

# Understand Texas

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Conservative dominance may be slowly changing as both the Texas economy and population expands

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Cowboys, independence and oil are all actors that make the story of Texas a fascinating and feisty one.

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Yep, Texans have state pride, but there's no arrogance about 'em when they're kickin' back in their pick-'em-up trucks.

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Whether country and western, alternative or new age, Texas music dances in its own direction.

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More than 268,000 sq miles is a lot of land to explore: coastal beaches to high mountains, prairies to pine forests.

# Texas Today

Oil set the pace for the state's early development, but modern Texas is diversified and constantly evolving. The economy has been one of the strongest in the nation for the last decade, and by most economic indicators it remains so. But so too is the population growing – quickly. Demographics seem to be shifting toward a young majority fueled by transplants both domestic and international, and immigration reform is as hot a topic as they come.

## Best on Film

**The Alamo** (1960) John Wayne's epic masterpiece, mostly filmed near Austin.

**Friday Night Lights** (2004) The ups and downs of high-school football define the social scenes of much of small-town Texas. Later adapted for TV.

**Giant** (1956) The life of an oil and ranching family, starring Elizabeth Taylor, Rock Hudson and James Dean.

**There Will Be Blood** (2007) Though set in California, this depiction of early-era oil explorers was filmed in part near Marfa.

## Best in Print

**Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans** (TR Fehrenbach; 2007) Comprehensive history of the state and people.

**Lone Star Literature** (ed Don Graham; 2006) Anthology of Texas works, far-reaching and diverse.

**In a Narrow Grave** (Larry McMurtry; 2001) Classic essays on Texas from the renowned local author.

**The Longhorns** (J Frank Dobie; 1980) Legends and history of the iconic Texas cattle breed and ranching in the region.

**Looking for Texas** (Rick Vanderpool; 2000) Follows the author's 20,500-mile journey photographing the word 'Texas' across the state.

## Conservative–Liberal Divide

Texas is a red state with a blue heart. During the 2016 presidential election – as in every election since 1976 – the state's 38 electoral votes were cast for Republican candidates. Looking county by county, the notable and consistent exceptions to the red-state rule are Travis County (Austin) and Harris County (urban Houston). There is also a liberal majority in the growing Mexican American-dominated counties along the rural south-western border in the Rio Grande Valley.

Republicans have dominated the Texas state legislature and the governor's office for more than 10 years. Governor Rick Perry led the charge until his 2016 presidential run, and Greg Abbott has pushed forward with conservative policies since his transition to that role.

Of the divisive conservative/liberal topics that regularly resurface, the ground seems to continue shifting on one: same-sex marriage rights. Most cities and counties have established marriage-equality laws at the local level in line with US Supreme Court rulings, but rural Irion County continues to refuse to recognize same-sex unions; the Texas Supreme Court began to hear cases in early 2017 that could once again put limits on these rights in defiance of national norms.

## The Economy & Oil

Historically oil and gas exploration and production was the only factor in the success or failure of Texas fortunes. But the boom-and-bust cycle of the 1980s taught the state a thing or two about diversifying. Today the Texas economy is based on numerous bread-winners, including a strong tech sector around Austin and a large biomedical industry in Houston. Oil no longer tops the list.