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## **Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips March 16, 2022**

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**Incumbent Justice of the Peace Judy Baker contests primary election results**  
Lynn Walker  
*Wichita Falls Times Record News*  
March 15, 2022

<https://www.timesrecordnews.com/story/news/2022/03/15/texas-elections-2022-justice-peace-judy-baker-contests-primary-results/7052043001/>

Incumbent Pct. 4 Justice of the Peace Judy Baker has filed for a new election in her race. Results from the March 1 Wichita County Republican primary showed Baker lost to challenger Randy Elliott by just 14 votes.

Baker has asked a judge to declare the election void and to instruct the county's Republican party to hold a new election.

The JP race was plagued from the beginning, with the Texas Secretary of State ordering early voting be stopped briefly because some voters were assigned to the wrong precinct. That resulted in some ballots having to be counted by hand, delaying the Wichita County vote count until the following morning.

"Both me and my opponent both said that it's only fair that someone does contest it because the people didn't get their rights to vote," Baker said of the snafu.

Only 405 people voted in the precinct, the county's largest JP district with the fewest voters.

Baker filed in 30th District Court, but Judge Jeff McKnight immediately recused himself because a judge cannot hear a contested election in his own county. Instead, 97th Dist. Judge Jack McGaughey of Montague County will hear the case.

Baker said if the judge grants a new election it would most likely be held May 24, date of the state's runoff primaries.

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## **Texas Voting Restrictions Take Their Toll: "Sorry – No Democrat Voting"**

Akela Lacy

*The Intercept*

March 15, 2022

<https://theintercept.com/2022/03/15/texas-voting-restrictions-poll-workers/>

WHEN VOTERS ARRIVED at their polling place on March 1 in Azle, Texas, a small city outside of Fort Worth, they saw a framed, printed sign with standard voting instructions: no phones, printed materials allowed. Taped to it was another handwritten sign that read: "Sorry — No Democrat voting (not staffed)."

More than 170 election workers in the county dropped out at the last minute, Tarrant County Democratic Party Chair Allison Campolo told *The Intercept*. The party did not know how many voters had been stopped from voting at the county's Azle location that day. Across the state, Campolo said, both parties had trouble finding election workers on primary day. But Tarrant County experienced "an extreme number of last minute drop offs of available election judges."

According to the *Texas Tribune*, more than a dozen polling locations in Tarrant County were closed for several hours due to staffing shortages among election judges. Texas is one of several states — also including Missouri, Maryland, and Colorado — to employ election judges to open and run poll locations, manage poll workers, and settle disputes. Other states call these officials "poll workers" or "election clerks," but in Texas, where election judges have been used for decades, they're partisan, and during primary elections, they are appointed by the chair of the county political party holding the primary. Numerous states had issues with recruiting poll workers at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number of jurisdictions that reported

difficulty in finding enough poll workers increased by 5 percent between the 2016 and 2018 elections. But the number of sudden dropouts in Tarrant County this month was unusual, according to Campolo.

Many of the difficulties with recruiting and retaining election workers for this month's primary stemmed from Texas's new voting law, known as S.B. 1, Parker County Democratic Party Chair Kay Parr told The Intercept. At least 19 states passed restrictive voting measures in the year after the 2020 election, which Republican officials continue to falsely claim was stolen, but S.B. 1 is one of the nation's most restrictive. Enacted by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott late last year, the law bans drive-thru voting, implements new ID requirements for mail voting, ends 24-hour voting, and expands the power of poll watchers. It also puts election officials at risk of committing a felony while carrying out their job duties.

S.B. 1 prohibits officials from "soliciting" or distributing mail ballot applications to people who haven't requested them, meaning that answering questions about filling out a mail ballot or helping voters submit them could now be considered crimes — punishable by up to two years in jail and \$10,000 in fines. In the eyes of the election judges, Parr said, the law threatens "legal liability for human error."

Beyond that, with the elimination of mask mandates in most of the United States — including Texas — working the polls can be hazardous for the temporary staffers, many of whom are elderly or retired, amid the ongoing pandemic. They are often required to work for more than 14 hours on election days, a taxing shift for any worker. The new law only compounds the difficulty, adding considerable risk to a job that requires long hours, entails tedious duties, and pays minimum wage.

Azle sits on the county line between Tarrant and Parker counties, and both counties have their own rules for designating election officials from either party to assist voters. Parker didn't have issues on primary day, Parr said, but several voters who weren't able to vote in Tarrant came to the Azle poll site, about a five-minute drive away, on the Parker County side to try to cast their ballots.

Joe Grizzard, an alternate Democratic election judge at the Parker County polling location in Azle, said he had seen a posting prior to primary day saying that the Tarrant County elections office still needed poll workers. And he was worried about the impact the new law would have on election workers.

The county elections office "knew they had problems and they were trying to fix them but they didn't fix them in time," said Grizzard, who has been an election judge for five years. "I still have concerns for legal liability for telling someone something wrong or helping someone do something that I'm not authorized to do because of the change in the laws."

OTHER ASPECTS OF the new Texas law made it harder to vote even before primary day. Last month, Texas election officials reported that thousands of mail ballots across the state were rejected at unprecedented rates because many people did not include the correct ID number on their envelope, as required by the new law. The number had to match the one they used on their voter registration, whether that was a driver's license number or a partial Social Security number. Harris County, the most populous in the state, rejected 35 percent of ballots received by the mail ballot deadline, Reuters reported, compared to a rejection rate between 5 and 10 percent in recent years. Applications for mail ballots were also rejected at similar rates due to missing or incorrect ID numbers.

The Department of Justice sued Texas over S.B. 1 in November, arguing that the law would "disenfranchise some eligible mail voters based on paperwork errors or omissions immaterial to their qualifications to vote." The case is expected to conclude before the general election, but the timeline is still in flux. In December, Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria and Cathy Morgan, a volunteer deputy registrar, filed a complaint in federal court against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. Both women — represented by the Harris County Attorney's Office, outside counsel, and the Brennan Center — argued that the provision that criminalizes helping someone vote by mail criminalizes constitutionally protected speech.

Several weeks before the primary, an appeals court stayed an injunction against the portion of S.B. 1 that criminalizes solicitation of mail ballots. The matter is still pending in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Unless courts reinstate the injunction, the problems are likely to persist through the runoff and the general election in November, said Andrew Garber, a fellow with the Brennan Center's voting rights and elections program. "We're going to continue to see mail ballots rejected at high rates because it's confusing," he told The Intercept. "People are going to continue to be confused, fill out the wrong form, miss information on the form that could be resolved if the qualified election officials were able to print out public notices and preemptively help people do that."

Texas's law was designed "to create this exact disenfranchising outcome," Garber said, and similar problems are likely to arise in at least 18 other states — including Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Iowa — that joined Texas in passing restrictive new voting laws. "It makes the process of voting harder so that the end result is fewer people can vote."

The shortage of poll workers has "certainly been made worse in Texas by some of the laws that have been passed," according to Parr. "Our poll workers have fear of being sued now because of all of the national attention that voting got with the last election and the lies about the voter fraud. It's harder for us to get poll workers. And that, combined with the lies and Covid, it's made it much more difficult for us to get the experienced judges that we need for our poll sites for both parties."

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## **League of Women Voters Honors Disgraced Harris County Elections Administrator**

Sydney Henry

*Texas Scorecard*

March 15, 2022

<https://texasscorecard.com/state/league-of-women-voters-honors-disgraced-harris-county-elections-administrator/>

Following the Harris County primary election—where thousands of ballots went uncounted, polling places were improperly supplied and staffed, and results were reported an unprecedented day later than state law requires—Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria resigned.

Harris County Republican Party Chairman Cindy Siegel called the county primary "an unmitigated disaster" in a press conference following the election.

Nevertheless, despite Longoria's failings as an administrator and her subsequent resignation, the League of Women Voters of Texas chose Longoria as the keynote speaker and honoree at their "Making Democracy Work" dinner.

"Isabel's goal is to build access for Harris County's 2.5 million registered and future voters," reads Longoria's biography on the LWVTX website. "Under her tenure, elections are administered with a focus on equity, access, fairness, and security – an approach that has led to the adoption of new voting machines, more data transparency, and higher rates of voter turnout in the country's third largest county."

Prior to her appointment in 2020 by Democrats who control the Harris County government, Longoria had no experience running elections.

Houston Talk Radio Host Kenny Webster posted the LWVTX advertisement for the dinner on Twitter with the caption, "This years theme: how to (not) get away with fraud."

The dinner is set to occur in April and also honors three other county elections administrators: Heider Garcia of Tarrant County, Michael Scarpello of Dallas County, and Bruce Sherbert of Collin County.

While the League of Women Voters is nominally nonpartisan, the organization's advocacy efforts trend left of center and often align with Democrats. The LWVTX strongly opposes voter ID and other election integrity measures, including the recently enacted Senate Bill 1.

The league's statement following Longoria's resignation said, "We applaud the professionalism that the Harris County Election Administrator, Isabel Longoria, and her staff demonstrated during this very complicated and confusing election. That these challenges led to Ms. Longoria's resignation is unfortunate."

The statement then further blamed Senate Bill 1 for "disenfranchising" voters, claiming, "Because of this new election law, too many voters were silenced during our primary elections."

