

TEXAS VS NORTH DAKOTA

Texas and North Dakota could not be more different. Texas is the second-largest state in the country in terms of population. North Dakota, with 675,905 people, ranks forty-eighth; only Vermont and Wyoming have fewer people. Population growth rates in Texas make the Lone Star State one of the fastest-growing states in the nation. North Dakota ranks near the bottom in growth. Texas is a highly urbanized state. North Dakota remains essentially rural.

Another difference between the two is found in their election processes. In North Dakota and a few other states, the lower house of the state legislature is chosen through a multi-member district (MMD) system. Each election district chooses two members of the lower house of the North Dakota Legislature. Each voter in North Dakota casts two votes in his or her election district. The top two vote-getters win seats in the North Dakota House of Representatives. The ninety-four members of the North Dakota House are selected every four years from forty-seven election districts. Elections are staggered so that odd-numbered districts elect their representatives in a given election year, followed two years later by even-numbered districts choosing their representatives. Other states using this system include Idaho, New Jersey, South Dakota, Washington, and West Virginia.

Because each district elects more than one representative, the possibility exists that candidates from both political parties will be elected to office. In some elections, as many as one in three election districts elects one Republican and one Democrat to serve in the North Dakota House. In such cases, voters from both political parties have a representative from their district.

The MMD system may encourage greater party competition than the single-member district system used in Texas. Parties have a greater incentive to run candidates. Getting elected in North Dakota means securing either first or second place, not just first place. Of course, parties also have an incentive to run more than one candidate in each district. In contrast to Texas, as discussed in Chapter 10, North Dakota has relatively few districts in which the two major parties do not compete. In 2008, for example, every district saw both Republican and Democratic candidates competing for office. In 2006, only three districts lacked a candidate from both major parties.

Split Results in Recent Elections to the North Dakota House of Representatives

Result	2012	2010	2008	2006	2004	2002
Two Republicans elected	75%	71%	57%	42%	61%	62%
One Republican, one Democrat elected	13%	13%	17%	33%	22%	17%
Two Democrats elected	13%	17%	26%	26%	17%	21%

Sources: North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 5, 2002,” <https://apps.nd.gov/sec/emspublic/gp/electionresultssearch.htm?searchType=STATE&electionDate=11052002&cmd=Search&showMap=N> (accessed August 28, 2014); North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 2, 2004,” <https://apps.nd.gov/sec/emspublic/gp/electionresultssearch.htm?searchType=STATE&electionDate=11022004&cmd=Search&showMap=N> (accessed May August 28, 2014); North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 7, 2006,” <https://apps.nd.gov/sec/emspublic/gp/electionresultssearch.htm?searchType=STATE&electionDate=11072006&cmd=Search&showMap=N> (accessed August 28, 2014); North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 4, 2008,” <https://apps.nd.gov/sec/emspublic/gp/electionresultssearch.htm?searchType=STATE&electionDate=11042008&cmd=Search&showMap=N> (accessed August 28, 2014); North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 2, 2010,” <http://results.sos.nd.gov/> (accessed August 28, 2014); North Dakota Secretary of State, “General Election—November 6, 2012,” <http://results.sos.nd.gov/resultsSW.aspx?eid=35&text=Race&type=LG&map=DIST> (accessed June 7, 2014).

THINKING Critically

- ★ Do you think the MMD system in North Dakota encourages greater party competition?
- ★ What do you think are advantages of the MMD system?
- ★ What do you think are advantages of the SMD system?
- ★ Are there any drawbacks to either system?
- ★ Which system would you prefer?
- ★ Do you think Texas should maintain its SMD system of elections for the Texas House of Representatives? Why or why not?