The Political Context of the 2025 Parental Rights Amendment in Texas

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Abstract

Texas voters approved the "Parental Rights Amendment" to the state constitution on November 4, 2025. The amendment, which appeared as Proposition 15 on the ballot, makes Texas the first state to adopt such a proposal. A similar amendment was rejected by Colorado voters in 1996. Some observers cast the amendment as a moral issue. This paper examines the political context of the statewide vote on the legislatively referred measure. Using county-level data, we analyze party identification, ideology, demographic variables, and religious affiliation to understand the amendment's appeal to voters better. The findings suggest that voter support for the amendment can be best described as partisan.

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Texas became the first state to adopt a parental rights amendment to its state constitution when voters approved a ballot question in November 2025. Texas was the second state to consider a parental rights amendment. In 1996, Colorado voters rejected a citizen initiative that would have added a parental rights amendment to that state's constitution (Smith & Herrington, 2000). Since Texas voters rarely reject the constitutional amendments sent by the legislature, the odds of approval were high. The Texas Legislative Council reports, "Since 1876, the legislature has proposed 731 constitutional amendments. Of these amendments, 547 have been approved by the electorate (although 2 have not been certified due to court challenges), 181 have been defeated, and 3 never made it to the ballot" (2026). From 2015 to 2025, only two amendments were defeated, and both would have changed judges' services (Rausch & Rausch, 2024). In Texas, all constitutional amendments are referred by the legislature. The Texas Parental Rights Amendment, appearing on the ballot as Proposition 15, received 70% of the vote. In fact, all seventeen propositions on the ballot were approved, with Proposition 6, which banned taxes on securities transactions, receiving support from only 55 percent of voters (Reynolds & Astudillo, 2025).

This paper assesses county-level voting on Proposition 15 to determine whether any factors emerge from the otherwise overwhelming support. The research presents a single-state case study, since Texas is the first state to approve a parental rights amendment to its constitution. The findings uncovered here may be used to compare other states as their voters act on parental rights amendments.[1]

[1]Voters in 49 states must approve constitutional amendments before they are added to their state's constitution. Voters in Delaware do not have the opportunity to approve amendments (Ciccanti, 2026).

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Proposition 15, Parental Rights Amendment (2025)

The successful campaign to add a parental rights amendment to the Texas Constitution began in the 2023 legislative session. Texas courts have "long recognized parents as having a *fundamental right* to raise their children (most notably in *Troxel v. Granville* 530 U.S. 57 (2000)), this right has existed primarily through **case law** and **statutory interpretation—**not constitutional text" (emphases in the original; Palmer, 2025). Senate Joint Resolution 34 was introduced in the 88th Texas Legislature (2023) to add the judicial principles to the state constitution (Palmer, 2025). The joint resolution was reintroduced in the 89th Texas Legislature (2025) by Senator Bryan Hughes (R-Mineola). The resolution declared that parents have the responsibility to nurture and protect their children, and they have a fundamental right "to exercise care, custody, and control of the parent's child, including the right to make decisions concerning the child's upbringing" (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The resolution passed the Senate on a unanimous vote of 31 to 0 in March. On May 14, 2025, the House of Representatives passed an amended version of the resolution by a vote of 112-22, with 16 members either absent or not voting (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The Senate concurred with the House's amended version by a unanimous 31 to 0 vote on May 20. The House amendment removed a provision restricting the state or a political subdivision from interfering with parental rights unless "the interference was necessary to implement a compelling governmental interest" (Cacciatore, 2025).

During the ensuing campaign, the parental rights amendment was supported by the Libertarian Party of Texas and several organizations, including the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission, Texans for Vaccine Choice, the Texas Eagle Forum, the Texas Home School Coalition, the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and Texas Right to Life. Opponents included the Green Party of Texas and the Collin County Democratic Party, as well as

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Accountability Matters, Jane's Due Process, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice, Planned Parenthood Texas Votes, and the True Texas Project (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

Jeremy Newman, director of public policy for the Texas Home School Coalition, summed up the position of supporters: "This is a priority because, currently, the constitutional rights of parents are found only in case law, which is controlled by judges. Those rights could disappear if we have bad judges who make it into office" (Cacciatore, 2025).

