

ESSENTIALS OF TEXAS POLITICS

SIXTH EDITION

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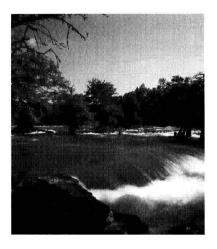
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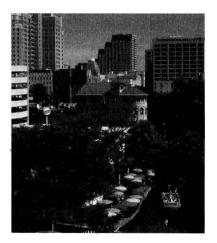
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The Cover Photos

The front cover is a portrait of Slumber Falls on the Guadalupe River between Canyon Lake and New Braunfels in central Texas.



The back cover features the Riverwalk in downtown San Antonio.



The first image is of water that is still partially wild, while the second photo shows water that has been wholly tamed and urbanized by people.

□ PREFACE

Government and politics are important aspects of modern life. Government includes public institutions and policies, while politics refers to political behavior and action. Both touch our daily lives in many ways. The traffic officer who stops us for speeding, the sales tax we pay with each retail purchase, the governor of Texas, presidential elections, the relations between the United States and Russia, and support/protest of the right to choose an abortion are all examples.

Yet, while the typical undergraduate student has studied a considerable amount of history, including aspects of government and politics, that student has often had little exposure to a focused look at political institutions and behavior. Moreover, as the Markle Commission on the Media and the Electorate reported in 1990, "American voters today do not seem to understand their rightful place in the operation of democracy." Unfortunately, Texans are no exception to this national trend. The upscale British magazine, *The Economist*, reported that "Public policy [in Texas] is . . . in shambles," and 60 Minutes and Saturday Night Live both derided Texas politics. This book is designed to help students learn more about the government and politics of Texas with the hope that this knowledge will encourage them to be active citizens and to help shape public policy.

In a short book such as this one, providing a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of Texas government and politics is impossible. Instead, we have tried to describe and to briefly analyze the major facets of the Texas political scene. How Texas government is organized, what its basic functions are, the importance of interest groups in Texas politics, the transitional nature of the political party system, the revenue crisis in the state, continuing issues of concern to citizens and public officials alike such as the quality of public education, and basic citizen rights are all a part of this book. Our hope is that students understand the tremendous influence government and politics have on their lives and will be knowledgeable participants, not unknowing bystanders.

We, the authors, are political scientists and, like other observers of politics, view our role as going beyond mere description. Unlike politicians who tend to defend the present governmental system, political scientists point out the differences between governmental practices and the sense of fair play and equity expected in a democratic system. We examine the faults of the system and suggest needed changes.

Essentials of Texas Politics is a condensed version of Texas Politics. In this fifth edition we wish to thank six individuals for their many valuable criticisms and suggestions. They are: Jim Carter, Sam Houston State University; Ronald Lane, University of Texas at Brownsville; Thomas H. Little, University of Texas at Arlington; Annette Lucksinger, Central Texas College; Marilyn S. Mertens, Midwestern State University; and H. Ibrahim Salih, Texas Wesleyan University. In addition, Stan Dyer and Al Waite of Central Texas College volunteered suggestions to Professor Lucksinger. Steve Poe of the University of North Texas has also volunteered helpful suggestions. While space limitations

^{1.} Michael Oreskes, "Study Finds 'Astonishing' Indifference to Elections," *New York Times*, May 6, 1990, p. 16.

^{2. &}quot;Sadly, Inept Texas Public Policy Draws World Attention," Austin American-Statesman, April 5, 1990, p. A12.

and an occasionally conflicting set of suggestions precluded incorporating all of the reviewers' recommendations, many changes in this edition are due directly to their comments. Additionally, we are grateful to Robert E. Williams, formerly of Abilene Christian University and now at Pepperdine University, for preparing the instructor's manual.

We are indebted to Helen Ballew, Ginny Clark, Claire Dawson-Brown, Thomas Debner, Tim Jones, Rebecca Lightsey, Rebecca Payne, and Bill Priddy for research assistance and to Walt Parker for sharing his legislative expertise. Also, we thank the many elected officials, legislative staff members, and stage agency staff members who provided us with information, clarification, and graphics material. We particularly thank Ben Sargent, winner of the 1982 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning, for again graciously permitting the use of his outstanding cartoons. Of course, any errors of fact or interpretation are ours alone.

