tax revenues.

Three major geological regions of the United States—the Rocky Mountains, the Great Plains, and the Gulf Coastal Plains—come together in Texas. (See Figure 1.1.) This confluence of national geological regions accounts for the existence of distinct regions in the Lone Star State. The *Coastal Plain of East Texas* is an extension of the Gulf Coastal Plains of the United States which stretch from the Atlantic to beyond the Mexican border. In Texas the belt is two hundred miles in width and runs from the Red River to the Rio Grande. This huge land mass constitutes a third of the total area of Texas and contains most of the state's population, its most fertile soil, and its largest cities. The region produces the bulk of Texas's oil and petrochemicals, lumber, vegetables, and citrus fruit; it supplies a major

FIGURE 1.1  
Texas Geographic Regions



SOURCE: *Texas Almanac and Industrial Guide 1982-1983* (Dallas: A. H. Belo Corporation, 1981), p. 59. Reprinted with permission from the *Texas Almanac*; further reproduction, without specific permission, not licensed.

portion of the state's cotton and cattle. A wide variety of manufacturing and service industries operate along the western edge of the East Texas Coastal Plain. Chief cities are Houston, San Antonio, Beaumont, and Corpus Christi.

*Texas's North Central Plains* form part of the Great Plains region of the United States. The Texas portion of that vast territory reaches from the Red River to the Colorado. Farming and ranching are the principal enterprises of this prairie country. Leading cities are Dallas and Fort Worth. Immediately west of the North Central Plains and rising to much higher altitudes, the *Texas Great Plains* is a southern extension of the Great High Plains of the United States. Entering Texas at the northern boundary of the Panhandle and extending to the Rio Grande, this high plateau is known principally for its large-scale production of cotton and grain sorghum. These irrigated crops draw their water from the *Ogallala Aquifer*, a water-bearing rock formation



located beneath the cap rock. Chief cities of the region are Lubbock and Amarillo.

Texas's only mountainous area is an extension of the Rocky Mountain range. This rugged triangle forming the westernmost part of the state is an outdoor recreational paradise for those who vacation in the Davis Mountains and the Big Bend National Park.

Although geographic factors do not directly determine political differences, geography does greatly influence the economic pursuits of a region's inhabitants; economic activity in turn largely shapes political attitudes. Geography has encouraged population growth, urbanization, and industrialization in East Texas; in West Texas, it has decreed a sparsely populated, rural, and agricultural environment.

### Texans: Identity, Numbers, Location

As we have seen, geography makes Texas a land of great contrasts; so also does the distribution of its people. Travelers crossing Texas encounter densely populated cities, but they also see vast areas that are sparsely populated. At one extreme is Dallas County with over 1,800 people per square mile; at the other is Loving County with a population density of .14 people per square mile.

As Professor Joe B. Frantz has written, "Once Texas was a great empty land, a world of animals and birds and insects and fish and nature."<sup>3</sup> Then came people. First to arrive were the Indians. They probably came from Asia across the Bering Strait and moved southward into Texas. Although the Indian population of Texas was never large, it was an early Indian tribe that gave Texas its name.<sup>4</sup> *Caddo Indians* in East Texas were accustomed to referring to each other as *Tayshas*, meaning "friends." When the Spaniards arrived, they were greeted by the Caddo Indians with this word. Then the term evolved into the Spanish word *Tejas* and finally the English word *Texas*.

Three major ethnic groups make up the population of Texas in the 1980s: *blacks*, Mexican Americans, and Anglos. Blacks first entered Texas in the sixteenth century as slaves of Spanish explorers. Three centuries later, larger numbers of black slaves from the United States were brought into Texas by Anglo settlers. By 1847 blacks accounted for one-fourth of the state's population, and in 1880 they numbered about 400,000. According to the 1980 census, there were slightly over 1,700,000 blacks in Texas, about 12 percent of the state's population. As the country's third most populous state, Texas also has the third largest black population in the nation; New York and California are first and second, respectively. The great bulk of Texas's black population is located in Southeast and North Central Texas, where in twenty-one counties in 1980 blacks constituted 20 percent or more of the total population. Like Texans generally, blacks have largely aban-