

Texas: Incipient Polarization?

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Population changes are leading Texas to becoming a majority-minority state, especially with the increase of Hispanics. Texas has become a GOP stronghold, and the GOP is increasingly cohesive, and conservative, winning all statewide offices in both 1998 and 2002, plus control of the legislature in 2002. Religious fundamentalism is clearly evident in the GOP, but many distance themselves from the Christian right. Ideological differences between the parties have increased, largely because Democrats are more liberal. GOP activists are upbeat, while Democrats appear dispirited, although less so than in 1991.

Introduction

The 1990s were a decade of great success for Texas Republicans. At the start of the decade, Democrats controlled the governorship, a substantial majority of the state legislative seats, one of the two U.S. Senate seats, and 70 percent of the U.S. House seats. By the end of the decade, Republicans held the governorship, one of two houses of the state legislature, both U.S. Senate seats, and nearly one-half of the U.S. House seats. This major change in Texas politics, which had begun earlier, affected the political party organizations in the state, including the grassroots organizations. The activists who were leaders in the county party organizations were surveyed in 1991 and 2001, and the data reveal changes in their behavior and attitudes, changes that may both reflect the electoral trends of that time period and have contributed to the trends.

Continuing Contextual Change

The Population Context

Despite its fame for being the land of “wide-open spaces,” Texas has become an urban state in many ways. In 1980, 79.6 percent of its population of 14.2 million was “urban” by Census Bureau standards. Ten years later, that had changed to 80.3 percent of 17 million. By 2000, Texas was now the

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second largest state, at 20.8 million, with 91 percent in urban areas. Significant changes have also taken place in the ethnic composition of the state. The Anglo population in 1980 comprised 78.7 percent; in 1990 it was 75.2 percent; and by 2000 it was 52.4 percent. African-Americans in 1980 were 12.0 percent, but by 2000 they had dropped to 11.5 percent. The change in the Hispanic population was the most notable, growing from 21 percent in 1980 to 26 percent in 1990. By 2000 they were at 32 percent, “projected to become an absolute majority within the next quarter-century” (Martinez 2002). In short, by this latest census, Texas was on the verge of becoming a majority-minority state.

The Political Context

Once a stalwart of the Democratic Solid South, Texas has been slowly changing to becoming a major Republican stronghold not only in the South, but for the entire nation as well. The nominal start of this transformation can be readily attributed to the 1961 “Tower Election,” when John Tower won the Senate seat vacated by Lyndon Johnson on winning the vice presidency a year earlier. With his election, Tower legitimized the idea of Republicans being electorally viable, and certainly at least as conservative as Democrats, who were increasingly identified with their more liberal brethren elsewhere. This election caught the state Democratic Party completely “unprepared to respond effectively,” as the party coffers were empty and it was in debt (Posler and Ward 1997, 312).

With Tower’s surprise victory, native Texans began to accept the fact that lightning would not strike them dead were they to vote Republican for an odd office or so. They were joined in this by their neighbors from elsewhere, who felt at home in the conservative Texas political climate (Posler and Ward 1997, 309-311). Table 1 presents election results for several offices over a number of years. The growth of Republican success is clear from even a cursory inspection of this table. In 1962 the first GOP members of the state House were elected, joined by senators in 1966. Following the 2000 elections, Republicans held 16 of the 31 seats in the state Senate, and 72 of the 150 seats in the state House. Republican strength in the Texas congressional delegation grew from just 2 of 23 U.S. House seats in 1961 to 5 of 27 seats in 1981, to 8 of 30 seats in 1991, and to 13 of 30 seats in 2001. While still a minority of the state’s House delegation in 2000, both the House Majority Leader, Dick Arme, and the Minority Whip, Tom DeLay hailed from Texas. Indeed, DeLay was widely regarded as the most powerful House member, as he had played a key role in selecting Speaker Dennis Hastert after Newt Gingrich stepped down. Senator Phil Gramm, a Republican elected in 1984, was joined nine years later by Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, giving the GOP control over both Senate seats.

