Florida: Presidential elections and partisan change, 1952-2004

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by

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To my parents, whose unconditional support and guidance enable me to “go to my destiny”, because no sacrifice has been too great for them.
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ABSTRACT

The presidential contest of 1952 established a new trajectory for Florida politics. This pivotal election reversed decades of Democratic dominance and signified the beginning of presidential Republicanism in the state. Elections in the second half of the 20th century provided evidence of an increasingly favorable environment for Republican nominees. During this period Democrats were limited to carrying the state’s electoral votes three times. GOP presidential ascendancy in Florida was augmented by partisan conversion and the disproportionate in-migration of white Northerners following World War II. Contrary to unrivaled 1980s support, which created an anchor in a new core Southern Republican electoral bloc, the 1990s restoration of competitiveness highlighted voter fluidity. This trend was exemplified by a virtual tie in the 2000 election.

This paper confirms an atypical regional diffusion of Republican presidential dominance attributable to demographics. Contemporary Florida elections have been profoundly altered by an older population, increasing diversity due to immigration, and the erosion of Southern culture. Unlike intensifying national sectionalism, Florida has been classified as a “too close to call” during most of the past four presidential campaigns. A unique partisan balance is a component of a demographic profile mirroring the nation. Steady population growth has gradually positioned Florida as an unexpected presidential bellwether. The longevity of highly competitive national elections will continue to be primarily dependent on the partisan inclinations of newcomers.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The 1952 election established the foundation for presidential Republicanism in Florida. An evolutionary shift in regional national voting patterns was magnified in the state due to a transformed political landscape. General Dwight Eisenhower’s personal popularity, not his party affiliation, was viewed as the impetus for unprecedented regional success. However, subsequent elections have confirmed that the Grand Old Party’s Florida victory was not aberrant. President Eisenhower’s electoral victory was pivotal in establishing an ascendant Republican Party. The GOP breakthrough, in the Democratic “Solid South”, was facilitated by increasing urbanization and postwar economic prosperity. The 20th century’s steady in-migration gradually produced a regional and ethnic diversity that altered the state’s social and demographic foundation. These factors caused V.O. Key (1949) to conclude that Florida was “scarcely part of the South” geographically and culturally. Thus, the state was uniquely positioned to be an early adopter of two-party competition. Presidential Republicanism in the state was augmented by the proliferation of middle class whites and an influx of affluent Northern retirees and Cuban immigrants. These groups provided a base of support for Republican presidential candidates. Rapid population growth diluted traditional Democratic solidarity among natives and newly registered, increasingly Democratic, African Americans. Prior to Eisenhower’s victory, the state’s population had doubled in the preceding two decades reshaping the electorate.

The political implications of unabated population growth continued with a tripling of state residents from 1960-2000. The realignment of Florida’s population was caused largely by newcomers from New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio, and Illinois. By 1980,
Florida was the only Southern state where Northern transplants constituted a majority of the total white population. The “Sunshine State” had become home to two out of every five northern-born migrants living in the region (Black and Black, 1987). Since 1952, only three southern Democratic nominees have carried Florida’s electoral votes. The unique demographic profile of Florida placed it at the forefront Southern presidential Republican success. The zenith of GOP dominance occurred in 1980 when Ronald Reagan won Florida by seventeen percent. This was the largest victory margin for President Reagan in the South over incumbent Jimmy Carter. Despite Reagan’s 1980 Florida success, this performance was exceeded by his thirty percent reelection gap and George H.W. Bush’s twenty-two percent 1988 win. In five decades, the emergence of a perceived “safe GOP” bastion corresponded with a rapidly increasingly population which elevated Florida from being the smallest southern state to the fourth largest in the nation. The new megastate generated the largest, or among the biggest, Southern winning margin for all GOP presidential candidates in the 1970s and 1980s (Hulberry, Kelly and Bowman, 1991). Despite its growing electoral significance, the political reality forced Democratic presidential candidates’ to write off this perceived “noncompetitive” state. The assumption was that the pendulum of electoral dominance had shifted from the Democrats to the GOP in less than three decades.

As recently as 1990, there was a prevailing opinion that Florida had emerged as the safest Republican bastion among the ten most populous states. This perception has been undermined by recent election results. The shifting composition of newcomers in the last decade restored competitiveness. President Clinton’s narrow defeat in 1992 and subsequent reelection victory after mobilizing his resources to secure Florida contradicted
public perception. Since winning the Sunshine State was part of a national electoral landslide, it was unknown if it was an aberration or an indication of renewed presidential competitiveness. Political analysts viewed the 1996 results as inconclusive in determining the state’s long-term partisan trajectory. Despite a partisan reversal in the second half of the 20th century, the volatility of Florida’s electorate was captured by Clinton’s comfortable 1996 Florida victory margin aligned with the national popular vote. A weak Republican challenger and a centrist Democrat campaign provided limited insight into the longevity of this phenomenon. The culmination of an unexpected restoration of electoral competitiveness was confirmed by the state’s pivotal role in determining the 2000 winner.

As late as the summer of 2000, Democrats were pessimistic about recapturing Florida’s electoral votes. Once Texas Governor, George W. Bush, announced his candidacy there was a general assumption that Florida electoral votes would go back to the GOP (DeHaven Smith, 2005). The initial prediction was that his brother, Governor Jeb Bush, and the GOP dominated legislature, had the political capital and resources to secure the state. Early assessments of the Republican candidate’s strength miscalculated the underlying partisan trends of the continued influx of newcomers. Unlike the 1960s and 1970s, the demographic composition of newcomers began to favor the Democratic presidential candidates. Minorities accounted for two out of every three in-migrants in the 1990s (Judis and Teixeria, 2002). The explosive growth among non-Cuban Hispanics, Asians, and gains among the African American population contributed to the ultimate virtual tie. Contemporary Florida, with an ethnic and racial diversity mirroring the nation, began to align with national partisan trends in sharp contrast to the preceding era
of Republican domination. The 2000 election results were a testament to Florida’s prominent role in choosing presidential winners. The underlying sectional cleavages in the state are a microcosm of national political polarization. Cumulatively, the underlying voting patterns and registration are indicating an evenly split electorate.

During recent campaigns the national media and political strategists have focused on Florida’s emergence as the largest electoral prize. The high stakes of presidential contests in the state attracts frequent candidate visits and a barrage of advertisements. Florida’s competitiveness in recent elections makes it crucial to building a winning electoral coalition. The state’s position of influence is largely a recent phenomenon. Rapid population growth, a defining feature of the past half century, continues to transform the political landscape. In Florida, a steady influx of newcomers is rarely politically neutral. The composition of new residents produced a split among voters contributing to the state’s contemporary battleground status. Florida’s demographic profile has become more representative of the nation than any other large state. Competition for the twenty-seven electoral votes, one-tenth of those needed for victory, makes the state a vital component of the national campaign strategies. Successful appeals to “persuadable” voters are viewed as essential in this crucial battleground. The even split between Democrats, Republicans, and Independents inspire aggressive, capital intensive campaigns. Florida’s political balance is derived from an ethnic, racial, and geographical diversity that is aligned with national averages.

The significance of winning Florida’s electoral vote is not merely a component of its growing size. During the past decade Florida’s has emerged as a credible 21st century presidential bellwether. Steady in-migration has resulted in a population composition
well positioned to forecast political trends. The political struggle for Florida, evident in recent elections, has intensified due to its “swing state” status. In the 2004 election, regional trends favoring presidential Republicanism caused the candidates to largely write off the entire region, excluding Florida. The state that was at the forefront of presidential Republicanism is now a regional aberration. In sharp contrast to Florida’s battleground status, the presidential candidates largely avoided campaigning and allocating resources to the South by 2004. Victory margins in Florida in the past two elections are more aligned with the national popular vote patterns than regional results. The Sunshine State’s role as arguably the single most important “swing state” places it at the epicenter of modern campaigns. During the past half century Florida’s political evolution has been shaped by the erosion of its southern roots. Currently, the deviation from regional neighbors has caused it to become more aligned with other Sunbelt states culturally and economically (Colburn and deHaven-Smith, 2002). The vast majority of non-native Floridians create a political “melting pot” that is more representative of their places of origin. Traditional cultural roots and loyalty to elected officials are often left behind in hometowns in New York, New Jersey, Ohio, and foreign countries; newcomers are more likely to be influenced by mass media (Dye, 1998). Voters are becoming increasingly apt to favor candidates, independent of party affiliation, seen as promoting their self-interests. Newcomer induced erosion of Old South culture facilitated Republicanism that foreshadowed regional trends. Paradoxically, the continuation of steady in-migration has diminished GOP gains in recent years. Unlike previous waves of newcomers, Democratic leaning groups account for a majority of the newest residents.
The net impact of steady migration is contributing to Florida’s emergence as a national bellwether.

While Florida’s growth dynamics are similar to the melting-pots including Texas and California (Mormino, 2005), their political trajectories are different. These other Sunbelt states account for almost half of the electoral total necessary for election. Despite California and Texas’ larger populations, with a combined 88 electoral votes, these other Sunbelt states have been written off by the major parties early in recent presidential contests. Gore held substantial leads in California and New York while native-son Governor George W. Bush was in command in Texas (Dover, 2003). Campaign strategists are reluctant to allocate scare resources to perceived non-competitive states. The remaining top five most populous states, New York and Illinois, were also dismissed as Democratic locks by both parties in the 2000 and 2004 elections. Similar to 2000, Florida retained “too close to call” status throughout most of the 2004 campaign once again thrusting it into the national media spotlight. The combination of polls confirming that Florida’s voters were closely divided in the final weeks and the lessons of 2000 inspired unprecedented voter mobilization efforts. The uncertain outcome in Florida forced both candidates to divert resources to the Sunshine State. In 2004, the continuation of regional ideological polarization forced an earlier concession of the other four most populous states by the campaigns. The shrinking number of legitimate battleground states, memories of the landmark 2000 election, and polls indicating Florida’s “too close to call” status made Florida vital to winning the election. Numerous campaign visits and unprecedented levels of funds were committed to the state. Conventional wisdom suggested that the unprecedented tightness of the 2000 race
was not an aberration among a national electorate that was again “in play.” Still, the underlying fluidity of Florida’s electorate was being shaped by the demographic compositions of newcomers.

**Objective Statement**

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that have contributed to the contemporary political landscape of Florida. Presidential elections in the state are characterized by a balance of registered Republicans, Democrats, and an increasingly significant group of Floridians without partisan affiliation. The political dynamics are uniquely positioned to represent America’s future voting behavior. The state is viewed as “a microcosm of what the rest of the nation will soon become, as America itself grows more diverse, older-and more crowded” (Merzer, 2001). Florida’s disproportionate senior and Hispanic population foreshadows national projections for an older and more diverse population. Florida’s median age substantially exceeds the national average. However, the median age discrepancy will reflect the nation in fifteen years (Fielder and Smith, 1998). An older population is having substantial public policy ramifications thrusting the state into a leadership role. Florida is already facing Medicaid induced fiscal constraints that threaten to become national crisis without drastic action. The transient nature of past electoral change highlights the importance of assessing the sustainability of two-party competitiveness. During the second half of the 20th century, Florida served as a bellwether of political trends in the South. It is feasible that this role is likely to evolve into predicting national political phenomenon for coming decades.

Tracing the evolution of Florida politics from Democratic Solid South roots, to a core GOP presidential state, and its current “swing state” status is an integral component
of the study. In-migration has been a major factor generating expedited electoral change. In the south, Florida was among the first to trend towards presidential Republicanism. Since 1952, the Sunshine State awarded its electoral votes to the Democratic nominee only three times. Democratic presidential candidates were almost as inept as the GOP’s mere one victory from 1880-1952. Despite a similar inability to secure Florida’s electoral votes, “Solid South” Democratic victory margins in Florida are unlikely to be replicated. In sharp contrast, the past four elections highlight fluid voter preferences that have recently trended away from core presidential Republicanism status. The decisive role played by Florida in recent presidential contests is the impetus for this research. Electoral College strategy implications enhance this subject’s timeliness.

**Importance of Research**

Media, corporate, and academic demands for reliable real-time assessments of Florida’s political environment are rapidly increasing. The state’s significance in forming winning electoral coalitions has placed its voters under the national microscope. Also, the efficacy of campaigns direct targeting of persuadable residents is crucial to conserving scarce resources. The capital-intensity of advertising in the numerous media markets inherently consumes time, money, and effort that could be allocated to other battleground states. The volatility of the Florida electorate creates a moving target for political advisors. Relying on 1980s elections results, not real time population data, Governor Clinton’s aides miscalculated the state’s partisan profile and labeled it a “big challenge”; a classification which included the GOP locks of Kansas, South Carolina, and South Dakota (Hulbary, et al., 1994). In retrospect, the Clinton campaign failed to capture the tendencies of an overwhelmingly minority influx that favored Clinton. Population
growth induced shifts create a moving target for candidates. Fast growth states are inherently more vulnerable to partisan change. This phenomenon illustrates the necessity of forecasting outcomes in the context of interim developments, not merely compiling previous election returns.

During the 1990s, the partisan impact of migrants’ points of origin established the foundations for a restoration of presidential competitiveness. The fluid nature of the electorate has been maintained by the erosion of native political clout by the continuous arrival of new residents. Consistent with increasing national polarization, Florida’s voting patterns are increasingly reflecting a U.S. “red-blue” political divide. This phenomenon is attributable to the increasing regional and ethnic diversity of the vast majority of Floridians with limited political roots. Based on Florida’s political history, the longevity of this trend depends on the partisan inclination of newcomers. Partisan ties tend to be less intense among in-migrants. This phenomenon is captured by the recent proliferation of voters registering without major party affiliation. Limited political roots create a formidable obstacle to public policy-makers efforts to address the state’s economic and political realities.

**Conceptual Framework**

The decisive role played by Florida in 2000 signified a restoration of competitiveness after a century characterized by one-party dominance. The protracted certification battle resulted in a mere 537 vote margin (.009005%), and the subsequent allocation of Florida’s decisive 25 electoral votes to President George W. Bush placed the state in the international spotlight. The virtual tie in the 2000 election generated additional demand for comprehensive state specific analysis. Understanding the internal
dynamics of state specific political change is an important component of enhancing presidential outcome forecasting accuracy. The varied socioeconomic structure, demographics, and issue priorities among state voters explain discrepancies in partisan trends. Numerous studies on national voting patterns fail to account for the distinct regional and local dynamics. The implications of partisan affiliation and public opinion are clearly demonstrated in state election results (Erickson, McIver, and Wright, 1987). In the past two elections, the polarization of American voters is reflected in “red-blue” divide. National electoral maps reflect the solidification of core presidential regions for both parties. Regional culture can have an independent impact on voter behavior even when ideology, partisanship, race, and income are taken into account (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). Sectional dynamics explain the strong support for Democrats in the Far West, Northeast, and the Middle Atlantic. The Republican Party possesses inherent advantages in the Great Plains, Mountain West, and especially the South.

Partisan Conversion

Florida was at the forefront of increasing two-party competitiveness in the South. Population growth, urbanization, and higher incomes were the pillars of presidential Republicanism in Florida. The state was ahead of a regional curve that resulted in a shift from a Democratic monopoly to significant GOP presidential advantages. The regional popularity of Reagan inspired GOP realignment of Southern conservatives (Black and Black, 2002). Top-down Republicanism gradually penetrated local politics. Record white margins, facilitated by Nixon’s “Southern Strategy” inroads, were achieved by Reagan. Native partisan conversion due to Great Society backlash was complemented by the steady influx of newcomers with lifelong Republican ties. The conversion of voters
from Democrat to Republican has been a component of partisan change in the state. Since ideological conservatism was inconsistent with an increasingly liberal national Democratic Party many voters aligned themselves with a national GOP that represented their policy views (Craig, 1998). The changing post-Great Society umbrella of the Democrats, appeasing a Black constituency, did not represent conservative orientations.

The first evidence of political conversion occurred following the 1948 Dixiecrat revolt. The erosion of the solid support for Presidential Democrats corresponded with the increasing influence of South Florida newcomers in elections. Cumulatively, these evolutionary factors lead to the Eisenhower breakthrough in 1952. Unlike Goldwater’s controversial rhetoric, the adoption of less overtly racial verbiage by President Reagan increased GOP identifiers. Reagan’s high approval ratings enabled landslide victories in what his strategists’ classified as the vital “three megastate anchor of the Sunbelt in Texas, California, and Florida” (Black and Black, 1992). The popularity of Reagan in Florida was the impetus for soaring GOP identification and registration during his term. In addition to an ability to connect with White voters, his anti-tax, pro-military, and socially conservative platform resonated among Southern voters. Beck (1982) viewed this phenomenon as providing a structural foundation conducive to electoral realignment. Citing the state’s unique stabilization of GOP gains from the early 1980s Beck argued that divergent mass shifts in voting behavior were evidence of a systemic reorganization. Contrary to Florida trends, the national reversal of Republican advances was attributable to diminished popularity for President Reagan. Since the strongest gains occurred among the young, more inclined to political mobilization in new directions, this study displayed
foresight in asserting that Democrats’ overwhelming margins in the state legislature were jeopardized by this dramatic transformation.