Texas Scorecard contacted the LWVTX to ask if they intended to change the dinner's speaking line-up following Longoria's recent failures. The LWVTX did not respond prior to publication.

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## **The elections police are coming**

Fredreka Schouten and Kelly Mena

*CNN*

March 15, 2022

<https://kvia.com/your-voice-your-vote/politics/cnn-us-politics/2022/03/15/the-elections-police-are-coming/>

A measure moving through the Republican-controlled Georgia legislature would hand new election policing powers to the state's bureau of investigations.

The bill under consideration in the Georgia House would give the Georgia Bureau of Investigations the power to probe election fraud allegations — supplementing the work currently overseen by state election officials.

If the proposal becomes law, the Peach State would become the second state in recent weeks to beef up enforcement of election fraud — a crime that federal and state officials say is exceedingly rare.

Last week, the Florida legislature created a scaled-back version of a new election police force that had been sought by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is on the ballot for reelection this year and has presidential ambitions for 2024.

The measure, headed to DeSantis' desk for his signature, would establish an Office of Election Crimes and Security within the Department of State with a staff of 15 to conduct preliminary investigations of election fraud. In addition, the measure calls for DeSantis to appoint up to 10 law enforcement officers to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to probe election crimes.

The Florida measure also makes it a felony to return more than two mail-in ballots on behalf of other voters.

The stepped-up fraud-detection efforts in these states are part of a wave of bills moving through Republican-controlled state legislatures aimed at rewriting election procedures, following President Joe Biden's 2020 victory. Former President Donald Trump and his allies have falsely attributed his loss in Georgia and other key states to election fraud.

In Georgia, which has a Republican governor and secretary of state, Biden's narrow 2020 victory was certified after three counts of ballots. And judges have tossed out several lawsuits claiming fraud.

Voting rights advocates say the enhanced policing is unnecessary and could chill participation in elections, if voters, election workers or third-party groups fear prosecution for honest mistakes.

An Associated Press review last year of every potential fraud case in six key battleground states found fewer than 475 cases — too few disputed ballots to have made any difference in the outcome of the 2020 election.

But proponents of the bills say any fraud is too much — and are committing millions of taxpayer dollars to root it out. (Florida state Rep. Daniel Perez, a Republican who guided the election police force bill through the Florida House, said both components of the law-enforcement package had a \$3.7 million price tag.)

In Florida, DeSantis is expected to sign the bill. His aides say having a team dedicated to investigating election fraud allegations will serve as a deterrent to wrongdoing.

The obscure legal theory that could upend US elections

Warning: We're about to wade into some wonky legal territory here. But it's sort of important to the future of US elections.

Last week, Democrats scored a big win when the Supreme Court rejected Republican-led challenges of congressional district maps in two key states, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

(As we noted in last week's newsletter, Democrats are faring better than expected in the once-in-a-decade redraw of congressional maps.)

But the court's action also set off alarm bells for those on the left because four of the court's conservative justices expressed openness to an untested theory advanced by North Carolina's GOP leaders: that the US Constitution leaves decisions about elections — including redistricting — to state legislatures, with no role for state courts to interpret state laws.

Some conservatives argue that this so-called "independent state legislature doctrine" gives state lawmakers unbridled power to decide election procedures — unchecked by their own state constitutions or state courts.

The idea has gained currency among Trump allies. Some argue the theory bars any deviation from long-established state practices without the explicit approval of state lawmakers. That included decisions by courts and election administrators to ease mail-in voting rules during the 2020 pandemic.

Keep in mind that the former President's allies also sought to have some legislatures ignore Biden's popular-vote victories their states in 2020 and install pro-Trump slates of electors instead.

Taken to its extreme, the doctrine could even prohibit state governors from vetoing election bills, Ian Millhiser wrote recently for Vox. In the last year, Democratic governors in key battleground states, such as Michigan and Wisconsin, have vetoed voting restrictions approved by Republican-controlled legislatures.

As Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in a 2020 dissent: "The Constitution provides that state legislatures — not federal judges, not state judges, not state governors, not other state officials — bear primary responsibility for setting election rules."

Critics of the theory, such as University of California law professor Rick Hasen, say it could block a state court from protecting voters' rights enshrined in a state constitution.

It "could upend any rules that state courts — relying on state constitutions — put in place that affect federal elections, such as striking down voter ID laws under state constitutions," Hasen recently told CNN Supreme Court reporter Ariane de Vogue.

Of course, should another case testing the doctrine land at the high court, five justices would need to agree before the court dramatically changed how US elections are run.

But, right now, at least four of them appear ready to listen.

20%

That's the percentage of local election officials who say they are likely to leave their jobs before the 2024 presidential election, according to a new survey.

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## **Port of Victoria announces plans for new regional logistics hub**

*American Journal of Transportation*

March 15, 2022

<https://ajot.com/news/port-of-victoria-announces-plans-for-new-regional-logistics-hub>

The Victoria County Navigation District announced plans for the Texas Logistics Center at the Port of Victoria (TXLC). Strategically positioned in a Foreign Trade Zone and Texas Enterprise Zone, the regional logistics hub is situated two hours from Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. With over 2,000 acres available for development and access to rail, water, and highway transport, TXLC provides strategic business opportunities in Texas.

Phase 1 will see the addition of over 42,000 feet of track, including the build-out of three 10,000-foot drop and pull tracks. Later phases include storage tracks, transloading, connections to new tenants, and upon completion, TXLC will be served by Union Pacific and BNSF railroads. “The Texas Logistics Center will significantly strengthen the Port’s ability to provide top-tier logistics solutions in economic development through the expansion of our services and physical footprint across North America.” said Executive Director of the POV, Sean Stibich.

TXLC’s connection to the 35-mile Victoria Barge Canal leading to the Gulf of Mexico is located on the M69 Marine highway, connecting 11 deep-water and 13 shallow-water ports along the Texas coast. In addition to ample water access, TXLC has over 3 miles of road infrastructure located within 8 miles of major Texas highways.

TNW Corporation, a privately held operator of short line railroads and logistics centers in Texas, currently provides industry rail operations for the POV and will continue assisting with the development of the TXLC / POV’s multi-phase rail expansion project. “Our strategic alliance with the POV continues to thrive.

The addition of the Texas Logistics Center offers a strategic logistics advantage to businesses seeking to relocate operations in Texas, and TNW is proud to be part of the Port’s growth.” said Wade Hoffmann, TNW’s Vice President of Marketing and Sales.

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## **Mexican LPG sees largest weekly hike since price controls began**

*BNAmericas*

March 14, 2022

<https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/mexican-lpg-sees-largest-weekly-hike-since-price-controls-began>

LPG prices in Mexico saw their highest weekly increase since the government’s enactment of price controls in August 2021 with the Russia-Ukraine war generating a string of hikes on the household fuel.

Energy sector regulator CRE set the maximum consumer LPG price for the week ending March 19 at 25.85 pesos (US\$1.24) per kilogram, up 6.4% from the previous week.

Under the price control policy, CRE publishes the maximum end-user price for domestically sold LPG for different regions, based on a model to calculate the costs of obtaining, storing, selling, and distributing the fuel.

Sales and transport prices remain in place from Sunday to Saturday and are published by CRE on its website.

The weekly increase was lower than the 11.5% jump seen in propane – LPG’s primary feedstock – at Texas’ Mont Belvieu market last week, reaching US\$1.45 per gallon, the highest level since the third week of October 2021.

## FUEL SUBSIDIES

Mexico has thus far managed to maintain a lower degree of hydrocarbons price hikes than the surges seen in the US market.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and energy minister Rocío Nahle have acknowledged that state-owned oil giant Pemex is boosting its exports due to the high international oil price, producing a windfall stirred by the Ukraine war.

AMLO hailed the higher exports as enabling the country to help keep prices low, even though it remains a net importer of fuels.

In addition to lowering its IEPS excise tax on fuels to zero, the finance ministry has confirmed it is now introducing an outright subsidy to keep gasoline and diesel prices at bay.

The ministry said that for a liter of the country's non-premium gasoline (known as Magna), the government had zeroed-out the IEPS set normally at 5.49 pesos/l, and in addition, there will be a federal subsidy of 3.87 pesos/l.

The complementary subsidy for the week of 12-18 March will be 2.75 pesos/l for premium and 5.24 pesos/l for diesel.

The program is set to go into effect now and run through December 2024 or until after AMLO's term ends (October 1, 2024), activating whenever the IEPS stimulus is set to its maximum.

## BIGGEST HIKE YET

The hike set for this week marks the third consecutive week of higher LPG prices, occurring in tandem with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Prices were up 3.4% the first week and 4% in the second.

The average price before the controls began sat roughly at 25.2 pesos/kg before dropping to 22.9 pesos/kg in the first week of the program. Prices, however, rose steadily in the next two months, hitting a maximum of 26.7 pesos/kg in the week of October 17-21, 2021.

The last average national price without a cap was 25.19 pesos/kg, which has already been exceeded eight times during the 32 weeks in which CRE has decreed capped prices for 125 regions of the country.

The price that will prevail this week is 3.3% lower than the maximum regulated price observed in the country, during October 17-23 last year at 26.73 pesos/kg.

Real prices for LPG continue to be higher than those set as nationwide maximums, with Mexican news outlet El Economista reporting that the latest reading has prices averaging 2.6% above regulated prices.

