Texas Republicans push secession referendum, law to block Dems from winning state office

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At its state convention in San Antonio last week, the Texas Republican Party voted for a 2024 platform that proposed new major attacks on democratic and constitutional rights and reaffirmed previous ones.

The three-day biannual convention demonstrated that the evolution of the Republican Party into a fascist political organization is accelerating and, basing itself on extreme Christian nationalism, the Texas party is a driving force in this development. A core element of the document is the erasure of the separation of church and state, which is foundational to the US Constitution.

Among the new planks in the 248-point platform is a call for a State Constitutional Amendment that would establish "concurrent majority" criteria for election to statewide office. This means that statewide candidates must carry a majority of Texas' 254 counties to win an election, a model similar to the US electoral college.

Such an amendment would effectively ban Democrats from ever winning statewide positions based on the current distribution of voter support throughout Texas. Since Democratic Party voters in Texas are disproportionately concentrated in a handful of major cities—such as El Paso, Dallas, Austin, Houston and San Antonio—party candidates would be unable to satisfy the concurrent majority requirement.

As reviewed by the *Texas Tribune*, "Under current voting patterns, in which Republicans routinely win in the state's rural counties, such a requirement would effectively end Democrats' chances of winning statewide office."

Even though the Democratic Party has not won statewide office since 1990, the Republican Party is seeking to implement a thoroughly undemocratic system that completely silences the voice of voters in the state's urban centers. Quoting historian Kevin Kruse of Princeton University, the *Tribune* report further explains that the embrace of a county-based electoral system creates, "something even more unequal than the scheme concocted by segregationists of a century ago."

Kruse points out that the Republican Party amendment, should it be adopted, would make one vote in Loving County, which has a total population of 64 people, have as much significance as more than 70,000 votes in Harris County, where Houston is located and has a population of 4.7 million people.

The Texas Republican Party platform also retains, in plank 21 and under the heading "State Sovereignty," a call for Texas to advance "the right to secede from the United States," and calls upon the Texas Legislature to pass a referendum acknowledging such a right.

The plank states, "Pursuant to Article 1, Section 1 of the Texas Constitution, the federal government has impaired our right of local self-government. Therefore, federally mandated legislation that infringes upon the 10th Amendment rights of Texas shall be ignored, opposed, refused, and nullified." State Republicans have already drafted the legislation called the Texas Sovereignty Act and filed it in the current 88th session of the legislature.

Advancing the demand for Texas to establish itself as an independent country, or possibly uniting with other states seeking a similar objective, is a deeply reactionary and undemocratic demand that raises the specter of civil war and mass impoverishment.

One need only consider the impact of Texas forming its own country in the 21st century. Mass unemployment would immediately follow as large corporate employers with headquarters, production facilities and offices moved out. Meanwhile, there are over 250,000 federal employees and military personnel in Texas who would either lose their jobs or be forced to relocate.

This is to say nothing of the threat to Social Security, Medicare and other federal programs, such as food stamps, and aid to elementary and secondary education, and the economic dislocation caused by an end to the huge federal subsidies to agriculture and the oil industry, two mainstays of the state's economy.

Texas was an independent republic for a brief period after separating from Mexico in 1836. It applied for annexation to the US and, in 1845, it became the 28th state, based on widespread popular support for doing so.

Today's push for secession is not based on nostalgia for conditions of nearly 200 years ago (when Texas was a slave state), but on a delusory perspective of creating an isolated, self-sufficient island in a globalized world. The real result would be the establishment of a Christian nationalist brand of fascism with a state government perpetually at war with its own population.

Among the other right-wing planks in the 50-page platform are statements that "abortion is not healthcare it is homicide" and "to enact legislation to abolish abortion by immediately securing the right to equal protection of the laws to all preborn children from the moment of fertilization." It states that gender-transition treatment for children is "child abuse" and "homosexuality is an abnormal lifestyle choice."

The platform calls for the reversal of recent name changes to military bases to "publicly honor the southern heroes," for gold and silver to be declared legal tender and for the US government to disclose "all pertinent information and knowledge" of UFOs.

Underpinning much of the far-right platform elements are multiple references to the Bible, including the demand for "prayer, the Bible, and the Ten Commandments being returned to our schools, courthouses, and other government buildings."

Among the name-changed military bases that the Republicans would restore is the former Fort Hood, which was renamed a year ago to Fort Cavazos. Fort Hood was originally named after the Confederate General John Bell Hood, who commanded troops during the Civil War to defend chattel slavery.

Under the misnamed heading "Religious Freedom and Government Schools," the platform urges the state legislature and the Texas Board of Education to "require instruction on the Bible, servant leadership, and Christian self-governance." The plank goes on, "We support the use of chaplains in schools to counsel and give guidance from a traditional biblical perspective based on Judeo-Christian principles with the informed consent of a parent."

The platform begins with an endorsement of the "Agenda 47" of Donald Trump, advanced for the 2024 presidential elections. The Trump far-right and xenophobic agenda—mass deportations, militarized border, tariffs and domestic police repression—are fully backed by the Texas party as "visionary positive solutions for the reconstruction of America."

The primary runoff elections in Texas on Tuesday offered a glimpse into the political conflicts with the Republican Party, between the fascist forces linked to Trump and his reelection campaign, and reactionaries defending the more traditional policies of Corporate America. These divisions are an element in the deep crisis wracking the entire capitalist political system in the US.

Several Republican Party establishment candidates came out victorious in two House Republican primaries and the speaker of the State House, Dade Phelan, survived a challenge from a Trump-backed Republican, David Covey, by a margin of 50.7 percent to 49.3 percent.

Representative Tony Gonzales, a Republican who had called far-right members of his party "scumbags," barely survived a challenge in the runoff. He defeated Brandon Herrera, a gun rights activist with a YouTube channel who calls himself "the AK guy," by just 400 votes. Herrera, who had the support of fascist Matt Gaetz of Florida and others within the House Freedom Caucus, had received less than 25 percent in the earlier five-person primary, but then won 49 percent in the runoff.

While these two narrowly survived Trump-backed challenges, six of eight incumbents lost to challengers Tuesday. Representative Justin Holland lost his suburban Dallas seat to Trump 2016 spokeswoman Katrina Pierson in a race that epitomized the conflict raging among Texas Republicans.

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