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Co-operation in the Texas State House of Representatives

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“Texas is a state of mind, but I think it is more than that. It is a mystique closely approximating a religion. And this is true to the extent that people either passionately love Texas or passionately hate it and, as in other religions, few people dare to inspect it for fear of losing their bearings in mystery or paradox. But I think there will be little quarrel with my feeling that Texas is one thing. For all its enormous range of space, climate, and physical appearance, and for all the internal squabbles, contentions, and strivings, Texas has a tight cohesiveness perhaps stronger than any other section of America.” John Steinbeck

Introducing the Txlege¹

For democracy to work for citizens we need to understand not only the outputs of political institutions, but how they operate. Parliamentary studies has tended to focus more on the results and rules than on processes and relationships (Taylor-Robinson et al. 2022). This is only a tendency and there are exceptions, as some parliamentary scholars are interested in coalitions, bipartisanship and networks. As just one example, Craig writes about how Members of Congress frequently collaborate on policy initiatives and those with better connections tend to receive a greater share of federal grant money, despite the general pattern of party antagonism (2023). As another example, women legislators in the US Congress, due to their efforts at building consensus, are better able than their male colleagues to move forward their bills when they are in the minority party, though not when in the majority party (Volden et al. 2013). But given their centrality to politics, the everyday experience of forging, maintaining and breaking relationships deserves more attention. It is bipartisan co-operation that we write about in this article, through the lens of a study of the Texas state House. Our puzzle emerges out of a context of political division, where there appears to be no common ground across parties, and one party has the votes to pass its preferred legislation: what is the incentive to build relationships outside of one’s group?

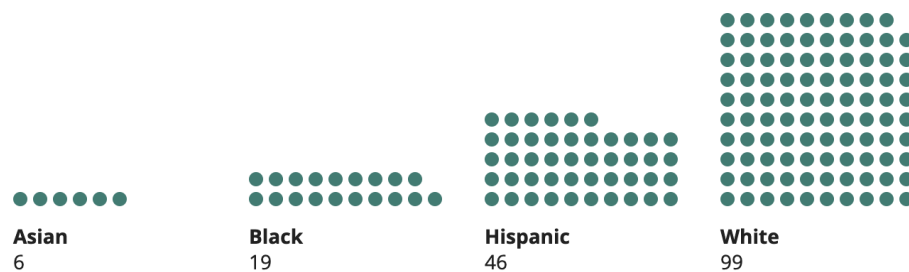
The Texas state legislature, or the Txlege/lege as it is nicknamed, meets bi-annually for a regular session of just 140 days. This creates a time pressure, increasing as the session progresses (in 2023 from January 10 to May 29), that affects the process of law-making significantly, even if the

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Governor can subsequently call ‘special sessions.’ The US has a 2-party system, and in Texas the Republican Party enjoys huge dominance. For the 88th session of the legislature, all state-wide elected offices were held by Republicans, and Republicans held 86 of the 150 seats in the House, and 19 of the 31 seats in the Senate.² The Democratic Party has not won a state-wide elected office since 1994. This complete control by one party is part of the reason why the Texas House is an ideal case for studying relationships among legislators: who works with whom, and in particular whether, when, and why there is work across party lines. Based only on the numbers the governing Republican Party can pass its initiatives with no support from the Democrats. Yet nonetheless we were repeatedly told about and observed relationships, including relationships across the parties.

To research co-operation we first need to explain the membership of the Txlege. Among the 150 Representatives, whites are over-represented while others, and especially Hispanics, are under-represented (see figure 2). In the House there are 104 men and 46 women (up from 38 in the last session and 33 in the one before). 26 Reps were new in 2023 and 36 were under 50 years old. Since they only earn \$7,200 per year and must spend five months of long days in the legislature every two years, it is financially unaffordable for most to be a Representative. Nonetheless, some Representatives have served many terms in the House: 29 terms for the most senior Republican, and 26 terms for the most senior Democrat. That some members have long careers in the House is interesting not only given the financial hardship of the job, but also because of the opportunity for “progressive” ambition to serve in the national Congress (Schlesinger 1966).

Entire 2023 Legislature



If the Legislature accurately reflected Texas, it would look like this ...

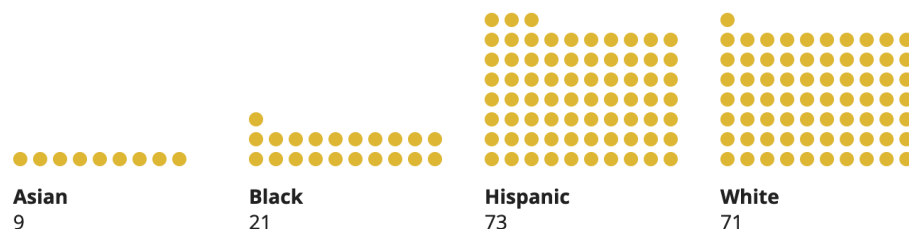


Figure 1 Texas Tribune research³

² The Republican Party has had a similarly large, or larger majority since the 78th term (2003), with the exception of the 80th and 81st sessions when the Republicans had only a 52.6% and 50.7% majority (source: <https://lrl.texas.gov/legeleaders/members/partyList.cfm> retrieved October 14, 2023).

³ <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/01/11/2023-texas-legislature-representation/>, retrieved July 28 2023.

Our research in the Texas legislature involved an ethnography, in the sense of an in-depth inquiry into a conceptually bounded world, through a mixed methods approach combining participant-observation, semi-structured interviews and network analysis. The main research question became: *to what extent, how and why do Representatives collaborate across political parties despite political polarisation across the parties and in society?* We begin with a brief summary of the political context in Texas, and its polarized cosmovisions, to make the working of the Txlege more intelligible, before explaining our methodology, findings and conclusions.

Texas Politics

Texas is the state with the second largest economy in the US, after California, and would rank 9th in the world in GDP if it was a country. Many Texans see their identity as Texan rather (or at least more) than American. You can have a sense of Texans living life to the full, while waiting for something bigger. You turn one way and see ugly buildings or barren scrubland, empty diners and nodding donkeys, but turn another way for an exquisite vista, a charming saloon or the mighty state Capitol. It contains stubborn determination, a strong ethos of hospitality and social diversity but also chronic intolerance and deprivation.

Many Texans feel blessed by God but want politicians to leave them alone. Except when they don't. The attitude of "keep government small and out of my life" that is a trait of Texas political culture clashes with the pressure citizen groups put on their legislators to pass legislation to protect their group's preferences and interests. Although Conservatives would like minimal interference by government, for many this is only once they have reinstated biblical social ways – including a ban on abortion, and transition-related care for minors – often expressed in terms of moral panic and defense of children. The 'culture wars' that have recently emerged out of 'hot button' issues between conservatives and liberals in the state but also nationally have translated into highly partisan legislation in the Txlege. In the 87th session in 2021 they passed the 'Heartbeat bill', banning abortion after six weeks, while the 88th regular session was dominated by what Republicans saw as dangerous ideas about sex and gender, resulting in SB14 banning care for trans kids; SB15 restricting trans athletes in college sports, and SB12 regulating sexually explicit shows).⁴ When the legislature is in session, daily there are visits by groups advocating for their intense policy preferences by visiting offices, and often protesting in the legislature's rotunda or outside on the grounds. The state is large, but organized citizen groups come to the capital from all over the state to pressure for policy X, or against proposal Y. During the 88th legislature there were hot button issues from trans rights to abortion that brought citizens to the legislature and divided the political parties.



Figure 2 monument just outside the Capitol

⁴ Texas Tribune, 2023, The regular 2023 legislative session is over. Here's how the most consequential bills fared, <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/18/texas-legislature-bills-pass-fail/> retrieved October 29, 2023.

Constituents expressing Christian nationalism are not necessarily the largest group; but they are politically well-organised and express their views with lethal certainty. Many Republican Representatives and their supporters hold a more moderate version of this cosmivision, even if they are quieter about it. One Republican Representative specifically disagreed with those who claim they have certainty about having the right interpretation of the bible; he changes his ideas with further study and even attends Hindu gatherings. He is so uncomfortable with the direction his party is taking he avoids party conventions and is not unusual in expressing a worry that moderate Conservatives are in decline. The Ultra Conservatives tend to be white-Americans, rural or peri-urban and Republican, but people of color can be on the far right too. But even among the Representatives who described their views as Ultra Conservative we were told about relationship building and working together, further prompting our questions of why, and of who works with whom?

The largest group in Texas are Hispanic (40%)⁵, with whites second (39%). Around 25% of Hispanics in Texas vote Republican. Both parties are extremely concerned to win support from the Hispanic population. Other significant minorities in Texas in 2021 include African Americans (12%), Asian-Americans (5%) and American Indian (1%). These groups are overwhelmingly urban-based, and Democrat inclined. Almost all Black Texans interviewed – formally or informally – had experienced racism, whether in schools, workplaces, the streets or political spaces and whether in the form of assumptions about who they were, and how they might or should be, or less commonly in the form of physical violence. A significant indicator of racism, that was prominently discussed in this session of the legislature, shows that Black women are twice as likely as white women to die in childbirth.⁶

We heard examples of racism from Representatives' history: a Black woman telling us that a teacher refused to put her in the top reading group in an almost all-white school, a Black Representative being demoted from author to co-author on their own bill, Black Reps being given fewer amendments to lead on than white counterparts. A Hispanic Representative was told by a potential political ally, "I'll be damned if I will vote for a Hispanic candidate." In the 88th session Reps were facing legislation that banned people from certain countries, including China, from owning land in Texas; defunding of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in universities; and changes in the electoral law that they judged would disadvantage people of color. According to one Rep there is a sub-set of the population who champions returning to an imagined age of societal purity, when the "others" are all gone.

Democrats tend towards a liberal cosmivision whereby they value state-provided social protection and political participation; they want to promote rights, better services for all, and restrictions on gun ownership. But the ideology of Texan Democrats is arguably more complex and fragmented than that of Republicans, influenced by race, gender, sexuality, class and age and more interested in these differences. There are tensions between older Democrats wanting to focus on collective experience of inequality while younger people draw attention to individual tales of personal suffering. Democrats of color point to the continuing dominance of white Democrats, despite the

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TX/PST045222>, retrieved July 30 2023.