## BIENESTAR PROBLEMS

Launched on August 31 last year, state-owned LPG sales unit Gas Bienestar, another of AMLO's strategies to contain prices, continues to face setbacks and delays.

Originally planned to begin operations in all of Mexico City's 16 districts by 1Q22, only seven districts had trucks on the ground by mid-February, and there have been no new announcements on planned launches in additional districts.

Furthermore, Mexico City lawmakers on the state civil protection committee have ordered the parent of Gas Bienestar, Pemex, to guarantee the safety of residents living near the 18 de Marzo LPG storage and processing facility in the Miguel Hidalgo district.

Amid safety concerns, residents called into question via a petition the storage of thousands of used containers, ostensibly marked for destruction, being stored at the former refinery facility.

Gas Bienestar has also been unable to offer LPG at the lowest prices on the market, with the latest CRE report showing it was the third most expensive supplier as of March 12 in the Álvaro Obregon district of Mexico City, and the second most expensive in Azcapotzalco district.

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## **Renovated CBP processing center reopens in McAllen**

Valerie Gonzalez

*McAllen Monitor*

March 14, 2022

<https://myrgv.com/local-news/2022/03/14/renovated-cbp-processing-center-reopens-in-mcallen/>

A U.S. Customs and Border Protection processing center in McAllen used to detain migrants in their temporary custody was officially reopened after a year-long renovation project.

The 77,000 square-foot processing center known as Ursula, due to its location on Ursula Avenue in McAllen, was updated after it was closed for renovations in October 2020.

About \$30 million appropriated from the Fiscal Year 2019 Emergency Supplemental were used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to make the improvements that include “the removal of chain link fencing, installation of a permanent HVAC system to provide cleaner air and a climate-controlled environment and improved personal hygiene stations and shower facilities,” Monday’s news release stated. “The facility was also retrofitted with appropriate physical security infrastructure, medical screening areas, laundry services, phone lines, computer stations for virtual processing, as well as consultation rooms for consulates.”

The facility will be able to hold up to 1,200 people at a time.

While the facility was renovated, the agency struggled with overcrowding during a year when apprehensions broke previous records.

The space created to hold migrants in the interim included a temporary outdoor processing center under the Anzalduas International Bridge and a soft-sided facility in Donna; but both proved to be problematic during the pandemic when numbers rose above capacity.

The facility in Donna will remain in operation for the foreseeable future, the agency affirmed. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz in late February indicated they may need the extra capacity in the near future when policies for asylum seekers change.

“CBP will continue to closely coordinate with ICE and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement in caring, processing, screening, and transitioning migrants out of Border Patrol custody,” Monday’s news release added.

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**Lubbock, with help from Biden, Arrington and Congress, on the road to become an international trade route**

James Clark

KLBK-TV

March 15, 2022

<https://www.everythinglubbock.com/news/local-news/lubbock-with-help-from-biden-and-congress-on-the-road-to-become-an-international-trade-route/>

LUBBOCK, Texas — President Biden signed federal legislation Tuesday that designates a portion of Ports to Plains as “interstate highway.” It brings Lubbock and the South Plains one step closer to having Interstate 27 reach all way from Laredo up to a connection with Interstate 25, which then goes to Denver and other points to the north.

Congressman Jodey Arrington R-Lubbock and Congressman Henry Cuellar D-Laredo filed bipartisan legislation to extend Interstate 27, which currently ends at 82nd Street in Lubbock. (South of 82nd, the road is currently designated as U.S. Highway 87.)

Arrington said the designation recognizes Ports-to-Plains as interstate highway from Laredo to Raton, New Mexico. This does not mean the extension of I-27 is already fully funded.

“This designation will make Texas and New Mexico eligible for increased federal funding to complete the I-27 highway expansion project,” Cuellar said. “I will continue to fund projects in south Texas that bring good-paying jobs and ease quality of life for my constituents.”

U.S. Senators John Cornyn R-Texas and Ted Cruz R-Texas both supported legislation to designate Ports-to-Plains as a federal interstate highway.

However, Cruz voted against the current bill, saying federal spending at a time of inflation only hurts people. Cruz supports the I-27 corridor as “a key transportation priority for Texas.” Cruz said extending I-27 will help the nation as a whole.

Arrington issued the following statement, calling Tuesday’s development a big win for West Texas:

#### US Designates Interstate 27 Part of the Interstate Highway System

(LUBBOCK, TX) – The designation of Interstate 27 (I-27) became official on Tuesday, March 15 as President Biden signed into law the appropriation bill. The designation recognizes the Ports-to-Plains Corridor from Laredo, Texas to Raton, New Mexico as an addition to the Interstate Highway System.

“Establishing a four lane, federal highway for I-27 is a game-changer for our economy and quality of life in West Texas for decades to come and will strengthen our food security and energy independence for the entire country,” said Jodey Arrington, U.S. Rep. for District 19. “I had three big goals for a better and stronger West Texas when I took office in 2016 – get cotton back in the farm bill, secure the B-21 bomber at Dyess, and establish a federal highway for West Texas. I had a lot of help from colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I’m humbled by the opportunities this will provide for generations of West Texans.”

Receiving the interstate designation is the first step to begin fundraising for the extension of I-27. As TxDOT’s feasibility study determined, the extension of I-27 impacts the state of Texas in improving the safety of the roads by reducing the annual crash rate by 21% and providing more access and opportunities for rural America.

“I am ecstatic we received the interstate designation for I-27 which will allow for the necessary infrastructure improvement to bring growth to our region and the state of Texas,” said Dan Pope, mayor for the City of Lubbock. “As with most momentous achievements, our thanks are due to many in their support of this project; specifically, Congressman Jodey Arrington, who has been an incredible advocate in this bipartisan effort, led the charge for what will be a changing moment for West Texas for decades to come.”

The Corridor represents three of the eight border crossings along the Texas-Mexico border: Laredo, Eagle Pass and Del Rio. As the next steps to fund the extension of I-27 begin, the economic benefit for the state of Texas within the first 20 years of completion is estimated at \$55.6 million increase in GDP and 22,110 new jobs.

“The impact of this designation is tremendous as it allows for the enhancement of infrastructure for domestic and international markets, creates safer roads for leisure and business travels, and connects underrepresented communities throughout the Corridor with outside markets,” John Osborne, chairman of the board for Ports-to-Plains Alliance. “We would not be celebrating this historic moment without the support of TxDOT, NMDOT, Congressman Arrington and Cuellar and Congresswoman Granger, as well as our team of advocates at Hance Scarborough. We are grateful for their leadership and support of this project.”

The following is a statement from Ports-to-Plains:

### US Designates Future Interstate 27 Part of the Interstate Highway System

(LUBBOCK, TX) – The designation of future Interstate 27 (I-27) became official on Tuesday, March 15 as President Biden signed into law the appropriation bill. The designation recognizes the Ports-to-Plains Corridor from Laredo, Texas to Raton, New Mexico as an addition to the Interstate Highway System.

“I am very excited that the I-27 highway expansion project is now written into law with the passage of the FY22 omnibus appropriations bill,” said Henry Cuellar, U.S. Rep. for District 28. This designation will make Texas and New Mexico eligible for increased federal funding to complete the I-27 highway expansion project, creating economic growth, jobs, trade opportunities across those two states. The I-27 expansion will grow the Texas GDP by \$17.2 billion and create 178,000 construction jobs. It will also add 17,000 long-term employment opportunities in the new I-27 corridor. With this project, Laredo will also become the only port of entry that has three corridors: I-35, I-69, I-27—a boon for our trade economy. As a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, I will continue to fund projects in south Texas that bring good-paying jobs and ease quality of life for my constituents.”

“Establishing a four lane, federal highway for I-27 is a game-changer for our economy and quality of life in West Texas for decades to come and will strengthen our food security and energy independence for the entire country,” said Jodey Arrington, U.S. Rep. for District 19. “I had three big goals for a better and stronger West Texas when I took office in 2016 – get cotton back in the farm bill, secure the B-21 bomber at Dyess, and establish a federal highway for West Texas. I had a lot of help from colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I’m humbled by the opportunities this will provide for generations of West Texans.”

Receiving the future interstate designation is the first step to begin fundraising for the extension of I-27. As TxDOT’s feasibility study determined, the extension of I-27 impacts the state of Texas in improving the safety of the roads by reducing the annual crash rate by 21% and providing more access and opportunities for rural America.

“I am ecstatic we received the future interstate designation for I-27 which will allow for the necessary infrastructure improvement to bring growth to our region and the state of Texas,” said Dan Pope, mayor for the City of Lubbock. “As with most momentous achievements, our thanks are due to many in their support of this project. From the Governor to our U.S. Senators and Representatives, as well as our State Representatives, this will be a changing moment in Texas for decades.”

“This exciting news represents years of planning and collaboration by so many people,” said Ginger Nelson, mayor for the city of Amarillo. “The extension of I-27 is vital to our future growth.”

“One of the most significant events of today was the inclusion of the designation of I-27 in the appropriation bill,” said Brenda Gunter, mayor for the city of San Angelo. “We are seeing a project that will have a significant impact on the Texas economy as well as our national GDP. The hard work and effort to accomplish this designation is finally paying off with a tremendous impact on the future of our region and the state of Texas. Thank you to all who have been a part of the process.”

