

Election

Analysts say peace, prosperity helped Bush

AUSTIN (AP) — Peace, prosperity and George Bush's popularity among his fellow Texans proved too tough a combination for Democrat Michael Dukakis to overcome, election analysts said Wednesday.

"In our history, you just don't turn out an incumbent party with a popular incumbent (President Reagan), which is something we haven't had for a while," George Christian, political consultant and former press secretary to President Lyndon Johnson, said.

"We do have peace," Christian said. "We have arms control negotiations started. The prosperity, while it's spotty, has created at least an air of optimism. And I think the Democrats had the assumption that Reaganomics is unpopular. Reaganomics is not unpopular."

Both Republicans and Democrats also said Dukakis waited too long before responding to Bush's well-honed attacks, and they said the Bush campaign was successful in painting the Massachusetts governor as an out-of-touch liberal.

Not even Texas Lloyd Bentsen's nomination as vice president could offset all that.

Final election returns compiled by the secretary of state's office showed the Republican ticket of Bush and Dan Quayle defeating the Democrats by a 56 percent to 43.4 percent margin. Bush received 3,028,528 votes to Dukakis' 2,345,989.

"Electing a Texan president is a banner, banner day for all Texans, not just us Republicans," Gov. Bill Clements, a co-chairman of Bush's state campaign, said.

Bush has been involved in Texas GOP politics since 1962. He represented Houston in Congress and lost a 1970 U.S. Senate bid to Bentsen.

A jubilant Clements credited Bush's strong showing in Texas with helping elect an unprecedented three state Supreme Court justices and a railroad commissioner who are Republican. "I now have some company," said Clements, who until now was the only Republican in 100 years to win a statewide office in state government.

The governor had his interpretation of Dukakis' performance. He lost, Clements said, "because he's a flaming liberal."

Republican political consultant Karl Rove of Austin said the vice president's conservative campaign theme struck a responsive chord with Texas voters.

"He had a consistent, understood message that resonated with what people felt and wanted," Rove said. "They were happy with the peace and prosperity they have with Reagan. Bush was able to say, 'I'll preserve that and improve on it.'"

Although Dukakis' choice of Texan Bentsen for a running mate was designed to give the Democrats a fighting chance in the nation's third-largest state, Rove said it backfired.

"Fundamentally, the presidential race is a choice about the presidency," Rove said. "When the choice became Bentsen-Bush instead of Dukakis-Bush, what that said was the Democrats admitted the guy at the top of the ticket was unpalatable."

Texas Democrats found some mistakes in the Dukakis strategy and were highly critical of what they called Bush's negative campaign.

State Treasurer Ann Richards, keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention, said Dukakis was riding high after that gathering but didn't capitalize on the surge.

"Our problem was immediately after the convention," Richards said. "There was no real organization for about five weeks. There was a lot of down time that we lost. We lost the momentum."

Christian said Bush was able to dictate the direction of the early debate by describing the race as a conservative-liberal matchup.

"The Bush campaign was smart enough to try to turn the Dukakis image left, and they succeeded in doing it," Christian said. "Bush turned out to be a very good candidate... They hammered Dukakis to death. They pushed him as far left as they could with the facts at hand — then they just kept pushing."

Ed Martin, executive director of the Texas Democratic Party, said he thinks the Republicans pushed too far. But he also said Dukakis failed to respond quickly to Bush's tough talk.

"I think the reason that Dukakis-Bentsen lost in Texas is Dukakis' failure to ever clear the record and the distortions on things like crime, gun control and such issues," Martin said.

State GOP ecstatic with gains on bench

AUSTIN (AP) — The first election of Republicans to the Texas Supreme Court was greeted Wednesday with jubilation by Gov. Bill Clements and GOP campaign officials.

Though Democrats came out with a 6-3 majority on the high court, Clements predicted the three GOP members will join forces with Democrats Raul Gonzalez and Jack Hightower to forge a new conservative majority led by Chief Justice Tom Phillips.

"The chief justice here has a working group in which he is simpatico, and that is a vast, vast difference in what it has been in the past, believe me," Clements said.

The governor introduced the three victorious Republicans — Phillips and newly elected justices Eugene Cook and Nathan Hecht — to a news conference Wednesday.

Clements credited the coattails of President-elect George Bush for their success.

"I was the first statewide candidate that we Republicans have elected, and I'm certainly pleased that I now have some company," Clements said.

GOP campaign consultant Karl Rove was even more euphoric, calling the Republicans' Supreme Court showing "terrific, fabulous, beyond our wildest expectations."

The GOP placed Democratic Justices Ted Robertson and William Kilgarlin square in their sights and picked off both of them, according to unofficial returns from Tuesday's election.

Phillips' victory gave the 39-year-old Harvard law graduate a place in history as the first Republican chief justice elected since the Reconstruction era. Cook and Hecht are the first elected GOP justices.

"We've had some difficult races for the Supreme Court this year — really unparalleled in our state's history, and now it is time for the court to go back to work to resume doing the job that we are constitutionally obligated to do," Phillips said.

Cook, who like Phillips was appointed to the court before the election, said "(he had) preached the gospel of integrity, fairness and reform all across this state, and that message was heard by the voters of this state."

But the GOP advances were tempered by the Democrats' three Supreme Court victories.

Incumbent Democrats won all three Court of Criminal Appeals races, defeating two Republicans and one Libertarian.

Texas voters support GOP, Democrats at polls

AUSTIN (AP) — Maybe Texans went a little schizophrenic in the voting booth. Or, maybe, the state finally is reaching that elusive two-party status Republicans have talked about for so long.

But one thing is certain after Tuesday's vote: Both sides had winners and losers, gains and losses.

Texans delivered their presidential vote to adopted son George Bush but rejected native son Lloyd Bentsen for vice president.

They still like Bentsen, though, and overwhelmingly handed the Democrat a fourth term in the U.S. Senate.

Republicans scored a 20th century first — electing three justices to the Texas Supreme Court.

Democrats picked up two seats in Congress, as voters ousted Republican incumbent Mac Sweeney in the 14th District and elected Democrat Bill Sarpalus to replace Republican Beau Boulter of Amarillo, who lost the Senate race to Bentsen.

Republicans claimed at least three seats on the new State Board of Education.

Democrats held their own in the Texas House of Representatives, retaining a majority that will be near the previous 94-56 split. Republicans gained two seats in the Texas Senate, however.

And Kent Hance — a Democrat-turned-Republican — finally claimed victory in a statewide race, becoming the first GOP candidate to be elected to the Railroad Commission this century and breathing new life into rumors about his plans for another statewide office, possibly governor, in 1990.

NBC-TV exit polls of 2,915 Texas members, families with incomes of more than \$20,000 and those who call themselves conservatives.

Dukakis won the majority of blacks, themselves as liberals or moderates. He also won a narrow majority of women voters, the poll found.

Bush won several regions of the state, and stayed close to Dukakis in two areas deemed critical for Democratic success — East Texas and South Texas.

"The philosophy of the people of Texas is consistent with the Republican Party philosophy and our Republican candidates," said Fred Meyer, state GOP chairman.

Meyer said the GOP is growing stronger. No longer does the party only win presidential races, he said. "We're picking up across the board in this state — both at the local level and the statewide level," Meyer said. "We're making substantial progress."

Since Texas joined the Union in 1845, no Democrat has ever been elected president without carrying the state.

Some Texas Democrats said this year's problem was at the top of the ticket, with Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis not quite used to Texas ways.

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