⁶ <https://www.dshs.texas.gov/sites/default/files/legislative/2022-Reports/Joint-Biennial-MMMRC-Report-2022.pdf>, retrieved July 27 2023.

under-representation of the former, while the latter stress the importance of party unity. A large proportion of Democrat potential supporters fail to vote.

The politics of Texas has been strongly influenced in recent years by two shifts. First, migration to Texas, mainly from other states, is only outstripped by Florida. Half a million people moved to Texas in 2022, around a quarter of them from California. Citizens you meet by chance regularly complain that internal US migrants are bringing liberal, rude and divisive habits. However, businesses are also moving to Texas and their staff tend to dislike the illiberal social legislation that has been introduced in recent years, especially relating to restricting abortion and LGBTQ rights. As Pérez-Boquete and Bello put it, there is an ‘increasing importance of cultural issues in the constitution of political identities and the beliefs associated with them’ (2023). For nationalists, politicians in Washington don’t listen to them and their way of life is in danger, so some even contemplate succession from the US (ibid). At the same time, the influx from California is not necessarily translating into a rise in liberalism in Texas. According to polling by the University of Texas at Austin and the Tribune, California migrants to Texas are 57% conservative and only 27% liberal.⁷

Secondly, redistricting after the census at the beginning of each decade means that Texas has few marginal seats and nearly all are predictably won by Democrats (mostly urban) or Republicans (rural or peri-urban). Since redistricting is designed and approved by the state legislature, whichever party has the majority tends to ensure that they benefit by how districts are re-drawn (gerrymandering). The electoral contests that matter most are intra-party at primaries rather than inter-party battles at general elections.⁸ However, primaries have far fewer voters, and the most politically active citizens tend to be more extreme in their ideologies than the majority, so primaries create a more extremist-inclined legislature relative to the general population. Representatives often vote or speak with their eye on the primary rather than the general election.

The population of Texas is also politically polarized – crudely put, liberal in urban areas, Conservative in rural parts of the state. In comparison, Texas Reps are far more collegiate and collaborative than you might expect in their practice of politics, even if not in their rhetoric. The Republicans face electoral losses in the longer-term in Texas due to demographic change, according to some, but in the shorter-term they have secured a dominance of the executive and all other state-wide elected posts, as well as the legislature. Outgoing Chair of the Republican Party, Tom Mechler, echoed the fears of many when he wrote in his resignation letter in 2017, “If we do not engage in the diverse communities across Texas, we will lose the state, then the nation, and there may be no coming back.”⁹ From the Democrat viewpoint, if they can persuade more citizens to vote, they can win the House if not the Senate. They are facing citizens’ feelings of political alienation. Hochschild wrote this about Conservatives, especially whites, in Louisiana but it seems equally relevant in Texas and not only for whites:

⁷ <https://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/blog/californias-conservative-migration/>, The Texas Politics Project, retrieved November 12 2023.

⁸ National parties do not determine candidate nominations. State-level party leaders may try to influence nominations but are not necessarily successful, as seen in the 2024 Republican primaries.

⁹ <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/05/20/prewrite-mechler-resigns-texas-gop-chairman/>, retrieved July 28 2023.

‘You are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It is a struggle to feel seen and honored. And to feel honored you have to feel – and feel seen as – moving forward. But through no fault of your own, and in ways that are hidden, you are slipping backward.’ (2016: 144).

Meantime the gulf between conservative and liberal is deepening in Texas as it is across the US. The geographical separation of political groups is exacerbated by a new tendency of people to move to live near people who think the same way (Hochschild 2016: 6). Right vs left divisions are reinforced by people listening to different news (the right listen to Fox News, the left MSNBC), consulting different websites, and attending churches that match their ideological disposition, with splits in Baptist and Methodist denominations reflecting the division. This is the socio-political, cultural and economic backdrop that constrains and enables Texan politics. But do these partisan and societal divides limit how Representatives build relationships within the House? Given the obvious centrality of law-making in US state legislatures, who do they work with on legislation?

Collaborative Ethnography: mixing disciplines and methods

Before getting into the question about co-operation between political parties, we will explain how the two researchers combined to produce an innovative form of collaborative ethnography. This research between a political scientist, Michelle Taylor-Robinson, and anthropologist, Emma Crewe, benefitted from a range of methods developed iteratively as the emerging research questions demanded. Throughout this research we conducted a literature review of secondary sources (mainly historical monographs and political science articles) but also primary sources (biographies, autobiographies [e.g., by Wendy Davis, Ann Richards, Ted Cruz, Suzanna Gratia Hupp, Mary Beth Rogers], legislation, newspaper articles, tweets, Representatives’ and civil society websites, the extremely comprehensive Texas state legislature websites, podcasts such as the ‘Texas Take’ and so on).

Engagement with interlocutors involved two overlapping phases: Phase 1 involved participant-observation, the traditional method of anthropology that requires immersion into a field site, from the start of the 88th session of the Texas legislature on January 10, 2023 to the end of the regular session on May 29, 2023. Phase 2 began on January 27 with formal interviews mostly conducted by both researchers. The network analysis began after the end of the 88th session.

The interviews generated insight into a surprising degree of collaboration between Representatives, despite the ideological polarisation across the parties and in Texas society. We discovered that Reps and their staff surmise that the following have an effect on co-operation: who you arrived with; proximity of desks on the chamber floor (see figure 6); neighbouring offices (see figure 5); neighbouring districts; shared caucus (caucuses organized around topics from ethnicity to water needs); and membership of committees. To further investigate this co-operation we undertook a network analysis on the relationships between Representatives.

Participant-Observation

On January 10 Emma Crewe entered the Texas State Capitol for the first time, passing the sign that directed those carrying guns without a permit to the West entrance, and into a magnificent corridor depicting various battles. On visiting a legislator who had booked a ticket for the gallery for her, she passed through his outer office and met a dead stag head, before chatting to his staff. The Opening Ceremony was remarkable for its informality, warmth and references to politicians' families – both historical and present and the presence of Rep's children. Later in the day she met a Representative's spouse who was praying for Brazil's former President Bolsonaro's recovery, complaining that he'd been ousted by the electorally cheating and Satan-worshipping new President Lula de Silva. A staffer recommended following Scott Braddock on X – a journalist with decades of experience of watching the legislature – which enabled a crash course on all things related to the #Txlege. It was a lot to take in all on one day.

On day two she watched the election of the Speaker, Representative (Rep) Dade Phelan, from the gallery. She met Ultra Conservative elected officials of the Republican party from outside Austin who were there to encourage Reps to resist the continuation of the practice of appointment of Chairs of Committee who were Democrats. They invited her to join them for dinner, so she spent the whole day and evening with them. Later in the session she visited them in their small town on two occasions for 2 days each time – once on her own and once with other researchers – spending at least 30 hours talking to them in total.



Figure 3 Emma Crewe in the Gallery of the House of Representatives

She met groups or individuals almost every time she watched proceedings from the gallery. She also talked to people she met in the corridors, at rallies, in the Rotunda, in the canteen and when watching committee hearings. During the session she talked to 100s of individuals informally. The informal interviews with individuals of more than 20 minutes amounted to around 70 people (as noted in her fieldwork log – a diary of impressions), but some interviews were far longer and, in some cases, repeated on many occasions during the session.

Table 1 Informal interviews in the Texas State Legislature 2023

	Dem	Rep	No party	Total
Representatives (including former)	3	4		7
Representative spouse		1		1
Other elected officials/candidates	3	5		8
Academic/journalist	4	1		5
Legislative staff	8	4	1	13
Lobbyists		1	2	3
Civil servants		1	3	4
Citizens	10	6	3	19
Total	28	23	9	60

As far as observation was concerned, the Texas legislature was easy to enter and there was always space in the gallery of the House Chamber. Only debates about trans rights required queueing. Committees were at times filled up with visitors wishing to give testimony, so some of their hearings could only be watched online. All chamber proceedings, and most committee public hearings, were recorded and available online. She also attended rallies, protests, conferences, party meetings (both Democrat and Republican), a training for women candidates, and events at the Texas Tribune. When she interviewed staff in El Paso she talked to constituents with the district-based staff member, and she also visited various places in Texas to get a sense of the diversity of the State (including El Paso, Laredo, Corpus Christi, Boca Chica, Brownsville, San Antonio, Waco, Fort Worth, Dallas, Fredericksburg and various small towns in the Hill Country and around Dallas).

Formal interviews

The formal interviews held by both researchers were difficult to arrange. Emma's initial attempts at persuading Representatives to be interviewed led to promises but few interviews, unsurprisingly as she was an unknown quantity. Since the Txlege only meets every two years, Representatives were extremely busy – at first preparing bills and getting support for them from colleagues, then trying to get bills passed. After writing to every Representative and Senator, on behalf of both authors eventually, about 10% agreed to meet. They chose this moment to write because both researchers and Representatives had had time to get acquainted with the House and write their bills respectively, but it was before the most intense period of the session. Most of the interviews were undertaken in March and April, with 8 of 31 undertaken by Emma Crewe alone, and of those two were held in Representatives' districts. Although we did not record interviews, Michelle was able to take almost verbatim notes.

The more interviews they held, and the more knowledge they accumulated (see Supplemental Appendix 1 for the checklist of interview questions), the more they became interested in bipartisanship, and asked about co-operation across parties. The interviews are not, therefore, comparable, but rather have been



Figure 4 Michelle Taylor-Robinson preparing for an interview

used to build up a detailed picture of the complexity of political work for Representatives in their relationships with each other. Although they kept the identity of the interviewee separate from the transcript, when analysing they needed to keep referring to their identity. They needed to know whether the interviewees were old or young, their level of seniority, their race, gender and previous work experience, and of course their party. We can't reveal too much about their identities without betraying our ethical commitments so some of our analysis has to be taken on trust.

Table 2 Formal interviews in the Texas State Legislature 2023

	Dem	Rep	No party	Total
Representatives (including former)	10	7		17
Legislative staff (including former)	7	2		9
Other elected representatives/ academic/NGO	3	1	1	5
	20	10	1	31

They have long found that interviewing politicians requires a particular kind of attention. They can be extremely articulate, explaining complex topics in pithy, thoughtful and interesting ways, but they can default into the political mode of trying to win you over to their view, cause or sense of achievement. So, they occasionally revealed their own knowledge, as concisely as possible, to emphasise that they were seeking insight not political gain.