The Corridor represents three of the eight border crossings along the Texas-Mexico border: Laredo, Eagle Pass and Del Rio. As the next steps to fund and construct the extension of I-27 begin, the economic benefit for the U.S. is the addition of 1.7 million jobs and a \$287 billion increase in GDP along the Corridor.

"The impact of this designation is tremendous as it allows for the enhancement of infrastructure for domestic and international markets, creates safer roads for leisure and business travels, and connects underrepresented communities throughout the Corridor with outside markets," John Osborne, chairman of the board for Ports-to-Plains Alliance.

"We would not be celebrating this historic moment without the support of Congressman Arrington and Cuellar and Congresswoman Granger, Senators Heinrich and Lujan, as well as our team of advocates at Hance Scarborough. We are grateful for their leadership and support of this project."

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### **Between violence and the pandemic, heritage tourism to Mexico has gotten complicated**

Rhonda Fanning

*KUT-FM*

March 15, 2022

<https://www.tpr.org/border-immigration/2022-03-15/between-violence-and-the-pandemic-heritage-tourism-to-mexico-has-gotten-complicated>

Heritage tourism, common for decades among Mexican Americans, has been declining in recent years. Between the pandemic and fears of violence, more and more Mexican Americans are choosing not to visit the places where they have roots in Mexico, and it's hurting the country's economy – especially during peak tourist times like spring break.

Dallas Morning News Mexico border correspondent Alfredo Corchado tells Texas Standard that those who do make the journey have had to change the way that they travel.

Listen to the interview with Corchado in the audio player above or read the highlights below:

– For many spring breakers, trips to Mexico means partying in Cancun. Heritage tourism, on the other hand, is an opportunity for families to reconnect with their Mexican roots, Corchado says.

"They want to make sure that the next generation knows about all these colonial gems, this part of their own history," he said. "So it's not just immigrants taking back their their kids to visit their relatives, but to really see the best of Mexico."

– Tourism is key to Mexico's economy, including in Guanajuato, where Corchado has been reporting. He says local officials are "trying to put the best face forward" to attract visitors to a city that depends on foreign investment.

"Tourism is a big deal, that it really does hurt them," he said.

– Heritage tourists who do come to Mexico are changing how they travel to stay safe. Some fly directly to their destination, instead of traveling through the country. Others orchestrate caravans of dozens of vehicles, and follow advice from family members in Mexico to only travel at certain times, keep gas tanks full and avoid certain roads.

"A lot of the families who live in the United States, I mean, they're determined to go back," Corchado said.

– Others have decided to forgo traveling to Mexico for now. Corchado says there aren't hard numbers about how much travel has dwindled, but he says immigrant groups in the United States have told him some families have chosen not to visit their hometowns because of the risks.

"The violence is so fluid that it may be, one week things are fine and then the next week things are down. The Mexican government says things are getting better, but yet the number of disappearances has also gone up," he said.

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## **What will turn Texas purple? Republicans**

Rick Casey

*San Antonio Report*

March 15, 2022

<https://sanantonioreport.org/texas-politics-democrats-purple-state/>

For decades Texas Democrats, who have wandered in the desert for nearly 30 years since last winning a statewide office, have held to the belief that the state's ethnic demographics make their return to glory inevitable.

The Hispanic population in Texas, which votes heavily Democratic, was 25.5% of the state's population in 1990. The official tally in the 2020 Census was 39.7%. That was just 1.5% behind the proportion of the population that is made up of non-Hispanic white people.

Last week the Census Bureau announced that Hispanic people nationwide were undercounted by 4.9%, while non-Hispanic white people were overcounted by 1.64%. If those numbers held in Texas — and there are reasons to believe the undercount here was even higher — then the Hispanic population has likely already surpassed the non-Hispanic white population in Texas.

And the trend will continue. Not only is there heavy Hispanic immigration, but Hispanic people had 48% of the births in Texas. Non-Hispanic white people had 33%.

But a funny thing happened along the way to Democratic resurgence. More Hispanic voters started voting Republican — especially in the heavily Hispanic Rio Grande Valley. In the 2020 presidential election, Starr County, whose population of 96,000 is 96% Hispanic, President Joe Biden beat Donald Trump, but by just 52% to 47%. That was Trump's best performance in the Valley, but his numbers throughout the area stunned Democrats.

To put it in historical perspective, consider Roy Barrera Jr.'s 1986 race for attorney general as a Republican against Democratic incumbent Jim Mattox. I joined Barrera, an attractive candidate who had the backing of major Republican leaders and financial backers, for a campaign swing through extreme South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley.

On our first stop, in Port Isabel near Brownsville, he was greeted by about a dozen people. They explained why another dozen or so Republicans couldn't make it — illness, out-of-town guests and such. Other "crowds" weren't much better. At one point he heard of a massive Hispanic family reunion and changed his course to work the crowd. He entered a large hall while a youth talent show was underway, and was quickly escorted out by a few formidable young men.

Barrera made a strong showing, losing to Mattox 53% to 45%, but he did not win the Hispanic vote. His showing was particularly weak in the Valley, including a few sparsely populated counties where he received no votes.

So what happened? Have Hispanic voters changed? Some, I'm sure. But much more importantly, the political parties have changed. From the Civil War until the late 20th century, the Texas Democratic Party, as in the

deep South, was mostly a conservative party. The party enforced a “whites only” rule until the U.S. Supreme Court finally banned it in 1944.

The reversal began in 1964 when, after passing the landmark Civil Rights Act, Lyndon Johnson told his press secretary, Bill Moyers, “I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come.” Just four years later, Richard Nixon initiated the Southern Strategy that has worked well for the Republican Party ever since. Until then, the parties did not differ radically. Nixon and John F. Kennedy were not far apart on issues.

The national consensus extended to the media, and for many years news coverage was dominated by three networks reading from the same songbook. Since then the parties have sorted themselves into the urban Democratic Party and the rural and small-town Republican Party — with the suburbs in play. The internet and cable news networks, Fox News and MSNBC especially, enable liberals and conservatives to live in separate “realities.” Racial attitudes were joined by guns and abortion as profoundly divisive issues.

Tip O’Neill, the Boston politician who ran the House of Representatives as its speaker from 1977 to 1987, used to say that “all politics is local,” a phrase he may have learned from his father. Today it is probably more accurate to say all politics is national.

In February, the Houston Chronicle reported the results of its attempts to question all 143 candidates running for Congress in the Texas Republican primary (as well as scouring their social media pages and websites) for their stances on “voter fraud” and the legitimacy of Biden’s victory in the 2020 election.

“Of the 87 with discernible stances on the issue of voter fraud, at least 42 have said outright that the 2020 election was stolen, called the results illegitimate or said they would have voted not to certify,” the Chronicle wrote. “Another 12 candidates have said there was enough fraud or irregularities to cast doubt on the results of the election. Twenty candidates are campaigning on the need to combat fraud, but did not appear to have taken a stance on the 2020 election.”

Of the answers they were able to get, the Hearst newspaper said it was able to confirm “just 13 Republican candidates who say the results were legitimate.”

Personally, I don’t for a minute believe only 13 actually believe that, considering the herculean and fruitless national Republican effort to find any meaningful levels of election fraud. But they may be correct that their own primary voters — only about 12% of the state’s registered voters — believe that the election was stolen, convinced of it by Trump and other party leaders and their wing of the media.

In order to appeal to that small but passionate segment of the electorate, Gov. Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton have joined Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz as culture warriors.

They supported an abortion law that has avoided Constitutional issues in the courts by having a ban on abortions enforced not by the state but by private citizens anywhere in world who can sue those who assist in abortions for a minimum bounty of \$10,000.

They have accused school librarians of providing “pornography” for children because some books present gays as sympathetic humans.

They have passed a law making it dangerous to teach accurately the history of slavery and racism in Texas because it might make white children uncomfortable.

And they have continued escalating the war on families with transgender children by declaring the treatments recommended by mainline medical associations as criminal child abuse. Paxton issued an official opinion suggesting that it could be a crime for teachers, psychologists and other professionals not to report loving families to Child Protective Services.

Meanwhile a recent Texas Tribune/University of Texas poll found that 63% of Texans oppose efforts to remove books from public school libraries, 47% strongly opposing. Just 29% support such removals, with 13% strongly supporting them.

Some 50% of Texans oppose restrictions on teaching about historical racism in Texas, with 35% doing so strongly. Meanwhile, 37% of those polled support such restrictions, 23% strongly.

I haven't found any Texas polls on the subject, but a national PBS NewsHour/Marist poll last year found nearly two-thirds of Americans oppose state laws that would criminalize gender transition-related medical care for minors and only 28% support such laws. Among Republicans, 55% opposed laws to criminalize transgender care for minors and 38% supported them.

When it comes to more mainstream practical issues, Republicans are more in sync with the public on border and immigration concerns, but substantial majorities of voters support expanding Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act.

So it won't be ethnic demographics that turns Texas purple. More likely, it will be Republicans.