Table 1. Republican Strength in Texas, 1960-2000

Year	Percent of Presidential Vote	Percent of Gubernatorial Vote	Percent of U.S. Senate Vote	Percent of U.S. House Delegation	Percent of State House Delegation	Percent of State Senate Delegation
1960	48.5	27.2	41.1	4.5	0.0	0.0
1962		45.6		8.7	4.7	0.0
1964	36.5	26.0	43.6	0.0	0.7	0.0
1966		25.8	56.4	8.7	2.0	3.2
1968	39.9	43.0		13.0	5.3	6.5
1970		46.4	46.4	13.0	6.7	6.5
1972	66.2	45.0	53.4	16.7	11.3	9.7
1974		31.1		12.5	10.7	9.7
1976	48.0		42.2	8.3	12.7	12.9
1978		50.0	49.8*	16.7	15.3	16.1
1980	55.3			20.8	23.3	22.6
1982		45.9	40.5	18.5	24.0	16.1
1984	63.6		58.5	37.0	34.7	19.4
1986		52.7		37.0	37.3	19.4
1988	56.0		40.0	29.6	38.0	25.8
1990		46.9	60.2	29.6	37.3	25.8
1992	40.6*			30.0	38.0	41.9
1994		53.5	61.4	36.7	40.7	45.2
1996	48.8*		54.8	43.3	45.3	51.6
1998		68.2		43.3	48.0	51.6
2000	61.0		65.0	43.3	48.0	51.6

Notes: *Won, despite absence of majority. In 1992, Republican George Bush won the state with 52.1 percent of the two-party vote. In 1996, Republican Robert Dole won the state with 51.2 percent of the two-party vote. The last three columns give the percent Republican following the specified election (e.g., after the 1994 election, Republicans held 45.2 percent of the state senate seats).

Sources: *America Votes* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1960-1990) and *Statistical Abstract of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960-1992), various editions. The 1992-2000 figures were provided by the Texas Secretary of State.

Further setting the stage for GOP dominance over Texas politics, the first Republican governor since Reconstruction was elected in 1978 and, after some alternation, this office was captured by George W. Bush in 1994 with 53.5 percent, beating the popular incumbent Ann Richards. That she was defeated in the same month that she had a 61 percent public approval rating may say something either about the nature of party organization or about personality politics. Reelected in 1998 with a smashing majority of 68 percent, Bush's coattails proved quite long, as Republicans held every statewide elective office.

Hence, a remarkable transformation had taken place. Texas was now a Republican powerhouse on the national stage. Texas gave George Bush a

winning 41 percent of its vote in the 1992 presidential election and 56 percent in 1988. It then helped send his son, George W. Bush, to the White House, with 59 percent of the vote. The GOP also held both Senate seats, was the locus of significant power in the House, and was tightening its grip on state politics as well.

The Status of Party Organization

Given this background, one might expect the state Democratic party organization to be disheartened if not moribund, but this was far from the case. In a very real sense, it had no place to go but up. And, to some extent, they were helped by the inevitable passage of time. Senator Gramm announced in September, 2001 that he would not seek reelection. He was joined in this three months later by Majority Leader Armev. While Armev's seat was safe Republican, Gramm's retirement set off a flurry in the Democratic Party. The next year, 2002, offered a window of opportunity for the Democrats that they had not expected so soon. The incumbent Governor, Rick Perry, had succeeded to office when Bush was elected President. Lacking the visibility of his predecessor, he was seen as vulnerable. Millionaire Tony Sanchez quickly emerged as the leading Democratic candidate, and the state party all but embraced him as their choice in the primary, which he went on to win in March, 2002. That he had contributed \$300,000 to George Bush's earlier campaigns (Martinez 2002) did not seem to hinder his candidacy, perhaps because this was seen as a chance that he might appeal to GOP voters. The possibility of a "rainbow" or "dream team" ticket was raised by party officials, as Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, an African-American, won the senatorial primary in April, 2002. Kirk was regarded as the GOP's favorite Democrat, as he had been a pro-business office-holder. The winner of this primary was to face the former state Attorney-General, John Cornyn, who was also seen as vulnerable by the Democrats.