The True Texas Project, an organization that emerged from the tea party movement in Texas, exemplifies one of the more interesting arguments against Proposition 15. The group's voters' guide indicates opposition "as unnecessary because this is a right already established by God":

> Prop 15 would simply declare that parents have the inherent right to make decisions for their children. We should not have to put this into the State Constitution! God has already ordained that parents are to be responsible for their children, and government has no place in family decisions, except in the case of child abuse and neglect. In our opinion, if we put things like this into the Constitution, it equates to an acknowledgment that the state has conferred this right. And we know that what the state can give, the state can take away (True Texas Project, 2025).

Most other groups and law firms that opposed Proposition 15 stressed its vagueness and redundancy (Coggins, 2025). Accountability Matters opined, "The phrase 'care, custody, and control' and the broad reference to 'decisions concerning the child's upbringing' are undefined, creating ambiguity that courts or state agencies could exploit" (Accountability Matters, n.d.). Diaz & Wright Attorneys at Law, PLLC (2025) wrote, "it's [Proposition 15 is] largely

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redundant and **performative**. . . . This amendment does **not** create new protections—it simply restates existing ones. It's a political maneuver to distract from **real crisis**: the collapse of Texas's child welfare system" (emphases in the original).

The state's news media offered their positions. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *Dallas Morning News* supported the proposition. The *Morning News* offered the insight that "the proposal drew no organized opposition and would not provide parents with a new justification to abuse or neglect their children" (*Dallas Morning News* Editorial Board, 2025). *The Austin American-Statesman*, the *Austin Chronicle*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and the *San Antonio Express-News*. *The Austin Chronicle* explained its "Hell No" recommendation on Proposition 15 by drawing attention to the ongoing culture war in Texas politics:

> This language was wielded this legislative session to push learning and conversations around gender, race, and sexuality out of Texas public school classrooms and take books with diverse perspectives off of school library shelves. The Christian push for "parental rights" should not be given a constitutional foundation (*The Austin Chronicle*, 2025).

There was no campaign spending recorded either supporting or opposing Proposition 15 (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

The ballot language seen by voters was, "**Proposition 15 – SJR 34** – The constitutional amendment affirming that parents are the primary decision makers for their children." One amendment critic, Canyon attorney Brad Yock, emphasized that even this ballot language was "a misleading, inaccurate, and incomplete description of what the actual proposed amendment states" (Yock, 2026, p. 2). Yock provides a verbatim copy of the amendment in his critical review:

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> *To enshrine truths that are deeply rooted in this nation's history and traditions, the people of Texas hereby affirm that a parent has a responsibility to nurture and protect the parent's child and the corresponding fundamental right to exercise care, custody, and control of the parent's child, including the right to make decisions concerning the child's upbringing.* (2026, 2).