Attempts to preserve Democratic majorities through redistricting only delayed the inevitable tide of Republicanism at the state level. Contrary to the competitiveness of Florida presidential elections, the GOP currently holds overwhelming majorities in the state legislature. The level of Democratic marginalization in the senate is unrivaled in the South. This development follows the general pattern of top-down Republicanism in the former Confederacy. Florida was a regional trendsetter for presidential Republicanism. This electoral restructuring created the preconditions for grassroots organizations that would enable statewide office gains, the legislature, and local offices. Florida’s many in-migrants with traditional GOP ties enabled further penetration of local offices than other states in the region. Based on contemporary federal and state level trends, other Southern states appear to be lagging the political trajectory established by Florida. While the GOP has gained significant advantages in local and state offices in Florida, presidential voting patterns indicate a restoration of competitiveness. This trend diverts from regional patterns. Other southern states still provide advantages for Democrats at the local level while the GOP has increasingly dominated presidential elections.

Black and Black’s (2002) studies indicated that the Democrats were forced into permanent minority status in the Southern electorate. According to political analysts the framework for this partisan realignment was rooted in failed campaign of Senator Goldwater in 1964 (Friendburg, 2002). The polarization of the national parties and the perception that the GOP had become the sole protectors of the conservative ideology
contributed to this dramatic political change. Partisan conversion is cited as a major factor in the realignment of white Southern voters. Skeptics assert that a true realignment has not occurred since the New Deal (Cowden, 2001; Craig 1998). The critics argue that this phenomenon is a issue-based racial realignment evolution, or even a dealignment. The dealignment theory is based on weakening partisan ties, a willingness to split tickets, and increased levels of voter apathy. The volatility of recent Florida election outcome displays consistency with this perspective. Recently, the divergence between state battleground status and the South has become more pronounced with the region providing decisive victories even in close national elections.

Unlike Florida, the Republican presidential top-down gains has yet to fully penetrate state offices in neighboring states. Alabama and Georgia voters still elect Democratic House majorities. This development is consistent with the hypothesis that states with rapid population growth experience greater political fluctuations than states that are less influenced by newcomers (Gimpel, J.G. and Schuknedt, J.E., 2003). Despite substantial population increases, Georgia and Texas have not experienced the level of in-migration from other regions. While other Southern states are bastions of GOP support, this dominance has not spread to the state legislature. This is especially true in Deep South states with the largest African American populations including Georgia, Alabama and Louisiana. Migration is a larger factor in Florida since generational replacement is mitigated by a steady flow of new retirees. This trend is likely to be exacerbated by the higher median age on the horizon due to the imminent Baby Boomer retirement.

The implications of minor shifts are magnified due to the fragile balance of political power in the state. Also, the rootlessness of non-natives and the inherent issue-
dominated senior agenda augments fluctuations between presidential elections. Initially, counties with large retiree populations were among the strongest Republican bastions in the state. While the large non-southern retiree populations contributed to post-war Republican strength in Pinellas, Palm Beach, and Sarasota in the 1960s, the most densely populated of these counties are trending Democratic in recent elections. Sarasota, Collier, and Lee County, on the other hand, the destination for typically more affluent Midwestern retirees, have remained reliable GOP bastions.

During the past four decades overall trends benefiting Republicans have subsided. The sectionalism of support for presidential candidates has shifted dramatically since 1960 with Palm Beach, Broward, and Volusia voters leaning towards presidential Democrats in recent elections. This South Florida concentration of support has been offset by a flight towards GOP presidential candidates in the more sparsely populated northern part of the state. Voter registration trends are a testament to shifting partisan bases of support within the state. Northern counties, including Clay, Escambia, St. Johns and Oklaloosa achieved double-digit gains in GOP registrants from 1988-1996. Broward, Pinellas, and Palm Beach, and Sarasota, on the other hand, experienced declines in Republican partisan affiliations (Craig, 1998). Traditional settlements of Northeasterners along the Gold Coast and Midwesterners along the Gulf are due to transportation induced precedents along I-95 and I-75, respectively. These selective retirees generally retain partisan ties from their home states. The implications of soaring Florida home prices may be a factor in reducing the flow of Midwest migrants. However, the state still possesses a comparative advantage for Northeastern retirees.
Generational Replacement

The dynamism of Florida politics undermines the long-term stability of partisan changes. The 20th century transformation of state demographics left a population that is a departure from traditional Southern populations. African American representation was eroded by rapid population growth. As a percentage of Florida’s total population blacks dropped from 34 to 14 percent between 1920 and 1980; this is a significant net 59% decline (Black and Black, 1987). This decline in the African American population is due to out-migration and the electoral dilution caused by rapid, predominately white, population growth during this era. The stabilization of this heavily Democratic population was a factor in enhancing Democratic presidential prospects. Florida and Texas currently are the only Southern states where Hispanics constitute the largest minority. Steady in-migration created an older, more ethnically and geographically diverse population. Migration induced generational replacement resulted in the acceleration of two-party competitiveness in all levels of government in Florida. The popularity of Florida as a retiree destination has mitigated the forces of this mechanism which has been the dominant cause of partisan change in many Southern states. The impact of generational replacement is largely confined to the counties of the Panhandle where there is still a majority native population.

Elsewhere in the South, the gradual partisan changes are attributable to the replacement of old Democrats with young Republicans. The slow transition is most visible in state elections. While Florida elected a Republican governor in 1966, Georgia and Alabama did not vote for a GOP governor until 2002 and the 1980s respectively (Gimpel, J.G. and Schuknedt, J.E., 2003). In Georgia, generational replacement is a
major contributor to growing GOP affiliation. The diminishing population of the New Deal generation strong Democrats combined with the political conversion of older white Georgians has further depleted the party. Substantial white GOP majorities ensure competitive state races despite the solidly Democratic African American voting bloc. The long period of time required for generational replacement creates a considerable lag in partisan shifts. Attrition of loyal FDR and Truman supporters leads to an electoral replacement of younger voters that cast their first ballots during the era of Republican domination in presidential elections. In Florida this process is prolonged by the replacement of these voters with voters in the same age group. Also, these retirees often adhere to the political inclination of their native regions. There is divergence between New Yorkers and Midwesterners who tend to settle along the Southeast and Gulf coasts, respectively. Unlike other Southern states, generational replacement and partisan conversion are not the key factor in transforming Florida politics.

Population Mobility

In-migration, both domestic and foreign, is having a profound impact on the trajectory of Florida politics. The contemporary racial, ethnic, and regional diversity in the state is primarily shaped by successive waves of newcomers. The demographic composition of the first post-World War II influx of newcomers provided the foundation for sustained two-party competitiveness in the state. Conservative suburbanites, wealthy retirees, and Cubans with the means to flee the Castro regime became core constituencies for the Republican ascendancy (Huckshorn, 1998). These gains were augmented by the Great Society backlash among many native white Floridians. While selective Midwestern retirees were inclined to support GOP candidates, the older Northeastern
settlers formed liberal bastions in Dade and Broward County (DeHaven-Smith, 1995). The demographic composition of the initial wave of in-migrants was vital to Florida’s evolution into a core Republican electoral state in the second half of the 20th century. Generally, the migrants from the north were more educated, affluent, and held higher-status jobs than the existing population (Brown, 1988). These predominately white professionals consisted of corporate managers complementing the growth of a native urban upper-middle class in the New South economy. The distinct groups of North to South migrants, retirees and younger professionals, augmented postwar socioeconomic restructuring in the state.

The role of newcomers as the primary basis of Southern presidential competitiveness is dismissed by some scholars favoring partisan conversion theories. Despite a reluctance to credit migration, the levels of Democratic support in the 1956, 1960, and 1964 elections are 35.1% for internal migrants compared to 68.6% for natives (Gimpel, J.G. and Schuknedt, J.E., 2003). This substantial gap indicates that, at the very least, realignment of the electorate was accelerated by new residents. Initially, presidential Republicanism was heavily concentrated in the urban centers of the state. Substantial Republican gains were visible as early as 1948 in these counties establishing “metropolitan Republicanism” in the postwar South. For example, from 1944 to 1948 GOP presidential support rose from 42 to 56 percent in Pinellas County (Sundquist, 1983). Pinellas, Palm Beach, Sarasota, and Broward Counties, popular destinations for northern retirees, provided some of the largest margins for President Eisenhower in 1952. The concentration of Republican voter registration gains in the fastest growing counties provides additional evidence that GOP strength continues to depend on steady in-
migration (De-Haven Smith, 1995). Assumptions that there is correlation between growth rates and Republican presidential success have been undermined by the demographic composition of newcomers over the past decade.

Recently, the rise in the proportion of Republican registrants has subsided while Independents have soared. The number of Florida voters with loose partisan ties has contributed to increasing competitiveness in the state. The split between Republican, Democrats, and Independents is consistent with the closely divided national electorate. In the 1990s, the explosive growth in the non-Cuban Hispanic population was a key factor in a restoration of Democratic presidential competitiveness in the state. Florida’s unique partisan balance is dependent on offsetting factions resulting in a net politically neutral outcome. Thus, the current split could be jeopardized by a migration stream favoring one party. Despite statewide balance, there is considerable variation among the regions of the state. Population growth has altered the politics of the Gulf Coast, South Florida, and Central Florida. Unlike a majority of the panhandle counties, population mobility has been the impetus behind the transformation of these counties. Partisan conversion and generational replacement are secondary forces in these areas due to relatively small native populations and large retiree communities.

Focusing on statewide electoral outcomes often neglects distinct sectional voting patterns. Inherent regional conflicts are formed between native and non-natives, the urban South and the Panhandle, and even between ideologically polarized Northeastern and Midwest retirees. The clustering of Midwestern retirees in the Southwest and Northeasterners in the Southeast create substate voter polarization that resembles the national “red-blue” divide. Voting behavior among these retirees are largely shaped by
the tendencies in their states of origin. Florida’s internal divisions are a microcosm of American regional partisan trends. The Panhandle, excluding the college-dominated counties of Alachua and Leon, reflects the remnants of Old South political culture in Florida. In presidential contests, North Florida provides the largest margins for Republican presidential candidates in the state. Significant populations of retired Northeasterners and minorities typically generate substantial margins for Democrats in three most densely populated Southeastern counties. The fastest growing regions of the state, which is partially attributable to a smaller population bases, are places where economically conservative retirees provide solid support for Republicans. Deep partisan divisions in these regions are in sharp contrast to the dynamism of Central Florida. Since these bastions of reliable support essentially offset, the I-4 corridor often plays a decisive role in determining the state’s winner. The proliferation of non-affiliated voter registrants in metro Orlando, Tampa, and Daytona Beach has ensured the area is “ground-zero” for targeted political advertising in the state. Florida’s reputation for electoral volatility is attributable to the proliferation of independents and its consistently changing population.

**Thesis Organization**

The thesis is organized in the following manner. Chapter two traces the evolution of Florida’s role in postwar presidential contests, emphasizing the applicability of a bellwether label. Chapter three outlines the ideological foundations of contemporary public opinion. Chapter four details the methodology utilized in this study and examines the empirical findings. Chapter five discusses the implications of demographic changes and internal issues on voting patterns in the state.
CHAPTER 2: EVOLUTION OF FLORIDA’S ROLE IN ELECTIONS

During the first half of the 20th century Florida politics was characterized by sustained one-party dominance. For over seventy years, the only competition was within the Democratic Party in statewide elections. The solidly Democratic South was rooted in hostility to the Republicans relatively progressive agenda during Reconstruction. Unlike the “party of Lincoln”, the Democrats were able to present themselves as the sole protectors of regional cultural and racial history. These elected officials were bound by a shared commitment to the preservation of white supremacy through restoring the racial caste system (Black and Black, 2002, Paulson 2000). Unlike their Northern peers, the Southern Democratic Party had limited ideological consistency. In this era, Florida’s Southern heritage dominated the political environment. At the turn of the century, Florida’s demographic landscape was shaped by a distinct regional perspective shared by post-Civil War settlers from Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina (Colburn and DeHaven-Smith, 1999). In 1920, the state’s African American population of 34 percent was comparable to Alabama and Georgia.

While blacks accounted for a significant percentage of the population, they were unable to influence election results due to barriers erected by the ruling class. Florida enacted a white primary, the eight ballot box law and was the first state to adopt a poll tax to discourage black voting. The eight ballot box law was especially successful. Based on high rates of black illiteracy, the law required voters to cast eight separate ballots and put each one in the correct ballot box. Thus, they were systematically disenfranchised. The Southern Democrats implemented election laws that severely limited minority
participation. A unified white electorate presented a significant obstacle to achieving two-party competitiveness.

After reconstruction, GOP opposition was effectively a non-existent factor in Florida politics. Republican ineptitude was pervasive in local, state, and national elections. This weakness culminated with the GOP’s failure to obtain five percent in a general election; the threshold necessary for legal status. Subsequently, the Florida Supreme Court ruled on the applicability of the election statute. In 1921, the justices concluded that, “having gone out of existence in the eyes of the law…it does not know such a party as the Republicans; it does not know its officers, it has no control over its internal affairs” (Klingman, 1984). As a result, formal recognition of the Republican Party technically ceased to be a legal organization due to an election law passed by Democrats. While the high court decision was a setback to GOP attempts to form a viable alternative for voters, this decision merely aligned political and legal realities. The institutionalization of the Democratic Party in the region had already ensured one-party dominance. The landmark court ruling, which declared important GOP political functions illegal, failed to prevent Republican nominee Herbert Hoover from winning five southern states. Hoover’s largest southern margin of victory was in Florida.

Pervasive anti-Catholic sentiment against Hoover’s opponent, Democrat Al Smith, trumped partisan affiliation in this election. Based on prejudice, Hoover’s aberrant victory failed to alter the underlying political dynamics. The state’s electoral votes returned to Democratic nominee in the next five elections by lopsided margins.

Except for 1928, the Republican presidential nominee failed to exceed one-third of the state’s popular vote in every race prior to 1948. Democrats carried Florida’s
electoral vote in seventeen out of eighteen post-Reconstruction elections. The South’s cohesion made the region a vital component of electoral strategies and gave it a central role in defining the national party (Paulson, 2000, Phillips 1969). Southern Congressional representatives and convention delegates extracted concessions from external leadership due to the electoral bloc’s collective significance. The Democrats were granted extraordinary veto powers that enabled the South to disapprove of presidential candidates and mold national policy. Regional priorities, especially racial conservatism, were assumed to be protected by internal agreements. As a result, federal intervention on sensitive racial issues did not occur until the mid-20th century (Paulson, 2000). The formation of a Democratic monopoly was facilitated by partisan unity in the South. This movement was predominately a white phenomenon due to widespread disenfranchisement of African Americans and the poor. The Democratic Party was hardly a public institution in the South; it was exclusively white and its leadership was overwhelmingly upper class (Moreland, et. al 1986). This system’s inherent lack of accountability and checks and balances prolonged maintenance of the Old South’s status quo. The pervasiveness and institutionalization of one-party politics is unlikely to be duplicated in American politics.

**Restoration of Two-Party Competition**

During the past six decades there has been a dramatic transformation in Florida’s political landscape. The shifting ideological foundations of the national political parties have contributed to erosion in Democratic support among Floridians. In 1948, the relatively aggressive civil rights platform adopted by the Democratic National Convention and President Truman was the impetus for a reassessment of party loyalty.
(Black and Black, 1992). The symbolic importance of Truman’s announcement was that it breached an era of accommodation by liberal Northerners on civil rights issues. This controversial program inspired considerable backlash among white Floridians superseding other issues that favored Democrats (Goodnough, 1974). Concerns that this was a first step to desegregation exposed a splinter in the party’s Southern base. Voter anxiety caused unprecedented third party defections in a few Southern states. Assumptions that solidly Democratic Florida would be “in play” proved to be premature after Truman’s decisive victory. A symbolic GOP campaign presence forced Truman to divert resources from traditionally competitive states. In addition, Governor Dewey’s performance in fast growing urban areas indicated GOP momentum. Pinellas and Broward County gave the Republican 56 and 51 percent of the vote respectively despite the dilution of major party support by the Dixiecrat ticket headed by South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond and Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright (Phillips, 1969). This election failed to reverse Democratic dominance. However, this contest was part of an evolution towards two-party competition.

Defections of native, racially conservative, voters coincided with rapid population growth to enhance GOP prospects. In 1948, the backlash generated by Truman’s racially liberal platform did not translate into a rise in the GOP vote. Many racially conservative voters in the Panhandle supported the states’ rights candidate, Strom Thurmond. For example, the Dixiecrat received the same percentage of the vote as Dewey, 26 percent, in Duval County. The native vote was overshadowed by the rapid population growth in south Florida. At mid-century there were profound changes in the state’s underlying partisan structure. In-migration was the leading force shaping the state’s demographic
characteristics during the 20th century. From 1900 to 1950, there was a quadrupling of the population with an astronomical increase of 80% from 1950-1960. Newcomers created the foundation for political change. During this period the steady influx of white, middle-class professionals and retirees translated into GOP gains (Scicchitano and Sher, 2003). The conservative tendencies of the new voters were reflected by the rise of two-party competition in densely populated counties. Northerners eroded the political clout of a native population that was molded by southern traditions. Since Florida was one of three southern states with an urban majority at mid-century (Black and Black, 1987), the basis for one party politics was undermined. The emergence of major cities was in sharp contrast to the domination of rural interests at the dawn of solidly Democratic south. By 1950, Florida bore little resemblance to the sparsely populated state with a large African American population that believed a unified electorate was essential to preserving the status quo. In fifty years Florida went from being the least populated Southern state to joining Texas as the only mega-states in the region.