Success is not without its costs. Just as the Democrats had nothing to lose and everything to gain, the GOP had to defend two major open seats, as a result of the resignations of Bush as governor and Gramm as senator. Consequently, statewide television ads began to appear at roughly the same time as our survey was undertaken, well prior to the primaries. Both the organization's message as well as that of its candidates were dominated by a single theme, if not an article of faith. Unwavering support of the state's former governor, President Bush, whether his policies were seen as relevant to the state or not, was the bottom-line message. The message was successful. The Democratic "dream ticket" was unable to achieve a break-through, as they lost all statewide races by significant margins. They lost both houses of the legislature as well, leaving the GOP in control of all branches of the

state government. This was the first time since Reconstruction that Republicans held such control. If this left the GOP in charge, it also put the onus of governance on them, as they had to deal with a two-year projected budgetary shortfall in the neighborhood of \$10 billion. In a state that is proud to have no income taxes, they were faced with how to cut state services and improve revenue, a bitter pill to swallow.

Texas may be somewhat unique, inasmuch as, at the time of the survey, both of its major party chairs are women. Although each was the first woman elected to this post within her party, there is little else in common between them. After long-time incumbent Bob Slagle was forced to step down in 1995 (Posler and Ward 1997, 314), following Bush's first gubernatorial victory, Molly Beth Malcolm, a former Republican and public school teacher, was elected Democratic Party state chair in 1998. A tireless worker, she publicized the progressive achievements of her party and worked at fund-raising and publicizing the party in a manner that had not been seen by Democrats in many years. However, as we have seen, this met with little or no electoral success, and she was unsuccessfully pressured to step down in the post-election period.

Her opposite number, Susan Weddington, was elected in 1997. Identifying with the pro-life faction, she came from the more conservative wing of her party. Thus, she faced the difficulties of dealing with success. First, having helped the party to a position of total dominance in the executive branch of Texas government, she had to defend those seats. Also, she was faced with the inevitable factionalism that can arise as a party becomes so dominant that multiple candidates are inevitably attracted to the leading party's label. As an example, within weeks of Majority Leader Armev's announcement, there were six GOP contenders for his seat. Where the Republicans once had trouble filling their slate with nominees, there now seemed to be an abundance of candidates for many slots. Factionalism of a personalistic nature also emerged within the GOP following their sweep of statewide offices in the 2002 elections, in terms of who was to blame for the budget crisis alluded to above.

Both parties have made major strides at the state level in terms of campaigning. Republicans employ sophisticated phone bank technologies that enable them to provide important information to candidates, local organizations, and voters at lower cost. The Democrats have new systems on-line that allow them secure communications between all levels of the party, and extensive voter files are maintained to enable better targeting of campaigns at all levels (Posler and Ward 1997, 314).

At the state level, the GOP website, TexasGOP.org, was named the best state party website for two years in a row by *Campaigns and Elections Magazine*, which stated that "The Texas GOP steals the show with a whole

section titled ‘Grassroots Growth’ that instructs people how to raise money, turn out voters, start their own auxiliary GOP chapter, donate, volunteer or register to vote” (Republican Party 2002). This can be taken as a measure of the technical sophistication one of the two parties has achieved. At a lower level, this emphasis on technology is reflected in the presence, if not always great sophistication, of web pages for numerous county organizations in both parties.

The Texas Activists

We now examine our data on Texas grassroots party activists, with a focus on the changes that have taken place both within each party and between the parties, from the time of our first survey in 1991 to the more recent 2001 study.

Social Characteristics

Despite the presence of women at the head of each state party, there is a notable drop of women in our total sample, as shown in Table 2. In the Democratic Party, running counter to the trend, 37 percent of the county chairs are women, a slight increase since 1991. However, the proportion of women party activists has fallen in the other three categories—Democratic members, Republican chairs, and, most notably, GOP members. While these differences are not especially large, they run counter to the generally increased activism of women at other levels in politics, and we see no easy answer as to why this is so. However, if this is not idiosyncratic, there is a danger that the grass roots of both state parties could be on the threshold of returning to a “good old boys” club of exclusivity. Certainly, it suggests that neither party has been especially effective at recruiting or retaining women.

