

active promoters and participants at the El Paso and San Antonio La Raza Unida conferences, where they eagerly embraced the concept of a Chicano political party.

In January 1970, translating the popular aspiration into concrete reality, MAYO created El Partido de la Raza Unida, widely known as La Raza Unida Party (LRUP).³² Established in the Winter Garden area, it was intended to serve as an electoral vehicle in local school board and city council contests. In the spring elections, Gutiérrez and other LRUP leaders ran for office. The party had a spectacularly auspicious beginning: Crystal City Mexicanos won two council seats and three school board seats, one of them belonging to Gutiérrez. These successes were repeated in two other predominantly Mexicano communities nearby, Cotulla and Carrizo Springs. His good fortune prompted the hardworking Gutiérrez to expand his political horizons. He was determined to make LRUP a national association, a third party for Chicanos in competition with the two traditional choices.

In Colorado, meanwhile, Corky Gonzales had similar plans. As we have seen, in the spring of 1970 a Colorado LRUP was established in Denver just a few months after Gutiérrez had initiated his regional organization of the same name in Texas. Beginning in late 1970, prompted by the Tejano, LRUP chapters began appearing in California. It was Gonzales, however, who took the initiative for a nationwide party first. At his urging, three thousand delegates from throughout the Southwest and parts of the Midwest met in El Paso on September 1-4, 1972. The result was the establishment of a national Raza Unida party.

Unfortunately, this first national convention would also be the last. Problems surfaced immediately, as the meeting was marred by massive internal dissension. Two factions emerged, a moderate group looking to Gutiérrez, who saw the party as a vehicle to achieve political power, and a radical contingent headed by Gonzales, who wanted the party to take a more ideological path by dealing with issues of class and gender. Additionally, moderates were willing to consider electoral alliances with the established parties in the coming elections. Radicals were vehemently opposed to this kind of interparty cooperation. Tensions were exacerbated by personal animosity between the two ambitious leaders. The moderates ultimately won out; Gutiérrez was elected chairman of the new party.

Work began immediately on extending LRUP into other parts of the Southwest in preparation for the 1972 primary and general elections. While LRUP was able to gain a small following in New Mexico, Arizona, and California, results at the polls were almost uniformly disappointing. In fact, electoral victories were confined to South Texas. Two years later, in 1974, the party's candidate for the Texas governorship, Ramiro (Ramsey) Muñiz, a former star football player at Baylor University, netted a mere 190,000 votes, less than 5 percent of the total votes cast.³³

The party never came close to meeting the lofty expectations of its founders. LRUP declined for the same reasons that the entire Chicano movement, which it