Network Analysis

Empirically, a legislative chamber should be modeled as a network (see Ringe, Victor and Cho 2016; Gross and Jansa 2016). In the second part of this paper we use network analysis to conduct a systematic assessment of the claims in our interviews that Representatives have relationships that reach across the party divide, even though the party divide receives so much media attention. The Texas House offers a particularly interesting case for studying relationships because Representatives work in a pressure cooker environment of short term but very intense interaction, with a strict deadline for getting bills passed out of the chamber to have a chance of becoming law. With the short legislative session, and 2 years of necessary government business (such as passing the state budget) plus legislative agendas of 150 Representatives to process, workdays are long, often going late into the night near the end of the session. Representatives need to find ways to navigate political disagreements while they virtually live together in the Capitol building. The detailed methodology for this network analysis is explained below.

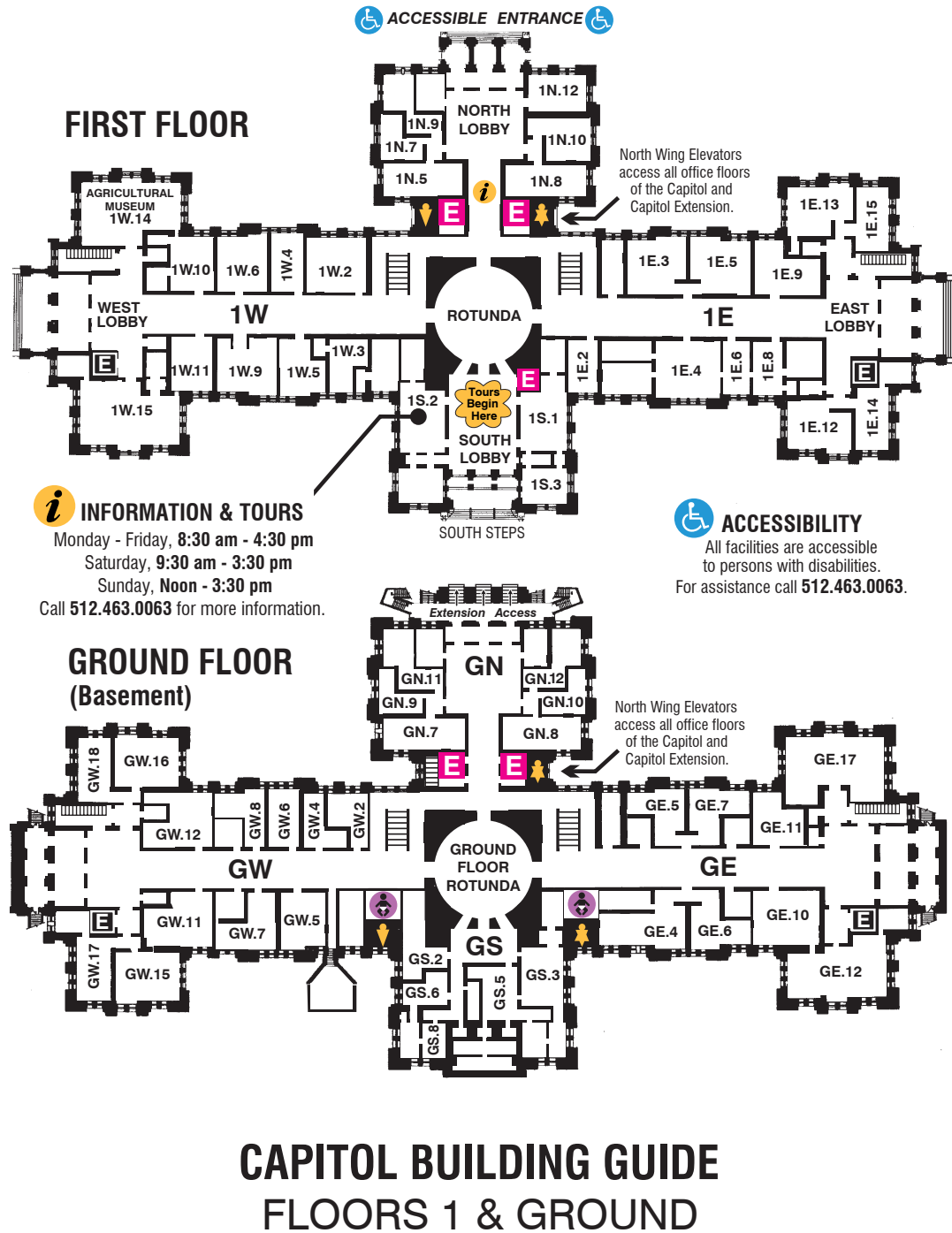


Figure 5 The Capitol Building and some of its offices. Others can be found in the extension

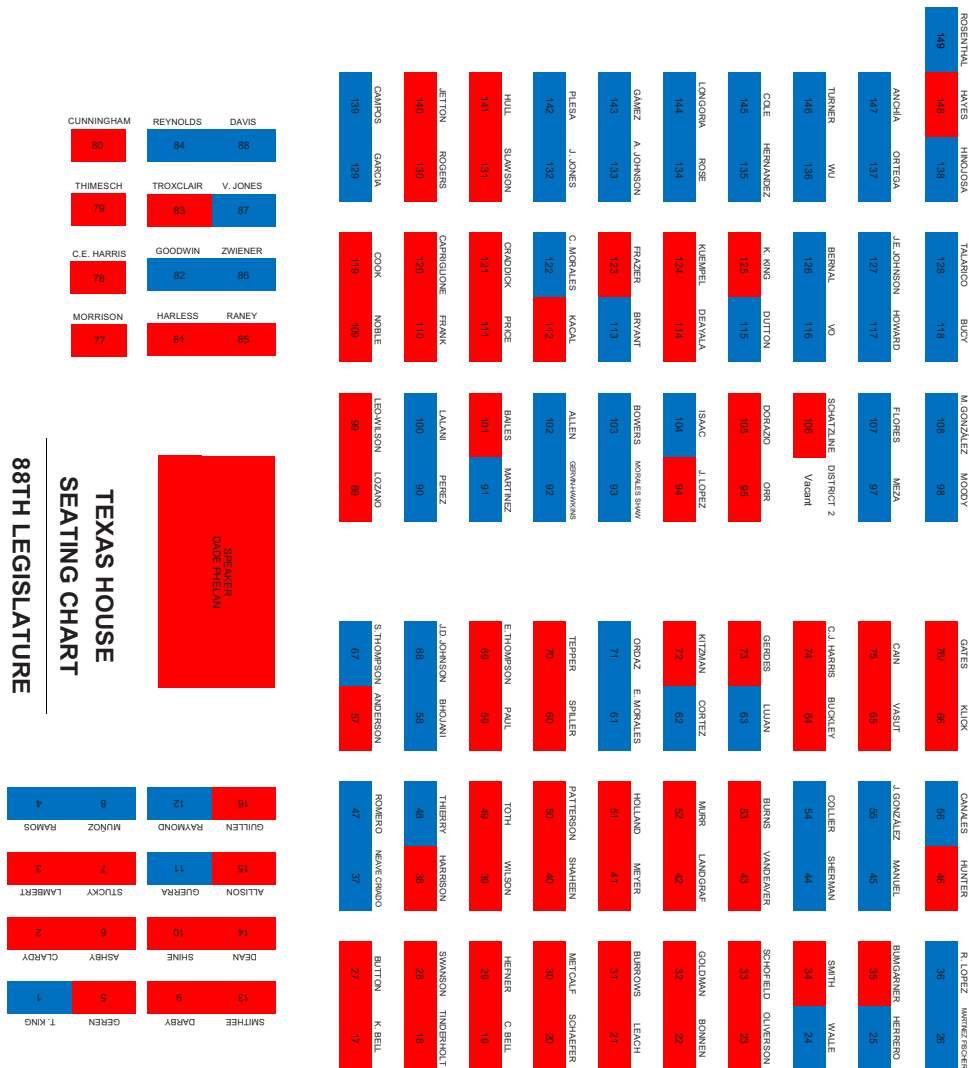


Figure 6 the Rep's Desks on the Floor of the House of Representatives (Red indicates seats of Republicans, blue are Democrats' seats)

Bipartisan Collaboration revealed

Both chambers of the Txlege are dominated by Republicans within a politically polarised society that contains multiple and complex power struggles over education, the church and resources, as explained above. The main purpose of the legislature is to legislate – pass the budget and other

bills that relate to all aspects of the state. It is extremely difficult for a Representative to get a bill passed. During the 88th session, more than 5,000 bills were filed in the House, 2,200 reported out of committee, 1,590 passed by the House, 1,301 referred to committee in the Senate, 281 reported out of committee in the Senate, 88 passed in the Senate and 40 sent to the governor.¹⁰ In addition, more than 2,000 bills are filed by Senators and face the same multi-stage process.

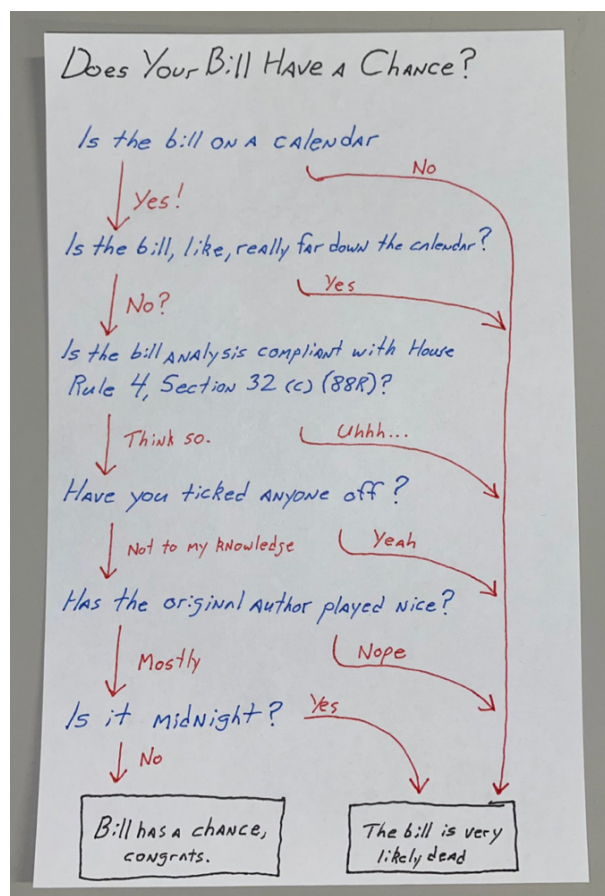


Figure 7 the prospects of a bill explained by a staffer

The process is explained by the Texas Legislative Council¹¹ but also more briefly by a Representative's member of staff (figure 7). You can only get a bill passed if it is sent to a committee, is passed out of committee to the chamber, gets on the agenda (i.e., the 'calendar'), gets the support of the House and then the Senate, and doesn't get vetoed by the Governor. In the 88th session the Republicans had a majority, but even Republicans usually need the support of the other side to avoid their bill getting 'killed', especially if the relevant Committee Chair is in the other party, according to informants. According to the House Rules, the committee chair consults with the members of the committee and determines the order of consideration and hearings. The Democrats don't stand any chance of passing a bill unless they have Republican support at critical moments. If you don't pass any bills, it is difficult to get re-elected and elections take place every two years. You might put down some bills just to convey a message – "to appease our base", as one Rep put it – even though you know it won't get passed.