If exclusivity is measured by race or ethnic status, the two parties are only marginally less so. The proportion of African-Americans has increased from 3.2 percent to 6.2 percent overall, but it is still significantly less than their 11.5 percent in the state. The largest single increase was among Democratic members, going from 6.6 percent to 14.7 percent. While GOP members increased from 1.5 percent to 3.4 percent, the 2001 survey failed to detect any black county chairs for the Republicans, and only two for the Democrats. Slight increases are noted for Hispanics in all categories, but again this is well below their statewide census proportion of 32 percent. While both parties have been somewhat successful in attracting Hispanic contenders for statewide office, this is barely reflected at the grass roots activist level. Clearly, major work has yet to be done in this area for either party to place a legitimate claim on being “representative” in the sense of either gender or ethnicity.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Texas Party Activists, 1991 and 2001

Characteristic	Democrats		Republicans	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Gender				
Male	56.6	56.6	59.4	66.8
Women	43.4	43.4	40.6	33.2
Race/Ethnicity				
White	83.4	78.4	94.6	91.4
Black	5.1	10.6	1.4	2.5
Hispanic	9.6	10.1	1.2	3.9
Age				
Under 40	14.8	10.0	18.6	12.9
40-49	19.6	16.6	20.1	21.2
50-59	22.6	26.4	22.7	22.2
Over 60	42.9	47.0	38.5	43.7
Education				
College degree	39.9	60.0	54.1	64.9
Family Income				
≥ \$60,000 (1991) or				
≥ \$75,000 (2001)	23.0	34.3	33.1	47.8
(N)	(692)	(767)	(781)	(675)

Note: Entries are percentages.

The educational level in both parties shows a marked increase over the 10 year period. Those with a high school degree or less have gone from 15 percent to 6 percent. At the opposite end of the scale, the proportion with a graduate degree has increased from 26 percent to 35 percent. Given that Texas is a state where significant emphasis is placed on public versus private college education, this may reflect the efforts of the state to achieve higher graduation rates at all levels, particularly at the college or university levels.

It is difficult to compare income differences between the two samples, inasmuch as the measures are not commensurate, and necessarily so, as income across the population in general would certainly reflect the inflationary effects of a decade. However, in 1991, the median family income group for the activists, regardless of party or party position, was in the rather broad range of \$30,000 to \$59,999. Perhaps reflecting the effects of increased education, or just normal inflation, for that matter, the 2001 median income level is \$50,000 to \$74,999. No major differences emerge, other than the

usual finding that Republican activists are much more likely to be in the highest category.

Our report on the 1991 sample concluded, in regard to social characteristics, that “. . . our samples reflect earlier findings of higher status for political activists at the precinct and higher levels,” which is consistent with earlier research (Conway and Feigert 1968; Cotter et al. 1984). We also wrote that in 1991 “Texas party activists are fairly described as white, Protestant, well-educated, of high income. . . . Age and gender differences are insignificant, suggesting that for Texas at least, party activity is not simply a place for older white males” (Feigert and McWilliams 1995, 80). Essentially, the same analysis holds, with the notable exceptions of declining female but increased minority participation in county and local parties.

Religion and Intra-Party Factionalism

Texas activists continue to reflect a Protestant domination (Table 3), although less so than in 1991, when 81.6 percent were adherents of a Protestant faith. As before, this is more likely the case for Republicans, although they show a slight decline of roughly 5 percent in this regard. Increases of a marginal nature are noted for Roman Catholics and Jews. Democratic

Table 3. Religion and Related Attitudes of Texas Party Activists, 1991 and 2001

Attitude	Democrats		Republicans	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Religion				
Protestant	76.4	65.0	86.2	80.8
Roman Catholic	18.7	21.7	10.8	14.0
Born-Again Christian	21.2	38.2	22.5	56.3
Closeness to Christian Right (not asked in 1991)				
Very close		4.6		20.4
Close		7.8		27.4
Neutral		19.0		30.6
Far		9.4		8.5
Very Far		59.1		13.1
Mean*		1.9		3.3