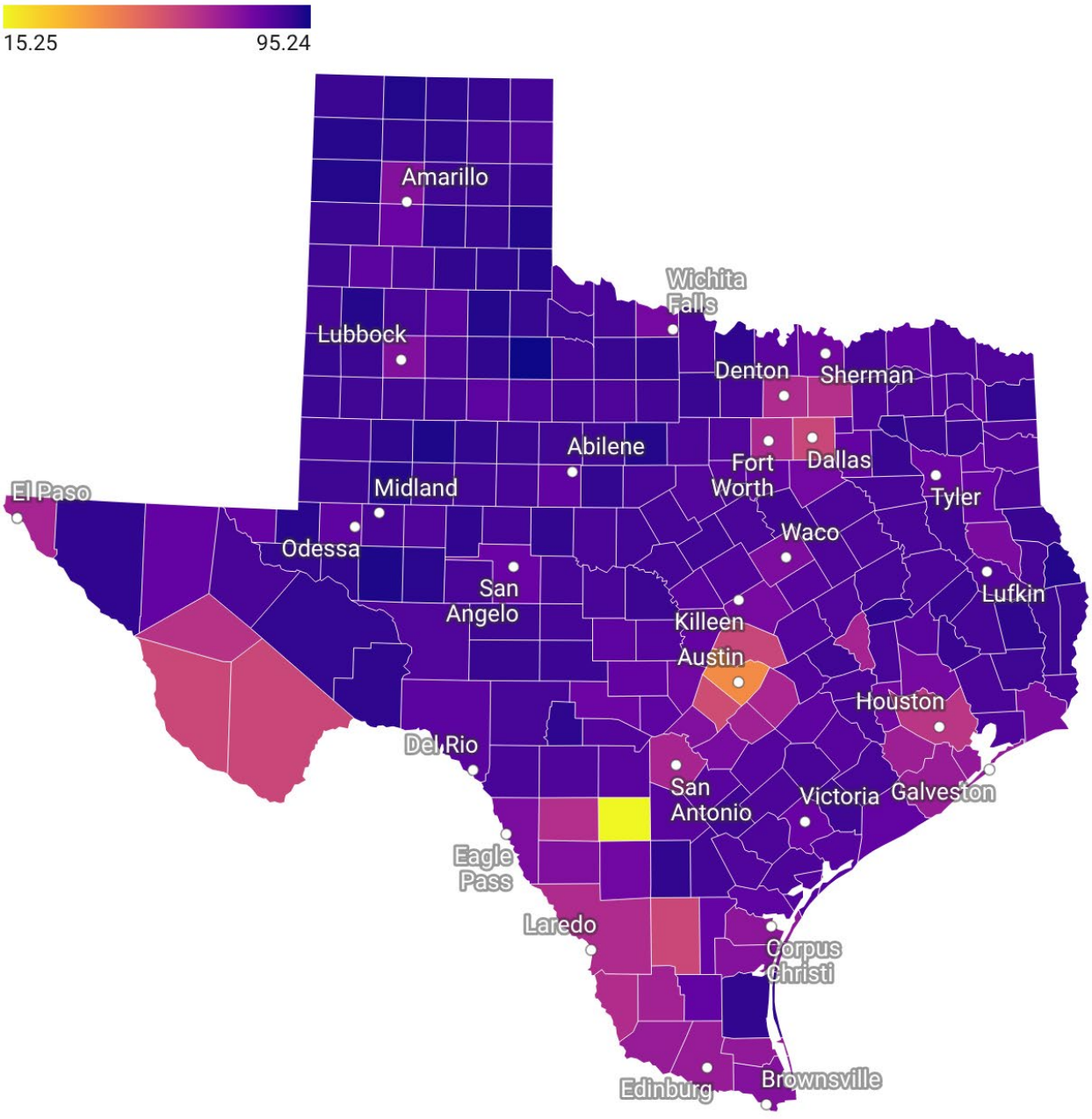
On November 4, 2026, Texas voters approved Proposition 15 by a vote of 69.87% to 30.1%. Almost 16% of Texas registered voters cast a ballot in the election (Texas Secretary of State, n.d.). With its approval, the amendment was included in Article 1, Section 37, of the Texas Constitution. Article 1 is the Bill of Rights.

The map below illustrates the distribution of the county-level vote for Proposition 15. The yellow county to the southwest of San Antonio is Frio County.

Some initial patterns are evident in the map. First, Texans voted in favor of Proposition 15. Locations with weaker support may be found in the urban and suburban areas around Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio. The Rio Grande Valley also exhibits slightly weaker support.

The research examines the county-level vote on Proposition 15, the Parental Rights Amendment. We seek better to understand the context of support for this amendment. Is the support for the parental rights amendment related to partisanship, morality, and religious affiliation, or the concerns of households with children?

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Method

To better understand voting patterns on Proposition 15, this paper uses a method similar to that presented in Morgan and Meier (1980) in their study of voting on moral issues in Oklahoma. Morgan and Meier use multiple regression analysis to examine county-level voting

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on several Oklahoma ballot questions. Their dependent variable is the percentage of voters in each county who supported the question under examination. They used several independent variables, including rural isolation, socioeconomic status, liquor consumption, and three categories of religious affiliation. They found that support for referenda liberalizing liquor and gambling laws was found in Oklahoma counties with higher socioeconomic status, a larger percentage of the population identifying as Catholic, and smaller percentages of both fundamentalist and other Protestants (Morgan &Meier, 1980; Satterthwaite, 2005a; Rausch, 2019; Rausch & Rausch, 2020). Despite the method's relative simplicity and the level at which the data are aggregated, Morgan and Meier's findings have been cited in additional research, especially on questions related to issues of morality (Gibson, 2004; Haider-Markel & Meier, 1996; LeDuc & Pammett, 1995; Oldmixon, 2002; Satterthwaite, 2005b; Wald, Button, & Rienzo, 1996; Wilcox & Jelen, 1990).

We identify several hypotheses to explain voter support for Proposition 15. The first hypothesis is that religious affiliation is a key indicator of support for parental rights. Several organizations that supported the proposition cited God in their messages. Others addressed the concerns that parents face in protecting their children from the immoral activities rampant in Texas public education.