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## **Texas Secretary of State Morning News Clips March 16, 2022**

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**Incumbent Justice of the Peace Judy Baker contests primary election results**  
Lynn Walker  
*Wichita Falls Times Record News*  
March 15, 2022

<https://www.timesrecordnews.com/story/news/2022/03/15/texas-elections-2022-justice-peace-judy-baker-contests-primary-results/7052043001/>

Incumbent Pct. 4 Justice of the Peace Judy Baker has filed for a new election in her race. Results from the March 1 Wichita County Republican primary showed Baker lost to challenger Randy Elliott by just 14 votes.

Baker has asked a judge to declare the election void and to instruct the county's Republican party to hold a new election.

The JP race was plagued from the beginning, with the Texas Secretary of State ordering early voting be stopped briefly because some voters were assigned to the wrong precinct. That resulted in some ballots having to be counted by hand, delaying the Wichita County vote count until the following morning.

"Both me and my opponent both said that it's only fair that someone does contest it because the people didn't get their rights to vote," Baker said of the snafu.

Only 405 people voted in the precinct, the county's largest JP district with the fewest voters.

Baker filed in 30th District Court, but Judge Jeff McKnight immediately recused himself because a judge cannot hear a contested election in his own county. Instead, 97th Dist. Judge Jack McGaughey of Montague County will hear the case.

Baker said if the judge grants a new election it would most likely be held May 24, date of the state's runoff primaries.

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## **Texas Voting Restrictions Take Their Toll: "Sorry – No Democrat Voting"**

Akela Lacy

*The Intercept*

March 15, 2022

<https://theintercept.com/2022/03/15/texas-voting-restrictions-poll-workers/>

WHEN VOTERS ARRIVED at their polling place on March 1 in Azle, Texas, a small city outside of Fort Worth, they saw a framed, printed sign with standard voting instructions: no phones, printed materials allowed. Taped to it was another handwritten sign that read: "Sorry — No Democrat voting (not staffed)."

More than 170 election workers in the county dropped out at the last minute, Tarrant County Democratic Party Chair Allison Campolo told *The Intercept*. The party did not know how many voters had been stopped from voting at the county's Azle location that day. Across the state, Campolo said, both parties had trouble finding election workers on primary day. But Tarrant County experienced "an extreme number of last minute drop offs of available election judges."

According to the Texas Tribune, more than a dozen polling locations in Tarrant County were closed for several hours due to staffing shortages among election judges. Texas is one of several states — also including Missouri, Maryland, and Colorado — to employ election judges to open and run poll locations, manage poll workers, and settle disputes. Other states call these officials “poll workers” or “election clerks,” but in Texas, where election judges have been used for decades, they’re partisan, and during primary elections, they are appointed by the chair of the county political party holding the primary. Numerous states had issues with recruiting poll workers at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the number of jurisdictions that reported difficulty in finding enough poll workers increased by 5 percent between the 2016 and 2018 elections. But the number of sudden dropouts in Tarrant County this month was unusual, according to Campolo.

Many of the difficulties with recruiting and retaining election workers for this month’s primary stemmed from Texas’s new voting law, known as S.B. 1, Parker County Democratic Party Chair Kay Parr told The Intercept. At least 19 states passed restrictive voting measures in the year after the 2020 election, which Republican officials continue to falsely claim was stolen, but S.B. 1 is one of the nation’s most restrictive. Enacted by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott late last year, the law bans drive-thru voting, implements new ID requirements for mail voting, ends 24-hour voting, and expands the power of poll watchers. It also puts election officials at risk of committing a felony while carrying out their job duties.

S.B. 1 prohibits officials from “soliciting” or distributing mail ballot applications to people who haven’t requested them, meaning that answering questions about filling out a mail ballot or helping voters submit them could now be considered crimes — punishable by up to two years in jail and \$10,000 in fines. In the eyes of the election judges, Parr said, the law threatens “legal liability for human error.”

Beyond that, with the elimination of mask mandates in most of the United States — including Texas — working the polls can be hazardous for the temporary staffers, many of whom are elderly or retired, amid the ongoing pandemic. They are often required to work for more than 14 hours on election days, a taxing shift for any worker. The new law only compounds the difficulty, adding considerable risk to a job that requires long hours, entails tedious duties, and pays minimum wage.

Azle sits on the county line between Tarrant and Parker counties, and both counties have their own rules for designating election officials from either party to assist voters. Parker didn’t have issues on primary day, Parr said, but several voters who weren’t able to vote in Tarrant came to the Azle poll site, about a five-minute drive away, on the Parker County side to try to cast their ballots.

Joe Grizzard, an alternate Democratic election judge at the Parker County polling location in Azle, said he had seen a posting prior to primary day saying that the Tarrant County elections office still needed poll workers. And he was worried about the impact the new law would have on election workers.

The county elections office “knew they had problems and they were trying to fix them but they didn’t fix them in time,” said Grizzard, who has been an election judge for five years. “I still have concerns for legal liability for telling someone something wrong or helping someone do something that I’m not authorized to do because of the change in the laws.”

OTHER ASPECTS OF the new Texas law made it harder to vote even before primary day. Last month, Texas election officials reported that thousands of mail ballots across the state were rejected at unprecedented rates because many people did not include the correct ID number on their envelope, as required by the new law. The number had to match the one they used on their voter registration, whether that was a driver's license number or a partial Social Security number. Harris County, the most populous in the state, rejected 35 percent of ballots received by the mail ballot deadline, Reuters reported, compared to a rejection rate between 5 and 10 percent in recent years. Applications for mail ballots were also rejected at similar rates due to missing or incorrect ID numbers.

The Department of Justice sued Texas over S.B. 1 in November, arguing that the law would “disenfranchise some eligible mail voters based on paperwork errors or omissions immaterial to their qualifications to vote.” The case is expected to conclude before the general election, but the timeline is still in flux. In December, Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria and Cathy Morgan, a volunteer deputy registrar, filed a complaint in federal court against Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton. Both women — represented by the Harris County Attorney's Office, outside counsel, and the Brennan Center — argued that the provision that criminalizes helping someone vote by mail criminalizes constitutionally protected speech.

Several weeks before the primary, an appeals court stayed an injunction against the portion of S.B. 1 that criminalizes solicitation of mail ballots. The matter is still pending in the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Unless courts reinstate the injunction, the problems are likely to persist through the runoff and the general election in November, said Andrew Garber, a fellow with the Brennan Center's voting rights and elections program. “We're going to continue to see mail ballots rejected at high rates because it's confusing,” he told The Intercept. “People are going to continue to be confused, fill out the wrong form, miss information on the form that could be resolved if the qualified election officials were able to print out public notices and preemptively help people do that.”

Texas's law was designed “to create this exact disenfranchising outcome,” Garber said, and similar problems are likely to arise in at least 18 other states — including Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Iowa — that joined Texas in passing restrictive new voting laws. “It makes the process of voting harder so that the end result is fewer people can vote.”

The shortage of poll workers has “certainly been made worse in Texas by some of the laws that have been passed,” according to Parr. “Our poll workers have fear of being sued now because of all of the national attention that voting got with the last election and the lies about the voter fraud. It's harder for us to get poll workers. And that, combined with the lies and Covid, it's made it much more difficult for us to get the experienced judges that we need for our poll sites for both parties.”

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## **League of Women Voters Honors Disgraced Harris County Elections**

**Administrator**

Sydney Henry

*Texas Scorecard*

March 15, 2022

<https://texasscorecard.com/state/league-of-women-voters-honors-disgraced-harris-county-elections-administrator/>

Following the Harris County primary election—where thousands of ballots went uncounted, polling places were improperly supplied and staffed, and results were reported an unprecedented day later than state law requires—Harris County Elections Administrator Isabel Longoria resigned.

Harris County Republican Party Chairman Cindy Siegel called the county primary “an unmitigated disaster” in a press conference following the election.

Nevertheless, despite Longoria’s failings as an administrator and her subsequent resignation, the League of Women Voters of Texas chose Longoria as the keynote speaker and honoree at their “Making Democracy Work” dinner.

“Isabel’s goal is to build access for Harris County’s 2.5 million registered and future voters,” reads Longoria’s biography on the LWVTX website. “Under her tenure, elections are administered with a focus on equity, access, fairness, and security – an approach that has led to the adoption of new voting machines, more data transparency, and higher rates of voter turnout in the country’s third largest county.”

Prior to her appointment in 2020 by Democrats who control the Harris County government, Longoria had no experience running elections.

Houston Talk Radio Host Kenny Webster posted the LWVTX advertisement for the dinner on Twitter with the caption, “This years theme: how to (not) get away with fraud.”

The dinner is set to occur in April and also honors three other county elections administrators: Heider Garcia of Tarrant County, Michael Scarpello of Dallas County, and Bruce Sherbert of Collin County.

While the League of Women Voters is nominally nonpartisan, the organization’s advocacy efforts trend left of center and often align with Democrats. The LWVTX strongly opposes voter ID and other election integrity measures, including the recently enacted Senate Bill 1.

The league’s statement following Longoria’s resignation said, “We applaud the professionalism that the Harris County Election Administrator, Isabel Longoria, and her staff demonstrated during this very complicated and confusing election. That these challenges led to Ms. Longoria’s resignation is unfortunate.”

The statement then further blamed Senate Bill 1 for “disenfranchising” voters, claiming, “Because of this new election law, too many voters were silenced during our primary elections.”