The New Deal altered the composition of the Democratic Party. The South had to share its power with a new base of African American and labor support. The preferential treatment given to the South by the national Democrats was weakened by demographic, economic, and political change (Paulson, 2000). After the Great Depression, the electoral costs-benefits of maintaining the regional partisan alliance were weighed. Consequently, the liberalization of the national party became inconsistent with Southern white ideology. Distinct ideological factions were splintering the party. This legislation was often inconsistent with the beliefs of non-southern members of Congress unwilling to alienate their core constituencies. The Democratic Party had a 2/3 rule requiring their presidential
candidate to win a substantial majority of the delegates to get the nomination. This gave the South a veto over the prospective nominee. Michigan, Ohio, and New York were perceived as being fertile targets for partisan gains due to growing black populations. Many of these African Americans had migrated from the south pursuing industrial jobs and a better quality of life. The out-migration of blacks coincided with Northern migration to the Sun Belt. Newcomers’ electoral clout began to offset the continued loyalty of natives to the Democratic Party. In 1950, 30% of Florida’s residents were born outside the South and these non-natives accounted for substantial portions of the population in most peninsula counties (Black and Black, 1987). The newcomers accelerated the transition to two-party competition. Presidential elections provided the first indication of the rise of Republicans in Florida.

The proliferation of a white middle class in the state undermined generational ties to the Democrats. Higher wage occupations made these voters more receptive to the GOP’s fiscal conservatism. The diversification of Florida’s workforce was firmly entrenched when other southern states moved away from agricultural dominated labor forces. Experienced professional workers possessed a comparative advantage as the demand for skilled occupations increased in the New South. The emergence of a modern economy increased the demand for skilled workers. Consequently, the alignment of the state with national average wages established the foundation of a large middle class. However, the rest of the South’s transition extended the region’s distinctive underperformance. Many new professionals severed ties to a Democratic Party due to financial self-interests. The relevance of a party that was designed to protect agricultural interests and ensure white supremacy was seen as detrimental to financial success. The
levels of urbanization in Florida, the highest in the region at mid-century, altered the underlying political and social foundations that had been the basis of a one-party system.

V.O. Key (1949) observed that apart from voting Democratic and location the state’s profile is unique. Florida’s top regional ranking in per capita income, moderation in racial views, and a population that was only half native are cited as evidence of the distinctiveness of Florida in *Southern Politics in the State and Nation*. Partisan ties that reflect states of origin inherently diminish prospects for a continuation of one-party dominance and native loyalties to local candidates. The post- New Deal evolution in Florida politics diminished Democratic strength. Despite overwhelming voter registration advantages, the rapid urbanization of the electorate meant that sustaining metropolitan advantages was sufficient for the GOP nominee to offset the opposition’s rural strongholds. By mid-century, a profound electoral transformation in Florida established the economic, demographic, and societal preconditions for two-party competitiveness.

**1952 Election: Eisenhower Carries Florida**

The significance of Dwight Eisenhower’s Florida electoral breakthrough was that he reversed traditional voting patterns. The 1952 election served as a turning point for presidential politics in the state. It established a trajectory of presidential Republicanism in the state spanning almost four decades. President Eisenhower utilized a candidate centered approach to market his campaign to Floridians. Democratic voter registration advantages of 10:1 meant Eisenhower’s GOP label had to be downplayed during the campaign. While some observers were surprised by General Eisenhower’s decision to aggressively campaign in Florida and the South, this investment paid substantial
dividends. The General’s military approach was displayed in his criticism of the GOPs defeatist approach to Southern politics that “one side owned them and the other side did not know how to invade” (Black and Black, 1992). The Republican establishment was convinced that Southern inroads were feasible. During the Solid South era GOP candidates, including the heavily favored Governor Dewey in 1948, followed precedent by writing off the entire region as a lost cause. Eisenhower’s aggressive campaign strategy forced Democratic advisors to defend a core region. Republican landslide defeats during the Solid South era were a testament to the unity among whites in the region. The assumption that one-party electoral dominance was so pervasive that a collapse would require sustained opposition was undermined in 1952. In reality, a replication of the Democrat’s 49 percent in 1948 was the threshold for Eisenhower. Dixiecrat voters in 1948 had already severed generational loyalty to the Democrats.

Lopsided one-party outcomes in the preceding 18 elections placed the South at the periphery of American politics. The dominance penetrated all levels of regional governance. Consequently, the opposition made only made token appearances in the former Confederacy during the general election campaign. Marginalization of previous GOP nominees in the region failed to deter General Eisenhower. The Republicans directed a full-scale campaign that emphasized cleaning up the “mess in Washington” and highlighted issues of southern interest including allocation of tidelands oil proceeds, foreign policy, and civil rights (Zehnder, 1973). The reference to corruption highlighted a theme of his outsider campaign. These rallies attracted Democrats and independents drawn by a charismatic war hero. Republican voter registration was approximately 5 percent in Florida at the time. Therefore, the limited political base would force
Eisenhower to attract over 40% of the Democratic vote. The General’s popularity and nonpartisan appeal in the South enabled Democrats, termed “Eisencrats”, to overcome the stigma associated with voting for a Republican. Governor Stevenson’s campaign, on the other hand, sustained atypical regional losses. Subsequent elections provided evidence that Eisenhower’s victory was not merely based on his personal popularity, but the start of sustained presidential Republicanism in Florida.

Black and Black (2002) assert that General Eisenhower was “a human triggering mechanism for the first Republican breakthrough in the South.” The candidate-focused campaign highlighted personal qualities as opposed to partisan affiliation. In Florida, the pundits were uncertain about the long-term implications of the rare GOP victory. It was feasible that Eisenhower’s national landslide created a deviant state result. The election victory provided only minor coattails for state and local candidates. However, the applicability of standard theories of partisan change was questionable due to the unprecedented combination of steady rapid population growth and economic vitality. The Florida electorate positioned the state to benefit from restored two-party competitiveness. During the Solid South period, there was limited incentive for the federal government to consider Florida’s demands when allocating resources. The perception that Florida elections are competitive provides additional motivation for national elected officials to prioritize state concerns. In addition, the emergence of Florida as a legitimate battleground promotes active campaigns that emphasize proposals that enhance state prosperity. Eisenhower’s breakthrough established a GOP precedent. During the next four decades, Florida reversed its partisan trajectory in presidential elections.
Southern Democratic Coalition Fractures

Florida was among four southern states that defied assumptions of a Democratic “lock”. Intense patriotism and the expanding middle-class’ economic conservatism were pillars of Eisenhower’s success in these states. Also, Virginia, Texas, and Tennessee had the four lowest percentages of African American population. In the Peripheral South Eisenhower had his highest support in urban districts with few blacks, precisely the areas where voters were less concerned about maintaining the status quo through the Democratic Party (Black and Black, 2002). Still, the Eisenhower wins deviated from a pattern of landslide victories for the Democratic nominees.

The Deep South, on the other hand, remained an impenetrable bastion. White voters in these states were generally obsessed with maintaining the racial caste system. The solid support for Stevenson in these five states with the highest African American percentages was evidence of continued hostility toward the GOP. The issue of civil rights received the highest priority among these voters. In 1948, the racial conservatism in South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama prompted them to cast their electoral votes for a third party Dixiecrat, Strom Thurmond. The 1950s elections provided evidence that these voters remained loyal to the Democrats even in national landslides. The political stability in the Deep South was in sharp contrast to Florida dynamic electorate.

Migrants Provide Bastions of GOP Support

A strong correlation existed between Republican gains and the level of population growth in a county. President Eisenhower relied on large urban margins to offset Panhandle weakness. However, Stevenson’s north Florida margins were offset by
increasing percentages of the state presidential vote in South Florida. Dade accounted for almost one of four ballots cast while Broward, Brevard, Orange, and Palm Beach counties generated 13% of Florida’s presidential votes cast (Phillips, 1969). The General exceeded seventy percent of the vote in Pinellas, Orange, and Sarasota which were among the state’s fastest growing during this time. Stevenson, on the other hand, swept all counties north and west of Alachua. Despite native resentment of an increasingly liberal national Democratic party their “yellow-dog” loyalty remained intact. Sectional patterns of GOP support confirmed that the presidential Republican breakthrough was facilitated by rapid population growth. The fluidity of the Florida’s electorate is attributable to an evolving demographic profile.

Eisenhower’s decisive victory was predicated on the urban concentration of traditional GOP constituencies from outside the South. Migration theory indicates that newcomers are mainly well educated, white, and upwardly mobile (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2001). This pattern of migration is not politically neutral. The composition of different waves of migrants typically favors one party. By 1960, almost 60% of the state’s residents were from outside the state, the highest percentage in the U.S. Therefore, a distinctive Southern vote had been eroded. The geographic origins of residents supersede the impact of culture in defining individuals’ ideological perspective. Contrary to a common fallacy, in-migrants are not a random subset of the population (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). The retiree from New York or Ohio is different from residents remaining in these states. Generally, the newcomers are more affluent than other voters in their states of origin.
There is evidence to support that the non-natives socioeconomic status accelerated partisan change from a solidly Democratic state. The southward shift in Florida’s population center had implications beyond the state legislature’s redistricting. This phenomenon signified a shift in the balance of electoral power. Divergent from south Florida, the Panhandle remained a figurative extension of Alabama and Georgia geographically and politically. They had little in common with many of the new residents in Miami, St. Petersburg, and Fort Lauderdale. The sectional differences in Florida reflect interstate variations found in the Northeast, Midwest, and Southern states. This geographical diversity is caused by in-migrants retaining the partisan affiliation of their birthplaces. Typically, due to traditional flows from different states to specific metropolitan areas their assimilation into a new political culture is marginal. Scholars believe that migration has limited impact at the destination due to the socialization of migrants by established residents encouraging conformity in the new community (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2001). Since Florida lacks a collective statewide identity their partisan ties are unaffected.

*Florida Emerges as Anchor of Southern Republicanism*

Steady Northern in-migration eroded Democratic advantages in presidential elections. This political transformation provided the impetus for the GOP carrying Florida’s electoral votes in three consecutive elections. Increasing levels of urbanization and industrialization in Florida expanded the middle class. Higher incomes inspired professional voters to be more receptive to the economic conservatism. Financial self-interest was viewed as a higher priority than civil rights issues among the managerial class of the New South. The development of a large urbanized middle class was seen as
the socioeconomic foundation of two-party competitiveness. In 1950, Florida and Texas were the only states in the region meeting this prerequisite (Black and Black, 2002).

By mid-century, the foundations of presidential Republicanism were in place in Texas, Florida, and Virginia. In 1947, these states had the three highest per capita incomes and were highly urbanized (Key, 1949). In addition, African American populations in these states were below the regional average. As a result of the political landscape, these states were well positioned to be the first to divert from the one-party Southern system. In Texas, three consecutive victories by Democrats in the 1960s reversed Eisenhower’s electoral gains achieved during the prior decade. The restoration of Democratic presidential victories undermined labeling Texas as solidly GOP. The influence of native son gave the Democrats a comfortable margin with President Johnson at the top of the ticket in 1964 and slim victories in 1960 and 1968.

For nine elections, excluding contests involving regional nominees, voting patterns in Florida and Virginia heavily favored Republican candidates. The momentum created by Eisenhower provided the foundation for partisan realignment in Florida and Virginia. Florida and Virginia were later considered the Southern anchors of presidential Republicanism. GOP nominees failed to carry the Sunshine State’s electoral votes only three times during this era. Since 1950, the sole GOP victory in Virginia was part of Johnson’s national landslide. Conservative presidential dominance in Virginia was overcome just once during this period. By 1984, the perception that Florida and Virginia had become impenetrable Republican presidential bastions caused campaigns to write them off early. The dramatic transformation was cited by Richard Moe, aide to Democratic candidate, Walter Mondale, who acknowledged a Southern challenge but
believed a heavy black turnout could make every state but Florida and Virginia a potential target (Stanley, 1986). These sentiments made active campaigns in these states rare during the general election. In Florida, four decades had elapsed after Eisenhower’s breakthrough victory before the state’s electoral prize was viewed as “in play.” Currently, unlike Florida, Virginia’s streak of GOP support has continued.

1960 Election: Reflecting National Divide

The 1960 election was the first time that a Republican lost the national election while carrying Florida’s electoral votes. Tennessee and Virginia were the other southern states’ that became the first to award their electoral votes to GOP nominee who lost. Vice President Nixon’s two percent margin of victory, approximately forty-seven thousand votes, was Florida’s second closest election of the second half of the twentieth century. In 1992, President Bush beat Governor Clinton by a 1.9 percent difference, about one hundred thousand votes. The 1960 election outcome in the Sunshine State mirrored a tight national race decided by a mere two-tenths of a percent, less than 110,000 votes. Alabama and Georgia, on the other hand, maintained their Solid South patterns and gave Kennedy a substantial victory. For three elections, an alignment with U.S. voting patterns was occurring in Florida. This was in sharp contrast to the Solid South era in which Democrats would receive lopsided state margins regardless of their national performance.

The 1960 campaign was characterized by the first modern aggressive campaign in the state. State polls, similar to national surveys, indicated a race that was often “too close to call.” The integration of Florida into the electoral mainstream was a precursor to the “nationalization” of southern politics (Cowden, 2001). The penetration of the New
Deal issue coalition did not occur until the next election in the other eight former Confederate states. Despite Nixon’s success in Florida, the GOP was forced to reassess their “southern strategy” following the election. The lesson of Nixon’s defeat was that future Republican candidates would benefit from not trying to match the Democratic Party’s racial liberalism (Meyer, 2002). This realization increased the GOP’s receptiveness to Senator Goldwater’s unrivaled conservatism on race and many other issues. Unlike Goldwater’s clear message, Nixon’s attempts to advocate state’s rights in southern speeches was undermined by his running mate’s and the GOP platform’s commitment to racial equality. Voters were ultimately confused by the inherent contradiction of Nixon’s strong civil rights record and his calls for the states rights status quo. This ambiguous policy produced limited success among both African Americans and southern conservatives. In Florida, voters based their decision on Nixon’s positions on crime, social security, and economic conservatism. As a result of racially moderate views among the growing majority of non-Southern residents the GOP positions on non-racial issues were of paramount importance.

*Urban Republicanism*

Texas, Virginia, and Florida had the demographic composition and economic infrastructure that created a New South dynamic for these states by 1960. They were trendsetters among the eleven former states of the old Confederacy in developing modern institutions. Florida ranked among the top three Southern states in median years of education, median family income, and non-Black population percentage (Phillips, 1969). Leadership in these metrics is largely attributable to 3/4th of Floridians residing in urban areas. The distinctiveness of the state’s vote had been eroded by steady in-migration and
an economy based on service-oriented commerce and technology occupations. The native, rural Northern population was being overwhelmed by Florida’s peninsular growth. Correspondingly, the state emerged as the leader in “metropolitan Republicanism” in the postwar South (Sundquist, 1983). The socioeconomic foundations of peninsular Florida have provided an advantage for Republican candidates. Broward, Pinellas, and Dade counties provided substantial net popular vote margins for Eisenhower in both 1950s elections (Phillips, 1969). The limited margin of error for both candidates in 1960 forced Nixon to commit resources to maintaining these pivotal metropolitan centers. Unlike the Democratic base, the GOP supporters were geographically concentrated in the large South Florida cities. This enabled Nixon to target his resources for voter mobilization, advertising, and campaign stops. Florida’s high level of urbanization enables candidates to overcome landslide defeats in North Florida by building substantial margins in the largest counties. Substantial victories in Pinellas, Orange, and Volusia counties were the cornerstones of Nixon’s Florida victory.

Republican success in urban Florida overwhelmed the ticket’s poor performance in North Florida. Voter sentiment in the Panhandle reflects a more stable electorate than the newcomer dominated peninsula. In Apalachicola, hostility towards Republicans was based on long standing perceptions of the party. Voters in this small town still blame Hoover for their struggles resulting from the depression and just see Nixon, and every other GOP candidate, as another Hoover (Boyles, 1960). Many residents in densely populated counties, on the other hand, share a common political rootlessness. They are not blinded by Southern tradition and often have weaker partisan ties derived from their home state. Excluding Dade and Hillsborough, the state’s largest counties were all
carried by Nixon. Three consecutive GOP victories were attributable to maintaining partisan advantages among the traditional core voters inhabiting these areas.

The emergence of presidential Republicanism in Florida was based on industrialization, urbanization, and in-migration.