But almost all Reps pass at least one bill for which they were 1st author, and some get a number of bills passed. Given the ideological

polarisation in Texan society, as explained above, and the difficulty of getting bills passed, how do Reps do this, especially if they belong to the minority party?

Not only do bills pass the House with the collaboration of both sides, but some Reps estimate that 90% of bills are supported by both Democrats and Republicans. 'Support' takes many forms: joint-author and co-author bills, speak in favour, speak against amendments or opponents, and vote in favour of proposed bills. Subtler forms of co-operation involve warning people whether you are going to support or oppose, or even try and kill, a bill. For those few who are truly unpopular, then you might get others to author your bill. Or a Rep can introduce an amendment if they mainly like a bill, but are troubled by a specific aspect, and help it get through on condition the authors accept the amendment. This support is given to each other on specific bills even though they may be

¹⁰ Email from the Legislative Reference Library, May 18, 2023 2:58pm.

¹¹ <https://tlc.texas.gov/docs/legref/legislativeprocess.pdf>, retrieved July 27 2023.

disagreeing on other bills, bitterly at times. So, Representatives will improvise from agreement to disagreement and back in a matter of days or even hours.

Reps or their staff constantly phone each other, or catch each other face to face, to find out how they are going to speak or vote on their bills. If they do not yet know, they ask them again later. They share information across factions, neighboring desks and offices, within committees and informally when they eat or drink together. Disagreement with your bill is not a matter of dishonor, but failing to share information is considered unco-operative. Whipping is extremely light, especially on the Democrat side, and individuals vote as they wish, more bound by ties of political friendship than by party or other caucuses. The party will have an influence over who authors and supports other bills, but much less so over voting. One of the reasons that co-operation is essential is the short length of the regular session. Given that the first 6-8 weeks of the session is spent setting up committees and preparing bills, the process of law-making mostly takes place in the last 10-12 weeks. This requires Representatives to seek support fast and existing good relationships makes the process far easier.

Co-operation goes beyond legislation. The Republican Speaker, Dade Phelan, was voted in and supported by all Democrats and most Republicans, with only a handful of Ultra Conservatives supporting the alternative candidate, Rep Tinderholt.

Reps repeatedly told us that they only get work done effectively if they build relationships. “It is all about creating and sustaining relationships except for a tiny minority of disrupters”, was a common refrain. On the Republican side, there were about a dozen Reps who regularly refused to collaborate, but the rest engaged in on-going processes of collaboration within their own party but also with the Democrats. On the Democrat side, everyone has to collaborate even if a handful do so reluctantly. One Democrat told us, “It is all about relationships that you build within this building. Even with people in conservative offices when you are far left.” Those who don’t co-operate are often referred to as ‘bomb-throwers’ and it was generally assumed that they will not go far in politics. Another Republican echoes the same sentiments:

“My strategy is to always preserve the relationship because she is a good Representative with a lot of intelligence. So, I tend to focus on the things we can agree on... We can acknowledge those differences. But there is a tremendous amount that we can agree on and work together on. I think folks back home often don’t realize that, and that we need to work on nonpartisan bills together.... I don’t care what party you are, if you will always tell me what you believe, I have a good relationship with you. ...For the most part I have a good relationship with most of the members. There may be some on the far right that don’t like me.”

What does a good relationship entail? We were told that it requires give and take in ways that can be relied upon – reliability is key to trust. So, if a Rep (or their staff) reveal that they will support or vote in a particular way, and they fail to, then they will be considered unreliable and not trusted. Trust depends on keeping your word; deceit engenders distrust instantly. You can change your mind – and your vote along with it – if you let the author know. Knowing that another Rep is not going to vote for your bill is not a cause for conflict, as long as they are honest about it. But failing to keep to your word tends to seriously damage relationships more than any other action. Reps

who are trusted make reasonable requests – they do not ask for more than the other side has promised, for example. They talk to each other with respect, politeness and consideration, in both private and public. They will be discreet with information shared when necessary and appropriate. One Rep said that to make relationships work you have to, “show love: be kind, patient and avoid boasting.”

This ethos of respect is sometimes disrupted. What is seen as betrayal in the last session will be remembered in the next one and this can influence reputations. Particular individuals are known for their reliability and honesty, or the opposite, and those who lie tend to find it harder to win support over time. One Democrat Rep talked about what happens when an individual transgresses:

“... if someone is operating in bad faith or has gone out of bounds in how they attack a colleague in a debate, or our constituents and their values in a debate. It is important that you call them out and do what you can to put them in their place. When people have operated in bad faith, or been dishonest, the House has a pretty good way of holding members accountable. Sometimes you might see some bipartisan cooperation in those instances, to say that we don’t tolerate that kind of behavior.”

This relates to parties as well, although of course the ethics of disruption is in the eye of the beholder. In the 87th session Democrats travelled to Washington during the session, breaking quorum and making it impossible for bills to pass, in protest at proposed changes to the electoral law. In the 88th session they were punished to some degree although this diminished, we were told, as the session progressed. The Texas legislature returned to its usually high levels of collaboration at least in contrast to the popular view of political institutions being places of hostility and disfunction. That is what we found in our interviews and observation. The next question is whether we can substantiate this through network analysis.

Network analysis of bill joint and coauthorship as a systematic measure of relationships¹²

For all bills initiated by 148 Representatives during the regular session, we scraped from the legislature’s webpage the name of the bill’s first author, names of any bill joint authors (up to 4 are permitted), and names of any bill coauthors (there are no limits on the number of coauthors). We include all types of bills (5,413 HB, 123 HCR, 206 HJR, 2,543 HR) for a total of 8,226 bills.¹³ Representatives differ in the number of bills they introduced (range 15 to 176, average = 55.6), joint authoring (ranging 0 to 90), and quantity of coauthoring (range 5 to 322).¹⁴

¹² We thank Erik Chi for invaluable assistance with the network analysis.

¹³ Fifty-nine bills are missing because we exclude two members. One is Speaker Phelan because the Speaker’s job is running the chamber. The Speaker initiated only 1 bill (an HR), did not joint author any bills, and signed on as a coauthor on only 1 Resolution to recognize Apr.20, 2023 as Texas Capitol Staff Appreciation Day. We also drop Rep. Bryan Slaton (Republican) because he was expelled on May 8, 2023 by unanimous vote for a major ethics violation (Robert Downen. May 9, 2023. “Texas House expels Bryan Slaton, first member ousted since 1927.” Texas Tribune (<https://www.texastribune.org/2023/05/09/bryan-slaton-expel-house-vote/> retrieved May 4, 2024). Rep. Slaton initiated 58 bills; none had joint authors. He was a joint author on 2 bills and those links are not included in this study. After his expulsion, he was dropped as a joint author from all but 17 of the 102 bills he had signed onto as a coauthor.

¹⁴ Supplemental Appendix 2 provides information about the distribution of coauthor and joint-author “degree” for the datasets.

There are many ways that Representatives can build relationships (discussed above). Yet joint- and coauthorship are ways that Representatives can signal support for one another, so we view these activities as forms of relationship-building. Joint authoring is arguably a more public relationship since a bill is listed with the 1st author's name, and the names of the joint authors (not in alphabetical order), in the transcripts of legislative sessions, and on the bill listings linked to each Representative's webpage for the legislature. Coauthors are listed, in alphabetical order, in the legislature's online "BillLookup" source (<https://capitol.texas.gov/billlookup/billnumber.aspx>). However, the "Bills Coauthored" link on each Representative's webpage names only the first 5 coauthors, in alphabetical order, then "et al."

The coauthor matrix contains all coauthor dyads between 148 Representatives. Each cell is a count of the number of bills by Rep X for which Rep Y signed on as a coauthor (range 0 to 25). We model this as a directed measure because Rep Y *chose* to become a coauthor of Rep X's bill. Interviews explained that while it is possible to remove a coauthor, that is rare.¹⁵ Thus, we assume coauthor dyads goes from Rep Y (coauthor) to the bill's 1st author. The joint author matrix contains all joint author dyads between 148 Representatives. Each cell is a count of the number of bills by Rep X (1st author) for which Rep Y is a joint author (range 0 to 17). Interviews indicated that typically the bill 1st author asks another Rep to be a joint author (with up to 4 joint authors permitted), however, the Rep asked to joint author must agree, so we model joint authoring as undirected, i.e., as a shared relationship.

Figures 8 and 9 present plots of each network, using the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm. Because we consider each link between 2 Reps (even if it is only on 1 bill) as a sign they have a relationship, both networks are very dense.

¹⁵ Review of coauthorships in late April and again after the end of the Regular session showed 47 cases where coauthorship was removed from a bill later in the session.