Notes: Entries are percentages. *Mean score reported based on a five point scale: Very close, close (5, 4), neutral (3), far, very far (2, 1).

activists are more likely to claim “other” or “none” than are Republicans, but this is still less than 10 percent. Differences in terms of Protestant affiliation are more striking when we probe for measures that are more likely to be reflected in politics. While the concept of “born-again Christian” is often associated in the popular mind with Republicans, more than 20 percent of the 1991 Democratic sample professed to be born-again Christians, scarcely less than the Republicans. Ten years later this had increased to more than 38 percent. An even more significant change took place among Republicans, in that more than 56 percent now identify themselves as “born-again.” This change might simply be dismissed as an artifact of the expansion of religious fundamentalism throughout Texas, the South, or the nation for that matter. However, it is reflected in another and perhaps more politically relevant sense when we examine adherence to the Christian Right. While we did not ask that question in 1991, the 2001 results are revealing, if not unexpected. Certainly, there are and always have been conservative strands among Texas Democrats, as there have been among Republicans. What is compelling are the differences between the two parties. Moreover, while almost half of the GOP activists identify themselves as “close” or “very close” to the Christian Right, about one-fifth say that they are “far” or “very far” from this movement.

The above findings are in accord with some anecdotal evidence associated with the 2001 study. A total of 32 letters, phone-calls, and e-mails was received from GOP activists, all objecting in one way or another, to the perceived take-over or control of the state party by the Christian Right. Included were several commenting on alleged undemocratic procedures followed at the state convention, implying that these were used to stifle debate. Several of those who so responded stated that they were staying active in Republican politics “in spite of” the Christian Right, or “that gang in Austin” as one caller put it. While this is only anecdotal, when coupled with the 21.6 percent who oppose the Christian Right, it suggests potential if not already existing divisions in what is now the state’s dominant party. Following the 1991 survey, we noted that the extent to which activists used a born-again (or charismatic, or evangelical, or fundamentalist) self-description, could “ultimately contribute to intra-party factionalism” (Feigert and McWilliams 1995, 83). On this basis, at least, the seeds are sown more among Republicans, as almost half are self-ascribed born-agains, and more than half are adherents of the Christian Right. History has shown us that when one party becomes so dominant that electoral success can be found only in that party, factionalism of one sort or another will inevitably follow (Key 1949). It may simply be that we have uncovered only another basis for schism.

Inter-Party Issue and Ideological Differences

The extent to which issue and ideological differences exist between and within parties is shown in Table 4. That there are differences between the parties comes as no surprise, although there is a widely held view that both parties are dominated by conservatives. In our sample of activists, the differences on specific issues are profound, and increasingly so. For example, while Democrats are normally identified as the “pro-choice” party, they increased their support of this position from 78 percent in 1991 to 86 percent in 2001. Republican activists decreased their support from 44 percent to 31 percent. Substantial differences exist over time within and between the parties on the question of government aid to minorities as well. Democrats are even more likely now to favor such programs than they were in 1991. While there has been some slow acceptance of this within the GOP, such that more than a third are supportive of these programs, the difference between the two parties increased from 1991 to 2001.

On two issues dealing with government spending, the differences have also increased substantially. Democrats were slightly less likely to support increases in defense spending than they had been ten years earlier. But, GOP activists are much more likely to favor such increases. Hence, the gap between the two parties has widened considerably. On the more general issue

Table 4. Issues and Ideological Orientations of Texas Party Activists, 1991 and 2001

	Democrats		Republicans	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Issue (percent agreeing)				
Legal abortion choice	78.3	86.3	44.4	30.8
Aid to minorities	70.7	85.1	31.1	34.8
Increase defense spending	30.8	24.0	62.2	83.0
Reduce gov't spending	22.9	10.3	77.2	74.9
Ideological Identification				
Very liberal	10.3	21.1	0.4	0.5
Somewhat liberal	32.4	38.5	2.1	1.5
Moderate	31.4	25.1	11.5	7.3
Somewhat conservative	19.2	11.9	46.2	37.6
Very conservative	6.7	3.4	39.8	53.2
Mean*	2.8	2.4	4.2	4.4