In the midst of regional solidarity, the Sunshine State’s uniqueness was been shaped by a partisan transformation facilitated by rapid population growth. Following the Second World War, the state’s political trajectory diverted from the region. Florida’s evolution from a traditional southern role, emphasizing regional heritage, to a greater alignment with the Sunbelt State accelerates partisan trends. Urban Republicanism signifies a new balance of political power in Florida. Natives are not capable of single-handedly determining election outcomes without support from other groups.

*Active Campaign for Florida’s Electoral Votes*

Polls indicating close race in Florida prompted candidates to allocate resources to the state. In the closing week of the 1960 election, a Florida survey proved that the state was “in play” with Senator Kennedy possessing a slim 51 to 49 percent advantage. The poll gave Nixon a 56% majority among Protestants, 52% among females, and 61% among seniors (First Research Group, 1960). Reflecting the increasingly tolerant electorate only one in four voters admitted that Kennedy’s Catholicism would influence their decision. The presence of nominees in the final weeks of a campaign was a rarity for Floridians. However, the 1960 election was shaping up to be the first highly competitive two-party election of the 20th century. Both candidates targeted their appeals to cater to different constituencies.
Discussion of contentious racial issues was often avoided by the candidates in the South. For example, Kennedy attacked Eisenhower’s for the token representation of blacks in the Foreign Service in northern speeches; the next day the lack of African American representation was omitted from a speech in Miami (Meyer, 2002). Even in racially moderate South Florida Kennedy continued a pattern of deemphasizing party platforms with relatively liberal civil rights agendas. The newcomers viewed racial issues in the context of their impact on the economy. While attempting to attract crucial black support in Northern cities, the threat of white backlash in the South curtailed presenting the issue. Multiple Kennedy campaign stops in Florida included a Miami Beach speech highlighting his anti-Castro position. In Tampa the Senator directly appealed to the Hispanic population by stating the U.S. wasn’t adequately funding Latin American nations and blamed Eisenhower’s policies for the rise of Castro (USPO, 1961).

Nixon invested heavily in television advertising to build support in the state. Florida received unprecedented attention from the candidates’ as a result of the perception that the state was balanced and had the potential to be decisive in an expected tight election.

*Continuity of Native Voting*

Senator Kennedy’s decisive edge in North Florida enabled him to carry 43 counties in his losing effort. Except for Alachua, Kennedy managed to sweep the counties in the Panhandle. Partisan loyalty to the Democrats remained strong among the overwhelming population of native residents in the panhandle. Their voting patterns were still closely aligned with the traditional South. Higher African American populations and the absence of rapid population growth made this area more resistant to political change than South Florida (Gimpel and Scknecht, 2003, Black and Black, 1992).
The Panhandle counties were the most “Southern” part of Florida. These residents were detached from the metropolitan areas of Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and St. Petersburg.

The divergence between North and South Florida exposed a significant cleavage within the state. Essentially, this sectional divide split “Old and New South Florida.” The Kennedy vote came from rural, slow growth, younger and lower income areas of the state. From 1956 to 1964, the Democratic nominees receive just 39% of the vote from non-natives compared to 67% among native Floridians (Gimpel and Scknecht, 2003). The success among Florida-born residents is diluted by the inclusion of the realigning 1964 contest. Kennedy’s poor performance in the Florida’s high growth metropolitan areas was an ominous sign for Democratic prospects. Population growth continued to dilute the remaining bases of their support. However, the 1964 election reversed sustained gains by the GOP in metropolitan Florida.

1964 Election: Divergence from Border States

The traditional “Southern vote” in Florida is reduced by the majority of its population born outside the region. Also, a smaller African American population distinguishes the state’s electoral behavior from the Deep South. Consequently, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina were the last unconquered remnants of the solidly Democratic South. The Republicans did not win any electoral votes in the Deep South for twenty two consecutive elections. Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater’s candidacy fundamentally changed presidential voting patterns in the Deep South. His conservatism on racial issues mobilized many southern white voters that had been alienated by federal intervention. Goldwater successfully capitalized on backlash over the passage of a broad civil rights bill. The Senator’s vote against the bill, even
though it was based on libertarian property rights views, sent a strong signal to the Deep South. The pervasive disenfranchisement of blacks was obvious due to Goldwater receiving 87 percent of the Mississippi vote in 1964. At the time, less than seven percent of Mississippi’s African American voting age population was registered. In some black belt counties there was no African American participation prior to passage of the Voting Rights Act (Phillips, 1969). Duplication of this overwhelming margin was improbable since pending civil rights legislation would prohibit systematic suppression of Black turnout in subsequent elections.

Senator Goldwater was designated as the favorite to win Florida’s electoral votes due its streak of presidential Republican victories. Goldwater failed to capitalize on the underlying political dynamics that were advantageous to his prospects in the state. Florida’s new Republicanism failed to generate enthusiasm for Goldwater’s anti-civil rights platform (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). Perceived extremist views alienated many of the urban voters that had supported both Eisenhower and Nixon. Traditional Republican strength among the increasingly vital metropolitan electorate diminished as a result of Goldwater’s controversial proposals. In Florida, Goldwater’s underperformance of 46% in cities was not overcome by winning a majority of the non-metropolitan vote due to the state’s urbanized population. Implementation of the southern strategy ultimately fell short due to urban areas accounting for two-thirds, rural one-third split of the electorate, respectively (Cosman, 1966). This performance reversed a trend that promoted Republicanism and Democratic dominance in the rural areas of the state. The election, ultimately decided by two percent reinforced the significance of Florida’s senior
voters. Substantial in-migration of northern retirees, combined with their high turnout rates, was beginning to be a decisive factor in elections.

Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) has had a profound impact on shaping the Southern political landscape. In Florida, the native white partisan backlash was concentrated in the Panhandle. The 1964 election highlighted considerable differences between the candidates on this issue. President Johnson was a proponent of the legislation and believed that no state had the right to deny African Americans their constitutionally protected right to vote. Senator Goldwater’s opposition to this bill generated unprecedented enthusiasm for his campaign in Dixie. Supporters saw him as an advocate for their segregationist agenda. The single issue focus on the VRA among white southerners was the primary reason for the GOP’s unprecedented advances in the Deep South. African Americans’ adamant opposition to this civil rights platform caused them to support President Johnson by overwhelming margins. The cohesion among blacks proved to be decisive in the close Florida election. They experienced limited disenfranchisement relative to the rest of the region and their alienation with this GOP policy caused many to become lifelong Democrats. Goldwater’s opposition to the VRA and perception that he was a champion of segregation permanently alienated many African Americans. The meaning the 1964 election had for Republican strategists was that open racism practiced by Goldwater’s supports must be decried, denied, and denounced (Mayer, 2002). This realization caused future candidates to incorporate subtle racial messages to appeal to southern conservatives.
Southerners that agreed with Goldwater’s VRA position were often faced a dilemma since they disagreed with many of his other policy positions. Electoral results in the Peripheral South indicate that a large segment of white voters had a broad range of concerns beyond racial issues (Cosman, 1966). Despite favorable GOP partisan trends in these states, Goldwater managed to alienate many of the voters that had supported Eisenhower and Nixon with extremist rhetoric. Also, blacks that had split their support between parties were concerned about Goldwater’s civil rights position. Similar to other Peripheral South states, President Johnson was aided by overwhelming African American margins. Prior to the passage of the VRA, Florida and Tennessee had the highest level of black participation in the South with 60% African American registration (Davidson and Grofman, 1994) The participation of African American voters preserved President Johnson’s narrow margin of victory in the state. Since a relatively high percentage of blacks were already registered in Florida, the implementation of the VRA did not have an impact comparable to Mississippi and Alabama. However, this civil rights legislation permanently altered Florida politics.

Social Security

Issues including social security, healthcare, and the economy tended to be priorities among these voters. In Florida, Goldwater’s desire to reform Social Security was adamantly opposed by the numerous retirees in the state dependent on the checks. The Republican nominee managed to undermine the momentum that Eisenhower and Nixon established in the state. Still, the designation of Goldwater as an early favorite was a departure from the state’s one-party system that existed less than two decades before. *Time* assessed the performance of the GOP campaign in Florida, “Goldwater
looked like an easy winner. Then he criticized Social Security in a state full of retired people and derided the moon race despite heavy U.S. space spending in Florida” (Black and Black, 1992). These statements displayed a blatant disregard for issues that were of paramount importance in Florida. Perceptions that Goldwater opposed Social Security generated anxiety that mobilized older voters to vote for Johnson. This election highlighted the growing electoral clout of seniors. A focus on social security, and later Medicare, enhanced the volatility of older voters in Florida.

Goldwater’s underperformance in Dade, Broward, Volusia, and Pinellas was indicative of the backlash precipitated by his controversial entitlement views. In cities including St. Petersburg, a city with a large northern senior population, the declines in Republican support were substantial. From 1960-1964, staunch presidential support in Pinellas County was diminished with the GOP’s worst decline occurring in Pinellas County (Phillips, 1969). The precipitous 64% to 45% drop in support between the 1960 and 1964 elections reflected the backlash inspired by his campaign speeches. After these comments, there was a perception that President Goldwater would threaten both the senior quality of life and eliminate space programs bringing high wage jobs to Florida. According to polls, his inept campaign on entitlement issues adversely impacted public opinion. Voters favored Johnson by a 63 to 10 percent margin when asked, “Who would do a better job of handling Social Security?” The Democrat even had an 18% advantage among Republicans (Kesel, 1968). Consequently, the social security issue alienated many voters’ that served as the base of Republican success in three consecutive wins.

Future candidates had benefited from the Goldwater case study so they could avoid the catastrophic implications of threatening Social Security solvency.
Controversial proposals to cut the costs of entitlement programs were risky propositions for candidates hoping to carry Florida. Social Security was truly the “third rail” of Florida politics, touching it comparable to political suicide. Goldwater expressed his adamant opposition to expanding the federal government to assist the elderly with health costs; polls indicated that this was another unpopular position with 50% of southern whites supporting Medicare compared to 42% opposition (Black and Black, 1992).

Many of the northern retirees who were critical to previous winning coalitions in three previous GOP wins were not receptive to these extremist views on entitlement programs. While seniors may have agreed with the 1964 GOP platform on other issues, Goldwater’s views on entitlement programs were the focus for these voters.

This contest highlighted the significance of the aged electorate and Social Security and “Medi-scare” became an integral part of Florida campaign strategies. Senior concerns about the solvency of Social Security proved decisive in the election outcome. Goldwater’s proposal to let younger workers opt out of Social Security was viewed as jeopardizing the solvency of the system. Many GOP leaning Florida retirees were unwilling to forfeit or sustain cuts in their monthly checks (White, 1965). Gains among the sizeable older population allowed Democrats to capture the state’s fourteen electoral votes for the first time since 1948. Unlike previous GOP success in metropolitan peninsular Florida, Senator Goldwater was able to achieve unprecedented success in the Panhandle. Southern culture still had a dominant influence on this area’s political landscape.
Change in Regional Voting Patterns

GOP electoral gains in five Deep South states occurred despite President Johnson’s national electoral sweep. Outside the region, the Democrat managed to carry every state except the Senator’s home state of Arizona. The 1964 election was viewed as a transforming election that was the impetus for the transformation of Southern politics and marked a turning point for Republicans (Asher 1992, Craig 1998, Paulson 2000). This pivotal election altered public perception on distinctions between the two parties. Goldwater’s candidacy established the national GOP as the protector of states’ rights. Civil rights liberalism in the Democratic platform began to erode their segregationist image in South (Aistrap, 1996). Despite the national landslide achieved by President Johnson, the GOP inroads into the South established conditions for a realignment. Florida’s results reflected the concentrated influence of the Old South in the state’s northern counties. The sectionalism in Florida provided a national microcosm of this election’s results on a state level.

For the first time, the panhandle generated solid support for the Republicans. The Democrats were only able to win seven of the thirty-six counties north and west of Ocala. In 1968, Governor George Wallace, the third party segregationist candidate, confirmed the geographic partisan divide in the state. Wallace, while barely exceeding 13% of the national vote, carried 27 of the 36 counties in “Old South” North Florida. At this juncture, north Florida was characterized by minimal socioeconomic change, dominant rural interests, and continuing one-party allegiance (Stern, 1986). Most of the panhandle maintained a partisan and social composition that mirrored Georgia and Alabama. Politically, they appear to be extensions of Border States with little in common with
densely populated, increasingly diverse Peninsula. Thus, this area’s voting patterns had little resemblance to rapidly growing, urbanized south Florida. The existence of “two Florida’s” was visible in these elections. Goldwater was the first GOP candidate to demarcate the intrastate divisions politically by thoroughly penetrating the panhandle.

President Johnson’s urban majorities, the support of a growing African American voting population, and inroads among traditionally GOP retirees became the foundation of his winning electoral coalition. These groups offset the political shift among native Floridians providing the incumbent with a narrow Florida victory. Johnson’s net margin of 91,461 in Dade County compensated for an approximately 43,000 deficit in the rest of the state (Dauer, 1984). Despite winning only twelve of thirty-one southern counties Johnson carried some of the fastest-growing counties. These victories included Hillsborough, Dade, and Pinellas counties where Johnson received 59, 64, and 55 percent of the vote respectively (See Table 4). The shift commencing with this election altered the state’s political landscape. Thus, the parties realized a need to change their geographic target areas in the state. This election signified the culmination of an evolution in regional voting patterns that commenced with the internal Democratic Party split of 1948.

**GOP Exceeds National Performance**

The Republicans entered the 1964 election with a streak of carrying three consecutive elections. Florida was seen as increasingly fertile ground for GOP presidential hopefuls. In just over a decade, the reversal in the state’s presidential voting patterns had been so dramatic that the GOP began to expect victory. Internal confidence was so high that, “few Republicans in Florida understood how Barry Goldwater failed to
carry their state….by the mid-1960s Florida had become a paragon of presidential Republicanism” (Klingman, 1974, pg. 155). While predictions of a new emerging GOP electoral stronghold may have been premature, the relative narrowness of Johnson’s victory displayed that the political landscape favored Republicans. Contrary to the first half of the 20th century, the state was not written off early. The Democratic Solid South had been essentially dissolved as a result of Goldwater’s unprecedented penetration into the five remaining electoral bastions. In Florida, the underlying sectional partisan changes meant that no region of the state was guaranteed for one party.

Florida remained competitive in the midst of a national landslide that gave President Johnson over 61% of the national popular vote and a 486-52 margin in the Electoral College. Goldwater was able to reduce the margin to 2.1% in Florida by gaining “yellow dog” panhandle Democrats. The Arizona Senator’s only gains over Nixon came in cities like Pensacola, Jacksonville and Tallahassee in northern Florida (Phillips, 1969). These voters were most likely to be attracted to his anti-CRA position. In Florida and Virginia, the Senator won a majority of the white vote yet lost due to Johnson capturing the entire black vote plus a substantial minority of whites (Black and Black, 1992). Despite being labeled as an ideological extremist, the Goldwater campaign’s competitiveness provided a blueprint for future Republican success. This election converted many strong Democrats to vote for Republican presidents. The Reconstruction heritage had built an illogical feeling in many of the state’s older sections against voting for a Republican candidate (Doherty, 1952). This election set a precedent that made GOP presidential voting acceptable among this traditional Democratic
stronghold. Two-party presidential competitiveness emerged in north Florida as a result of Goldwater’s inroads.

The refinement of Goldwater’s “southern strategy” paid enormous dividends for the GOP in subsequent elections. Richard Nixon executed on a plan that kept the Deep South in the GOP column without alienating vital consistencies in Florida. In 1968, Nixon built considerable leads over Democrat Hubert Humphrey in the major urban areas of Florida (Phillips, 1969). The focus on racial conservatism enabled a third party segregationist, Governor George Wallace, to amass over 40% in areas north of Ocala. By 1972, a coalition of economic and social conservatives enabled Nixon to sweep all 67 Florida counties. This unprecedented level of GOP success reflected a recapturing of the mainstream Republicans that had rejected Goldwater’s extremist positions.

The perception of Goldwater as a straight shooter reflected his down-to-earth style. Critics, on the other hand, saw the tendency to shoot from the hip as a worrisome trait for an American president (Friendenburg, 2002). The Senator was dedicated to his conservative principles and openly criticized his predecessors more moderate stances. Eisenhower and Nixon, who became extremely popular figures in Florida politics, were openly criticized by Goldwater for accepting the New Deal consensus (Bear, 2000). His outspoken criticism of all government economic intrusion jeopardized many programs that were popular among Floridians. Unlike the Deep South, maintenance of the racial status quo did not trump Goldwater’s controversial position on other issues among Florida voters. Goldwater’s “southern strategy” specifically targeted the states with influxes of northerners and Midwesterners including Florida, Texas, and Virginia. The GOP nominee believed his message of lower taxes and less government would resonate
in the New South (Friedenburg, 2002). Despite the harsh criticism he received after the GOP’s landslide defeat, Goldwater’s loss has had significant implications on the trajectory of Florida and national politics. The zenith of the movement the Senator created culminated with the landslide elections of Reagan. The incorporation of more subtle rhetoric reduced the edge of the “new right” proposals. The penetration of the panhandle was a crucial component of building winning Republican presidential coalitions in Florida.

1980s: Reagan Realignment?