☐ ELECTION '94: THE MORNING AFTER

Throughout this book, the reader will see references to office holders identified as incumbents as of mid-1994. Some of these incumbents—the presiding officers of the Texas Senate and Texas House of Representatives, all but one of the elected executives—were continued for another term on November 8, 1994. However, through the course of this election, George W. Bush (son of the former president) replaced Ann Richards as governor; the Texas Supreme Court had a Republican majority (5–4) for the first time in 120 years, and the Court of Criminal Appeals moved closer to a GOP majority; the Texas Railroad Commission was all Republican for the first time in its history; and the State Board of Education had an 8–7 Republican majority. The Texas congressional delegation moved closer to partisan equality, with 19 Democrats and 11 Republicans as well.¹ While the Democrats maintained a majority in the Texas legislature, the legislature, nevertheless, grew more conservative.

Election 1994 resulted in a sea of change in American politics. For the first time since the early Eisenhower administration, Republicans hold the majority in both houses of the U.S. Congress as well as in the governor's mansions in a majority of states. They also held about half of all the state legislative seats and a good share of judgeships. The American public voted a powerful series of messages:

- throw out the too-long-dominant Democratic incumbents
- step away from using government as an instrument to promote social equity
- return control of government to those who want to curtail its power through term limitations, a balanced budget, and a line-item veto for the chief executive
- send President Bill Clinton a message that his policy proposals do not have widespread public support.

Nationally and in Texas, Democrats were left to ponder whether they could, in the future, effect a different coalition that could hope to win an election. At the same time, across the country, *no* Republican incumbent member of Congress or sitting governor lost.

The biggest shock in Texas was the defeat of Ann Richards, who enjoyed a 60 percent job approval rating after leading efforts which resulted in bolstering the state economy, avoiding tax increases, decreasing crime, and increasing SAT scores. Richards was caught in the Republican tidal wave and in her own ineffective campaigning, which stressed what was wrong with George Bush more than what was right with Ann Richards.² Richards needed a big ethnic minority voter turnout to win, but her campaign rhetoric failed to inspire such a vote.

Two other Texas developments concerned those interested in democratic political processes particularly. In the judicial races, negative campaigning was far more evident than at any time in the past. In the State Board of Education contests, the conservatives made an all-out effort to take over the Board.

^{1.} Paul Burka analyzed the plight of the conservative Democrats—too far to the right for their own party, too far to the center for their districts—in "Stuck in the Middle," *Texas Monthly*, November 1994, pp. 80–85. One of them, Bill Sarpalius, did not survive Election 1994 and neither did the dean of the Texas congressional delegation, Jack Brooks. In the Senate race, Kay Bailey Hutchison, the Republican incumbent, handily led Democrat Richard Fisher throughout the campaign.

^{2.} Richards had won a narrow victory in 1990 only after the GOP candidate managed to offend enough women to enable Richards to capture part of the Republican women's vote.

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CHAPTER



THE CONTEXT OF TEXAS POLITICS

If I owned Hell and Texas, I'd rent out Texas and live in Hell.

Gen. Philip H. Sheridan, Fort Clark, Texas, 1855 If somebody's smart enough to move here, he must be all right.

Lynn Ashby, newspaper columnist, Houston, 1977

□ Introduction

Much has changed between the 1850s when General Sheridan made his well-known evaluation of Texas and the modern period when journalist Lynn Ashby made his. In 1855, Texas was poor and offered few comforts to a soldier assigned to garrison an outpost against Indian raids. Today, Lynn Ashby's Houston is an air-conditioned metropolis of almost 2 million people. Of all the major cities besides New York, only Houston has four fully professional theatrical arts companies—opera, ballet, theater, and symphony. Yet, in some ways, the state has changed little since Sheridan's time. Texas is a mix of old and new.

Habits of thought and behavior evolved to meet problems of the nineteenth century, when Texas was settled by Americans of western European background. These habits persist today, despite serious new problems created in the latter decades of the twentieth century. As Texans prepare themselves to meet the problems of the twenty-first century, they have to ask themselves if the habits and institutions they have inherited are up to the job.

