



BIPARTISANSHIP REPORT

86TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION // PREPARED BY GLASSHOUSE POLICY

BIPARTISANSHIP IN THE 86TH TEXAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Despite a “blue wave” election in 2018, flipping several House seats previously seen as safe Republican districts, Republicans managed to maintain control of both chambers of the Texas Legislature, in addition to winning every statewide election— as they have since 1996. This single-party dominance in the legislature, in part, resulted in the majority of bills being authored by and passed by Republicans.

Soon after being sworn in, the Big Three— Governor Abbot, Lieutenant Governor Patrick, and House Speaker Bonnen announced in apparent harmony that school finance and property tax reform were to be the top priorities for this session¹. Even with controversial bills largely off the table, such as the 85th Session’s “bathroom bill”, bipartisan bills joint authored by both sides of the aisle received a “bipartisan boost” in their success rate.

OVERVIEW

During the 86th Legislative Session, only 12% of bills filed were bipartisan, meaning they had at least one Republican and Democratic author or joint author. Notably, the bipartisan bills filed this session were not trivial in nature. As opposed to covering uncontroversial issues that often slip by on the local and consent calendar, the bipartisan bills that were successful instead tackled significant legislative priorities for the session.

Important bills relating to disaster recovery, school finance, untested rape kits, and mental health had authors from both parties, and they proved more likely to be passed than single-party authored legislation. The scope of the bipartisan bills filed this session demonstrates an increased understanding within the legislature that working across the aisle to produce bipartisan legislation is worthwhile, if only to improve the chances of the bill's ultimate passage.

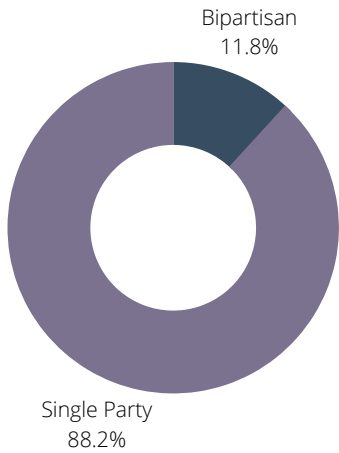
Across the board, bipartisan bills were more than twice as likely to pass than were bills authored by legislators from a single party. Even in a Republican-controlled legislature, where bipartisanship does not appear necessary for success, this report demonstrates the advantage of securing bipartisan authorship for bills navigating the arduous process to become law in Texas.

METHODOLOGY

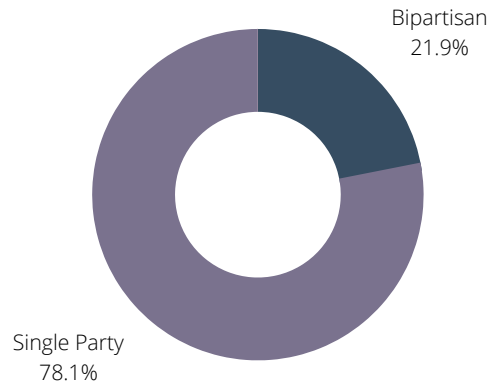
Information for each bill filed during the 86th Texas Legislative Session was obtained from the Texas Legislature Online (TLO) database. A full list of all House Bills and Senate Bills, including each bill's author(s), joint authors (when applicable), and most recent action, was extracted. We then compiled and coded a list of all representatives and senators based on party affiliation.

A bill was classified as "bipartisan" if it had at least one Democratic and one Republican author or joint author; all other bills were classified as "single party." Bills that passed both chambers were classified as "passed" regardless of whether or not they were eventually signed into law by the governor.

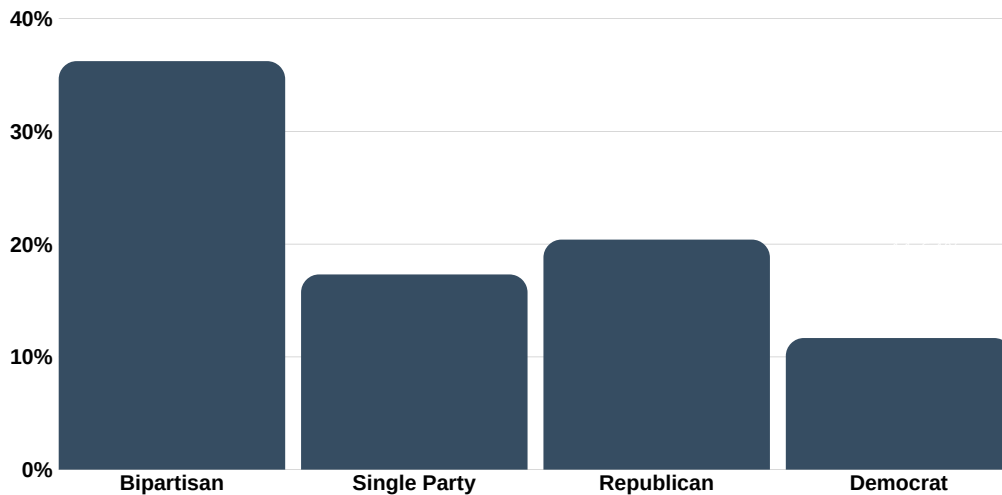
Bills Filed



Bills Passed



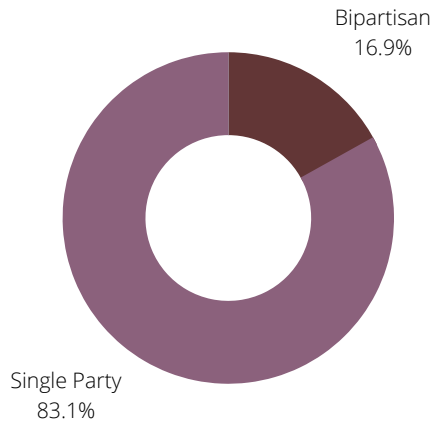
The percentage of bills passed that were bipartisan (21.90%) was nearly two times the percentage of bills filed that were bipartisan (11.80%).