Figure 8 Plot of coauthor network

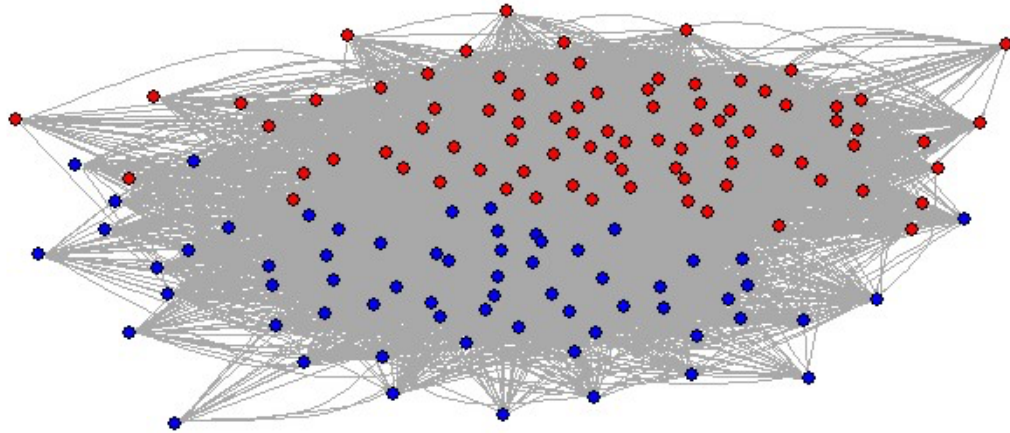
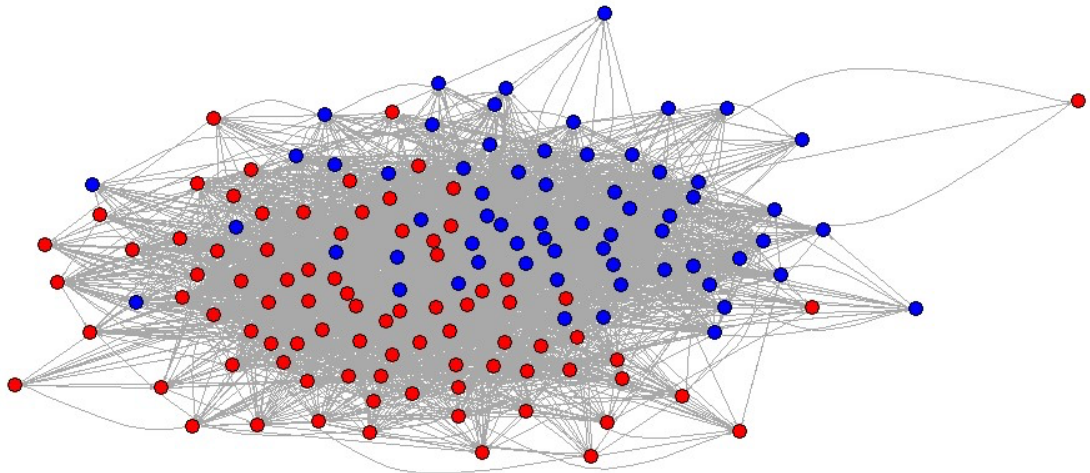


Figure 9 Plot of joint author network



Our interest is to study relationships across parties in a context of extreme party polarization in Texas society, so we want a measure that allows us to compare Representatives based on the extent to which they build ties with copartisans compared to ties with Representatives from the other party. For this we utilize the E-I Index (Krackhardt and Stern 1988): $\frac{EL-IL}{EL+IL}$ where EL is a count of the number of ties a Rep has with members of the other party, and IL counts the number of ties the Rep has to members of their own party. E-I Index scores can range from -1 (a Rep only has links to Reps from their own party) to +1 (all links are to members of the other party). We utilize the Igraph package in R to calculate E-I Index scores for each Representative for coauthoring relationships, and for joint authoring.

Figure 10 plots both E-I Index scores. More Republicans than Democrats have highly negative E-I Index scores, which is not surprising since the Republican party has a majority and can pass ordinary legislation without opposition support.¹⁶ But Figure 10 also illustrates that the propensity to build legislative relationships with Reps from the other party varies. Particularly notable is that for joint authoring, 10 Democrats and 8 Republicans work more often with Reps from the other party than from their own party.¹⁷

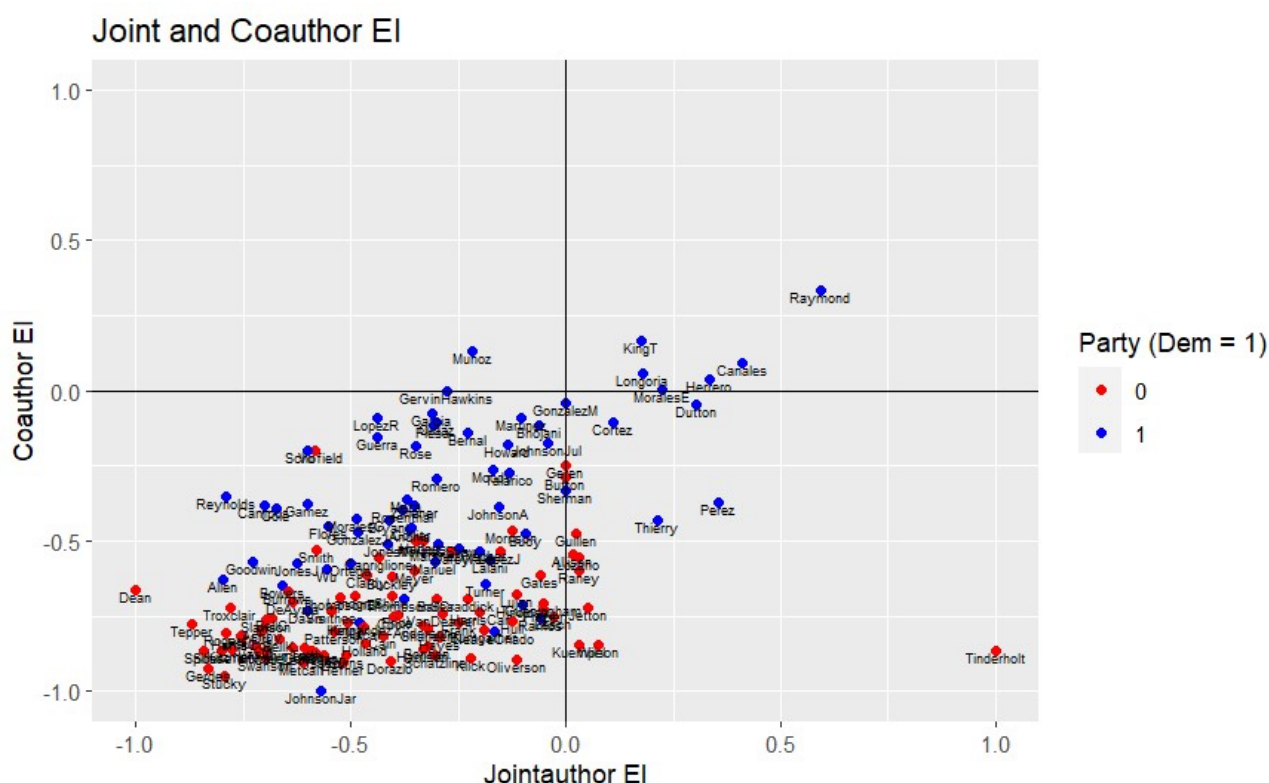


Figure 10 E-I Index scores for coauthorship and joint authorship Red circles are Republicans, blue circles are Democrats¹⁸

First, we explore if some Representatives are more likely than others to build ties across party lines. Democrats must work with the governing party to pass their bills. Figure 10 shows that Democrats generally have higher E-I Index scores, indicating they have more bipartisan

¹⁶ Constitutional amendments require a 2/3rds vote in each house.

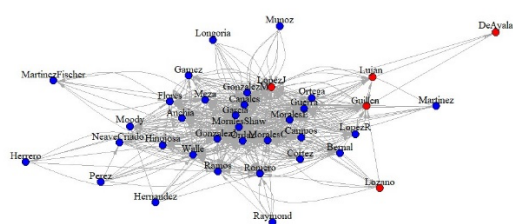
¹⁷ Rep. Tinderholt (Republican) is an outlier with a joint author E-I Index of +1. He often argued against cooperation with the Democrats and even left the Freedom Caucus so as not to be constrained.

¹⁸ The standard calculation of the E-I Index does not consider the direction of the ties. We theorize that coauthorship is a directed tie, so only directed ties (coauthor → bill 1st author) are included in the coauthor E-I Index.

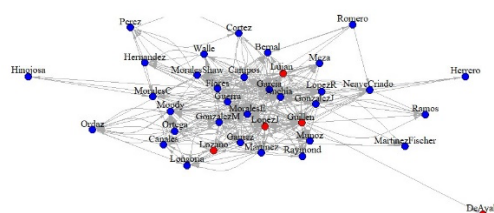
networks. Race/ethnic minorities and women also lack the numbers to pass legislation on their own. Race/ethnicity or sex create a homophilous “likeness” that can cut across party lines, though “likeness” in one area (e.g., gender) can encompass differences in another (e.g., race). Based on homophily, we hypothesize that E-I Index scores for race/ethnic minority Representatives will be higher than the scores of white Representatives. Generally, the literature about women legislators expects that women will work together across party lines, unless their party punishes them for doing so. Due to their small number of seats in most legislatures, women need to work together – with women across parties, and with men – to have a chance of passing women’s interest bills (Barnes 2016; Jewett 2022; Swers 2014). But given that party polarization about women’s bodily autonomy is one of the sources of polarization in US politics, we may not find that women in the Texas House reach across party lines more than men do. The Texas Legislature has many caucuses, some with bipartisan membership. We hypothesize that Representatives who joined a bipartisan caucus will have a higher E-I Index score because the caucus allowed them to know Reps from the other party with whom they have some interests in common. Also of interest is the Freedom Caucus, composed of 13 far-right Republicans. We hypothesize that its members will not form (many) relationships with Representatives from the Democratic party and will have E-I Index scores close to -1. Seniority and holding a committee chair are standard controls in studies of legislator behavior, so we include both in our analysis. For joint authoring we control for the number of bills a Representative initiated because the opportunity to joint author is a function of how many bills a Representative initiated. Descriptive statistics are in the Supplemental Appendix.

First, we plot coauthor and joint author networks within race/ethnic minority groups and for women (Figure 11). Red nodes are Republicans, and blue nodes are Democrats. The plots illustrate that there *is* bipartisan network building within these groups that are numerical minorities, but not all Reps coauthor or joint author with coethnic colleagues, and not all the women reach across party lines to other women. Recall that joint author network plots include links in both directions, and coauthor network plots only show links from the Rep who decided to sign onto a bill as a coauthor.