Notes: Entries are percentages. *Mean score reported based on a five point scale: liberal (1, 2), moderate (3), conservative (4, 5).

of reducing government spending, about 10 percent of Democrats favor this, while almost three-quarters of Republicans take this position. The difference between the parties in 2001 is the greatest of the four issues we examined.

These differences are reflected in underlying ideological orientations. If there is a middle ground among party workers, it has been among Democrats, but this is down from 31 percent in 1991 to 25 percent in 2001. If anything, the differences between the parties at the grassroots level are approaching polarization. In 2001, 43 percent of Democrats described themselves as “somewhat” or “very” liberal. By 2001, this had increased to 60 percent. On the other hand, 86 percent of Republicans were self-described conservatives in 1991, but this increased to 91 percent ten years later. Each party moved somewhat toward the poles over 10 years. The difference was more pronounced among Democrats, who clearly rejected, for themselves at least, the centrist position adopted by former President Clinton. On the other hand, there is not much room for the GOP to move toward the right, given the substantial proportion taking a “very conservative” position. Polarization has established itself at the grassroots level in Texas. It remains to be seen if this is reflected in the parties in government as well as the electorate.

Perceptions of Organizational Vitality

It must be noted that both surveys took place when a Republican was in the governor’s mansion. It is possible that our results are distorted by this, and we might have had significantly different results if we had conducted at least one of them while the Democrats were hegemonic. But, if the GOP must ultimately pay a price for its electoral success, holding all top elective offices in Texas, there is a benefit as well (Table 5). In 1991, GOP grassroots workers “overwhelmingly saw their county organizations as stronger in each of the areas” (Feigert and McWilliams 1995, 84). This is true in 2001 as well, as Republicans believe their county organizations to be highly effective in all. Indeed, differences between the parties actually increased in all eight of the areas we examined. While Republicans were reaping the dividends of activists who have a positive outlook on their party, Democrats were seemingly dispirited. Scarcely more than a third of the Democrats in either survey year agreed that our criteria of vitality applied to their county organizations. Except for a small difference in perceived fund-raising ability, the only organizational criterion in which Democrats improved was that of using computer technology. Clearly, the Democrats have a long way to go. One thing to do, of course, would be to win some statewide offices. Another step would be to provide assistance to county organizations to ensure their vitality, and give activists a reason to believe that their work matters. This may be a chicken-egg situation, but clearly the Democrats have a lot to learn

Table 5. Perceptions of Organizational Vitality Among Texas Party Activists, 1991 and 2001

	Democrats		Republicans	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Campaign effectiveness	37.6	29.7	77.5	83.8
Ability to raise funds	25.7	27.3	67.3	79.6
Recruitment	27.8	23.3	68.2	78.7
Worker organization	33.5	32.5	58.9	63.1
Use of media	41.3	34.6	57.7	61.9
Use of opinion polls	29.2	23.4	43.1	42.3
Use of computer technology	51.5	69.3	63.1	79.7
Means*	35.1	33.8	65.1	72.1

Note: Entries are the percent who reported significantly stronger (1) and stronger (2) responses.
*Mean scores are based on a five point scale: stronger (1, 2), little change (3), weaker (4, 5).

from their Republican counterparts as to how to put a spring in the step of those activists who might be going door-to-door, conveying their party's message.

Role Orientations and Activities

Before these foot soldiers of the parties actually go to work, it is necessary to consider how they see themselves in the larger picture. Here the picture for the Democrats is not as grim as we have just seen, but there are still significant inherent GOP advantages (Table 6).