The zenith of 20th century Republican strength occurred in the 1980s. In a mere three decades a dramatic transformation of Florida’s electorate occurred. A one-party Democratic South had been replaced by a political landscape dominated by presidential Republicanism. The integration of “Reagan Democrats” further diminished the opposition’s competitiveness in Florida. Economic libertarianism, Reaganomics, appealed to the state’s expanding base of fiscal conservatives. Also, the focus on “law and order,” a refinement of Nixon’s theme, was a popular component of the 1980s Republican platform. Reagan had learned from Goldwater’s inability to appeal to diverse constituencies within the Florida electorate. The California Governor appealed to retirees by stressing his commitment to Social Security and focused on anti-Castro policies in speeches to south Florida’s large Cuban American population (Craig, 1988). His ability to cater to influential electoral groups in the state built a formidable coalition. Reagan’s largest southern margin of victory in 1980 occurred in Florida despite incumbent President Carter residing in neighboring Georgia.
The Republican surge in Florida and throughout the South has been a phenomenon studied by scholars extensively. Attitude changes towards the political parties were altered as a result of President Reagan’s popularity in the state. Reagan’s astronomical levels of success were facilitated by the evolving demographic profile of the state. Selective northern migrants, a partisan conversion among native Floridians, an erosion in the African American proportion of the electorate, and a significant Cuban American population accelerated GOP presidential gains in the state. The composition of Florida’s electorate enabled Reagan to achieve his highest regional margins of victory in the state. His legacy provided his vice-president, George H. W. Bush, an opportunity to build upon the vast majority of Southern whites that favored GOP presidential candidates. The foundation of continued Republican dominance in Florida was firmly established when Bush, Sr. became the nominee in 1988. The pillars of GOP presidential success included lower taxes, welfare reform, anticommunism, racial conservatism, and integrating religious conservatives (Airstup, 1996). In addition, the GOP nominees were able to successfully label their opponents as “tax and spend” liberals during this decade. Centrist Democrats were the only candidates able to diffuse GOP attacks on taxes. Florida, remaining at the forefront of partisan alignment, produced the second highest margin of victory for the president in the South.

Republican Presidential Stronghold

The magnitude of GOP presidential gains signified a reversal of partisan trends in the states over three decades. The one-party South has been replaced by Republican dominance on the presidential level. Beck (1982) asserted that Florida was in the midst of a partisan realignment. The changes in partisan affiliation were pronounced in public
opinion polls and occurred independent of national ideological preferences.

Realignment, Beck asserted, would be highest among young voters in Florida. While the 18-29 age groups displayed the highest net percentage gain from 1980-82 in Republican Party identifiers, the change failed to achieve statistical significance compared to older voters. Also, the youngest eligible voters continued to have the smallest percentage of GOP partisan affiliation. Craig (1998) disputes assumptions that realignment has occurred in Florida. He attributes partisan change to in-migration, conversion, and mobilization of younger voters. Newcomers in the modern era had been predominately traditional, non-Southern Republicans. Also, there has been a conversion from the Democratic Party to the GOP among many native adult Floridians. However, this change in voting patterns, especially at the presidential level, has limited ideological implications. Many of these Floridians were conservatives that found the national Democratic Party failed to represent their views on important issues. Instead, Craig views the state’s post- World War II political trajectory as trending toward dealignment. This is evidenced by the proliferation of independent voters and party affiliated voters willing to cross-over and support the opposition.

The Republican presidential stronghold that existed in the second half of the 20th century emerged as a central base for national GOP strength. Florida’s rapid population growth diminished its similarities with other southern states during this period. While the Sunshine State’s political evolution has augmented its “scarcely part of the south” (V.O. Key, 1949), the state has become more aligned with other Sun Belt states. Lee Atwater, GOP strategist for Reagan’s reelection, focused on their electoral significance in the GOP base; “The Sun Belt has the lion’s share of electoral votes, and the three mega-state
anchor is Texas, California, and Florida….if we nailed down the West and South with those three states as an anchor that we could spend the rest of the campaign challenging him on his turf” (Black and Black, 1992). The crucial role of Florida was not solely attributable to its 21 electoral votes. According to Atwater, Florida served as a regional bellwether that had an unrivaled predictive capacity. With the exception of regional Democratic nominees, Florida was usually written off before Labor Day in the last three decades of the 20th century. Allocation of campaign resources and the presence of state presidential organizations after the primaries were rare. Contrary to two distinct electorates, demarcated by the frost line, national politicians began to view Florida as becoming an increasingly dependable part of the GOP electoral coalition (Stern, 1986).

Unlike the Kennedy vote pattern, Johnson, Senator McGovern and Mondale drew their support from diverse, urban and high status counties. The ineptitude of the Democratic presidential nominees, commencing with the McGovern shutout, was followed by Mondale and Dukakis managing to win only one county, Gadsden, the states only majority-minority county. Democratic success was primarily limited to African Americans and the poor. These elections confirmed assumption that Florida had become a lost cause. Thus, Republicans were not forced to allocate scarce resources to the state. In 1988, President George H.W. Bush was able to build on the unprecedented levels of white support generated by Reagan. Florida was at the forefront of preserving the Reagan legacy, providing the second highest margin of victory in South, which was just a half percent less than South Carolina.
The implementation of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) had a profound impact on minorities and white electoral coalitions. The Democratic association with the Great Society legislation inspired a significant backlash among white southerners. Implementing this legislation resulted in higher levels of participation and support among African Americans. Consequently, the growing share of statewide vote provided by the minorities has resulted in the Democratic Party becoming more liberal. Conservative white southerners, on the other hand, have dropped steadily as a proportion of Democrats since this bill’s passage. This is partially due to alignment of conservative ideology with the GOP. Over the past fifty years, the mass base of the one-party system in the South has been altered. The share of Democratic support among whites has declined from 95% to 52%, blacks have increased from 5% to 38%, and Hispanics and other minorities comprise 10% of the electorate (Black, 2004). The dramatic restructuring among the major parties’ coalitions are having major implications for how campaigns are run. While the Republican base of voters has become more dispersed throughout the state, the Democratic core supporters have become geographically concentrated. Reagan’s personal popularity had a major role in the GOP gains that occurred during the 1980s.

White Protestants were the foundation of the Democratic Solid South. Religious groups, liberal and conservative, have consistently had a significant impact on the region’s politics. The southern conservative ideology on racial, economic, and moral issues is primarily derived from religious institutions. Also, the social order emphasized maintaining the status quo of racial segregation. Racial fractures began to erode the linkage between the Democratic Party and the Protestants due to the civil rights
movement originating in African American churches in the 1950s and 1960s. Beginning in the late 1970s, the seeds of the contemporary Christian Right were planted by evangelical churches in the South (Bullock and Rozell, 2003). Reagan’s emphasis on abortion, family prayer, and family values were components the GOP platform’s social conservatism promoted by the church. The landmark Roe v. Wade decision prompted many apolitical religious conservatives to become involved in the political process. The integration of the religious right has not been as crucial in Florida as other southern states. By 1998, one-third of Alabamans, consistent with the regional average, were considered evangelical Protestants in sharp contrast to 11% of Floridians (Hood, et. al. 2004). Republican mobilization of the religious right is diminishing the traditional Democratic political ties among the lower income segment of this group.

The conversion of working class evangelicals to the Republican party is another component of their formidable state coalition. Despite only being a relatively small portion of the electorate, these voters have provided the GOP margins comparable to African American support for the Democrats. Thus, the mobilization of both of these solid blocs is essential to partisan success in Florida. According to exit polls, the religious right accounted for 17% of the electorate and favored Dole by a more than 3 to 1 margin. In 2000, Bush received an overwhelming 82% among this group. By 2004, the margin among white conservative Protestant Florida voters reached its modern peak. White conservative Protestants accounted for 15% of the electorate and favored President George W. Bush by a 95/5 margin. African American dropped to 12% of the electorate, compared to their unprecedented 2000 levels, and favored Senator Kerry 86/13 (CNN, 2004). The integration of evangelical Protestants has been widespread in the rural
Panhandle and has solidified the gains achieved by Reagan among native Floridians. While some of these voters are still registered Democrats they tend to vote for GOP presidential candidates.

*Composition of Newcomers*

The combination of internal partisan shifts to the GOP, particularly during Reagan’s term, complemented favorable in-migration trends. The mid-1960s influx of conservative suburbanites, wealthy retirees, and Cubans fleeing Castro established the base of the modern presidential Republican Party in Florida (Huckshorn, 1998). In the 1970s and 1980s white migration growth rates doubled that of African Americans diluting the electoral clout of the black population. During this period Florida politics and growth were inseparable due to the steady flow of in-migrants (Dauer, 1984). The composition of newcomers accelerated the transformation of the state from the Solid South to GOP presidential ascendancy. While partisan conversion and generational replacement occurred gradually, the political dynamics of Florida were constantly evolving due to rapid population growth. The extensity and intensity of partisan change were magnified by the unique characteristics of its population.

The growth in the Cuban American population was another factor in the ascendancy of the Republican Party in Florida. In the early 1980s Cubans accounted for a vast majority of the immigrant population. GOP support among these residents exceeded non-immigrants by 8 percent in the 1976, 1980, and 1984 elections (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). The high turnout and strong GOP tradition among Florida’s Hispanic population made them a cornerstone of presidential Republican ascendancy in the state. During Reagan’s presidency the state’s Hispanic population remained largely Cuban.
The conservatism of this politically Dade County concentrated group is based on their origins as middle- and upper-class economic and political refugees (Stokes, 2003). Florida’s substantial Cuban population aligned itself with Reagan’s aggressive foreign policy platform that was consistent with its anti-Castro sentiment. Unlike Democratic leaning Hispanics in other Sun Belt states, the Cuban Americans in Florida are a Republican stronghold. Reagan continued GOP efforts, started by Eisenhower, to mobilize Hispanic voters with the funding of Florida-based VIVA during the 1984 reelection campaign (Connaughton, 2005, Alexander & Haggerty, 1987). VIVA was a group formulated to mobilize Hispanic and increase their share of this vote. Outreach programs favored an incremental approach to building Hispanic GOP support.

The pinnacle of 20th century GOP presidential dominance in Florida resulted from a combination of partisan conversion and in-migration. Reagan played a crucial role in 1980s presidential dominance in the state. The President realigned conservative southern whites sharing his values, concerns, and priorities. At the end of his tenure, 60 percent of regional conservative whites classified themselves as Republican which was a 50 percent increase in just eight years (Black and Black 2002). This change in partisan affiliation was derived from Reagan’s enormous personal popularity which gave him approval ratings over eighty percent among this group. The cumulative effect of these two forces was to create the highest margin of victory for his vice president, Bush, Sr., among the ten most populous states. The gains enabled the GOP nominee to carry Florida’s 19 electoral votes, the 7th highest number in 1980, while devoting scarce resources to other states. The astronomical population growth continued unabated. By 2000 the Sunshine State was the fourth largest in the nation. Contrary to the 1980s political landscape, the
partisan fluidity of newcomers produced an unexpected battle for the state’s 25 electoral votes. Assumptions that Florida was an impenetrable GOP bastion proved outdated just four years after Bush, Sr. won by a 22 percent margin over Governor Dukakis.

2000 Election: The “Perfect Tie”

The fluidity of Florida politics was exemplified by the transition from a solid presidential Republican state to its role as the decisive electoral battleground. Florida, similar to the nation, had become so divided that the outcome was a virtual tie. The state had been in the “too close to call” column for weeks, but no one could have anticipated that a statistically insignificant 537 votes, .009005%, would determine the inhabitant of the White House. Rapid population growth continued to dominant force shaping the state’s demographic landscape. These changes have resulted in Florida’s contemporary partisan balance. The state’s modern role in presidential politics is heavily influenced by an older population, Hispanics becoming the largest minority, and the lack of a collective statewide identity. Florida’s restored competitive environment reflects a trend toward national microcosm status. The importation of residents from Latin and South America, the Northeast and Midwest has produced racial and ethnic diversity more reflective of the national population than any other state (MacManus, 2004). Balanced Voting patterns in Florida produced an American presidential bellwether. However, the longevity of this distinction is susceptible to minor electoral changes.

From GOP “lock” to Battleground Florida

For several decades it appeared that Florida had become solidly Republican on the presidential level. Since 1952, the state had only awarded its electoral votes to the Democrats in three elections. Florida became the strongest state in an increasingly
Republican South in the 1980s. The state remained an anchor for GOP success in both the South and the Sunbelt. This political characteristic forced many Democrats to write of the state as a lost cause. This era of unprecedented success created a perception among campaign aides that, “Florida has become an almost impregnable Republican bastion in presidential elections” (Steed, et. al. 1991) and the *American Political Almanac* called it “the most Republican of the ten largest states”. Therefore, Florida was usually cast aside in developing Electoral College strategies. However, Florida’s top-down presidential Republicanism became an incremental process. Prior to 1984, the Democrats maintained a stronger grassroots organization than the GOP. (Dauer, Angelo, 1984). The lack of a Republican “farm team” was a factor in the three decade lag in GOP penetration of state and local offices. The presence of state presidential campaign organizations was virtually non-existent in the period of Republican dominance.

The perception that Florida was a non-competitive state continued in the 1990s. In 1992, Democratic strategists decided to essentially disregard a state that had provided the incumbent a landslide margin in the previous election. Ultimately, Bush’s narrow 1992 margin of victory was a precursor to modern competitiveness. President Clinton’s 1996 victory provided evidence that Democratic victories were obtainable in the state. Clinton was able to capitalize on favorable demographic trends in the state. Vice President Al Gore hoped to build upon the Clinton victory and made a commitment early in the campaign to pursue the fourth largest electoral prize. Despite the vice president’s state visits and media funding, the Texas Governor maintained a sizeable advantage in the state governed by his brother until the summer. Due to a successful Democratic convention the state became a major battleground and retained that status through the fall.
Population Growth/Diversity

Steady population growth continued to define Florida politics in the 1990s. From 1990-2000, the 1.7 million net in-migrants (Scicchitano and Scher, 2003) generated a 23 percent increase in the state’s population. These changes were not politically neutral. Unlike the previous half century, the GOP was not the primary beneficiary of growth. Non-Cuban Hispanics, Caribbean blacks, African Americans, and senior citizens from the Northeast exceeded the rate of growth among core Republican groups in the 1990s (De-Haven Smith, 1995). Increases in electoral clout among these groups, especially minorities, favored the Democrats. According to census figures, the state’s population of Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics all fall within five percent of the national average. While Florida’s ethnic and racial diversity is a microcosm of America, it also has a geographic balance that is unrivaled.

The dynamism of the state’s electorate is attributable to the erosion of regional roots. Florida has diverted from a southern trend towards presidential Republicanism. These voting patterns, dominated by partisan conversion and generational replacement, are still visible in the few remaining majority native counties. However, the impact of strengthening GOP support among native white Floridians is diluted by the overwhelmingly non-southern migrant population. Since less than a third of Florida residents are native, the state’s political shifts have been expedited. According to 2000 Census data, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, and Illinois are the five largest states of origin for in-migrants. While New York accounts for 1.5 million residents, the combined total of the other four states is approximately 2 million. The unique balance between Northeasterners, Midwesterners, and Southerners has produced an “electorate of
visitors” (Dye, 1998; MacManus 2004). The political clout in the state has been gradually transferred from natives. Consequently, Florida has diverted from the regional trend due to integrating the tendencies of newcomers. Alignment with the geographic composition of the U.S. is especially relevant in an era of regional electoral polarization.

**Campaign Intensity**

The battle for Florida differed from 20\(^{th}\) century elections that were typically conceded early in presidential campaigns. Vice President Gore decided early in the campaign to compete for Florida despite pre-convention polls indicating a substantial advantage for the Republican, George W. Bush. Initially, the GOP assumed that Florida could be won with minimal effort due to historical voting patterns and an ally in the state house. Thus, the four most populous states would be split and the electoral battlefield would shift to the Midwest where Republicans believed Gore was vulnerable on his environmental record (DeHaven-Smith, 2005). After the Republican convention, polls indicated that Gore faced a deficit that made Florida victory a long shot. Thus, Gore eliminated popular Florida Senator Bob Graham from consideration as his running mate.

However, his selection of Senator Joseph Lieberman may have paid comparable dividends in the state (Tauber, Hulbury 2002). Lieberman was able to mobilize a sizeable Jewish population and compensate for Clinton’s moral indiscretions. Republican attempts to consolidate the battlegrounds in the Midwest failed to come to fruition. This was due to the state emerging as “too close to call” following the Democratic convention.

