

Texas Political Culture

The Shape of Things to Come

In the past, a simpler economy that relied heavily on natural resources and a dominant Anglo, Protestant, and rural population exerted little pressure for social services and limited inclusion in the political process. But today, the Texas economy and the Texas population are being transformed. Texas conservatism is deeply engrained, but new citizens, raised in urban environments with different ethnic, religious, and economic experiences, and with different needs and expectations, will influence Texas political culture into the future.

Texas remains a low-tax, low-services, conservative state that celebrates individual effort and responsibility, resists government interference in public life, and relies on traditional social values to maintain stability in a rapidly changing world. Whether this political culture can survive in a world fundamentally different than the one in which it was born is an open question.

Virtual Roundtable

The 21st century will test the ability of state government to address the issues posed by changing economic and demographic trends. What are the major challenges facing Texas government in the 21st century?

Video: Sen. Judith Zaffirini, Texas 21st Senatorial District, Laredo, TX

Video script:

In the 21st century, our problem and our challenge will be exactly what we have faced before – funding, because when we differentiate between those who consider education and healthcare “rights” versus those who consider them “privileges,” and when we look at the different priorities and different needs and different interests of competing groups, it doesn’t matter what legislation we pass or fail to pass. What matters, more important than that, is funding the programs that are important to us. So it’s always about funding.

End of video.

Video: Allan Saxe, Associate Professor of Political Science, University of Texas at Arlington

Video script:

I think it's still an asset because we like to pride ourselves on individuality...entrepreneurship. But there could be some friction with the national government, because it seems like again, as we speak at this moment, the national government is moving toward becoming stronger, more powerful, perhaps taking away some of the responsibilities that used to be with the state government and education is one of those, healthcare. So all the issues, all these great policy changes to a great extent are dependent on what the national government begins to do and where they move in the next several years.

End of video.

Video: Jessica Lavariega Monforti, Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Texas – Pan American

Video script:

There are a lot of challenges that Texas is going to face as we move on into this 21st century and I think probably the biggest one is dealing with two shifts in population – one, it's increasing diversity and two, it's increasing urbanization. All kinds of problems are going to pop up as a result of those two things. How are we going to deal with bilingual education beyond just Spanish in our public school systems? How are we going to provide the very few services that we provide in Texas in mandarin, for example, as our Chinese populations continue to grow, and Chinese-American populations. How are we going to deal with issues of mass transportation in our cities? Because at some point we just can't keep building highways. We will run out of space. So we've started to do that in some of our urban areas, but how will we link those up with one another? So those kinds of issues really is sort of what I see as being on our...our frontier.

End of video.

Video: Elise Hu, Journalist & Political Reporter, Austin, TX

Video script:

I think the problems that face Texas government come out of this major population growth and demographic shift that we see in Texas. There's more people coming into the state than ever before and yet there's questions about whether we have the infrastructure to handle it. So, in terms of major big picture issues that Texas is really going to have to look at and try and figure out how to address are transportation, you know, some of the cities in Texas are the most congested cities in the nation for their size. Austin is one of them.

End of video.

Video: Rep. Rafael Anchia, Texas House of Representatives, District 103, Dallas, TX

Video script:

When you're talking about children, I mean that should be the most compelling case. Through no fault of their own, I guess...I guess it was their bad judgment, for example, not to pick parents who had insurance or parents that were wealthy or parents that lived in highly funded school districts. Clearly I'm being ironic there, because they had no say in the matter. They were born into whatever circumstances they were born into. And my view of the role of government is that we need to give...to equalize the playing field and give those children the same shot as anybody else who was born in a...in a wealthy neighborhood, in a middle class neighborhood, who was born to parents with or without insurance. The playing field should be should be level for all of those Texans and I think we still have a lot of work to do.

End of video.

Additional Resources

Websites

[Texas Public Policy Foundation](http://www.texaspolicy.com/)

<http://www.texaspolicy.com/>

This conservative, non-profit organization's mission is "to promote and defend liberty, personal responsibility, and free enterprise in Texas by educating and affecting policymakers and the Texas public policy debate with academically sound research and outreach."

[Center for Public Policy Priorities](http://forabettertexas.org/)

<http://forabettertexas.org/>

This progressive, non-profit policy institute is "committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans."

Books

Lone Star Tarnished: A Critical Look at Texas Politics and Public Policy, by Cal Jillson.

Professor Jillson approaches public policy in the nation's most populous "red state" from historical, comparative, and critical perspectives. The historical perspective provides the scope for asking how various policy domains have developed in Texas history, regularly reaching back to the state's founding and with substantial data for the period 1950 to the present. In each chapter, Jillson compares Texas public policy choices and results with those of other states and the United States in general. This critical perspective allows the reader to question the balance of benefits and costs attendant to what is often referred to as "the Texas way" or "the Texas model."

The Texas Model: Prosperity in the Lone Star State and Lessons for America, by Chuck DeVore.

DeVore compares Texas to its large state peers and details why Texas is increasingly the destination for Americans seeking a better life. The book describes a state with low taxes, modest government, and a lawsuit climate that allows entrepreneurship to flourish while encouraging job creation.