One signal advantage enjoyed by the Democrats lies in their stress on supporting the party's candidate, even if that person is not altogether to their liking. In a like vein, despite their national reputation for being a fractious lot, Democrats are also more likely to stress party unity than are Republicans, a factor that may reflect the tendency toward the ideological right noted above. Of some interest, as well, is the increased Democratic agreement on local activities, up 18.8 percent. Perhaps reflecting their leadership in Austin, there is a much stronger orientation toward and approval of activities of their state party organization than there had been ten years earlier. In this respect, the two parties, each looking inward, are not that far apart.

Finally, since those surveyed represent the party base, which is most likely to engage in face-to-face voter contact, to what do they profess importance? In this respect, the parties are quite similar, although Republicans no longer enjoy the clear advantage they had in 1991, as Democrats seemingly place greater emphasis on such activities. While they showed signs of being

Table 6. Role Orientations and Activities of Texas Party Activists, 1991 and 2001

	Democrats		Republicans	
	1991	2001	1991	2001
Role Orientations (percent agreeing)				
Support candidate	62.6	61.1	36.3	35.6
Party unity most important	43.8	43.2	27.5	31.9
Candidate values	86.0	65.4	91.8	58.2
Controversial issues	43.7	37.1	35.7	35.2
Remain neutral	47.3	41.1	46.0	29.9
Local activities	64.9	83.7	63.3	79.0
State activities	30.7	86.4	64.4	85.8
Activities (percent important)				
Voter contact	84.6	92.6	86.0	90.6
Raising money	41.4	58.5	45.8	46.4
Voter registration	88.9	91.3	82.2	87.6
Campaigning	70.6	80.6	71.3	77.2
Public Relations	72.5	75.5	70.4	73.3
Policy Formulation	53.0	65.2	55.5	67.0
County organizational work	67.1	75.7	60.5	64.9
Information to voters	79.4	87.9	83.1	86.9
Local candidate recruitment	55.0	67.1	63.0	61.6

Notes: Entries for role orientations are the percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. Entries for activities are the percent saying that it is an important aspect of their position.

dispirited above in terms of local organizational effectiveness, they at least claim to place greater emphasis on practical activities, those associated with generating more potent campaigns. Little change is noted among Republicans, although there is a greater stress on policy formulation in 2001 as compared to 1991. Although the difference between the GOP and Democrats is negligible, this may reflect the increasing ideological tone within each party, in the sense that activists are increasingly driven by issues and ideological positions. In order of increasing distinction between the parties, the 2001 study showed two factors that could play to a Democratic advantage, doing county organizational work (10.8 percent more than Republicans), and fundraising (12.1 percent more).

Conclusion

As in our earlier study, we find evidence that Texas party activists are above-average on measures of social status. Despite an atmosphere of in-

creasing inclusiveness in the larger Texas society, this is not quite reflected in the makeup of either Republican or Democratic Party workers, although the latter stood ready to work on behalf of a state ticket headed by an Hispanic for governor and an African-American for U.S. Senator. That this ticket failed may be attributed to other factors brought out in the campaign.

The success of their statewide party in capturing all statewide offices had the GOP in the position of attempting to defend this remarkable achievement, one that would have been all-but-unthinkable just a few years earlier. Two successive gubernatorial victories by George W. Bush, who had very long coattails, left the party in an invigorated state. This is reflected by GOP activists, who held positive views about their state and local parties. On the other hand, despite a vigorous state headquarters, Democratic activists were less likely to think well of their local parties. Yet, if weight can be placed on their answers, they stood as ready as their GOP counterparts to engage in the kinds of aggressive local activities that can generate a good turnout and vote.

In one respect as well, we must update and modify a finding of the 1991 study, in which we said “Republicans evince a strong tendency toward the conservative side of the spectrum, while the Democrats are much more normally distributed” (Feigert and McWilliams 1995, 89). While the conservatism of the Republicans is both apparent and increasing, what is notable is how Texas Democratic activists have shifted left in their issue stances and self-professed ideology. The two parties, as reflected by their activist base, are further apart than they were before. Given an apparent religious influence, in terms of identification with the Christian Right, if electoral success lies in appealing to the broad middle, the views held by the activists had best be held in check.

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