A second hypothesis considers Proposition 15 as a purely Republican proposal. In terms of partisanship, Texas is a strongly Republican state, and the Republican Party holds the majority of seats in both chambers of the legislature. This hypothesis has less support when one considers the arguments of the True Texas Project that the amendment gives the government the power to declare parental rights. According to some Republicans, parental rights are inalienable rights granted by God.

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The third hypothesis posits that voters with children were more likely to support Proposition 15. We admit that this hypothesis is challenging to test with aggregate-level data, but we will try anyway. Households with children should be more supportive of the proposition than households without children.

Using data from a variety of sources, the present research assesses the hypotheses while testing for alternative explanations of support for Proposition 15. Data were collected on each of the 254 counties in Texas.

The present research employs aggregate county-level data. While individual-level survey data would be preferable to county-level data, the chosen level of aggregation is more practical and will allow for future comparisons across states. The reliability of the data is much higher than that of a survey due to issues of respondent recall. County-level data are useful for examining the political, economic, and social environment in which voters make their decisions on referenda (Giles, 1977; Hero, 1998; Key 1950; Morgan & Meier, 1980; Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000; Rausch, 1994; Satterthwaite, 2005a; Satterthwaite, 2005b; Smith, DeSantis, & Kassel, 2005; Tolbert & Hero, 2001).

Election return data are found on the Texas Secretary of State's website (https://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/historical/index.shtml). The data on religious adherents were compiled by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB) and published in the 2020 U.S. Religious Census (Grammich et al., 2023). The religious census is available online at the Association of Religion Data Archives website (https://www.thearda.com/). Demographic data are from the United States Census.

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Measures

SUPPORT FOR PROPOSITION 15

The dependent variable, support for Proposition 15, is measured by the percentage of voters in each of the 254 Texas counties who cast a ballot in favor of the proposition. The highest percentage of "Yes" votes was 95.2% in King County, east of Lubbock. The lowest support was 15.3% in Frio County, near San Antonio. The mean county vote was 84.6% with a standard deviation of 8.8.

RELIGION

Data were collected on the proportion of county residents affiliated with different religions. Religion has been involved in American political life for a long time, but social scientists have only seriously researched the role of religion in politics for about the past forty years (Jelen, 1998; Satterthwaite, 2005a, 2005b; Wald, Silverman, & Fridy, 2005; Wald & Wilcox, 2006). Jelen (1998) reviews much literature that specifically examines the role of religion in political behavior. Religious conservatives became actively involved in the Republican Party in the late 1970s and early 1980s to advocate their positions on several social issues (Guth, 1983, Chapter 2; Oldfield, 1996). It was during this period that social science saw increased interest in the role of religion in American politics.

This paper incorporates one variable for religious affiliation: evangelical Protestants. Denominations included in the category "Evangelical Protestants," or Conservative Protestants, were identified by the authors of the Religious Congregations & Membership Study 2020 as follows:

> Evangelical Protestant denominations and churches emphasize conversion and evangelism, hold biblical authority in high regard, and tend to seek more

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> separation from the broader culture. Evangelical Protestantism is usually seen as more theologically and socially conservative than mainline Protestantism, although there is obviously variation among evangelical denominations, congregations, and individuals. Evangelical Protestant denominations include the Southern Baptist Convention, Assemblies of God, and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (https://thearda.com/us-religion/group-profiles/traditions?T=1).

The proportion of Texas county residents who are Evangelical Protestant is calculated from data published in Grammich et al. (2013). The percentage ranged from 452.5% in King County (not a typo) to 0.0%. King County has a small population. The Religious Congregations & Membership Study only identified the number of members of churches in King County; it cannot identify the counties of residence for members of churches located in King County. The mean was 34.4% with a standard deviation of 31.7. We expect to see a relationship between the Evangelical Protestant population and support for the state questions.

VOTERS IN RURAL AREAS

The present research uses population density as a measure of a county's rurality (Gimpel, Lovin, May, and Reeves, 2020). This measure is one way to look at the rural/urban divide, providing a continuous variable to use in regression equations. The data are drawn from the United States Census. Population density by county in Texas ranged from 0.1 persons per square mile (Loving County) to 2,993.6 persons per square mile (Dallas County). The mean population density is 121.8 persons per square mile with a standard deviation of 357.3.

POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP

The second hypothesis posits that Texas counties with differing proportions of party identifiers will exhibit different voting rates on Proposition 15. Texans do not register by party.