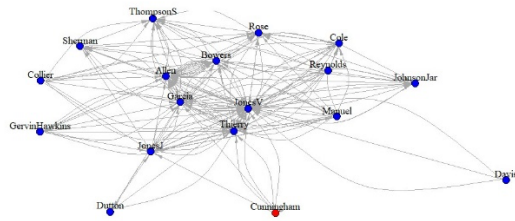
Hispanic coauthor network



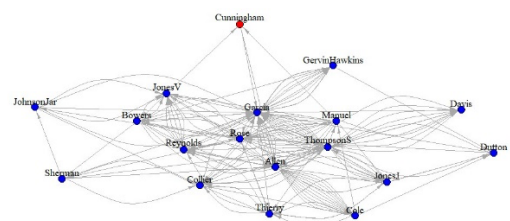
Hispanic joint author network



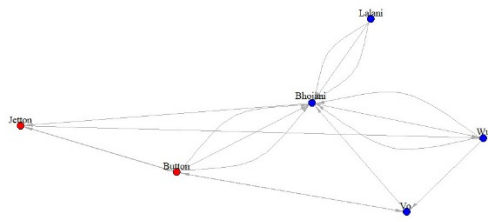
African American coauthor network



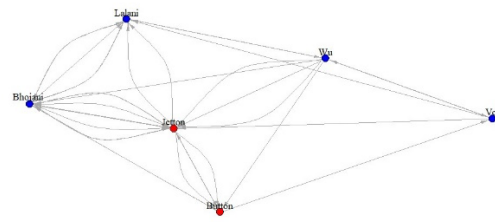
African American joint author network



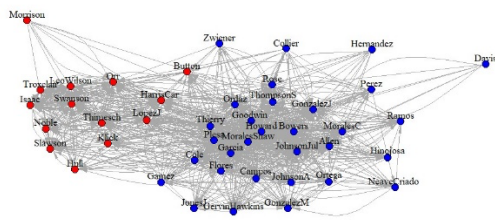
Asian coauthor network



Asian joint author network



Women's coauthor network



Women's joint author network

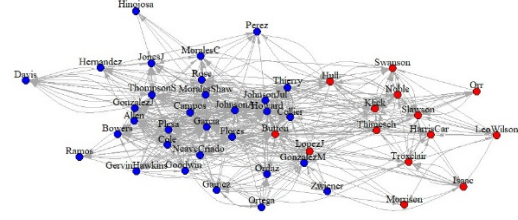
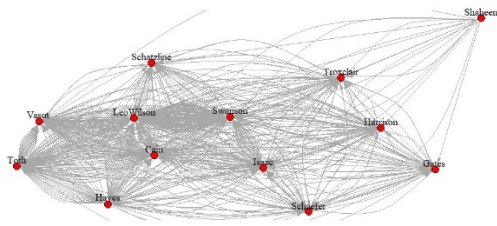


Figure 11 Plots of networks for minority groups

Figure 12 presents plots of networks for another group within the Texas House: the Freedom Caucus. Freedom Caucus members are viewed by others in the Chamber as a close-knit group of ultra-conservative Republicans. The plots in Figure 13 show that Freedom Caucus members work together, but some do so more than others (dense vs. sparse ties).

Coauthor network



Joint author network

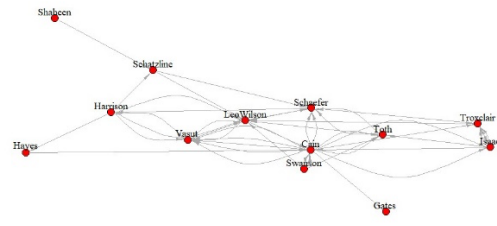


Figure 12 Plots of networks for Freedom Caucus members

Next, we use multivariate regression to explore the propensity of Representatives to build relationship links across party lines (see Table 3). Hispanic Representatives coauthor and joint author outside of their party more than white Representatives. All else equal, a Hispanic Rep has a Coauthor E-I score 0.23 higher than a white Rep, and a Joint Author E-I score 0.21 higher. The SD for these E-I scores is 0.289 and 0.320 respectively, so these increases indicate a comparatively high level of “working across the aisle” by Hispanics. Asian Representatives coauthor bills with Representatives from the other party more than white Representatives. However, African Americans do not “reach across the party aisle” significantly more than whites, and women are not more bipartisan than men. Representatives who joined the IT Caucus coauthor more outside of their party, though the effect is small. Membership in none of the other bipartisan caucuses has a significant effect on E-I scores. Freedom Caucus membership, however, is significant and negative for coauthoring. All else equal, a member of the Freedom Caucus has a Coauthorship E-I score 0.15 lower than other Representatives. Finally, senior Reps coauthor and joint author across party lines significantly more than their junior colleagues. However, being a committee chair has no effect on coauthorship or joint authoring with members of the other party. Overall, decisions to joint author appear to be influenced by factors other than group membership, but homophily does have explanatory power for decisions to coauthor.

Table 3 Effects of attributes of Representatives on their E-I Index

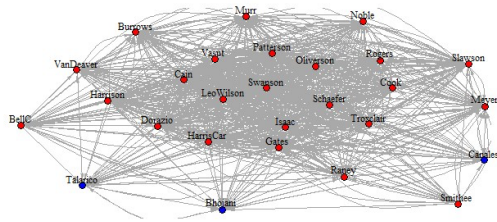
	Dependent Variable:	
	Coauthor E-I Index	Joint Author E-I Index
Race/ethnicity & sex of Reps:		
Hispanic	0.227*** (0.051)	0.210** (0.065)
African American	0.104 (0.072)	0.054 (0.092)
Asian	0.261* (0.104)	0.170 (0.133)
Woman	-0.041 (0.047)	-0.083 (0.060)
Caucus membership:		
Water	-0.018 (0.042)	-0.033 (0.053)
Energy & Climate	0.011 (0.048)	-0.007 (0.063)
Innovation & Technology	0.076† (0.043)	0.086 (0.055)
Early Childhood	-0.015 (0.052)	0.028 (0.067)
Freedom	-0.150* (0.074)	-0.047 (0.095)
Seniority	0.019*** (0.005)	0.012† (0.007)
Committee Chair	-0.004 (0.049)	0.041 (0.065)
No. of bills 1st authored		0.001 -0.001
Intercept	-0.728*** (0.049)	-0.543*** (0.069)
Observations	148	148
R-squared	0.3184	0.198
Adjusted R-squared	0.2632	0.127
F-statistic	5.774***	2.779**

Notes: *** p<.001; ** p<.01, * p<.05; † p<.1. Models are OLS regression. For race/ethnicity the comparison category is white Reps.

We use neighbor networks to illustrate the trait variables that have a significant effect on E-I Index scores: race/ethnicity (compared to white Reps), seniority¹⁹, membership in the Innovation and Technology (IT) Caucus, Freedom Caucus (see Figures 13 and 14). The “neighborhood” of node I (the Rep of interest) is all the Representatives who have links with node I, and the links they have with each other; in other words, who the Representative of

¹⁹ The mean for seniority is 4.9 terms (SD=3.8), so we selected Reps whose seniority was as close as possible to 1SD above and below the mean. For the Freedom Caucus the highest seniority is 6 terms.

white Republican + Freedom Caucus
E-I Index -0.864 (links w/3 Democrats)



white Republican + Freedom Caucus
E-I Index = -0.862 (links w/5 Democrats)

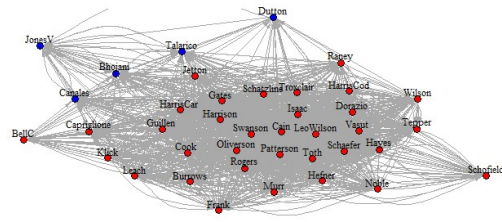
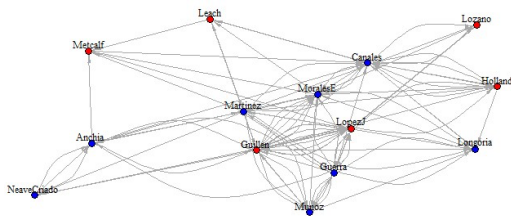
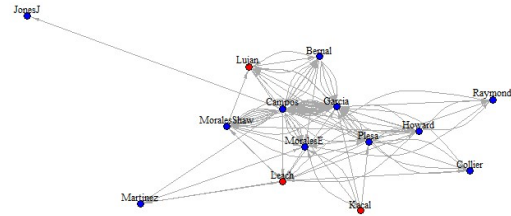


Figure 13 Neighbor networks illustrating coauthorship linkages (left side is high seniority, right side is low seniority)

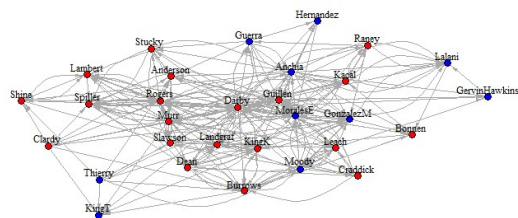
Hispanic Democrat
E-I Index -0.103 (links w/6 Republicans)



Hispanic Democrat
E-I Index -0.701 (links w/3 Republicans)



white Republican
E-I Index -0.264 (links w/10 Democrats)



white Republican
E-I Index -0.407 (links w/4 Democrats)

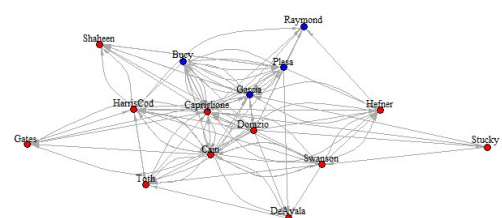


Figure 14 Neighbor networks illustrating joint authorship linkages (left side is high seniority + IT Caucus, right side is low seniority)

Review of Coauthor E-I scores for all Hispanic Reps shows that 5 of the 6 positive scores are for Hispanic Reps who have served more than the mean number of terms. Additionally, race/ethnic minority Reps often have higher (more bipartisan) E-I scores than white Reps, though there are exceptions. Looking at all Reps, 7 of the 8 Reps with positive E-I Index scores are race/ethnic minorities and only 1 is white, and half are members of the IT Caucus. Regarding Joint Author E-I Index scores, 9 Hispanic Reps (24%) have a positive E-I score and all but one of those has served 5 or more terms. Six white Reps (7%) have a positive E-I score, and all but one have served 5 or more terms. This is further indication that experience is associated with bipartisan cooperation for some, though not for all Reps.