Texas Scorecard contacted the LWVTX to ask if they intended to change the dinner’s speaking line-up following Longoria’s recent failures. The LWVTX did not respond prior to publication.

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**The elections police are coming**  
Fredreka Schouten and Kelly Mena

CNN

March 15, 2022

<https://kvia.com/your-voice-your-vote/politics/cnn-us-politics/2022/03/15/the-elections-police-are-coming/>

A measure moving through the Republican-controlled Georgia legislature would hand new election policing powers to the state's bureau of investigations.

The bill under consideration in the Georgia House would give the Georgia Bureau of Investigations the power to probe election fraud allegations — supplementing the work currently overseen by state election officials.

If the proposal becomes law, the Peach State would become the second state in recent weeks to beef up enforcement of election fraud — a crime that federal and state officials say is exceedingly rare.

Last week, the Florida legislature created a scaled-back version of a new election police force that had been sought by Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is on the ballot for reelection this year and has presidential ambitions for 2024.

The measure, headed to DeSantis' desk for his signature, would establish an Office of Election Crimes and Security within the Department of State with a staff of 15 to conduct preliminary investigations of election fraud. In addition, the measure calls for DeSantis to appoint up to 10 law enforcement officers to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to probe election crimes.

The Florida measure also makes it a felony to return more than two mail-in ballots on behalf of other voters.

The stepped-up fraud-detection efforts in these states are part of a wave of bills moving through Republican-controlled state legislatures aimed at rewriting election procedures, following President Joe Biden's 2020 victory. Former President Donald Trump and his allies have falsely attributed his loss in Georgia and other key states to election fraud.

In Georgia, which has a Republican governor and secretary of state, Biden's narrow 2020 victory was certified after three counts of ballots. And judges have tossed out several lawsuits claiming fraud.

Voting rights advocates say the enhanced policing is unnecessary and could chill participation in elections, if voters, election workers or third-party groups fear prosecution for honest mistakes.

An Associated Press review last year of every potential fraud case in six key battleground states found fewer than 475 cases — too few disputed ballots to have made any difference in the outcome of the 2020 election.

But proponents of the bills say any fraud is too much — and are committing millions of taxpayer dollars to root it out. (Florida state Rep. Daniel Perez, a Republican who guided the election police force bill through the Florida House, said both components of the law-enforcement package had a \$3.7 million price tag.)

In Florida, DeSantis is expected to sign the bill. His aides say having a team dedicated to investigating election fraud allegations will serve as a deterrent to wrongdoing.

The obscure legal theory that could upend US elections

Warning: We're about to wade into some wonky legal territory here. But it's sort of important to the future of US elections.

Last week, Democrats scored a big win when the Supreme Court rejected Republican-led challenges of congressional district maps in two key states, Pennsylvania and North Carolina.

(As we noted in last week's newsletter, Democrats are faring better than expected in the once-in-a-decade redraw of congressional maps.)

But the court's action also set off alarm bells for those on the left because four of the court's conservative justices expressed openness to an untested theory advanced by North Carolina's GOP leaders: that the US Constitution leaves decisions about elections — including redistricting — to state legislatures, with no role for state courts to interpret state laws.

Some conservatives argue that this so-called "independent state legislature doctrine" gives state lawmakers unbridled power to decide election procedures — unchecked by their own state constitutions or state courts.

The idea has gained currency among Trump allies. Some argue the theory bars any deviation from long-established state practices without the explicit approval of state lawmakers. That included decisions by courts and election administrators to ease mail-in voting rules during the 2020 pandemic.

Keep in mind that the former President's allies also sought to have some legislatures ignore Biden's popular-vote victories their states in 2020 and install pro-Trump slates of electors instead.

Taken to its extreme, the doctrine could even prohibit state governors from vetoing election bills, Ian Millhiser wrote recently for Vox. In the last year, Democratic governors in key battleground states, such as Michigan and Wisconsin, have vetoed voting restrictions approved by Republican-controlled legislatures.

As Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote in a 2020 dissent: "The Constitution provides that state legislatures — not federal judges, not state judges, not state governors, not other state officials — bear primary responsibility for setting election rules."

Critics of the theory, such as University of California law professor Rick Hasen, say it could block a state court from protecting voters' rights enshrined in a state constitution.

It "could upend any rules that state courts — relying on state constitutions — put in place that affect federal elections, such as striking down voter ID laws under state constitutions," Hasen recently told CNN Supreme Court reporter Ariane de Vogue.

Of course, should another case testing the doctrine land at the high court, five justices would need to agree before the court dramatically changed how US elections are run.

But, right now, at least four of them appear ready to listen.

20%

That's the percentage of local election officials who say they are likely to leave their jobs before the 2024 presidential election, according to a new survey.

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## **Port of Victoria announces plans for new regional logistics hub**

*American Journal of Transportation*

March 15, 2022

<https://ajot.com/news/port-of-victoria-announces-plans-for-new-regional-logistics-hub>

The Victoria County Navigation District announced plans for the Texas Logistics Center at the Port of Victoria (TXLC). Strategically positioned in a Foreign Trade Zone and Texas Enterprise Zone, the regional logistics hub is situated two hours from Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. With over 2,000 acres available for development and access to rail, water, and highway transport, TXLC provides strategic business opportunities in Texas.

Phase 1 will see the addition of over 42,000 feet of track, including the build-out of three 10,000-foot drop and pull tracks. Later phases include storage tracks, transloading, connections to new tenants, and upon completion, TXLC will be served by Union Pacific and BNSF railroads. "The Texas Logistics Center will significantly strengthen the Port's ability to provide top-tier logistics solutions in economic development through the expansion of our services and physical footprint across North America." said Executive Director of the POV, Sean Stibich.

TXLC's connection to the 35-mile Victoria Barge Canal leading to the Gulf of Mexico is located on the M69 Marine highway, connecting 11 deep-water and 13 shallow-water ports along the Texas coast. In addition to ample water access, TXLC has over 3 miles of road infrastructure located within 8 miles of major Texas highways.

TNW Corporation, a privately held operator of short line railroads and logistics centers in Texas, currently provides industry rail operations for the POV and will continue assisting with the development of the TXLC / POV's multi-phase rail expansion project. "Our strategic alliance with the POV continues to thrive.

The addition of the Texas Logistics Center offers a strategic logistics advantage to businesses seeking to relocate operations in Texas, and TNW is proud to be part of the Port's growth." said Wade Hoffmann, TNW's Vice President of Marketing and Sales.

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## **Mexican LPG sees largest weekly hike since price controls began**

*BNAmericas*

March 14, 2022

<https://www.bnamericas.com/en/news/mexican-lpg-sees-largest-weekly-hike-since-price-controls-began>

LPG prices in Mexico saw their highest weekly increase since the government's enactment of price controls in August 2021 with the Russia-Ukraine war generating a string of hikes on the household fuel.

Energy sector regulator CRE set the maximum consumer LPG price for the week ending March 19 at 25.85 pesos (US\$1.24) per kilogram, up 6.4% from the previous week.

Under the price control policy, CRE publishes the maximum end-user price for domestically sold LPG for different regions, based on a model to calculate the costs of obtaining, storing, selling, and distributing the fuel.

Sales and transport prices remain in place from Sunday to Saturday and are published by CRE on its website.

The weekly increase was lower than the 11.5% jump seen in propane – LPG’s primary feedstock – at Texas’ Mont Belvieu market last week, reaching US\$1.45 per gallon, the highest level since the third week of October 2021.

## FUEL SUBSIDIES

Mexico has thus far managed to maintain a lower degree of hydrocarbons price hikes than the surges seen in the US market.

President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) and energy minister Rocío Nahle have acknowledged that state-owned oil giant Pemex is boosting its exports due to the high international oil price, producing a windfall stirred by the Ukraine war.

AMLO hailed the higher exports as enabling the country to help keep prices low, even though it remains a net importer of fuels.

In addition to lowering its IEPS excise tax on fuels to zero, the finance ministry has confirmed it is now introducing an outright subsidy to keep gasoline and diesel prices at bay.

The ministry said that for a liter of the country’s non-premium gasoline (known as Magna), the government had zeroed-out the IEPS set normally at 5.49 pesos/l, and in addition, there will be a federal subsidy of 3.87 pesos/l.

The complementary subsidy for the week of 12-18 March will be 2.75 pesos/l for premium and 5.24 pesos/l for diesel.

The program is set to go into effect now and run through December 2024 or until after AMLO’s term ends (October 1, 2024), activating whenever the IEPS stimulus is set to its maximum.

## BIGGEST HIKE YET

The hike set for this week marks the third consecutive week of higher LPG prices, occurring in tandem with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24. Prices were up 3.4% the first week and 4% in the second.

The average price before the controls began sat roughly at 25.2 pesos/kg before dropping to 22.9 pesos/kg in the first week of the program. Prices, however, rose steadily in the next two months, hitting a maximum of 26.7 pesos/kg in the week of October 17-21, 2021.

The last average national price without a cap was 25.19 pesos/kg, which has already been exceeded eight times during the 32 weeks in which CRE has decreed capped prices for 125 regions of the country.

The price that will prevail this week is 3.3% lower than the maximum regulated price observed in the country, during October 17-23 last year at 26.73 pesos/kg.