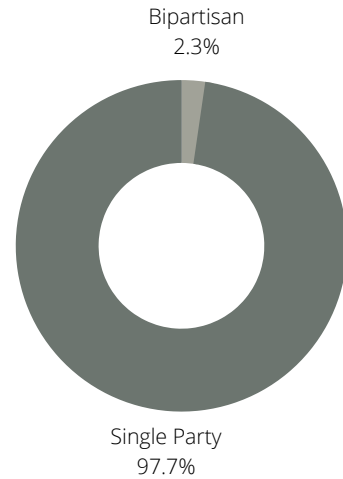
Passage Rates: Bipartisan vs. Single Party vs. Either Party

As shown above, the passage rate of bipartisan bills (36.20%) was significantly higher than the passage rate of single party bills (17.28%), regardless of whether the single party bills were authored by Republican (20.37%) or Democratic (11.64%) legislators.

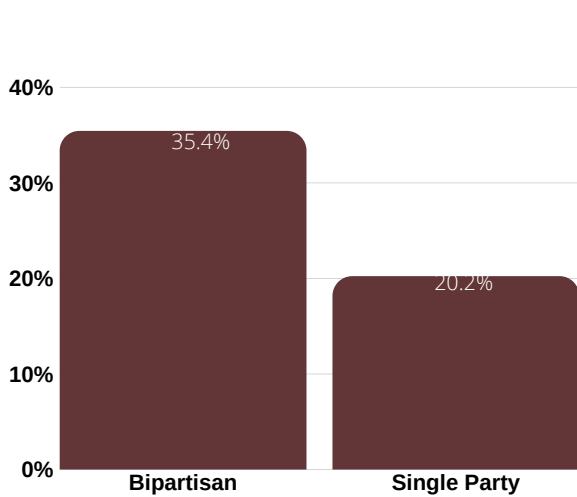
House Bills Filed



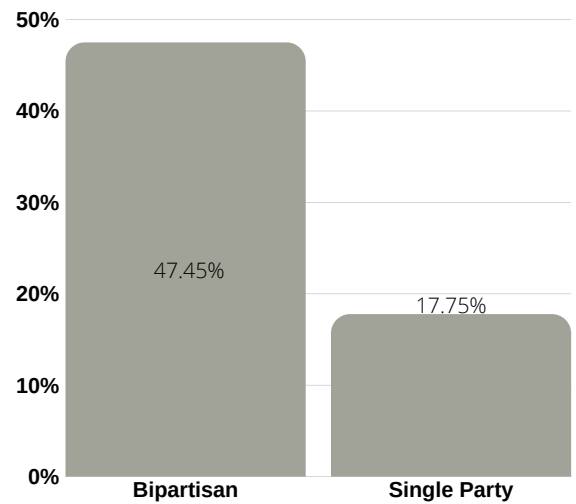
Senate Bills Filed



The Texas House filed a significantly higher proportion of bipartisan bills (16.9%) than did the Texas Senate (2.3%).



"Bipartisan Boost" in the Texas House



"Bipartisan Boost" in the Texas Senate

Despite a much smaller proportion of bipartisan bills in the Senate, they received a significantly larger boost (29.7%) than those in the House did (15.2%). Bipartisan bills in the Senate were more than twice as likely to pass than those authored by a single party.

ANALYSIS

The data shows that the proportion of bipartisan bills that passed was higher than the number of bipartisan bills filed. They received an average of 19 percent increase in likelihood of passage over bills authored by a singly party. Even when single party bills were broken down into each respective party, bipartisan bills were still more successful than Democratic or Republican bills, in spite of Republican dominance.

ANALYSIS

Analysis within each chamber shows that the Texas House filed a higher proportion of bipartisan bills than did the Senate. In both chambers, bipartisan bills were more successful than those authored by a single party. However, bipartisan Senate bills received almost twice the "bipartisan boost" than did bipartisan House bills.

The importance of bipartisanship impacted the "priority" bills for each chamber, as well. Looking at the lower number bills, traditionally gives one a glimpse into what the Speaker and the Lieutenant Governor view as the most pressing issues. In the House and Senate, respectively, over 60 percent and 23 percent of the bills were bipartisan, further proving the impact of reaching across the aisle.

CONCLUSION

SECURING BIPARTISAN AUTHORSHIP INCREASES THE CHANCE OF BILL PASSAGE BY 170%

If legislators want to be effective lawmakers, the data shows that reaching across the aisle to find bipartisan partnerships on policymaking dramatically strengthens their chances of passing legislation. Furthermore, bipartisan authorship works when applied to omnibus legislative priorities such as disaster recovery and mental health awareness in public schools. While many bills pass without bipartisan support, such as property tax reform, when legislators from both parties work together, Texans have a greater chance of seeing solutions come out of their state legislature.

CONCLUSION

This research not only shows the effectiveness of bipartisan bills in terms of passage, but also the disturbingly low number of bipartisan bills filed in the 86th Legislative Session. Improving rates of bipartisanship can achieve positive policy outcomes for major issues across Texas.

The effect of bipartisan authorship cannot be understated as it has been shown session after session to increase legislative success and help pass important measures throughout Texas. In coming years, regardless of which party has the majority, state legislators should look to craft policy solutions by reaching across the aisle to bring more meaningful reform to the Texans they represent.