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The political party of Texas voters is recorded based on which party's primary they vote in. This research measures partisanship by actual votes. We find an average of the county votes for the Republican for President in 2020, the county votes for the Republican for governor in 2022, and the county votes for the Republican for President in 2024 and create a measure of "Republicanness." The county exhibiting the least support for Republican candidates was Travis County (Austin), with 27.3 percent over the three elections. The county with the most support for Republican candidates was Roberts County (in the Texas Panhandle), with 96.2 percent in the same three elections. The mean county Republicanness is 76.2% with a standard deviation of 13.9.

HOUSEHOLDS WITH CHILDREN

The third hypothesis indicates that counties with more households with children should exhibit more support for Proposition 15. The United States Census includes data on the number of households with children in each Texas county. Concho County, with 15.8% of households with children, has the fewest, while King County has 43.9%. The mean is 25.3% with a standard deviation of 3.1.

CONTROL VARIABLES

Additional independent variables were used as controls in the analysis. These variables are the percentage of each county's population aged 25 or older with a high school diploma and each county's median age.

Analysis and Findings

The present research seeks to understand the votes on Proposition 15 in November 2025. One of 17 propositions on the Texas voters' ballot in that constitutional amendment election, Proposition 15 was supported by a clear majority of voters.

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We constructed a correlation matrix to assess multicollinearity among the independent variables.

Table 1. Correlation between selected independent variables (N=254)

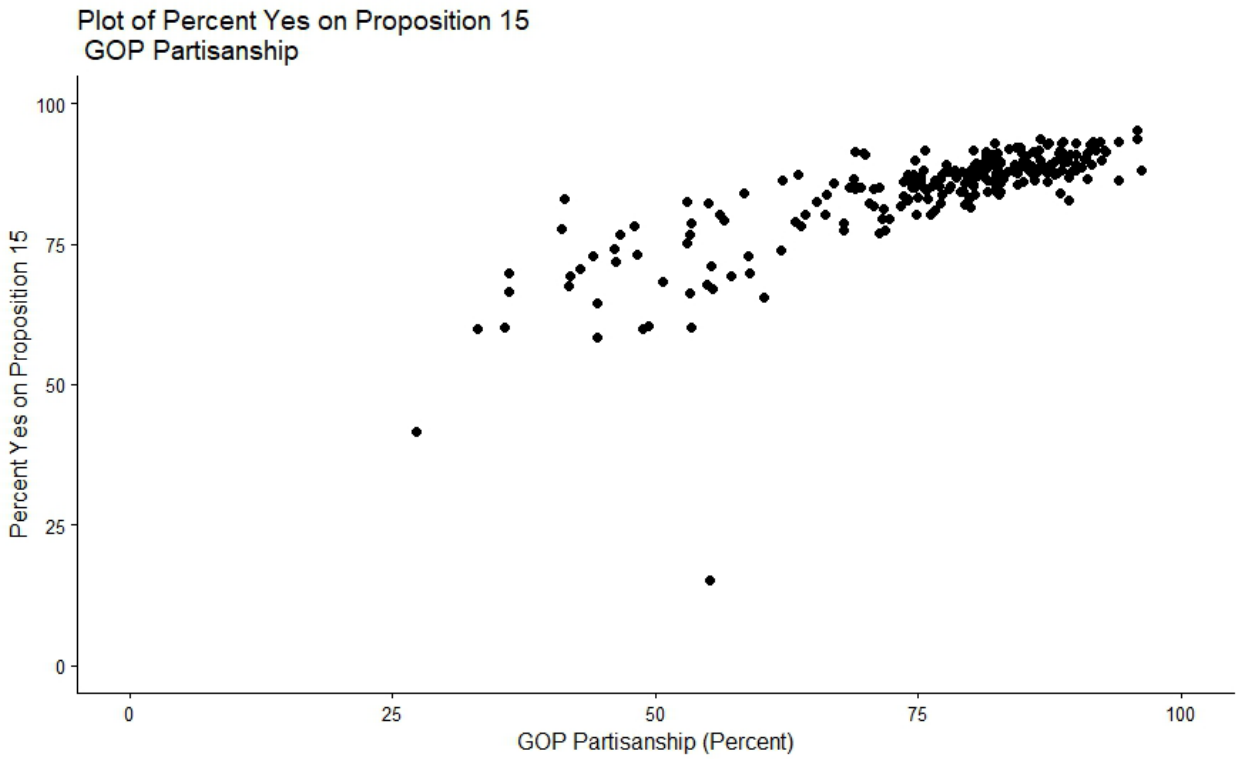
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
(a) Percent Over 25 High School Graduate	1					
(b) Median Age	.405**	1				
(c) County Population Density	.131*	-.208**	1			
(d) Percent Evangelical Affiliation	.087	.204**	-.101**	1		
(e) Percent Republican votes	.230**	.395**	-.506**	.351**	1	
(f) Percent Households with Children	.246**	.341**	-.045	.390**	.278**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

