

# Texas Political Culture

## Shaping Culture: History

Political culture is shaped by historical experience. Texas conservatism developed as a reaction to specific historical circumstances. Those events shaped Texas government at its origins and continue to be reflected in contemporary Texas government.

In the early 1800s, Texas belonged to Spanish Mexico. When Mexico achieved independence from Spain in 1821, Texas became a frontier territory ruled by a government in Mexico City that exerted little real control. As Anglos settled in increasing numbers, Mexico could not hold the territory, and in 1836 Texas became an independent republic. A sovereign nation, but under constant pressure from Mexican raids, the state's nine-year stretch of independence helps explain the maverick quality that pervades Texas political culture to this day.

A second critical factor shaping Texas political culture and helping explain the origins of Texas government is the Radical Republican takeover following the Civil War. After the war, former Confederate officers and soldiers were barred from holding office. The Radical Republicans took control of state government and attempted to nullify the political, economic, and social order that existed before the war. This new government operated under a constitution that granted strong, centralized powers to the state, implemented policies of the federal government, extended freedoms to former slaves, and amassed considerable state debt. Both the constitution and the policies proved to be unpopular in Texas. When the ban was lifted on former Confederates holding office, the old political elites reclaimed control of state government and rewrote the constitution in 1876. Their goal was to limit government's ability to act, while keeping taxes and spending low. Although amended hundreds of times, the Constitution of 1876 remains in force today.

### Activity: Check Your Understanding

Covers historical events that shaped Texas' political culture. Highlights Texas' nine-year stretch as an independent republic and the changes political elites made to Texas government when they reclaimed control from the Radical Republicans.

## **Additional Resources**

### **Websites**

#### **[Texas State Historical Association](http://www.tshaonline.org/)**

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Texas State Historical Association: Organized in 1897, the Texas State Historical Association's mission is to "foster the appreciation, understanding, and teaching of the rich and unique history of Texas and, by example and through programs and activities, encourage and promote research, preservation, and publication of historical material affecting the state of Texas." The TSHA's website includes the Handbook of Texas Online, comprising more than 25,000 articles on people, places, events, historical themes, institutions, and a host of other topic categories.

#### **[The Portal to Texas History](http://texashistory.unt.edu)**

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A gateway to digital Texas history materials, including excerpts from the "Oral History Collection" of the University of North Texas. From prehistory to the present day, you can explore unique collections from Texas libraries, museums, archives, historical societies, genealogical societies, and private family collections.