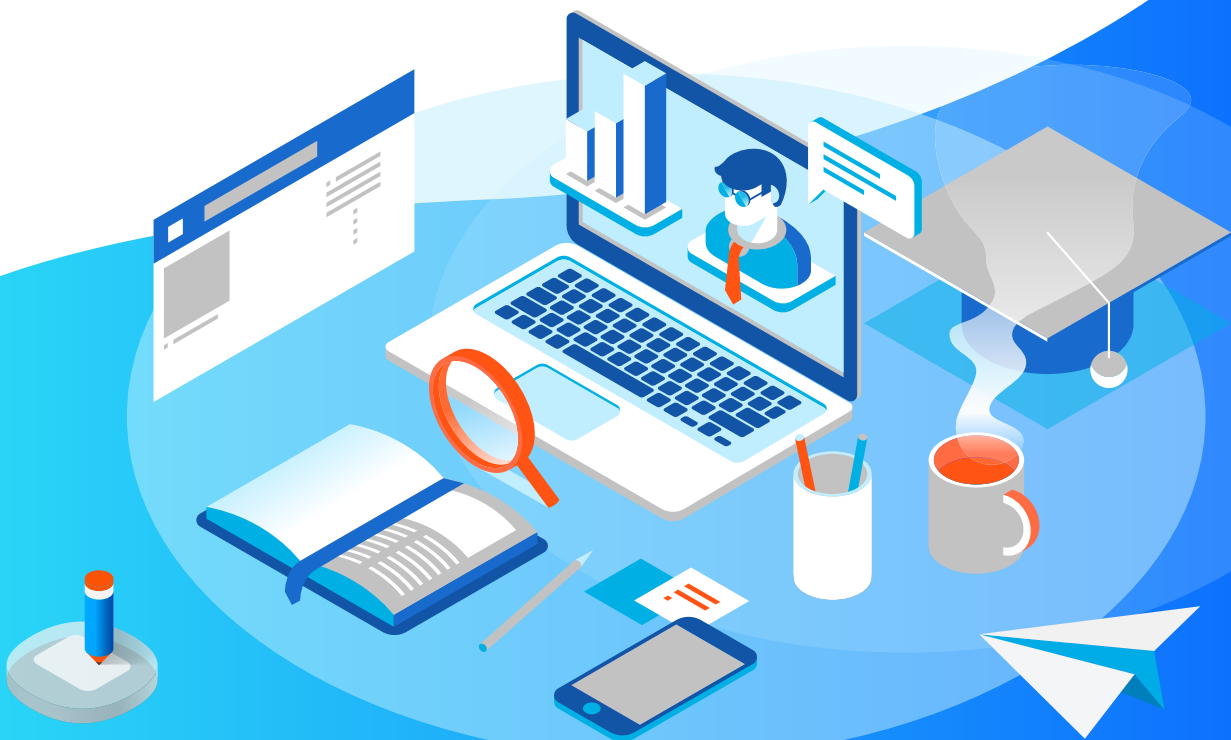


Political Parties and Political Participation in Texas

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The spread of the spirit and values of democracy is one of the main features of modern civilization, one of the manifestations of globalization of civilization achievements. The democracy is a political system, in which the only legitimate source of power in the state is the one recognized by its people. Modern Western political scientists consider democracy not as the people's power that defines the essence of public policies. According to them, democracy is a system of government that considers the will of people, which is expressed at the time of the election of the ruling elite.

It is difficult to imagine a society and its political system without interaction of parties and party groups. In the political arena, there are different political forces. In terms of representation and expression of group and individual interests, political parties serve as key elements of civil society. The political parties of the United States play an important role in the political system of the country, although the United States Constitution does not specify their existence. Traditionally, the United States of America are characterized by the two-party system. The modern two-party system is consisting of the Democratic and Republican parties, which invariably win the presidential election since 1852 and control the United States Congress since 1856. The strengths of the two-party system include such factors as stability of the political system, high degree of control by the state, predictability of political activity.

One-party system is the most distinctive of totalitarian and authoritarian political regimes. One-party system has several advantages, i.e. it is able to integrate social groups, harmoniously combine their various interests, concentrate resources and direct them to solve urgent problems. For about 100 years, from the end of

Reconstruction until the 1980s, the Democratic Party has been dominant in Texas politics. However, Texas remained a democratic state. Its democratic rule was presented by conservative political elite, which had strongly promoted state's economic development. However, Texas policy resisted changes in social and racial relations. This resulted in the civil rights movement. Since 1950 the Republican Party has grown considerably and has taken a more important place, becoming the dominant political party of the state in the mid-1990s. Charldean Newell, David Prindle, and James Riddlesperger state (2011) "it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that the history of Texas is written in the story of the two major parties."

There are also third parties, which affect national politics. They are the Populist Party (has played an important role from the 1880s to the 1910s), the Reform Party (founded in the 1990s), the Green Party, and the Libertarian Party. Texas political system is characterized also by the presence of Tea Party that became a significant political force. According to Political Participation (2012), "the most important issues for the Texas Tea Party include government spending, tax rates, government regulations, illegal immigration, and governmental responsiveness".

The level of political participation in Texas is relatively low, at least in terms of voter turnout. According to Regina Lawrence, Deborah Wise and Emily Einsohn (2013), "in 2010, 61.6% of voting-eligible Texans reported being registered to vote, 20 compared with 65.1% of voting-eligible Americans overall, making Texas 42nd in the nation. In 2008, 67.3% of voting eligible Texans reported being registered to vote."

Texas has a long history of voting restriction. Among these restrictions, the ballot access played a significant role in decreasing participation rank. This law requires paying annual tax, which made a barrier for the poor. Gary M. Halter (2011) states "in 1902 the Texas legislature

adopted, with voter approval, the payment of a poll tax as a requirement for voting. This law was aimed primarily at the Populist movement, which had organized low-income white farmers into a political coalition that threatened the establishment within the Democratic Party.” In 1994, African Americans were prohibited to take part in voting. Women were also prohibited to participate in Texas. Despite eliminating these restrictions, there is no significant increase in voting participations. It is caused by different economical and social factors. Education problems, language disability of people, low family income contribute to low voter turnout. Another reason of this is the fact that the political system of Texas goes not give much space for the immigrants and the poor people.

As Texas is tending to a two-party system, improving the educational and social policies, it will affect its democracy and contribute to the increase of voting participation.

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