Florida was considered a battleground state in a competitive national election for the third time in over a century. The sole exceptions were the 1960 and the 1976
the last one featuring Governor Carter of neighboring Georgia. Florida’s significance as the largest state gave it a prominent role in 2000 election. While states including New York, Texas, North Carolina, and Tennessee would see little evidence an election was occurring, Florida received a disproportionate amount of candidates’ time, money, and effort even among battleground states (Abrahamson, et. al., 2002). Numerous campaign stops and the allocation of an unprecedented amount of campaign funds verified that Florida had become the most important electoral prize. Governor Bush allocated more funds to Florida than any other state reflecting its role as a “must-win” for the GOP. Bush’s expenditure of $14.5 million dollars on Florida television advertising, was slightly higher than the Democrats $10.1 million dollars, second largest nationally, but this was partially offset by political group issue ads favoring Gore by a 7:1 margin (Magelby, 2002). “Americans for Job Security”, a pro-GOP organization, competed with Democratic groups, including Planned Parenthood and the NAACP to promote their candidate’s policies. The presence of a liberal third-party candidate, Ralph Nader, diverted Democratic resources destined for Florida to typical Democratic strongholds that remained competitive. These electoral “swing states” included Washington and Wisconsin where the Gore campaign had to commit 5.4 and 3.7 million dollars respectively. The allocation of scarce resources and campaign time proved to especially important in this election. Both candidates and their running mates visited the state numerous times. At these rallies, traditional senior issues including Medicare and Social Security were frequently emphasized in the state with the oldest median age.

Alienating seniors by proposing Social Security or Medicare cuts, lessons from the 1964 and 1996 election, is comparable to political suicide. Dye (1998) observes
that, “in no other state is Social Security and Medicare so politically charged; it is truly the third rail of Florida politics: ‘touch it and you will die.’” Despite most presidential candidates adhering to this rule, Bush advocated a plan to privatize elements of Social Security and Medicare. The Democrats tried to exploit Bush’s plan to overhaul entitlements to gain senior votes. During a September rally, Gore assured Florida voters that Medicare would be secured and promoted the expansion of preventive test coverage without deductibles (Sack, 2000). In addition, the vice-president highlighted the implications of extracting funds from Medicare to finance Bush’s tax cut. These convoluted proposals made sound-bites tailored to Florida’s eleven media markets difficult. Social Security became a greater policy concern than Medicare among Florida voters (VNS, 2000). Bush’s clear commitment to privatization exacerbated Gore’s inability to articulate a Medicare alternative. A substantial advantage in state advertising expenditures for Bush allowed him to diffuse allegations that his prescription drug benefit was insufficient, and concerns that Medicare funds would be used for discretionary spending, not placed in a “lockbox”. Based on proportional distribution of exit poll data, Bush received an advantage exceeding 64,000 votes among residents over 60. This is a relative landslide considering the ultimate razor-thin outcome. These voters accounted for over a quarter of the total electorate. As evidenced by the results in Florida, the composition of the state’s selective retirees generates support for plans viewed as being in their financial self-interest. The perception that senior issues dominate Florida elections results in candidates’ tendencies to overemphasize their importance in the state.

The disproportionate influence of senior voters in Florida’s contemporary political landscape had public policy implications. Renewed presidential competitiveness
had a significant role in the politics of behind the expensive prescription drug benefit. The battle for Florida’s 27 electoral votes, “contributed to an enactment of a prescription drug benefit that kept getting larger due to the political bidding process” (Shaviro, 2004). The escalation of cost estimates for this program places an additional burden on Medicare system at a time when preparations ought to be devised to accommodate Baby Boomers retirement. Perhaps, the concentration of seniors in Florida and other electoral battleground states ensured more favorable parameters for a liberal plan implementation. Medicare and social security are largely classified as Florida special interests despite the national implications of federal policy (Edwards, 2004). The emergence of Florida as a “swing state” meant that the its special interests would inherently receive preferential treatment. Even small groups would benefit since minor tilts in the electorate can alter the partisan balance.

2004 Presidential Contest Implications

The high expectations generated by the 2000 outcome placed Florida in the spotlight in 2004. A vast majority of state polls indicated that the state was once again “too close to call.” The stakes were increased further due to Florida receiving two additional Congressional districts. The twenty-seven electoral votes now account for ten percent of the electoral votes necessary to win. As a result, Florida was seen as a central component in both candidates’ strategies. The state’s significance in the 2004 election required another capital intensive campaign. Electoral volatility requires full-time polling and an emphasis on focus groups. In addition, ten distinct media markets are responsible for the astronomical costs associated with Florida campaigning (MacManus, 2004). In 2004, Florida and Ohio emerged as the key electoral battlegrounds.
Terrorism, the economy, and the Iraq War were viewed as the key issues during the 2004 election. The political environment was a striking departure from the peace and prosperity that characterized the 1996 and 2000 elections. Nationally, Senator Kerry attempted to exploit the job losses that occurred during the first term of Bush’s administration. While this strategy resonated in northern battlegrounds like Ohio and Michigan, Florida was less inclined to vote based on pocketbook issues due to its relatively low unemployment rate. Kerry hoped that traditional Democratic strengths including entitlement protection, education, and health care would propel him to victory in Florida. Also, mobilizing the base through opposition to the Bush’s Iraq War policies was viewed as critical to Kerry’s strategy. The efficacy of these tactics was undermined by the marginalization of issues that were traditionally Democratic strengths.

Internal factors were also brought to the forefront during the 2004 campaign. The unprecedented four hurricanes that made landfall in the state emerged as an important issue for Florida voters. Relief trips enabled the President to display his leadership and compassion. More importantly, Bush was able to expedite delivery of billions in aid and immediately call up over four thousand troops (Silva, 2004). The challenger, on the other hand, was essentially powerless during this time and displayed caution in not undermining presidential powers during a state crisis. The concentration of the storms along the vital I-4 corridor had shaped the competitive landscape in the state. President Bush promptly visited the areas after each storm and committed federal aid to the region (Goodnough, Van Natta 2004). Republican gains in Central Florida, with the state’s highest proportion of independent voters, may have been increased by the federal and state response to the hurricanes. Governor Jeb Bush was widely praised for his handling
of the storms which indirectly benefited President Bush. According to exit polls, an overwhelming 87 percent of Floridians that approved of the government response to the hurricanes and 57 percent of these voters supported the incumbent (CNN). The ability of the President to coordinate relief efforts with his brother paid dividends for the Republicans. The hurricanes had a significant role in molding voter behavior. Based on observing the political implications of inaction by Bush, Sr., the President and the Governor were cognizant of the backlash associated with slow response.

The effectiveness of the 2000 Democratic mobilization operation was viewed as a crucial to their success in Florida. Liberal groups were able to overcome the advantages possessed by conservative interests. Dedicated Republican operatives, determined not to repeat the mistakes of 2000, built a comprehensive voter mobilization effort. Contrary to efforts funded by liberal 527 groups, the GOP relied on volunteers to get out the vote (GOTV). The enthusiasm among statewide Bush volunteers generally exceeded the dedication among the Democrats paid workers. The Republicans emphasized getting conservative voters to the polls that rarely participated. The massive turnout in Okaloosa, Santa Rosa, and Escambia extended GOP victories by 60,000, 193,000 ballots in entire Panhandle, votes over 2000 margins (Wallsten and Glionna, Smith 2004). Escambia County overcame a direct hit by Hurricane Ivan and still had the highest turnout in the state, 85 percent. Gains were not limited to the Panhandle. Partisan gains in voter turnout were most dramatic in peripheral metropolitan areas.

Senator Kerry focused on preserving Democratic strength in the state’s large cities. He made numerous campaign stops in Miami, Tampa, Orlando, and West Palm Beach. This reflected a strategy that emphasized building margins in the Democratic
urban base. In addition, these areas received an overwhelming portion of funds from Democratic sources. The 10 to 1 advantage in staffing and greater overall funding by liberal groups failed to translate into a GOTV advantage (Smith, 2004). President Bush, on the other hand, focused his efforts in suburban and rural areas, especially the fastest growing counties of the state. Republican stars including the President and Rudolph Guiliani visited Pasco County at a crucial juncture in the campaign. Their appeals to preserve traditional values and eradicate terrorism resonated among the largely white, middle-class and religious leaning residents of this county (Goodnough, 2004). The success of Bush in the areas targeted by his campaign was a testament to the success of his strategy. Pasco County, carried by Gore in 2000, provided an 18,481 vote margin for Bush in his reelection campaign. Success in the outlying suburbs, or “exurb”, resulted in a net advantage of 684, 588 votes for Bush which almost double his statewide margin (Smith, 2004). While Kerry maintained margins comparable to Gore in urban and suburban areas, Bush’s gains in peripheral and rural counties produced a relatively comfortable win for the incumbent. Mobilization of voters in peripheral metropolitan counties, neglected in previous elections, was crucial to Bush’s Florida performance that surpassed expectations.

President Bush’s ultimate vote differential surprised many observers of Florida politics. The fluidity of the Florida’s electorate produced an outcome that defied many analysts’ predictions. Cumulatively, the nine major final presidential election polls indicated a .6% advantage for Bush (UWSP, 2004). The discrepancy between the polls and the election results reflect greater mobilization among Bush supporters. In retrospect, the efficacy of the Republican GOTV efforts was decisive. Bush carried the twenty-
seven electoral votes by 5 percent. However, this election continued a decade of highly aligned state and national election results. Florida’s GOP vote was only 1.3% more than Bush’s national popular total. The state’s even partisan balance means that minor shifts in the political landscape can affect election outcomes.

The 2004 election results caused some to believe that 1996 and 2000 were an aberrant and that a trajectory of presidential Republicanism had been restored. The gains in Florida’s fastest-growing counties are favorable for the Republicans due to the potential strength in these areas. This conclusion appears premature based on demographic trends for the state. Population increases in exurban counties are facilitated by their rural origins. Inherently, high growth is more likely in a county that starts with a small base. While these counties are expanding, their populations are marginalized by existing cities. The fifty counties with the largest population growth average 1.46 million people compared to 109,000 residents in fastest-growing counties. As these areas become less white, due to the erosion of rural origins, they are likely to become more Democratic (Judis and Teixeira, 2002) . In Florida, Dade, Broward, Palm Beach, Martin, and St. Lucie County provide examples of changing voting patterns in counties influenced by Miami (See figure). Historically, the fastest growing counties in Florida have become more Democratic as their populations have become more established. Current voting patterns indicate a correlation between increasing diversity and Democratic performance (Lublin, 2004). Projections indicate that Florida will become older and more ethnically and racially balanced in the next couple decades. GOP gains in these “exurban” counties are necessary to offset Democratic leaning minorities that are projected to be the fastest growing segment of the state’s population.
CHAPTER 3: FLORIDA PUBLIC OPINION

Dramatic changes in partisan affiliation have not corresponded with ideological shifts. Public opinion has remained stable despite a transformation in Florida’s political trajectory. While major party candidates attempt to reflect electoral dynamics, the political landscape of Florida is defined by citizen’s attitudes and policy demands. The lack of a statewide identity undermines collective action to ensure that the long-term challenges facing Florida are met. The vast majority of non-native citizens exhibit allegiance to their states of origin. Steady population growth contributes to an expanding “electorate of visitors” possessing a limited knowledge of state politics.

It is difficult to develop a cohesive state public opinion profile since multiple states have essentially been compressed to one. The forces of domestic and international migration have resulted in a demographic and ethnic profile aligned with the nation. The steady importation of ideas, values, and culture establishes change as the major force defining the state’s policy preferences (Carver and Fielder, 1999). While Panhandle counties maintain native cultural roots, South Florida exhibits the policy tendencies of Michigan, Ohio, New York, and New Jersey. The clustering of these Northern in-migrants generates a virtual transplantation of their places of origin. Newcomers are often detached from state politics due to their perception of limited personal interest in Florida’s future. As a result, they are generally reluctant to invest in social programs without direct benefits. Paradoxically, these in-migrants favor increases in funding for government services while incorporating Florida’s pervasive anti-tax mentality. These unrealistic expectations create a dilemma for public-policy makers.
The dynamism of the Sunshine State’s electorate is attributable to the fluidity among new residents. Sectional fragmentation and population diversity are obstacles to formulating a collective public opinion. As a result of these divisions modern Florida residents are viewed as possessing a selfish attitude toward state government since it is, “a place, not a state of mind” (Fielder and De-Haven Smith, 1998). Unlike other states, there is no assumption of a shared destiny requiring collective action. The prevailing ideological classification is primarily derived from perceived widespread anti-tax sentiment. Conventional wisdom is that a conservative ideological tilt dominates Florida’s political landscape and incorporates antigovernment, anti-crime, and anti-tax themes. Since there is an assumption that any new tax proposal would inspire immediate backlash, elected officials usually tackle complex issues with insufficient resources. GOP ascendency is having negligible effects on resolving chronic problems including education, Medicaid, and environmental degradation. Both parties have risen to power as a result of an electorate with relatively constant public policy preferences.

Mobilizing public support is difficult among an increasingly diverse electorate. The geographic distinctiveness of Florida’s regions supersedes traditional partisan affiliation among these residents. The clustering of residents from the Midwest on the Gulf Coast and Northeasterners on the Gold Coast promotes a transfer of cultural heritage. “North Florida is the South, South Florida is like New Jersey with palm trees, the Panhandle may as well be lower Alabama, while the Southwest coast is Ohio with better golfing” (Date, 2004, pg. 59). Sectionalism increases the complexity of state campaigns. Florida is a microcosm of American voting patterns and racial and ethnic diversity. Therefore, the discrepancy between Florida and Southern public opinion has
Gimpel and Schukecht (2003, pg. 387) compare Florida’s electoral behavior to geographically distant states:

*Michigan and Illinois are highly similar, but they are joined in our estimation by a seemingly unlikely companion, Florida...Florida too is a two-party competitive state, with a concentrated urban minority population, along with prosperous suburbs and centers of rural conservative strain. Florida’s manufacturing workers, like those of Illinois and Michigan, look increasingly less likely to vote Democratic in recent elections, while those states farmers and white natives are among the most likely to favor the GOP. In our view, native Southerners are correct in characterizing Florida as a Northern state. While Florida is certainly not an old line manufacturing state like MI or IL, and it has been the net recipient of out-migration from these sluggishly growing Midwestern locations, it now stands closer to them than it does to its confederate neighbors.*

The classification is easier to understand in the context of population growth origins. According to 2000 census data Illinois is the fifth largest state of origin and Michigan ranks among the top ten. Distinct from the dominance of Chicago and Detroit Florida has a dozen metropolitan areas. V.O. Key’s (1949) observed that the state was, “scarcely a part of the South” and a “different state” is still relevant today at mid-century. Also, religion derived morally based policy preferences are distinct from the solid presidential Republicanism in the “red” South. Cultural issues exert a significant role in influencing voter behavior in the “red-blue” polarized national electorate. Political analysts refer to the split as religious versus secular America. Unlike its former confederate allies, self-identified white, evangelical Christians are not the largest GOP constituency in Florida. Increasing presidential domination in this core region is derived from the overwhelming margins among these voters.

The core of Southern GOP support has been eroded in Florida by its sizeable non-Southern born population. Correspondingly, the state’s Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and religious right electoral proportions are within 3 points of the national sample based on
2004 exit polls (CNN). Ethnic and religious alignment provides further evidence of an unrivaled national microcosm. Less dogmatic economic conservatives display a willingness to disagree with GOP protocol on abortion, stem cell research, and church and state separation. Mainstream views on social issues distinguish some affluent traditional GOP supporters. Public opinion in this realm is inconsistent with partisan affiliation. An overwhelming majority of Florida voters are self-identified moderates or conservatives. Despite presuppositions regarding GOP advantages, statewide candidates understand the importance of appealing to the centrists that account for almost half of the total electorate. Traditional partisan labels are often trumped by geographic sectionalism in statewide races.

**Ideological Foundations**

Between 1880 and 1950 there was limited ideological conformity within Florida’s one-party system. The legacy of Reconstruction left maintaining the racial status quo as the primary unifying issue for Southern politics. Contrary to the increasing national liberalism, Florida’s Democratic Party remained dominated by “Old South” social conservatives during the one-party era. At mid-century the underlying ideological shifts among the state’s electorate were overlooked due to Democratic control of all levels of government. *Southern Politics in State and Nation* cited Florida’s geographic configuration, steady in-migration, and urbanization as the major forces behind its political uniqueness. V. O. Key (1949), in his seminal work on regional politics, observed a state that was experiencing the most intense factionalism in the South. The social composition of the state was being altered by newcomers and economic diversification. Expanding metropolitan areas in the peninsula, with large populations of
Northern migrants, provided the most reliable conservative vote supporting conservative Democrats and Republicans (Doherty, 1952). The expanding middle and upper classes in the state viewed limited business regulation as promoting their financial best interests. These newcomers and upwardly mobile residents disrupted the statewide identity that had been shaped by Southern culture. Traditional Democratic loyalty was being diminished by the erosion of natives’ clout that had been preoccupied with social conservatism, especially race issues.

The splintering of the Democratic Party was becoming more pronounced after World War II. The underlying conservatism of the state’s electorate was exemplified by the 1950 Senate race. In this contest Congressman George Smathers defeated New Deal Democrat incumbent Claude Pepper by successfully labeling him as a liberal (Black and Black, 2002). Smathers associated “Red” Pepper’s liberal record as being inconsistent with the priorities of the Florida electorate in a calculated attempt to capitalize on anti-Communist sentiment. There was a clear ideological divide between the candidates on issues including the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), the size of government, and support for organized labor (Doherty, 1952). Senator Pepper’s support for the FEPC and perceived liberalism on civil rights issues contributed to a widespread voter backlash in North Florida. Also, Smather’s was able to make inroads among the economic conservatives in the Panhandle. The incumbent’s defeat was facilitated by the development of a coalition that penetrated all regions of the state. He was able to combine areas of the state where Thurmond received widespread support in 1948 with all of the Atlantic Coast Counties, except Dade, and Southwest retiree strongholds. It was the first indication of Floridian’s rejection of New Deal liberalism and the restoration of
conservatism in the state. This contentious Senate battle exposed fractures in the one-party system that provided a foundation for Eisenhower’s presidential breakthrough in 1952.