Findings on co-operation

Through a combination of interviews, observation and network analysis we have created a picture of bipartisan collaboration in the Texas House, even if uneven. This contrasts with the polarised hostility across the parties and in wider society. This supports the prediction that social ties created by some networks may help offset polarization (Ringe, Victor and Cho 2016: 484). Both our qualitative study utilizing methods of anthropology, and the quantitative analysis utilizing methods of political science indicate that some Representatives operating in the highly polarized environment of Texas politics have social ties, and also coauthor and joint authorship networks that may help bridge the gap, that is becoming a chasm, of party polarization.

The collaboration begins at the start of the session, building on relationships from the last session. First, the Reps chose the Speaker almost unanimously without the Democrats even putting up an alternative candidate. Although a few Ultra Conservatives supported another candidate, even one Rep who received large donations from far-right donors backed Phelan, to the fury of the donors. This pragmatic option on the part of the minority party ensured that they got a Speaker who favoured bipartisan co-operation. Speaker Phelan then met with every Rep to hear about their committee preferences (which has to be done after the Speaker is chosen, otherwise it would look like a quid pro quo) before making committee assignments, including chairs, and Phelan protected the tradition of giving some Chair positions to Democrats.



Figure 15 point of order in the Texas House of Representatives

informal meetings. Repeatedly we heard that the relationships between Reps was affected by the proximity of desks and offices.

Each committee has members of both parties and they then get to know each other and become mini social networks. The Clerk of the committee sets up the members' seating arrangement and some rearrange the members every meeting. Occasionally the Committee Chair might intervene and say, "don't seat those two Reps together, they had a fight yesterday." But generally, committees are a place where Reps get to know each other as people. Reps also get to know their desk mate (i.e., the person sitting on the neighboring desk in the Chamber), even casting votes for each other with permission. Notably, 73/148 sit beside a member from the other party (if you ignore the aisles) and 35 choose to share a desk with someone in the other party. When you enter the House, you chose your desk with the most senior Reps deciding first. Offices are also chosen, and these affect networks as well. The Reps office halls or neighborhoods (e.g., the corridors in the Extension of the Capitol Building) often arranged to have shared lunches, or dinners (even including families), and enabled regular

We surmise that the opportunities to win support for your bills, or reduce opposition, are more frequent between those who meet regularly because their districts,²⁰ desks or offices are close; they sit on committees or eat together; or they were already friends/connected, and they can be connected through the chamber's many caucuses. This works in extremely uneven and unequal ways. We heard that some lobbyists tend to approach white Reps more than Black, Hispanic or Asian Reps, to author bills. When Reps gather socially, to eat for example, they sometimes sit in groups organised by race. Relationships are also gendered, as for example, men can talk longer in the chamber without getting into trouble. Race and gender can intersect, whereby the assumption of Black women as more disposed towards anger means they have to take even more care when speaking not to raise their voices. Given the importance of past as well as current networks for creating and sustaining relationships, it is not surprising that these processes favour white men who have long dominated the House of Representatives.

The emotional work of bipartisan relationships – bitterly disagreeing one day and then making an agreement the next – is taxing. One Democrat explained, “One minute you are being driven mad by them and then next you want to hate them, but you can’t cos they are being so kind and co-operative. It is confusing.” Many talked about how they get past the feeling of alienation from another Rep by finding common ground. Most try not to take political disagreement personally and when they do, learn the capacity for forgiveness. One Democrat Rep told us:

“...we force ourselves to have conversations with people on the other side, afterwards you realize they are not evil. You have to try to understand why they are so passionate about issues that are hurtful to some other people. I do that with conservative friends I have who are part of the Freedom Caucus. You learn a lot that way.”

So, while some avoid close connections across the two parties, we found it was relatively rare. Close connection does not necessarily translate into agreement. As one Rep put it, “You can’t expect people to come here and abandon the things they campaigned for. That is not bipartisanship. Bipartisanship is when people realize that in the nation’s or the state’s issues I will have to compromise, if the other side will also compromise, in order to pass, say, an education bill.” The compromise will not necessarily be harmonious. You might have to fight for your specific viewpoint, but you will also have to be ready to move your position, sometimes with a feeling of loss and sometimes with satisfaction that both sides have gained. So, collaboration doesn’t always mean selling your soul to the devil, and whether your compromise is ethical or not will always be contested by someone.

Unsurprisingly our network analysis revealed that Reps work across the aisle to different extents. For example, Hispanics, who are underrepresented but members of both parties, co-operate between the parties the most, while Asians do so less than Hispanics but more than white Reps. More senior Reps coauthor and joint author more than junior ones. This may reflect a more thorough socialization into the ethos of the House, which has a history of bipartisanship stretching back to the days of Democrat dominance, and that they came into politics when there was more common ground on policy. But there is no guarantee that co-operation in the House will remain into the future.

²⁰ For example, rural districts having common interests regardless of the party of their Representative.

A final reflection on sociality and co-operation

Anthropology can perhaps help us understand how sociality can have such a profound impact on politics – a process that could be relevant to any legislature as one of us has argued elsewhere: ‘Some scholarship on parliaments suffers from a surfeit of judgement and dearth of theory; by rushing to judge, it is as if it has warped our capacity to understand.... Rather than jump to an abstraction, let’s consider empirically which social actors and what social processes we find in parliaments’ (Crewe 2021: 25, 27). Whether understanding how politicians win votes, support or money; represent people; administer or scrutinize the state, in all these instances socio-political processes of interaction between them and those they encounter will affect how they do this.

In this case study, there are two specific social processes that might help us understand what underlies the kind of political compromise needed to collaborate. The first is reciprocity. When the French anthropologist Marcel Mauss wrote his seminal book, *the Gift*, he focused his attention on ‘archaic’ societies, but he has influenced our understanding of moral political economies in all societies (1954). His contention was that gift-giving comes with rights and duties about giving, receiving and repaying; if you fail to give, accept or repay a gift in ways appropriate to that culture, you are refusing friendship (ibid: 11). You risk ostracism. To know what is appropriate, you have to discover how that society is organised and what is considered generous in relation to the status of the people involved. Mauss goes further than writing just about gifts to wider social processes of reciprocity so that a favour, courtesy or invitation have to be returned as much as a present (ibid: 63). The important point here that is relevant to our study, and that has been well-established within anthropology/sociology for over 70 years, is that you can’t isolate reciprocity from its context if you wish to understand it.

To return to our case study, when trying to understand how reciprocity works between Texas Representatives it is important to see how their negotiations – the give and take of supporting each other’s political moves – work over time and within networks. If you give another Rep information, or better still a vote in Committee or the Chamber, then they have incurred a debt that has to be repaid in a roughly equal spirit over time. You might ask them to give you something in return or it might be more useful to get them to ask someone else on your behalf. Since disagreement has to be tolerated as well for Reps to be able to satisfy other demands, such as representing their constituents, the process of reciprocity demands memory, trust and patience. So, what might feel like a loss within a process of compromise in the shorter-term, might even out over time (Stolz 2020), even if Texas time is relatively short because the regular session lasts less than five months. If you betray the spirit of reciprocity in the Txlege, you risk being frozen out by other Reps which leaves you isolated during the legislative session.



Figure 16 anti trans vs pro trans activists in a ‘relation of relationlessness’

The second process that is important within compromise is resonance. The German sociologist Hermut Rosa also takes the same starting point that we are all socialized into specific social and cultural worlds, adding that in our contemporary globalised world, we all share certain conditions (2021:6). The one he is interested in arises because the world has become a point of *aggression*. We are under pressure to optimize our bodies, grow our economies, and innovate technologically. Humans are becoming alienated as we find ourselves in constant competition with one another, expressing hostility, aloofness and an existential relation of relationlessness (ibid: 9, 22-27).

So, Rosa asks, how can we work against the aggression and alienation, even if not escaping entirely, by nurturing our capacity for resonance? This means being touched by the world, communicating resonantly, experiencing a transformation, and accepting the uncontrollability of these processes (ibid: 32-39). Texas surely exemplifies his portrayal of the modern world in an amplified form. The wider culture and political economy of Texas puts extreme pressure on its citizens to be aggressive in various ways including by optimizing themselves through work. They point with pride that their GDP is 9th in the world if it was a country; Texas has introduced aggressive measures to deter and repel migrants and asylum-seekers from travelling from Mexico; and resists limiting access to guns. At the same time, you find within the legislature reciprocity and resonance – the opposite of aggression. Representatives create social bonds which allow them to forge deep friendships, changing each other's viewpoints and improvising to negotiate in an ever changing and uncontrollable world of politics. It is as if Texas contains the best of the world and the worst of the world; we can learn from all of it.

However, sociality is not enough to explain the bipartisanship we found in the Texas House or why it changes over time. To illustrate this importance of history, it is worth considering power shifts within the House. Cox and Phillips tell a fascinating story about how the role of Speaker evolved from one of relative obscurity to one of the most powerful posts in the state, which clearly had an impact on relationships between Representatives (and Senators for that matter) (2010). Barnes and O'Neill write about how in contrast to other state legislatures, the Texas House was a 'partially bipartisan' rather than partisan legislature for twenty years up until 2003 when the Republicans became the majority. Following this shift in control, both parties struggled to adjust to their new roles, with a breakdown in the norms of civility and reciprocity (2006: 6, 8). Although some blamed bullying by the US House Majority Leader, Tom DeLay, and the new Texas House Speaker Tom Craddick, leading to Democrats refusing to appear on the floor of the House for a quorum call in 2003, Barnes and O'Neill provide additional explanations. Craddick was a new and inexperienced Speaker who had not yet developed relationships as a leader. In addition, representatives were becoming more focused on electoral outcomes, and it was when the Republicans started winning more seats from Democrats that competition between parties crept into relationships in the House between elections. Two significant rule changes also affected bipartisanship. The House abandoned 'substantial compliance', which gave the Speaker the power to overrule points of order, in theory giving the minority more power to disrupt but in practice leading to fewer points of order being sustained (ibid: 17). Another rule change in 2003 increased standing committees from four to thirty-seven and gave the Speaker the power to select all the members, reducing the influence of the minority party (ibid: 20). These shifts in power contributed to strained relations. By the end of the 2003 session, 'both sides noted that there was little respect for each other, and that civility had markedly declined on the floor and in the committee hearing rooms' (ibid: 25).