Real prices for LPG continue to be higher than those set as nationwide maximums, with Mexican news outlet El Economista reporting that the latest reading has prices averaging 2.6% above regulated prices.

## BIENESTAR PROBLEMS

Launched on August 31 last year, state-owned LPG sales unit Gas Bienestar, another of AMLO's strategies to contain prices, continues to face setbacks and delays.

Originally planned to begin operations in all of Mexico City's 16 districts by 1Q22, only seven districts had trucks on the ground by mid-February, and there have been no new announcements on planned launches in additional districts.

Furthermore, Mexico City lawmakers on the state civil protection committee have ordered the parent of Gas Bienestar, Pemex, to guarantee the safety of residents living near the 18 de Marzo LPG storage and processing facility in the Miguel Hidalgo district.

Amid safety concerns, residents called into question via a petition the storage of thousands of used containers, ostensibly marked for destruction, being stored at the former refinery facility.

Gas Bienestar has also been unable to offer LPG at the lowest prices on the market, with the latest CRE report showing it was the third most expensive supplier as of March 12 in the Álvaro Obregon district of Mexico City, and the second most expensive in Azcapotzalco district.

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## **Renovated CBP processing center reopens in McAllen**

Valerie Gonzalez

*McAllen Monitor*

March 14, 2022

<https://myrgv.com/local-news/2022/03/14/renovated-cbp-processing-center-reopens-in-mcallen/>

A U.S. Customs and Border Protection processing center in McAllen used to detain migrants in their temporary custody was officially reopened after a year-long renovation project.

The 77,000 square-foot processing center known as Ursula, due to its location on Ursula Avenue in McAllen, was updated after it was closed for renovations in October 2020.

About \$30 million appropriated from the Fiscal Year 2019 Emergency Supplemental were used by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to make the improvements that include “the removal of chain link fencing, installation of a permanent HVAC system to provide cleaner air and a climate-controlled environment and improved personal hygiene stations and shower facilities,” Monday’s news release stated. “The facility was also retrofitted with appropriate physical security infrastructure, medical screening areas, laundry services, phone lines, computer stations for virtual processing, as well as consultation rooms for consulates.”

The facility will be able to hold up to 1,200 people at a time.

While the facility was renovated, the agency struggled with overcrowding during a year when apprehensions broke previous records.

The space created to hold migrants in the interim included a temporary outdoor processing center under the Anzalduas International Bridge and a soft-sided facility in Donna; but both proved to be problematic during the pandemic when numbers rose above capacity.

The facility in Donna will remain in operation for the foreseeable future, the agency affirmed. Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz in late February indicated they may need the extra capacity in the near future when policies for asylum seekers change.

“CBP will continue to closely coordinate with ICE and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement in caring, processing, screening, and transitioning migrants out of Border Patrol custody,” Monday’s news release added.

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## **Lubbock, with help from Biden, Arrington and Congress, on the road to become an international trade route**

James Clark

*KLBK-TV*

March 15, 2022

<https://www.everythinglubbock.com/news/local-news/lubbock-with-help-from-biden-and-congress-on-the-road-to-become-an-international-trade-route/>

LUBBOCK, Texas — President Biden signed federal legislation Tuesday that designates a portion of Ports to Plains as “interstate highway.” It brings Lubbock and the South Plains one step closer to having Interstate 27 reach all way from Laredo up to a connection with Interstate 25, which then goes to Denver and other points to the north.

Congressman Jodey Arrington R-Lubbock and Congressman Henry Cuellar D-Laredo filed bipartisan legislation to extend Interstate 27, which currently ends at 82nd Street in Lubbock. (South of 82nd, the road is currently designated as U.S. Highway 87.)

Arrington said the designation recognizes Ports-to-Plains as interstate highway from Laredo to Raton, New Mexico. This does not mean the extension of I-27 is already fully funded.

“This designation will make Texas and New Mexico eligible for increased federal funding to complete the I-27 highway expansion project,” Cuellar said. “I will continue to fund projects in south Texas that bring good-paying jobs and ease quality of life for my constituents.”

U.S. Senators John Cornyn R-Texas and Ted Cruz R-Texas both supported legislation to designate Ports-to-Plains as a federal interstate highway.

However, Cruz voted against the current bill, saying federal spending at a time of inflation only hurts people. Cruz supports the I-27 corridor as “a key transportation priority for Texas.” Cruz said extending I-27 will help the nation as a whole.

Arrington issued the following statement, calling Tuesday’s development a big win for West Texas:

#### US Designates Interstate 27 Part of the Interstate Highway System

(LUBBOCK, TX) – The designation of Interstate 27 (I-27) became official on Tuesday, March 15 as President Biden signed into law the appropriation bill. The designation recognizes the Ports-to-Plains Corridor from Laredo, Texas to Raton, New Mexico as an addition to the Interstate Highway System.

“Establishing a four lane, federal highway for I-27 is a game-changer for our economy and quality of life in West Texas for decades to come and will strengthen our food security and energy independence for the entire country,” said Jodey Arrington, U.S. Rep. for District 19. “I had three big goals for a better and stronger West Texas when I took office in 2016 – get cotton back in the farm bill, secure the B-21 bomber at Dyess, and establish a federal highway for West Texas. I had a lot of help from colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I’m humbled by the opportunities this will provide for generations of West Texans.”

Receiving the interstate designation is the first step to begin fundraising for the extension of I-27. As TxDOT’s feasibility study determined, the extension of I-27 impacts the state of Texas in improving the safety of the roads by reducing the annual crash rate by 21% and providing more access and opportunities for rural America.

“I am ecstatic we received the interstate designation for I-27 which will allow for the necessary infrastructure improvement to bring growth to our region and the state of Texas,” said Dan Pope, mayor for the City of Lubbock. “As with most momentous achievements, our thanks are due to many in their support of this project; specifically, Congressman Jodey Arrington, who has been an incredible advocate in this bipartisan effort, led the charge for what will be a changing moment for West Texas for decades to come.”

The Corridor represents three of the eight border crossings along the Texas-Mexico border: Laredo, Eagle Pass and Del Rio. As the next steps to fund the extension of I-27 begin, the economic benefit for the state of Texas within the first 20 years of completion is estimated at \$55.6 million increase in GDP and 22,110 new jobs.

“The impact of this designation is tremendous as it allows for the enhancement of infrastructure for domestic and international markets, creates safer roads for leisure and business travels, and connects underrepresented communities throughout the Corridor with outside markets,” John Osborne, chairman of the board for Ports-to-Plains Alliance. “We would not be celebrating this

historic moment without the support of TxDOT, NMDOT, Congressman Arrington and Cuellar and Congresswoman Granger, as well as our team of advocates at Hance Scarborough. We are grateful for their leadership and support of this project.”

The following is a statement from Ports-to-Plains:

#### US Designates Future Interstate 27 Part of the Interstate Highway System

(LUBBOCK, TX) – The designation of future Interstate 27 (I-27) became official on Tuesday, March 15 as President Biden signed into law the appropriation bill. The designation recognizes the Ports-to-Plains Corridor from Laredo, Texas to Raton, New Mexico as an addition to the Interstate Highway System.

“I am very excited that the I-27 highway expansion project is now written into law with the passage of the FY22 omnibus appropriations bill,” said Henry Cuellar, U.S. Rep. for District 28. This designation will make Texas and New Mexico eligible for increased federal funding to complete the I-27 highway expansion project, creating economic growth, jobs, trade opportunities across those two states. The I-27 expansion will grow the Texas GDP by \$17.2 billion and create 178,000 construction jobs. It will also add 17,000 long-term employment opportunities in the new I-27 corridor. With this project, Laredo will also become the only port of entry that has three corridors: I-35, I-69, I-27—a boon for our trade economy. As a senior member of the Appropriations Committee, I will continue to fund projects in south Texas that bring good-paying jobs and ease quality of life for my constituents.”

“Establishing a four lane, federal highway for I-27 is a game-changer for our economy and quality of life in West Texas for decades to come and will strengthen our food security and energy independence for the entire country,” said Jodey Arrington, U.S. Rep. for District 19. “I had three big goals for a better and stronger West Texas when I took office in 2016 – get cotton back in the farm bill, secure the B-21 bomber at Dyess, and establish a federal highway for West Texas. I had a lot of help from colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and I’m humbled by the opportunities this will provide for generations of West Texans.”

Receiving the future interstate designation is the first step to begin fundraising for the extension of I-27. As TxDOT’s feasibility study determined, the extension of I-27 impacts the state of Texas in improving the safety of the roads by reducing the annual crash rate by 21% and providing more access and opportunities for rural America.

“I am ecstatic we received the future interstate designation for I-27 which will allow for the necessary infrastructure improvement to bring growth to our region and the state of Texas,” said Dan Pope, mayor for the City of Lubbock. “As with most momentous achievements, our thanks are due to many in their support of this project. From the Governor to our U.S. Senators and Representatives, as well as our State Representatives, this will be a changing moment in Texas for decades.”

“This exciting news represents years of planning and collaboration by so many people,” said Ginger Nelson, mayor for the city of Amarillo. “The extension of I-27 is vital to our future growth.”