Attaching a “liberal” tag to the opposition in statewide races is a reoccurring theme in Florida politics. The election of 1950 established the framework for utilizing this campaign tactic. Subsequently, two-party competition altered the parameters for attracting conservative and moderate voters. The ideological unity of the Democratic Party increased with the exodus of Southern whites following the 1960s Great Society legislation. By 1972, President Nixon’s sweep of all Florida counties reflected a widespread rejection of Democratic Senator George McGovern platform. Southern Republican presidential advantages were strengthened by Reagan’s effective strategy of connecting national liberals to big government programs unpopular in Florida (Hulbary, Kelly, and Bowman, 1991). In federal contests, the GOP often tries to link state candidates to unpopular Democrats in Washington. Campaign mudslinging included implying that an opponent is cut from the mold of national leadership’s “tax and spend” and “soft on crime, defense, and terrorism” a reputation that is often inconsistent with the political realities. However, the shaping of public perception is capable of reinforcing negative partisan stereotypes regardless of the nominee’s proposals and record.

The conservative inclination of the state’s voters dictates that low taxes, crime prevention, and a strong national defense are emphasized issues in the state. The efficacy of this strategy is derived from Florida’s ideological composition. Since 1980, self-identified conservatives have consistently outnumbered liberals by almost a three to one margin. While liberals typically account for less one-fifth of the electorate,
approximately four out of every five Florida voters classify themselves as conservative or moderate. The perception that the electorate is conservative is reinforced by priorities including opposition to new taxes, crime prevention, and distrust of big government (Dye, 1998, De-Haven Smith, 1995). These issues became the pillars of Republican’s Florida success in the 1980s. Democrats need to attract a substantial portion of the moderate voters to win statewide elections. While Republicans maintain an edge in statewide elections, the large number of persuadable voters enhances the competitiveness of races. Therefore, perceived centrist candidates tend to exert advantages over extremists in U.S. Senate, state executive, and presidential races.

Historically, the consistency in the ideological profile of Florida’s electorate has been a better predictor of state voting patterns. Presidential Republicanism emerged in Florida despite a ten to one disadvantage in partisan affiliation in 1952. The GOP failed to exceed thirty percent of total voters prior to 1980. During this time Republicans carried Florida’s electoral votes in five out of seven elections. Similar to other Southern states, GOP voter registration lagged presidential performance. White Democrats did not conform to party labels in the voting booth particularly in state and local elections (Fiedler, 1998). In addition, many new voters registered as Democrats to be able to participate in the primary contests while they still dominated state politics. Gradually, partisan affiliation began to reflect the Republican gains in the state. The Republican share of a major party voter registration surged over 12 percent during the Bush, Sr.-Reagan presidencies. The GOP tide in Florida produced unrivaled gains for conservatives. Thus, the alignment of performance and voter registration resulted in a more accurate barometer of the state’s political trajectory.
While the achievement of a plurality of voters seemed inevitable, the GOP gains stabilized and Democrats maintained slight advantages in registration. Since 1996, the Motor Voter registration program has generated almost as many people aligning themselves with no affiliation than registrants for the major parties (Fieldler and De-Haven Smith, 1999). The proliferation of independent voters has resulted in greater electoral volatility. According to a Democratic pollster Florida is characterized by a unique partisan balance, “There’s an enormous amount of churn in the electorate. A lot of people on the voter rolls today weren’t on the voter rolls five years ago. As a result, Florida politics are much more related to the tides of events and personalities” (Barone and Cohen, 2004). The contemporary fluidity of the Florida electorate is responsible for the state’s emergence as a volatile national microcosm. Still, self-identification as conservative or middle of the road account for 82% of the population. (FAPSR, 2000)

Conservatives ranged from 34-47 percent of the electorate from 1982-1995 (Parker, 1995). The overwhelming majority of state offices held by the GOP are a product of limited liberal ideology. National results, on the other hand, are correlated with the even split in partisan affiliation.

**Economic/ Demographic Realities**

The diminishing gap between incomes in Florida and the nation played a role in the ideology of the modern electorate. The growing political clout of middle and upper class voters was typically aligned with messages of economic conservatism. In 1950 and 1970 Florida per capita incomes were 14.4 and 6.4 percent below the national averages respectively. By 1990, the median wage in Florida was almost identical to national figures (West, 1995). These upwardly mobile voters emerged as the most vocal
opponents of tax increases and more government in the state. Gradually, partisan conversion and generational replacement lead to greater proportional margins among natives. The disproportionate support for the GOP among younger voters is attributable to Florida’s uniquely large group of elderly citizens that were socialized in the New Deal period (Jackson and Carsey, 2002). In state politics, retirees and increasingly affluent young professionals have contributed to the image of Florida as an anti-tax state. These voters are typically opposed to redistributive state social programs that have marginal returns on investment. This mentality has contributed to Republican dominance in state politics. However, it is difficult to separate state and national elections. Presidential elections often bring issues to the forefront for state races. A republican advantage to shape campaign issues from the top-down has expedited their penetration of state politics.

The uneven distribution of wealth among Florida residents presents a challenge to elected officials. Fifty years ago the state’s economic underperformance, relative to national averages, was not as pronounced as the region. Urbanization in Florida placed it at the forefront of trends towards occupational diversification. Nevertheless, the state has been unable to overcome systemic poverty that is traceable to “Old South” institutions. The per-capita income ranking of nineteenth in the U.S. is deceptive. The large elderly population with high to moderate incomes offsets national bottom-tier figures with over 17 percent of children living in poverty (Date, 2004). The discrepancies in regional wages in Florida are significant. Income inequality is most prevalent in the Panhandle. While Baker, Hamilton, and Madison counties have the highest wage differentials, Palm Beach, Collier, Martin, and St. Johns exhibit the lowest levels of inequality (Kim, 2004). The affluence and economic consistency in these four counties are reflective of their
disproportionate senior populations. Deeper income inequality in the three Georgia border counties is attributable to higher African American populations, reliance on agriculture and manufacturing, and lower educational attainment in this region. Florida’s elected officials face a significant challenge in modernizing the state’s economy.

The state’s dependence on tourism enabled the state to be at the forefront of a movement away from the agricultural origins of the South. While tourism generated numerous service sector jobs and enabled exportation of the tax burden, the state economy is vulnerable to recessions. Also, high fuel costs can inspire residents to stay closer to home and depressing the number of tourists visiting the state (Williams, 1995). An infrastructure designed to support this industry has limited the growth of higher wage technology occupations. Less desirable occupations generated by the tourism industry, with limited benefits and advancement opportunities, are viewed as inadequate by many Americans. Therefore, these occupations have attracted numerous non-Cuban Hispanic immigrants. Florida’s economy is characterized by a disproportionate number of low paying service sector occupations. Economic advancement in the state has been undermined by corporate perceptions that educational shortcomings create an employee pool with insufficient skills (Colburn and De-Haven Smith, 2002). The structural deficiencies of the public school system place residents at a comparative disadvantage in competing for high-wage jobs in an economy being transformed by globalization. The information age requires a workforce with higher educational attainment capable of being trained for a complex, evolving industry.

The senior population, which composes more than one-third of the electorate in state elections, is reluctant to pay taxes to fund social programs without direct benefits to
them. However, the inclination of retirees is to vote against taxes to fund schools since they have limited personal connection and their children no longer attend public school (MacManus, 2000). Overall, this group has been an asset to the state, but they adamantly oppose the increased taxes that would be necessary to improve social services. This mentality is not confined to this demographic. A common theme of Florida voters is that they want expanded services, but there is generally an unwillingness to pay the higher taxes necessary for funding. This contradiction is a major obstacle for politicians desiring better public schools. School improvements are imperative to modernizing the economic structure. The fragile partisan balance in Florida is likely to be shaped by the economic fortunes of new migrants and immigrants (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2004).

Appealing to a diverse electorate is necessary for building winning electoral coalitions in the state. The partisan inclination of African Americans, Hispanics, and the elderly has restored presidential competitiveness in the state. The volatile senior electorate has played a decisive role in recent elections.

**Disproportionate Senior Influence**

The divergence between state and national election outcomes is primarily attributable to senior public opinion. A perception that the federal government is the protector of entitlement programs results in this vital group’s willingness to support national Democrats. They are the direct beneficiaries of Social Security and Medicare and are typically linked to the “entitlement society”. While 45 percent of Floridians over 60 are registered Democrats, a majority of this age group considers itself conservative ideologically (Dye, 1998). This discrepancy is a component of the New Deal and Great Society legacies. Perceptions that Democrats possess an advantage in protecting these
entitlement programs still persist today. A presidential nominee’s credibility on ensuring solvency is often a major force in determining voter behavior in this group which accounts for almost a one-third of the state electorate in presidential contests. Fixing social security’s shortfall by using the budget surplus and raising taxes on benefits of $50000+ income earners are favored by a majority of Americans over 65; while only 9% of these voters favor reducing benefits to ensure the program’s long-term stability (MacManus, 2000). Widespread opposition to benefit cuts among this politically influential group deters elected officials from funding cuts. The attrition of New Deal Liberals has the potential to dilute Democratic support among older voters. The imminent retirement of the baby boom generations will have profound implications on the political balance in the state. Contrary to New Deal Liberals, the partisan affiliation of these seniors was shaped during the Reagan administration. The integration of this electoral bloc is poised to benefit Republicans.

In national elections, Medicare tends to be the untouched “third rail” of state politics. Many senior voters believe that the federal government’s primary purpose is protecting old age entitlements. Divergent success levels for the state and national Democratic Party are largely attributable to the significance of Medicare governance. National candidates are viewed as protectors of programs for the aged that are of paramount importance to older voters. This narrow focus enhances the volatility of the pivotal senior electorate. In the 1996 and 2000 elections Democrats received 63 percent of the senior vote compared to 46 percent of the younger electorate. While voting behavior is influenced by organizations and shared culture value system in other state, Florida’s senior population is persuadable because their ties remain with their home states
(Fielder and deHaven-Smith, 1998). Therefore, the ideology of Florida’s retirees lacks the ideological anchors of their peers. Also, internal issues including crime and health care shape the perspective of this group. The uniqueness of Florida senior population dilutes the efficacy of entitlement focused tactics utilized in other states.

These selective retirees generally possessed the economic means to select where they would live and how to maintain their lifestyle. In addition to entitlements, crime became a policy demand for this influential group. Between 1950 and 1980 the concentration of the elderly in Broward, Palm Beach, and Dade counties rose from 20 to 34 percent. With the influx of Hispanics following the 1959 Cuban revolution, the Dade proportion of this elderly group dropped from 71 to 33 percent (Winsberg, 1984). The flight of the non-Hispanic elderly away from a more diverse Miami was a defense mechanism to retain their homogeneity and provide separation from rampant crime. The clustering of these retirement communities enhanced the political influence of this population. New Deal Liberalism gradually emerged as the dominant ideology of Broward and Palm Beach counties due to relocation of these Northeastern in-migrants. Social Security, Medicare, and health care continue to be top priorities for seniors on the Gold Coast and the Gulf Coast.

An assumption that senior public opinion is monolithically limited to entitlement issues oversimplifies their perspective. Multiple issues shape the voting behavior of this pivotal constituency. Stem cell research has the potential to emerge as a decisive issue for seniors. Also, the Terri Schiavo case resonates among this age group due to its implications on death with dignity issues. Federal and state intervention into a family matter perhaps will have ramifications for elected officials. The possibility of
breakthroughs in this realm diminishes the likelihood of debilitating ailments and improves their overall quality of life. Consequently, these medical advances would promote additional life expectancy. Stem cell research tended to be marginalized by terrorism, Iraq, and the economy in 2004 even among senior voters. Finally, older Floridians follow international affairs closer than other age groups. However, seniors have different issue priorities than younger residents with 87 percent viewing international drug trafficking as the most important foreign policy issues (MacManus, 2000). The implications of the drug trade on crime rates along the Gold Coast makes this issue a top concern for the elderly.

The vulnerability of seniors to crime makes them supportive of candidates viewed as “tough on crime.” The politician’s credibility on deterring crime trumps partisan affiliation among these voters. In 1994, crime was considered a key issue in state elections. As a result, GOP gains resulting in obtaining a majority in the Florida Senate were male-dominated. The inability of female candidates to be viewed as “tough on crime” eroded their support among seniors (Nelson, 1996). The “New Democratic” platform focused on mitigating the traditional Republican advantage on this issues originating with Nixon’s “law and order” stance.

President Clinton’s inroads among traditionally GOP retirees were facilitated by his plan to preserve entitlement solvency and success in reducing crime. In 1996, Clinton benefited from his strong law and order stance advocating mandatory sentences, capital punishment, and massive increases in the police corps (Baer, 2000). The traditional conservatism of these voters increases receptiveness to the GOP’s focus on moral values. Older Floridians were the strongest age group with 56 percent supporting ending
affirmative action (FAPS, 2001). Also, seniors are the staunchest opponents of new
taxes, especially state levies. Higher income seniors tend to have more negative attitudes
regarding the Social Security tax since they believed that they could increase their rate of
return by investing themselves (Beck and Dye, 1982). Thus, the relatively affluent
Florida retiree was more inclined to support Governor George W. Bush’s privatization
plan than their national peers. Less wealthy seniors, on the other hand, are especially
dependent on the federal government financial aid than other groups and are less inclined
to favor radical reforms. Overall, federal taxes are less adamantly opposed since retirees
are the direct beneficiaries of the largest entitlement programs.

The steady flow of senior capital into the Sunshine State, including Social
Security checks and pensions, contributes to economic vitality. In the 1990s retirees
brought $55 billion to Florida exceeding agriculture, tourism, and construction
(Mormino, 2005). As a result, the state leads the nation with over a fifth of all home
purchases made in cash. This remarkable statistic is expected to diminish due to the
astronomical appreciation in Florida real estate. Housing affordability in Florida, a key
factor in retiree in-migration combined with climate and low taxes, lacks the comparative
advantage that characterized the market in the 20th century. Demographic advantages in
the state have lead to real estate prices beginning to exceed many Midwestern markets.
Still, relative value advantages remain in Florida compared to the two largest states of
origin for new residents, New Jersey and New York. Seniors that are fully vested in
their Florida residences are experiencing a wealth effect capable of increasing purchasing
power. Corporations are targeting the lucrative market of senior services for sales growth
generating higher income jobs for younger residents. Competition for scarce resources
between Medicaid, with growing long-term care expenses, and the priorities of families, including education, children’s health care, and environmental protection, augments the existing generational divide.

State Government Perception Implications

The divergent trajectories of state and national partisan trends are visible through the lens of Medicare and Medicaid. These government subsidized health care programs are a microcosm of elderly support for state versus federal programs. Public perception, inconsistent with reality, is that Medicaid is another unnecessary redistributive program with limited tangible benefits for this pivotal voting bloc. In the 1998 gubernatorial election, Floridians over sixty accounted for 42 percent of the voters while constituting 18% of the population (Coburn and Smith, 2002). Non-presidential elections augment this group’s influence since their turnout is more reliable than younger voters. Substantial turnout inspires a pro-elderly state political agenda. Senior priorities in local elections preserve low, regressive taxes. Generally, federally regulated Medicare is the most important issue in presidential and senatorial elections. While participation among seniors remains high in presidential elections, their impact is diluted by higher turnout for all groups. Traditional turnout advantages among GOP voters, with the exception of Broward County, undermine Democratic GOTV efforts in most of the state (Dyck, et al., 2004). Turnout rates among Republicans and seniors are magnified in lower participation mid-term elections. This phenomenon has been visible in recent gubernatorial elections. The underlying conservatism of the state, combined with more consistent GOP voters, has been a cornerstone of the emergence of Republican dominance in state races.
The emergence of the Republican Party has thoroughly penetrated all levels of Florida government. Currently, the state is controlled by the GOP. Republicans have overwhelmingly majorities in the legislature, the governor’s office, and all three statewide elected cabinet officers. The divergence between state and national voting patterns is being intensified by what Bob Graham referred to as the “Cincinnati factor.” This creates an environment where migrants are reluctant to invest in state social programs. As a result, Floridians tend to favor lower taxes and reduced government at the local level. President Reagan’s popularity in the state was the impetus for partisan realignment in state politics. In 1980, the Democrats had comfortable two-thirds majorities in both houses of the legislature. Similar advantages continued into the early 1990s. In 2002, the rapid transformation of partisan composition of both the state house and senate results in similar margins by the GOP. The marginalization of Democrats in the legislature was virtually identical to the role of the Republicans just two decades before. Despite the reversal in the balance of political power there have been limited public policy implications. The underlying conservatism of the state’s electorate aligned itself with the national GOP ideology. Increasing liberalism of the national Democratic Party shifted partisan allegiances rooted in the single party South. Pervasive anti-tax sentiment among Floridians continued to undermine elected official’s efforts to develop the infrastructure to accommodate rapid population growth induced public demands.

