

Secure West Texas Toehold By GOP Viewed By Pollster

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DEMOGRAPHIC changes, both on the national and state levels, have provided Republicans some secure toeholds in areas once considered Democratic strongholds, political pollster V. Lance Tarrance told a Lubbock audience Tuesday.

And West Texas, Tarrance said, is becoming an increasingly important region for the GOP.

Tarrance, who serves as president of Tarrance and Associates of Houston, was guest speaker at the Greater Lubbock Rotary Club. He has conducted polls in more than 500 political campaigns and is the author of several books on voting behavior.

Balance Of Power Shifts

West Texas has seen a gradual shifting in the balance of power from the Democrats to the Republicans during the past several years, Tarrance told Rotarians.

The first indication of the change came in 1974, when Lubbock dentist Jim Granbury was running for governor, the pollster said. Tarrance noted that Granbury was able to garner much of the West Texas vote which before had been tallied only in the Democratic column.

And during the gubernatorial race four years later, West Texas provided the pivotal vote needed to put Bill Clements in office, Tarrance said.

Tarrance pointed out that Clements spent a lot of time campaigning in West Texas, going from one small town to another. "And it paid off," he said.

Vital To Clements

To assure his win, Clements had to maintain a solid Republican base in Dallas and also make sure John Hill didn't take Houston, Tarrance said. But Clements also had to score a win in West Texas to push his campaign over the top, he added.

On a statewide basis, Tarrance said the the Democratic Party is finding new sources of power in the minority centers of Houston and San Antonio.

But if Republicans can maintain their base in Dallas, make further in-roads in Harris County and take the West Texas vote, the GOP can count on winning more statewide elections, he said.

This may be very possible, Tarrance said, with the character make-up of many of the state's newest residents. He said that between 18 and 20 percent of Texas' voters have moved to the state in the past several years. About 40 percent of these new Texans are Republicans, the pollster said.

The Deep South is another region that

long has been under Democratic control but is now showing a growing trend toward Republicanism, Tarrance said, adding that the South is becoming a pivotal vote for the nation.

Since the Reconstruction days following the Civil War, the Democratic Party has held sway in the South, Tarrance said. But with the emergence of new leaders and the advent of "electronic ministries" that have preached conservatism, Tarrance said many southerners are beginning to change their voting behavior.

Tarrance said Republicans also have been building strength in the eastern and southwestern portions of the United States. These also are the areas growing in population and gaining congressional seats, he said.

As the western states gain seats in
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Congress, some of the "battleground states" — such as Ohio, Massachusetts and Kentucky — appear to be losing them, Tarrance said. At the same time, he said, Republicans are retaining power in the Plains states.

Controlling the West, Mid-West and the South should put the Republican Party in a strong position to gain an electoral majority despite the Democrats' strength in major urban centers of the Northeast, he said.

Based on the current demographic trends in the nation, Tarrance said he would be "very surprised" if the Republicans can't win three out of the next five presidential elections.