In this chapter we will first consider some of the most important principles of democratic theory and try to explain why it is vital to understand them. Then we will examine the political culture of Texas, explore some of the social and political attitudes that have been of historical importance in the state, and suggest some of the factors of socialization that might help explain why Texans think the way they do. Next we will discuss the economy of Texas and the way it interacts with the state's political system. As an introduction to some of our discussions later in the book, we will then consider the origin and distribution of the people of Texas. Finally, we will briefly outline our agenda for the rest of the book.

□ Texas as a Democracy

In this book we will often be discussing the concept of **democracy** and evaluating the extent to which Texas measures up as a democratic state. A democracy is a system of government the **legitimacy** of which is based on the people's participation. Legitimacy is the belief that people have that their government is based upon morally right principles and that therefore they should obey its laws. According to the moral theory underlying a democratic system of government, because the people themselves (indirectly, through representatives) make the laws, they are morally obligated to obey them.

Complications to this theory abound, and we will be exploring a number of them later. Because some means to allow the people to participate in the government must exist, free elections, in which candidates or parties compete for the citizens' votes, are necessary. There must be some connection between what a majority of the people want and what the government actually does. Nevertheless, majorities must not be allowed to take away certain rights from minorities, such as the right to vote, the right to be treated equally under the law, and the right to freedom of speech.

Although most of them could not state it clearly, the great majority of Americans (and Texans) believe in some version of the theory of democracy. That being so, it is possible to judge our state government (as it is also possible to judge our national government) according to the extent to which it approximates the ideal of a democratic society. In this book, we will frequently be comparing the reality of Texas government with the ideal of the democratic polity and asking our readers to judge whether they think Texas is a successful democracy. Before beginning that, however, we must introduce some more aspects of Texas society.

□ THE TEXAS POLITICAL CULTURE

Like the other 49 states, Texas is part of a well-integrated American civil society. It also is a separate and distinctive society with its own history and present-day political system.

Culture is the product of the historical experience of a people in a particular area. Our political system is the product of our political culture. By **political culture** we mean "the particular pattern of orientation to political action in which each political system is embedded." It is a shared framework of values, beliefs, and habits of behavior in regard to government and politics.

Texas political culture is distinctive for a variety of reasons. Among the more important are the state's great size, its relative geographic isolation until the twentieth century, the fact that Texans were engaged almost continuously in warfare against Indians, Mexicans, or Yankees for the first decades of their history, and its experience as an independent nation from 1836 to 1845. In addition, Texas shares with other Southern states its history as a society that formerly held slaves and that was defeated in a civil war and then occupied in a humiliating fashion by victorious Northern troops. Political culture reflects these and other aspects of our history and culture.

^{1.} Daniel J. Elazar, American Federalism: A View from the States, 2d ed. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1972), 89.

Daniel Elazar, a well-known political scientist, has found that there are three distinctive political subcultures in the United States, which he has designated as **traditionalistic**, individualistic, and moralistic.²

The Traditionalistic Political Culture

In the traditionalistic political culture, which originated in a preindustrial agrarian society, people approach politics from an elitist and paternalistic perspective. Their culture is characterized by great economic and political inequality between individuals at the top and at the bottom of the social scale. In this culture, government plays an important but restricted role, its primary function being to maintain the established—traditional—social order. Politicians rarely initiate new programs, except those necessary to maintain the traditional society and the status quo. Real political power is held by a small, self-perpetuating elite consisting of the members of a few prominent families who also have close social ties.



Political culture is not static, but changing. Not only do Texas residents change their values and beliefs, but the state's culture has been altered dramatically by the influx of newcomers. For example, between 1980 and 1990 the population increased by 19.4 percent, and about a third of the increase consisted of mi-

grants from outside the state. Polls indicate that in many ways these new citizens are different from native Texans. The immigrants are younger than the average state resident (who is 31) and four times as likely to report that they never attend religious services. They have higher incomes, are predominantly Republicans, and consider themselves "economic conservatives." However, they are far more liberal on social issues. They are not nearly so opposed to abortion, and a majority have no objection to political candidates who are atheists.