How does this relate to the contemporary situation in the House? We have argued that civility and bipartisanship on everyday legislation still exists. There are exceptions, such as when the

Democrats broke quorum in 2021 because the Republicans planned to introduce election rules that they deemed unfavorable to black voters. Trust had to be reformed in the 88th session. Social legislation about abortion, LGBT rights, and border security also bring out high levels of tension. Democrats were furious about a bill that proposed to give the police the power to deport anyone found illegal in the state, and that Republicans curtailed debate. Democrat Rep Walle's explosive tirade against his friend Republican Cody Harris, shared on social media by another Democrat, was notable for its exceptional heat.²¹ But this is unusual. Cross-party debate is usually cordial on everyday legislation. There are various reasons for the revival of collaboration since 2003. The processes of reciprocity and strong social bonds, shaped in part by long-standing norms in the House, have been influenced by three shifting power dynamics: (a) within the House (b) between the House and Senate and (c) between the legislature and the outside world. In the 88th session the House had a powerful and experienced speaker, Dade Phelan, supported by the overwhelming majority, including Democrats. The minority party may choose to collaborate with the Speaker, and moderate Republicans, rather than simply oppose for at least two political reasons. They would rather work with moderate Republicans than undermine them, in the face of the threat of rise in the far right. Linked to this, the Senate is dominated by the far right, so the Democrats choose to support a Republican House Speaker in his political struggles against an aggressively Ultra Conservative Senate agenda. Ultra Conservatives endorsed a different Republican candidate in the primaries in 2024 and although it went to a run-off, Representative Phelan won on May 28. There is nothing inevitable about the level of bipartisanship we say in the Texas House; it is historically and politically contingent, has changed and could change again at any point, especially if the Ultra Conservatives gain more seats.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that this interest in collaboration within the Txlege emerged out of a collaboration between two scholars trained in such different disciplines: political science and anthropology. Like Representatives, the authors of this article were determined not to give up on their own long-crafted principles (in the researchers' case of academic integrity, ethics and rigor). But they did not need to either. They won each other's respect with hard work, honoring agreements, being reliable and learning at every turn, and did so entirely without aggression or competition. They did what Texas Representatives do as a matter of everyday political work, and what Hoshchild (2016: 13) suggests the whole nation needs to do: forged a connection across difference to the benefit of both.

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²¹ <https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/politics/2023/10/26/467873/i-would-do-it-all-over-again-state-rep-armando-walle-of-houston-defends-profanity-laced-tirade-about-proposed-immigration-laws/>, retrieved on November 12 2023.

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Supplemental Appendix for “Co-operation in the Texas State House of Representatives”

Appendix 1: Checklist of questions for interviews

Those in bold were prioritised if the interviewee was short of time

History

1. **What made you decide to run for a seat in the legislature? Did anyone influence you?**
2. Have any other members of your family served in the legislature or government? Who (relationship to you) and in what capacities?
3. How did you campaign to (1) win your primary, (2) win your election? Who helped and who hindered?
4. **What was your first impression of the work when you began?**
5. How did you learn your different roles? Who gave you information / advice at the start and as you learned the role, what was it and what impact did it have?

General on the position

6. **What are your policy goals for your term in the legislature?**
7. **What is your average day / week like?**
8. What is easy / important? What is difficult / less important?
9. What would you like to change the legislature or other political sites/behaviour?
10. **How do you prioritise your time?**
11. How many letters / emails/posts etc do you get and from who?
12. Which MPs are you impressed by and why?
13. **How do different MPs establish their reputation?**

Representation

14. In what ways are you involved with your local community?
15. **Who are your constituents, and what do you do for them?**
16. **How do you communicate with your constituents?**
17. **How many cases does your office deal with in the constituency? How? Who deals with them? What are they about? What else do you do in the constituency?**
18. How many requests for help do you receive in an average week from individuals, groups, and local governments? What do you think explains the number of requests you get?
19. Do you do anything to encourage constituents or local governments to bring their problems to you for help? Please explain. **What have you done to make individuals, groups, and local governments in your province aware of how they can get in touch with you?**
20. How many trips to you make to your district per month while the legislature is in session? How long does it take you to get from Austin to your district?
21. **How many public meetings have you held in your district? How many party-related meetings have you held in your district (or took part in in your district)?** Do you have regularly scheduled hours when people can come talk to you (in your district, in your office in Austin)? How many times have you, or a member of your staff, contacted a government agency to help a constituent?
22. What results have you had on behalf of constituents?
23. **What sorts of things do you do to make the people of your district aware of what you have done for them?**

Scrutiny/accountability

24. What posts do you have/have you had in the legislature?
25. What committees did/do you sit on/what is it like?
26. How are you involved in or engaged with various associations and groups, including those who are experts in causes you mind about, and what role do they play?
27. **What factors influence you when are deciding how to vote on an important bill?**
28. **What is it like to give a speech in the plenary session? In a committee meeting?**

29. **How much influence do you have over who is called to speak before the committees you are a member of?**
30. How were your committee assignments determined? Did you have influence over which committees you are assigned to work on?

Political party & media

31. What is your relationship like with other party members/leaders?
32. **Does your party try to influence the way you vote**, particularly when it concerns an issue that is important to major party supporters? **With what issues?**
33. How often do you say you comply with party requests? When you don't what sorts of reasons come into play?
34. **How can and does the party enforce its requests?** How is it affected by party, relationships, longevity of service etc, and change over time?
35. What sorts of things do you do to make the leaders of your party aware of your activities?
36. **What relationships do you have with the media. How do they help/hinder you?**
37. How do you use digital media and what impact does it have?

Complexity and diversity

38. **When there is a conflict between what you think is best and what you think the people in your district want, how do you make your decisions?**
39. Where does your loyalty lie and why?
40. What non-parliamentary work do you do? What impact does it have?
41. **How is your work, performance and impact affected by your identity? (Gender, age, ethnicity etc.)**
42. How is your work, performance and impact affected by your background? (Class, education, professional etc)
43. How is your work, performance and impact affected by your length of service?
44. Who helps you? Who do you help? How? Why?
45. Who do you make alliances with? How? For what reasons?
46. **What is your ambition? What are your 'goals'? What are your future career plans?**
47. Thinking broadly about your role as a legislator/senator, what are the most important duties and responsibilities involved?
48. Thinking for a moment very broadly about Texas, how important is your work as a legislator to the functioning of Texas society as a whole?
49. Thinking about your political activity, what do you personally find most satisfying and frustrating about it? What would you miss most if you left politics?
50. If you were mentoring a new legislator, what advice would you give to him or her?
51. Who would you suggest that we interview, and can you help us to get those interviews

Appendix 2: Distribution of coauthor and joint-author "degree" for the 2 matrices

"Degree" is the number of connections ("edges") that a node has with other nodes. For our study, "nodes" are Representatives. A Representative's "coauthor degree" (the number of times a Rep signed on as a coauthor on a bill) ranges from 5 to 322. Joint author "degree" ranges from 0 to 90.²² A Representative's degree score can include multiple ties to the same Representative, so "degree" of 90 in the joint author analysis does not mean the Rep joint authored with 90 different Representatives, and coauthor "degree" of 322 cannot mean the Rep coauthored bills by 322 different Representatives since there are only 148 Representatives in the study. Figure 9 shows the distribution of degree scores for coauthor and joint author ties, and show that Representatives vary in the frequency of their use of coauthoring and joint authoring to build relations with colleagues.

²² Both are "out degree" measures, counting only the links going out from the Rep who signs on as a coauthor → the 1st author of the bill, or from the Rep who as 1st author of a bill asks (→) a Rep to be a joint author.

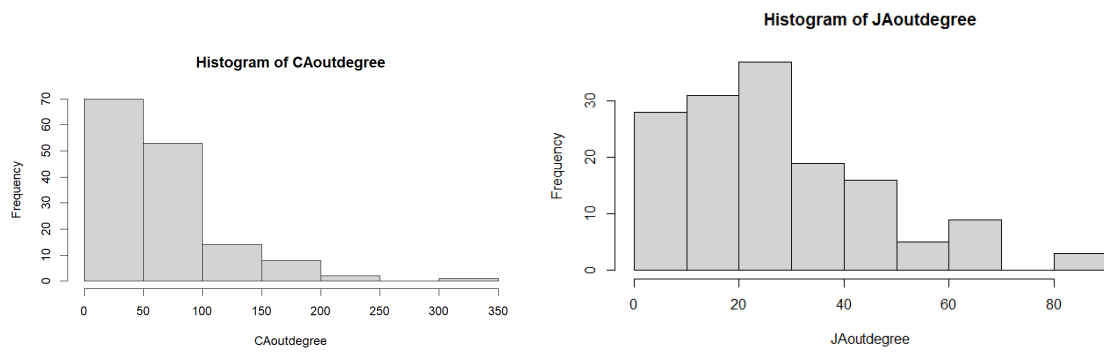


Figure 8 Distribution of “out degree” scores for Coauthor (left) and Joint Author (right) datasets

Appendix 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable:	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Coauthor E-I Index	148	-0.568	0.289	-1.000	0.333
Joint author E-I Index	148	-0.342	0.320	-1.000	1.000
Republican Party Reps	84 (14 women)				
Democratic Party Reps	64 (31 women)				
Race/ethnicity of Reps:					
Hispanic	37 (32 Democrat, 5 Republican)				
African American	18 (17 Democrat, 1 Republican)				
Asian	6 (4 Democrat, 2 Republican)				
Biracial	1 (Democrat)				
white	86 (10 Democrat, 76 Republican)				
Texas House Water Caucus	68 (31 Democrat, 37 Republican)				
Texas Energy & Climate Caucus	50 (40 Democrat, 10 Republican)				
Innovation & Technology Caucus	54 (27 Democrat, 27 Republican)				
Texas House Early Childhood Caucus	33 (26 Democrat, 7 Republican)				
Freedom Caucus	13 (all Republican)				
Seniority	148	4.9	3.81	1	19
Committee Chair	148	0.24	0.43	0	1
Number of bills initiated	148	55.6	32.76	15	176