Without a doubt, Texas is the strongest Republican state in the nation. The people of Texas have entrusted Republicans with the stewardship of every statewide elected office and majorities in the state senate, state house and on the state board of education. Republicans now have majorities in 107 Texas counties that contain nearly two-thirds of the state’s population. And Texas’ own George W. Bush was the 43rd President of the United States.

But things haven’t always been so great for Texas Republicans. For over one hundred years, the Republican Party was not a viable force in Texas politics. We were the second party in a one-party state. During that time, the GOP failed to win a single statewide race and controlled only a handful of seats in the Legislature.

**Foundations**

To understand how the Republican Party of Texas got from point A to point B, one must understand the history of Texas and her citizens. Unlike the original 13 colonies, Texas was never a British colony. Although many nations would try at different times to subjugate Texas, none could maintain authority over the fiercely independent men and women of the state for very long. With foreign armies constantly invading, and the daily trials of life in the Wild West, Texas by necessity developed a free spirit, a pride in self-reliance and a work ethic that is still unmatched today. Without those characteristics, Texas could not have survived.

Early Texans lived, loved and died entirely by their own efforts without relying on government to fulfill their needs. Just like modern Texans, early settlers believed in families, churches and neighbors, not in bureaucracy. That sense of self-respect and self-reliance is still the envy of the world.

Today’s Republican Party was founded in 1854 by a group of Mid-Western abolitionists opposed to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, which allowed a choice of slavery in the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska. Texas, which had become a state in 1845, was right in the middle of the heated slavery controversy. Most state leaders were Democrats prior to the Civil War, and thus supported the pro-slavery Confederacy. But President Abraham Lincoln, the first Republican president, gained the support of Texas Republicans and several prominent state leaders, like Sam Houston, Texas’ first Governor. However, most of those who decided to support Lincoln’s decision to defend the Union were forced from office, and Democrats succeeded in allying Texas with the Confederacy.

The effects of the Civil War and its aftermath would be felt for more than a century throughout the South, and especially in Texas. For its first two generations, Texas had known only honor, victory and valor. Though Texans never lost a battle at home during the Civil War, the Union army under orders from a Republican President marched in and occupied the Lone Star State after the Confederacy surrendered. For the first time, Texas would not be victorious. The next four generations of Texans would not forgive the Republican Party.

**Early Support**

African Americans were one group of Texans that would consistently support the Republican Party in Texas in those early years. In fact, throughout Reconstruction, African Americans comprised about 90% of GOP membership, and 44 African Americans served in the Texas legislature as Republicans.

It was through the hard work of a number of dedicated African American men and women that the earliest foundations of the Republican Party of Texas were laid. The first ever state Republican convention that met in Houston on July 4, 1867 was predominantly African American in composition, with about 150 African American Texans attending, and 20 Anglos.

The second State GOP Chairman, Norris Wright Cuney, an African-American from Galveston who led the Republican Party from 1883 to 1897, is said by State historians to have held “the most important political position given to a black man of the South in the nineteenth century.”

**The Brink of Collapse**

Despite the strong support of groups like African Americans and Germans, the Reconstruction period was troublesome at best for the fledgling Republican Party. Edmund J. Davis, a Unionist and a Republican, became Governor in 1870, and his four-year administration was marked with bitter controversy. Though soundly defeated in1874, Davis refused to leave office. He barricaded himself in the state capitol and had to be thrown out by force of arms. It would be 104 years before another Republican was elected Governor of Texas.

Despite embarrassing episodes like that of Davis, Republicans managed to make gradual gains in Texas as the 19th Century drew to a close. In 1876, nearly one-third of the statewide vote went to Republicans. A handful of Republican candidates, including several African Americans, won election to the State Legislature. But beginning in 1905 with the passage of the Terrell election law, which required Texans to pay a poll tax, the number of Republican voters in the state would be slashed as many poor Texans could not afford to pay.

Fifty years after Reconstruction and Edmund J. Davis, the first Republican statewide primary was held in 1926 with a meager 15,239 voters participating. Only two more primaries would be attempted in the next thirty-four years. In the same year, 821,234 voters participated in the Democrat primary, and Democrat Ma Ferguson was eventually elected to a second term as Governor of Texas.

**The Long Road to Recovery**

As new issues arose and memories of the Civil War subsided, the GOP gradually grew stronger in Texas. In 1947, the Republican Party of Texas entered the modern era. With the founding of the Republican Club of Texas that year by Captain J.F. Lucey of Dallas, a drive was initiated to build a potent Republican Party in the Lone Star State. The current governing body of the RPT, the State Republican Executive Committee, was organized in 1952.