“One of the most significant events of today was the inclusion of the designation of I-27 in the appropriation bill,” said Brenda Gunter, mayor for the city of San Angelo. “We are seeing a project that will have a significant impact on the Texas economy as well as our national GDP. The hard work and effort to accomplish this designation is finally paying off with a tremendous

impact on the future of our region and the state of Texas. Thank you to all who have been a part of the process.”

The Corridor represents three of the eight border crossings along the Texas-Mexico border: Laredo, Eagle Pass and Del Rio. As the next steps to fund and construct the extension of I-27 begin, the economic benefit for the U.S. is the addition of 1.7 million jobs and a \$287 billion increase in GDP along the Corridor.

“The impact of this designation is tremendous as it allows for the enhancement of infrastructure for domestic and international markets, creates safer roads for leisure and business travels, and connects underrepresented communities throughout the Corridor with outside markets,” John Osborne, chairman of the board for Ports-to-Plains Alliance.

“We would not be celebrating this historic moment without the support of Congressman Arrington and Cuellar and Congresswoman Granger, Senators Heinrich and Lujan, as well as our team of advocates at Hance Scarborough. We are grateful for their leadership and support of this project.”

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## **Between violence and the pandemic, heritage tourism to Mexico has gotten complicated**

Rhonda Fanning

*KUT-FM*

March 15, 2022

<https://www.tpr.org/border-immigration/2022-03-15/between-violence-and-the-pandemic-heritage-tourism-to-mexico-has-gotten-complicated>

Heritage tourism, common for decades among Mexican Americans, has been declining in recent years. Between the pandemic and fears of violence, more and more Mexican Americans are choosing not to visit the places where they have roots in Mexico, and it's hurting the country's economy – especially during peak tourist times like spring break.

Dallas Morning News Mexico border correspondent Alfredo Corchado tells Texas Standard that those who do make the journey have had to change the way that they travel.

Listen to the interview with Corchado in the audio player above or read the highlights below:

– For many spring breakers, trips to Mexico means partying in Cancun. Heritage tourism, on the other hand, is an opportunity for families to reconnect with their Mexican roots, Corchado says.

"They want to make sure that the next generation knows about all these colonial gems, this part of their own history," he said. "So it's not just immigrants taking back their their kids to visit their relatives, but to really see the best of Mexico."

– Tourism is key to Mexico's economy, including in Guanajuato, where Corchado has been reporting. He says local officials are "trying to put the best face forward" to attract visitors to a city that depends on foreign investment.

"Tourism is a big deal, that it really does hurt them," he said.

– Heritage tourists who do come to Mexico are changing how they travel to stay safe. Some fly directly to their destination, instead of traveling through the country. Others orchestrate caravans of dozens of vehicles, and follow advice from family members in Mexico to only travel at certain times, keep gas tanks full and avoid certain roads.

"A lot of the families who live in the United States, I mean, they're determined to go back," Corchado said.

– Others have decided to forgo traveling to Mexico for now. Corchado says there aren't hard numbers about how much travel has dwindled, but he says immigrant groups in the United States have told him some families have chosen not to visit their hometowns because of the risks.

"The violence is so fluid that it may be, one week things are fine and then the next week things are down. The Mexican government says things are getting better, but yet the number of disappearances has also gone up," he said.

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## **What will turn Texas purple? Republicans**

Rick Casey

*San Antonio Report*

March 15, 2022

<https://sanantonioreport.org/texas-politics-democrats-purple-state/>

For decades Texas Democrats, who have wandered in the desert for nearly 30 years since last winning a statewide office, have held to the belief that the state's ethnic demographics make their return to glory inevitable.

The Hispanic population in Texas, which votes heavily Democratic, was 25.5% of the state's population in 1990. The official tally in the 2020 Census was 39.7%. That was just 1.5% behind the proportion of the population that is made up of non-Hispanic white people.

Last week the Census Bureau announced that Hispanic people nationwide were undercounted by 4.9%, while non-Hispanic white people were overcounted by 1.64%. If those numbers held in Texas — and there are reasons to believe the undercount here was even higher — then the Hispanic population has likely already surpassed the non-Hispanic white population in Texas.

And the trend will continue. Not only is there heavy Hispanic immigration, but Hispanic people had 48% of the births in Texas. Non-Hispanic white people had 33%.

But a funny thing happened along the way to Democratic resurgence. More Hispanic voters started voting Republican — especially in the heavily Hispanic Rio Grande Valley. In the 2020 presidential election, Starr County, whose population of 96,000 is 96% Hispanic, President Joe Biden beat Donald Trump, but by just 52% to 47%. That was Trump's best performance in the Valley, but his numbers throughout the area stunned Democrats.

To put it in historical perspective, consider Roy Barrera Jr.'s 1986 race for attorney general as a Republican against Democratic incumbent Jim Mattox. I joined Barrera, an attractive candidate who had the backing of major Republican leaders and financial backers, for a campaign swing through extreme South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley.

On our first stop, in Port Isabel near Brownsville, he was greeted by about a dozen people. They explained why another dozen or so Republicans couldn't make it — illness, out-of-town guests and such. Other "crowds" weren't much better. At one point he heard of a massive Hispanic family reunion and changed his course to work the crowd. He entered a large hall while a youth talent show was underway, and was quickly escorted out by a few formidable young men.

Barrera made a strong showing, losing to Mattox 53% to 45%, but he did not win the Hispanic vote. His showing was particularly weak in the Valley, including a few sparsely populated counties where he received no votes.

So what happened? Have Hispanic voters changed? Some, I'm sure. But much more importantly, the political parties have changed. From the Civil War until the late 20th century, the Texas Democratic Party, as in the deep South, was mostly a conservative party. The party enforced a "whites only" rule until the U.S. Supreme Court finally banned it in 1944.

The reversal began in 1964 when, after passing the landmark Civil Rights Act, Lyndon Johnson told his press secretary, Bill Moyers, "I think we just delivered the South to the Republican Party for a long time to come." Just four years later, Richard Nixon initiated the Southern Strategy that has worked well for the Republican Party ever since. Until then, the parties did not differ radically. Nixon and John F. Kennedy were not far apart on issues.

The national consensus extended to the media, and for many years news coverage was dominated by three networks reading from the same songbook. Since then the parties have sorted themselves into the urban Democratic Party and the rural and small-town Republican Party — with the suburbs in play. The internet and cable news networks, Fox News and MSNBC especially, enable liberals and conservatives to live in separate "realities." Racial attitudes were joined by guns and abortion as profoundly divisive issues.

Tip O'Neill, the Boston politician who ran the House of Representatives as its speaker from 1977 to 1987, used to say that "all politics is local," a phrase he may have learned from his father. Today it is probably more accurate to say all politics is national.

In February, the Houston Chronicle reported the results of its attempts to question all 143 candidates running for Congress in the Texas Republican primary (as well as scouring their social media pages and websites) for their stances on "voter fraud" and the legitimacy of Biden's victory in the 2020 election.

"Of the 87 with discernible stances on the issue of voter fraud, at least 42 have said outright that the 2020 election was stolen, called the results illegitimate or said they would have voted not to certify," the Chronicle wrote. "Another 12 candidates have said there was enough fraud or irregularities to cast doubt on the results of the election. Twenty candidates are campaigning on the need to combat fraud, but did not appear to have taken a stance on the 2020 election."

Of the answers they were able to get, the Hearst newspaper said it was able to confirm "just 13 Republican candidates who say the results were legitimate."

Personally, I don't for a minute believe only 13 actually believe that, considering the herculean and fruitless national Republican effort to find any meaningful levels of election fraud. But they may be correct that their own primary voters — only about 12% of the state's registered voters — believe that the election was stolen, convinced of it by Trump and other party leaders and their wing of the media.

In order to appeal to that small but passionate segment of the electorate, Gov. Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton have joined Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and U.S. Sen. Ted Cruz as culture warriors.

They supported an abortion law that has avoided Constitutional issues in the courts by having a ban on abortions enforced not by the state but by private citizens anywhere in world who can sue those who assist in abortions for a minimum bounty of \$10,000.

They have accused school librarians of providing “pornography” for children because some books present gays as sympathetic humans.

They have passed a law making it dangerous to teach accurately the history of slavery and racism in Texas because it might make white children uncomfortable.

And they have continued escalating the war on families with transgender children by declaring the treatments recommended by mainline medical associations as criminal child abuse. Paxton issued an official opinion suggesting that it could be a crime for teachers, psychologists and other professionals not to report loving families to Child Protective Services.

Meanwhile a recent Texas Tribune/University of Texas poll found that 63% of Texans oppose efforts to remove books from public school libraries, 47% strongly opposing. Just 29% support such removals, with 13% strongly supporting them.

Some 50% of Texans oppose restrictions on teaching about historical racism in Texas, with 35% doing so strongly. Meanwhile, 37% of those polled support such restrictions, 23% strongly.

I haven't found any Texas polls on the subject, but a national PBS NewsHour/Marist poll last year found nearly two-thirds of Americans oppose state laws that would criminalize gender transition-related medical care for minors and only 28% support such laws. Among Republicans, 55% opposed laws to criminalize transgender care for minors and 38% supported them.

When it comes to more mainstream practical issues, Republicans are more in sync with the public on border and immigration concerns, but substantial majorities of voters support expanding Medicaid as part of the Affordable Care Act.

So it won't be ethnic demographics that turns Texas purple. More likely, it will be Republicans.

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