

TEXAS VS NEW YORK

In November of 2006, voters in Texas and in New York participated in elections for one of their U.S. senators. Texas voters selected from three candidates: a Republican, a Democrat, and a Libertarian. In New York, voters selected from among candidates from nine different political parties. One key difference between the two elections was the fact that in New York three political parties selected and listed the same candidate for U.S. senator: Hillary Clinton. She was the candidate for the Democratic Party, the Independence Party, and the Working Families Party. Her primary opponent, John Spencer, ran as the Republican Party candidate and as the Conservative Party candidate. In New York, the ballot is laid out so every party and candidate appears separately. As a result, Hillary Clinton's name appeared on the ballot three times and John Spencer's name appeared twice.

The practice of two or more parties legally running the same candidate for office is called electoral fusion. Electoral fusion is allowed in a handful of states, including New York. While electoral fusion was once practiced in Texas as a means of protecting Democratic dominance, it is now illegal.

The practice of electoral fusion allowed voters to support Hillary Clinton or John Spencer without voting for either of the two major parties. In addition, during the campaign, both Clinton and Spencer had to address issues of concern not only for their respective party's base of voters but also for the additional parties that gave them a nomination.

U.S. Senate Election in New York, 2006

Candidate	Percentage of Votes	Party
Hillary Rodham Clinton	57.4%	Democratic
John Spencer	25.8%	Republican
John Spencer	3.8%	Conservative
Hillary Rodham Clinton	3.4%	Independence
Hillary Rodham Clinton	3.2%	Working Families
Howie Hawkins	1.2%	Green
Jeffrey T. Russell	0.4%	Libertarian
Roger Calero	0.1%	Socialist Workers
William Van Auken	0.1%	Socialist Equity

Source: New York State Board of Elections, "U.S. Senate Election Returns Nov. 7, 2006," www.elections.ny.gov/NYSBOE/elections/2006/general/2006_ussen.pdf (accessed September 3, 2014); some calculations by authors.

THINKING Critically

- ★ What is electoral fusion?
- ★ How does electoral fusion allow third parties to participate in an election?

- ★ How does electoral fusion legitimize voting for third parties?
- ★ Why did Texas Democrats support electoral fusion in the past?
- ★ Why did the practice become illegal in Texas?