In 1960 Texas Republicans still didn’t even have a regular primary. However, in the Presidential Election that year, Republican Richard M. Nixon ran a close second to Democrat John F. Kennedy, winning 49% of the state vote. In the same election, Republican John G. Tower of Wichita Falls got 926,653 votes as a candidate for the United State Senate against Lyndon B. Johnson, a Democrat who was running concurrently for Vice-President. When Johnson resigned his seat in the Senate to become Vice President of the United States, Tower was elected to replace him in the special election that followed, defeating interim Senator William A. Blakely of Dallas. Tower thus became the first Republican to hold statewide elective office since Edmund J. Davis was elected Governor during Reconstruction.

The Republican Party held a non-binding presidential preferential primary for the first time in 1964. In 1966, U.S. Senator Tower was re-elected to his first full term. Two Republicans (including future President George H. W. Bush of Houston) were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time since Reconstruction, three to the State House, and the first Republican in 39 years was elected to the Texas Senate.

Further gains by Republicans were made in the Texas Legislature in 1972 when 17 were elected to the House and three to the Senate. These gains were consolidated in 1974 when 16 Republicans were elected to the House and the same three Republican Senators were returned to the Texas Senate.

**The Beginning of Realignment**

In 1978 Texas elected William P. Clements, Jr., the first Republican Governor in over 100 years. In the next four years, Clements and Tower utilized their statewide organization in Texas to continue to build the Party.

While Clements’ 1982 defeat was a temporary setback, the Party’s enthusiasm built to an unprecedented high as Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Phil Gramm campaigned in Texas in 1984. With the help of an active State GOP that supplied a centralized network of communications, the Republican victory was overwhelming in what had historically been a Democrat state. As liberal Democrat candidates moved from primary victories to the general election, the moderate and conservative Texas Democrats abandoned their party loyalty to support conservative Republican candidates.

In 1984, Phil Gramm held on to John Tower’s U.S. Senate seat when the latter retired. Gramm an incumbent congressmen and former Democrat who had resigned his office, joined the Republican Party, and recaptured it in a special election the year before won unprecedented support across the state in his successful bid to become the second GOP U.S. Senator in modern times. The Republican Party also gained five seats in Congress that year, 15 seats in the State Legislature and 107 local offices.

Any doubts about Republican realignment in Texas were removed in the 1986 election cycle. The majority of the members of the old school of conservative Democrats had either fled their Party’s ranks or retired from office, leaving the liberal core that is the heart of today’s Democrat Party. Needless to say, former Governor Bill Clements was re-elected by a wide margin. Republicans enjoyed a net gain of 127 local seats, the most in the nation, and four more state representative seats.

The 70th Session of the Legislature saw an agenda that was largely determined by the Republican Party. Unlike Governor Clements’ first term, when the number of Republican House Members never exceeded 36 out of 150, the 56 Republicans who served in the House at the start of his second term rendered him veto-proof as they controlled more than one-third of the House votes.

In 1987, Kent Hance was appointed Railroad Commissioner and Judge Thomas Phillips was appointed Chief Justice of the Texas Supreme Court. Both men were elected to those positions in 1988, the first Republicans since Reconstruction.

**An Era for Breaking Records**

The GOP continued to make gains in the early 1990’s. Texas House Agriculture Committee Chairman Rick Perry scored a surprise victory in the race for Agriculture Commissioner in 1990. That same year, John Cornyn was elected to the Texas Supreme Court, and former state legislator Kay Bailey Hutchison secured the post of State Treasurer. In 1993, Hutchison would become the first woman elected to the US Senate from Texas.

In 1994, George W. Bush would become only the second Republican Governor since Reconstruction in his landslide victory against popular Democrat incumbent Ann Richards. Rick Perry and Kay Hutchison would hold onto their statewide posts, while Austin’s first female mayor, Carole Keeton Strayhorn, would become the first woman elected to the Texas Railroad Commission. Republicans that year also saw a three-seat increase in the Texas House, and gained another seat in the Texas Senate.

Two years later, Republicans would gain an additional three seats in the Texas Senate, giving the GOP a majority in the body for the first time since Reconstruction. Seven new Republican legislators would also be sent to Austin in 1996, and voters would return Phil Gramm to the US Senate and John Cornyn to the Texas Supreme Court.

In 1997, Susan Weddington became the first woman to chair a major state party in Texas. She and Vice Chairman David Barton were reelected in 1998, 2000, and 2002, and together they united the grassroots and kept all members of our party marching in the same direction.

In November of 1998, Republicans were able to sweep the statewide ballot by forging inroads into traditional Democrat constituencies. Governor George W. Bush became the first Republican governor to win back-to-back four-year terms, winning 240 out of 254 counties and becoming the first GOP gubernatorial candidate ever to win the heavily Hispanic El Paso, Cameron and Hidalgo counties. Texans elected Rick Perry as the first ever Republican Lieutenant Governor, John Cornyn as the first ever Republican Attorney General, Carole Keeton Strayhorn as the first ever Republican Comptroller, David Dewhurst as the first ever Republican Land Commissioner, Susan Combs as the first female Agriculture Commissioner and Railroad Commissioner Tony Garza as the first Hispanic Republican to win statewide office.