Thus immigration has made Texas both more liberal and more Republican at the same time.

In this traditionalistic culture, which was dominant in all the Southern states until well into the twentieth century, political parties are suspect because of their public status and openness; therefore, parties are usually weak or nonexistent. Political participation by anyone other than the members of the elite is frowned upon, and even voting may be discouraged. Politics in the traditionalistic culture is limited mainly to the wealthy. Politics may be relatively efficient and clean, or inefficient and corrupt. In either case, the primary function of the traditionalistic culture's political system is to perpetuate the privileged position of the ruling elite.

The Individualistic Political Culture

In the individualistic political culture, people approach politics almost as a business or commercial activity. The process of politics consists of "who gets what"—the jobs, contracts, and favors that government can bestow on those with the right connections.

^{2.} Ibid., passim.



Cartoonist Ben Sargent pokes fun at the individualistic political culture with its purportedly businesslike approach to government. Junior Mosbacher, a wealthy Republican businessman, was appointed Commissioner of the Department of Human Services. In 1990, he failed to stay within his department's budget and was then forced to substantially curtail services to the sick and the poor.

Courtesy of Ben Sargent, Austin American-Statesman. Reprinted by permission.

Public office is important because officeholders receive and dispense rewards, and individuals succeed by fulfilling their mutual obligations. Government's role is usually limited to providing basic services and to taking actions necessary to keep the marketplace functioning properly. Officeholders rarely initiate new government programs.

Because this culture values individual private activities, political participation is viewed as a series of personal relationships. Political parties are important because they provide the organization necessary to structure these relationships—thus party loyalty is valued.

Knowing that politicians are "in it" only for the rewards, citizens in this culture view politics as dirty and expect a degree of corruption. In the individualistic culture, nothing less than a major scandal will arouse adverse citizen reaction. Like the traditionalistic culture, the individualistic culture does not produce admirable democratic politics.

CONCEPT	Traditionalistic	Individualistic	MORALISTIC
Basic Values	Maintenance of the prevailing social order	Private gain, competition	Community; achieve- ment of general welfare
Government	Means of maintaining existing order; initi- atory only for that purpose	A business; limited to basic services; es- sentially noninitiatory	Means to achieve so- cial and economic good; initiatory
Participation	Restricted to socioeconomic elite	Open to all who play by the rules	Responsibility of all members of community
Corruption	Possibly	Definitely	Rarely
Political parties	Undesirable because they are open and public; usually weak or nonexistent	Important for organiz- ing personal rela- tionships; worthy of loyalty	Useful for pursuing general welfare but less important than ideology

TABLE 1-1 Summary of the Three Political Cultures

Source: Adapted from Table One, pages 24–25 in Daniel J. Elazar, "The American Cultural Matrix," in Daniel J. Elazar and Joseph Zikmund II, The Ecology of American Political Culture: Readings (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), 13–42.

The Moralistic or Participatory Political Culture

The moralistic political culture is the one most of us think of when we imagine a well-run democracy. Its basic idea is that the inhabitants of a city, state, or nation constitute a commonwealth, a community of people united by shared interests and values.

Political participation in this culture involves a struggle to achieve the public interest, or in the words of the U.S. Constitution, the "general welfare." Government, although clearly limited in scope and power, is seen as a positive force that has an important and sometimes indispensable role in promoting justice and prosperity for all. Politics is open to everyone, and participation is encouraged because it is seen as important for the complete self-development of each member of the community.

In this culture, political parties are regarded as useful devices for organizing politics and elections. Since the attainment of the general welfare is more important than loyalty to an organization, however, candidates and ideologies tend to be more important than parties. Officeholders are generally held to higher standards of conduct than are ordinary citizens but politics itself is considered an important and positive, rather than a dirty, activity. Corruption is comparatively rare.

Table 1–1 summarizes these three political cultures.

Historically, the political culture of Texas, like the culture of every Southern state, was traditionalistic. Politics was largely left in the hands of the wealthy whites. African Americans, Mexican Americans, and poor whites were discouraged or even prevented from participating. Parties were weak and fragmented. Government was minimal, except to organize the marketplace for the benefit of business. By the middle of the twentieth