A county's Republicanness appears to be correlated with the other independent variables. Republican vote share and population density have the strongest relationship (r = -.506). Denser, or more urban, counties tend to vote less Republican. The one relationship that does not make intuitive sense is that older counties tend to have more high school graduates.

A scatterplot was produced to examine the relationship between Proposition 15 voting and Republican vote share in each county. The plot shows a positive relationship: counties with larger Republican vote shares also vote more in support of Proposition 15. It is difficult to determine with county-level data if the voters who turned out for the constitutional amendment were Democrats or Republicans.

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Two ordinary least squares regression models were calculated. The results are presented in the following table. The first model includes only the Republican vote share measure. This variable is statistically significant and positively associated with the vote on Proposition 15. This simple model explains about 62 percent of the variance. Model 2 includes all the independent variables. Including those variables only moves the explanation needle to about 63 percent of the variance. In short, it appears that only the Republican vote share matters.

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	Dependent variable:	
	YesPerProp15	
	(1)	(2)
High school grads		-0.145***
		(0.053)
Median Age		-0.018
		(0.072)
Population Density		-0.002*
		(0.001)
Percent Evangelical		0.005
		(0.012)
Average GOP Vote	0.500***	0.487***
	(0.025)	(0.032)
Households w/ Children		0.066
		(0.124)
Constant	46.452***	58.635***
	(1.916)	(4.407)
Observations	254	254
R^2	0.619	0.642
Adjusted R^2	0.617	0.633
Residual Std. Error	5.472 (df = 252)	5.356 (df = 247)
F Statistic	408.765*** (df = 1; 252)	73.790*** (df = 6; 247)
Note:		*p**p***p<0.01

Discussion and Conclusions

The present research seeks to understand the vote on the parental rights amendment to the Texas Constitution, which Texas voters considered as Proposition 15 in November 2025. Three hypotheses were tested. The first hypothesis treats the vote as a moral issue, suggesting that counties with large Evangelical Protestant populations would strongly support the initiative. This hypothesis loses some luster in light of the True Texas Project's arguments that the government should not impose parental rights, since God establishes these rights. If the government may

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grant these rights, it may also take them away. The second hypothesis considers Proposition 15 as a purely Republican political proposal. Finally, the third hypothesis is that county households with children would be more supportive of the amendment because they are parents who need more rights to raise their children.

The regression analysis clearly shows Republican vote share as the dominant predictor. This observation reflects the views presented by opponents, such as Diaz & Wright Attorneys at Law, PLLC (2025), who pointed out that the proposition was a "political maneuver" to distract from the task of strengthening the Texas child welfare system.

Additional research should look more closely at the counties with lower-than-expected support. The other variables may help develop a more nuanced story. Also interesting are the two counties with a majority of voters opposing Proposition 15. Travis County (Austin) is well-understood as a Democratic county. Frio County, the other minority county, is less well understood and deserves further investigation.

One additional, potentially fruitful line of research is to examine all 17 propositions considered by Texas voters in November 2025. While all 17 were approved, the levels of support differed across the propositions. Many media outlets grouped the propositions' subjects in their reports (see, for example, Runnels and Astudillo, 2025). Research may find that the vote outcomes reflect those topics.

There may be some value in examining the Texas vote on a legislatively referred amendment compared to the citizen initiative defeated in Colorado in 1996. The challenge is that the 1990s were different both culturally and politically from the mid-2020s.

The findings presented in this research may make understanding voter support and opposition to parental rights amendments as they appear on ballots in other states. Of course, we

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also may see other state legislatures send more clearly drafted parental rights amendments. It is then that the findings presented in the present research will become generalizable.

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AI Disclosure Statement

The authors used the Texas A&M University System institutional license of Grammarly, an AI-assisted writing tool, to improve the clarity, grammar, and style of this manuscript. All substantive content, analysis, arguments, and conclusions are solely the work of the authors. The use of Grammarly was limited to prose refinement and did not involve generating new ideas, data, or intellectual content.

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