That same year, Republicans would defend the GOP majority in the State Senate and gain four seats in the Texas House a record number for an off-year election at the time. Republicans would also enjoy much success in the battle to gain seats at the county level, as the number of GOP-controlled county courthouses increased by one-third.

**A Model for the Nation**

Two years later, our nation would embark on perhaps the most surreal electoral journey in US history. On November 7, 2000, Texans went to bed believing that we had sent our own Governor George W. Bush to the White House, only to awake the next morning to learn that perhaps we had not. One month, and countless recounts later, Texans finally breathed a collective sigh of relief and celebrated as one the finest Texas Governors of all times was declared the 43rd President of the United States!

Back in Texas, however, it wouldn’t require any recounts to declare that Republicans had once again swept all the statewide offices on the 2000 ballot. Notably, Michael Williams, a Bush appointee to the Texas Railroad Commission, won his first full term and became the first African American to be elected to a non-judicial statewide office in Texas history.

Once again, the GOP maintained a majority in the Texas Senate in 2000, giving Republicans three consecutive majorities in the body for the first time since Reconstruction. Perhaps most memorable was State Rep. Todd Staples’s landslide victory in the race for State Senate District 3 a contest that some observers called the most important legislative race in the nation in a decade.

After November 2000, the battle lines in the State House would remain essentially unchanged as Republicans and Democrats stalemated across Texas. As the votes around the state were canvassed, many Republicans were shocked that Republicans had earned 60% of the vote in all state house races, but only received 48% of the seats. Accordingly, attention shifted to the importance of drawing fair and compact district lines during the redistricting process in 2001.

November 2002 proved to be a historic election for Republicans on all levels in the state of Texas. Republicans swept all statewide offices for the fourth consecutive election, with Governor Rick Perry leading the ticket in a landslide victory over a wealthy opponent. Texans also sent Attorney General John Cornyn to the U.S. Senate to replace the retiring Phil Gramm, and Land Commissioner David Dewhurst became only the second Republican to serve as Lt. Governor.

With fair new districts in place for the first time in decades, Republicans gained the first majority in the Texas House of Representatives for the first time in 130 years with a pick up of sixteen seats. Rep. Tom Craddick of Midland, who in the 1960’s was one of only four Republicans in the chamber, was subsequently elected the first GOP Speaker since Reconstruction.

Republicans also made record gains in the State Senate, gaining 3 seats for a total of 19, and in the U.S. Congressional delegation, gaining 2 seats for a total of 15. Texas Republicans also shattered records at the county level, gaining 210 seats across the state, including 20 county judge seats and 42 county commissioner seats the largest gain in modern history. This gave Republicans a controlling majority in 73 county courthouses, containing two-thirds of the state’s population.

**A Bright Future Ahead**

In June 2010, delegates to the Republican Party of Texas state convention in Dallas elected Steve Munisteri of Houston as Chairman. Chairman Munisteri ran on a platform of retiring the party’s debt, streamlining its fundraising operations, grassroots participation in the party, and standing on our core principles of limited government, unleashed free enterprise, personal liberty and strong national security. Chairman Munisteri is leading a freshly energized and freshly united Texas GOP in promoting Texas values and the Texas record at the helm of the Republican Party.

Today Republicans hold all statewide offices and enjoy majorities in both houses of the Legislature. The November 2010 elections brought staggering victories to Republicans across Texas.

* 23 of 32 U.S. Congressional seats
* 19 of 31 State Senate seats
* 101 of 150 State House seats
* 234 New Republican Elected Officials at the County level
* Over two dozen Democrat elected officials have switched to the Republican Party since November 2010

Across Texas, more and more citizens of the Lone Star State from all walks of life and background are identifying themselves with the Republican Party’s values and ideals. Texas today is the largest solidly Republican state in America, and boasts an unrivalled economic record that is the result of hard working Texans’ efforts combined with our conservative approach to governance. Simply put, the exponential growth that the Republican Party has experienced in recent years has ushered in a new era of Texas politics and made Texas an economical powerhouse, as well as a model of responsible, productive and reasonable government.

The authoritative 1998 **Almanac of American Politics** stated:

*“Texas is now an indisputably Republican state… On the major issues, and on the overriding question of whether to continue Texas’s traditions of cultural conservatism and minimalist government … the Republicans seem very much on the majority side. The future of Texas appears to be theirs and, if this state is as attractive a model as it thinks, perhaps the nation as well.”*