Economics and crime were considered to be the greatest state issues in the 1980s and 1990. By 1992, education replaced growth as a top priority for Floridians. The rise of educational concerns in Florida corresponded with unprecedented in-migration of teenagers in the decade. In 1994 crime was cited by 45 percent as the most urgent issue
facing the state (Parker, 1998). The perception that the GOP was best positioned to ensure prosperity and fight crime without raising taxes contributed to their rise to power. A new partisan trajectory in state elections reflected the fluidity of the electorate. Similar to Southern presidential Republicanism Florida was ahead of the top-down regional partisan trajectory. Subpresidential offices were penetrated by the GOP more intensely than other Southern states.

Dissatisfaction with the state’s public school system has entrenched the issue among the top four problems. In 2001 over a quarter of respondents in the *Florida Annual Policy Survey* considered education the most important problem area. Community development and the environment rounded out the top three issue concerns (FAPS, 2001). An inability to increase tax revenue has limited the efficacy of public school reform. The allocation of funds to education is merely sufficient to meet the needs of the steady influx of children. Unlike state government, federal politicians are viewed as the protectors of entitlement programs, the environment, and funding the national defense. Since the national government is perceived as serving distinct functions, presidential voting patterns have diverted from state trends. The materialization of two-party competitiveness in Florida is in sharp contrast to its classification as a core Republican electoral state only a decade before.

**Voter Resource Allocation Priorities**

Florida’s conservative inclination has been shaped by the steady flow of newcomers to the state. Extensive anti-tax sentiment among voters is reflected in public opinion polls. Assumptions that new taxes will result in substantial voter backlash
prevent elected officials from implementing systematic modernization. Therefore, government resources are rarely sufficient to address the complex state issues. Lance De-Haven Smith (1995) asserts that this perception is a fallacy citing resident willingness to sacrifice to adequately address education and environmental issues generated by rapid population growth. In 1979, polling indicated that Floridians were satisfied with social security, sales, and property tax rates. However, there was widespread dissatisfaction with two-thirds of respondents stating federal income taxes were too high (Beck and Dye, 1982). This negative voter sentiment was reflected by voter backlash towards President Carter’s re-election. Reagan’s economic conservatism and promise to cut taxes resonated among these voters stating their federal tax burden was too high. Despite maintaining one of the lowest burdens in nation, there is opposition to property, gas, and even the popular sales tax. Between 1980 and 1994 the sales tax was viewed as “excessive” by 10-30 percent of residents and the controversial property and gas taxes registered 40-50 percent opposition (Fielder and De-Haven Smith, 1998). Assumptions that the large non-native population would better comprehend Florida’s inherent tax advantages were not verified. It is feasible that expectations of these in-migrants, drawn by a low tax burden, were detached from reality since they were already more tax averse than the average resident.

The profound transformation of the state’s political landscape is attributable to the steady influx of newcomers. During the second half of the 20th century the arrival of Midwestern retirees and Cuban immigrants revitalized two party competitive prospects. Contrary to Southern tradition, the conservative ideology was not perceived as monopolized by the Democrats. Public opinion in Florida is usually portrayed as
conservative; opposed to increased taxes, cynical of government, focused on the state’s high crime rate, despite maintaining a demand for services comparable to their place of origin (Dye, 1998). A general distrust of both the federal and state governments inspired a loosening of partisan loyalties. In 2001, only 29 percent of Floridians trusted politicians in Washington and 33 percent trusted state politicians “most of the time” (FAPS, 2001). This mindset exacerbates anti-tax sentiment since these voters believe that the bureaucracy is unable to spend their resources wisely. Erosion in support for increased funding of programs to combat crime reflects an elevated sense of security attributable to progress in this realm. Unlike the early nineties when crime topped the list of voter policy demands, violence has become a secondary issue in the 21st century. Elected officials face a predicament when responding to demand for increased services. Since voters are unwilling to pay for additional programs, reallocating funds becomes the sole viable option.

Unconstrained by fiscal realities the public exerts pressure on state leaders to invest in numerous fields. Paradoxically, there is a general unwillingness among residents to sacrifice personal capital to adequately meet their policy demands. Constituent state issue priorities that received majority support for increased funding include, public schools (84%), health care services (75%), elderly programs (71%), combating crime (66%), low income families with children (63%), environmental protection (60%), and colleges and universities (59%) (FAPS, 2001). While this establishes a hierarchy of public wishes, the poll can only be utilized as a mechanism to prioritize funds. The tourism dependent budget requires sustained prosperity to generate adequate increases in tax revenue. Still, merely meeting the additional demands
generated by population consumes a large portion of any surplus. Conversely, as evidenced during the 2001 recession, the cyclical vulnerability of the government’s revenue stream can result in dramatic across-the-board cuts in popular programs. Due to the “save our homes” amendment, the limited success of raising county sales tax for specific areas like education or transportation remains the only option for municipalities. However, municipal governments have benefited from uncapped new and existing real estate sales. Analysis of the Florida electorate as a single entity inspires the generalization that state voters are irrational and selfish. The unwillingness to sacrifice for the common good forces politicians to fund growth at a moderate pace while symbolically diverting resources allocated elsewhere to fund services (DeHaven-Smith, 1995). The diversity and geographic proximity of metropolitan areas impedes forging an issue consensus.

Apart from economic conservatism, the Florida electorate exhibits relatively moderate views on social issues. The typically contentious subject of minority assistance is not as divisive in Florida than the rest of the South due to a lower African American population and greater affluence. From 1981 to 1995 residents opposed to government help to improve the status of minorities dropped from 38 to 23 percent (Parker, 1998). During this time, positions changed on government’s role in ensuring a good standard of living for all its residents. In the Sunshine State, Governor Bush’s “One Florida” plan, effectively stopping affirmative action, program failed to gain majority backing of residents. Governor Bush’s initiative polarized the electorate along partisan lines with 79 percent of the GOP favoring it and 67 percent of Democrats opposed (FAPS, 2001). Civil rights issues have shifted from desegregation to compensating for past hardships.
This racial moderation is attributable to the steady erosion of Southern roots and economic diversification. Middle and upper class whites do not see poor minorities as jeopardizing their career or status. The limited influence of the religious right, compared to the region, enabled less dogmatic views on social issues that are increasingly aligned with the nation.

Greater social tolerance was reflected by the 54 percent of residents supporting legal abortions if the family was poor and could not afford more children compared to the Southerners 39 percent and the national average of 44 percent (Osmond and Pavalko, 1986). The 15 percent discrepancy between middle and upper class and working class voters support for abortion reflects the schism between economic and social conservatives in the state. By 2001, 79% of the electorate believed abortion should at least sometimes be legal (FAPS, 2001). The moderation on social issues among Floridians reflected ideological centrism despite the growth in GOP registration during this period. The nationalization of the state’s electorate on issues including moral values and the environment reflected an alignment with national ideology that would be conducive to a restoration of two-party competitiveness.

The pro-choice position of Democratic nominees is a factor in the state’s considerable gender gap in recent elections. This Republican disadvantage is augmented since females are disproportionately represented in the state’s population. Gender life expectancy differentials are magnified in Florida due to the state having the highest median age. The foundations of gender cleavages are traceable to the post-VRA partisan divergence on racial issues. The gender divide in partisan attrition rates resulted in females constituting the largest portion of the Democratic electorate. Thus, women have
been a core electoral block for national liberals. Erosion in female support has not been as pervasive as generally pro-GOP Southern males. During the past decade the stabilization of female Democratic affiliation has resulted in their prominent role as the “center of political gravity” (Black and Black, 2002). Women’s support of affirmative action and financial aid to minorities are solidifying this trend in contemporary elections.

Their ideological perspective increases sympathy towards racial liberalism and extending aid to disadvantaged groups, including African Americans (Hutchings, et. al., 2004). In Florida, population growth has resulted in an erosion of cultural roots. In this environment specific civil rights proposals are generally marginalized by other issue priorities. As evidenced by the backlash that contributed to the virtual tie in 2000, internal developments in this realm are still capable of having a decisive role in national elections. While the unprecedented mobilization of African American is emphasized in analyzing the historic presidential contest, the implications of “One Florida” on non-minority populations are rarely considered. Accounting for 54 percent of the 2000 electorate, the largest electoral bloc favored Gore by 8 percent after a double-digit advantage for Clinton in the preceding election (VNS). Conceivably, perceived intolerance on this issue undermined the credibility of the GOP nominee’s efforts to extend his message of compassionate conservatism into other realms.

Campaign marketing efforts to target persuadable women typically focus on a narrow set of issues assumed to be public priorities for women. Still, the credibility of a nominee’s message of tolerance is affected by sensitivity to issues viewed as peripheral like civil rights. Conventional wisdom suggests that traditional “women’s issues”, including the equal rights amendment and abortion, are responsible for their voting
behavior, but this theory has been discredited in recent studies (Kaufman and Petrocik, 1999). The disproportionate impact of issues including education and health care among women facilitates Democratic advantages. In Florida, the chronic underperformance of public schools has typically been perceived as a state and local problem. Nevertheless, it is feasible that pro-education women see the national government as the only institution capable of implementing systematic change. In addition, Democratic plans to improve healthcare access have increased resonance with Florida women. Females account for two-thirds of voters classified as New Deal Liberals and environmentalists; they represent a majority of jobs liberal issue publics.

A plurality of New Deal Liberals targets the national government to shape policy and a quarter of these respondents cite two government levels. These voters advocate increased resource allocation for health care and education Environmentalists, on the other hand, generally focus on county and state governments to promote their interests. A vast majority of Jobs-Oriented Liberals, second to a consensus among the small Foreign Policy Monitor issue group, target the national government to further their agenda. Despite a short history in the traditional workforce women outnumber men among traditionally liberal constituents. Cumulatively, these three groups exceed a third of the statewide electorate (DeHaven-Smith, 1995). The substantial representation of females among these progressive groups provides additional insight into their voting behavior. The prevalence of Jobs-Oriented and New Dealers, accounting for thirty percent of the total electorate, provides a base for national Democrats. Their representation far exceeds the number of self-identified liberals in public opinion polls.
during the past quarter century. Unlike jobs and New Deal progressives, environmentalists typically focus on state and local governments to advance their cause.

Environmentalists target county and state officials in efforts to shape public policy unlike the two largest left-leaning groups. During the past three decades, legislation and judicial application of the commerce clause has granted the national government greater authority in this realm. Therefore, the dominance of state environmental law is becoming outdated. Lobbying efforts have been gaining momentum as the primary mechanism to solve ecological problems. Environmental concern in Florida is a product of the coastal environment and the over two-thirds of residents born outside the state. Also, the degradation of the environment has been accelerated by the forces of rapid population growth. A political science thesis is that most people do not conceptualize political issues in very sophisticated terms. Environmentalism is frequently viewed as a temporary emphasis for an indecisive electorate that is destined to return to traditional voting behavior (De-Haven Smith, 1991). Elite discourse is characterized by an emphasis on the global commons and a big picture perspective. The Florida system of growth management incorporates a regional oversight of statewide impact of urban development and vests the power to protect areas of in the government. De-Haven-Smith (1995) classifies 5 percent of the state’s population as environmentalists. These voters are concentrated in the Southern suburban coastal counties of the state including Manatee, Collier, Monroe, Palm Beach, and Broward. Beyond this segment of the electorate, the vast majority of the state’s electorate is worried solely about local degradation of the environment and utilization of a sustainable growth management.
Resistance to NIMBY, “not in my backyard”, pollution often establishes the foundation for national and global movements. Their self-interested quality of life focus sometimes expands into broader themes and promotes regional collective action (De-Haven Smith, 2005). A 1996 presidential election exit poll ask voters to state the higher priority, protecting the environment or encouraging economic growth. Protecting the environment received a 58 to 38 percent advantage and among these voters, President Clinton had a substantial 15 percent edge over his opponent. The 2001 Florida Annual Policy Survey lists the environment as the third highest priority among residents.

Steady GOP voter registration gains did not reflect the final phase of the Reagan realignment in Florida. The ideological terrain of the electorate reflects self-identified “middle-of-the-road” voters exceeding conservative by a 46 to 39 margin in 1993. Despite a GOP tide in registration the underlying public philosophy was virtually unchanged during this era. Conservative voters accounted for 42 percent of the electorate in both 1982 and 1995 (Parker, 1998). This stability of public opinion in Florida diverged from the GOP’s 16 percent increase in major party registration. The economic conservatism that dominated state politics failed to translate a consensus with the Republican platform on national social issues. Moderating views on divisive issues including school prayer, abortion, and welfare programs distinguished Florida from other Southern states with higher proportions of religious right voters. The uniqueness of the electorate gradually contributed to the state’s restoration of two-party competitiveness.

Mechanisms responsible for the emergence of apparently contradictory trends are comprehensible through the lens of public philosophy. Contrary to GOP dominance of state elections, Democratic inroads in presidential contests are attributable to increasing
racial and ethnic diversity, a disproportionate senior population, and distinct issue
priorities. Non-Cuban Hispanics, the fastest growing segment of the population, tend to
favor Democrats. Senior voters are more inclined to support national Democrats since
they are perceived as the protectors of the entitlement society. Also, environmental
concern among Floridians tends to benefit Democratic nominees. The priorities reflect
common views regarding the functions of different levels of government. The expedited
transformation of Florida from a core Republican state in 1992 to its pivotal role in the
2000 election was facilitated by rapid population growth and corresponding changes in
the state’s ideological composition.

**Political Behavior Approaches: Theoretical Applicability**

The large population and sectional political inconsistencies frustrate politicians
attempts to win a statewide race. Florida’s geographical distinctions often supersedes partisan affiliation. The state’s ethnic and racial diversity impedes efforts to mobilize collective action. Disproportionate senior and Hispanic populations enable these groups to exert political clout that is rarely granted to the other 12 million Floridians. The political and demographic reality is there is no controlling interest group or metropolitan area. Cognizant of high turnout, fluctuating partisan preferences and the actual population size national campaigns are typically characterized by a focus on senior issues. While the elderly account for an even greater share of voters in state and local election, statewide major party nominees perceive anti-tax sentiment as the dominant theme of Florida politics. A legitimate campaign requires substantial media expenditures in a dozen markets, frequent polling, and extensive knowledge of Florida politics. Steady population growth is a constant theme of Florida politics and results in dramatic shifts in
public opinion. The demographic landscape of the state creates a “moving target” for identifying persuadable voters. Despite a tripling of the population in four decades, public policy in the state has been relatively consistent.

Conflict Avoidance

Conflict-avoidance strategies are utilized by candidates to divert attention from the complex underlying issues facing the state. The fact that this model is consistently utilized in state politics is derived from an inability to generate additional revenue to sufficiently fund infrastructure to address the consequences of population growth. Elected officials must overcome obstacles to forging the united front to deal with imminent problems. Still, Florida lacks the political and economic infrastructure to implement these initiatives (Colburn and de-Haven Smith, 1998). Instead state campaigns and elected officials typically focus on rather superficial issues or ambiguous proposals. The focus on short-term cycles is seldom conducive to bold policy initiatives. Public perception becomes reality for elected and prospective public officials. Inaction and unfunded mandates usually result from campaign proposals that neglect the revenue constraints of the state. Special interests, “colored” funding commitments, and public cynicism further dilute the adequacy of scarce resources. Emphasizing trivial issues and talk without administrative action is assumed to be vital to a successful campaign. Consequently, the leadership vacuum leaves the state without the political desire to sacrifice to pursue Florida’s shared long-term interests (DeHaven-smith, 1995). Conflict-avoidance tactics are a major force behind Florida’s bottom tier rankings in almost all social service categories. Modernization of the tax structure, necessary for systematic funding increases, continues to be adamantly opposed by voters. The transfer of state
political control is having a marginal impact on solving existing and imminent crises in education, the environment, and Medicaid. Attributable to steadiness in the underlying electoral dynamics, the inept handling of social service programs transcends party.

This defense mechanism is also prevalent in national politics. Abstract campaign concepts including ensuring entitlement solvency, being tough on Castro and terrorists, and cutting government waste are vague themes that the electorate understands. Complex policy initiatives have limited resonance among an electorate without strong partisan ties. Proposals are often diffused to the electorate via “soundbites” due to Florida’s divided electorate. Also, it is difficult to hold politicians accountable for campaign promises that are difficult to quantify. Thus, the trustworthiness of a candidate during reelection is difficult to assess without outlining specific goals. Florida’s emergence as the largest competitive electoral prize perhaps will have long-term consequences for entitlement solvency. Major party politicians see alienating Florida’s senior voters as the equivalent of conceding defeat due to their decisive role in the past two presidential elections.

The emergence of Florida’s role in contemporary elections is impeding significant policy modifications. A comprehensive approach is necessary to accommodate the unprecedented health care demands generated by Baby Boomer retirement is lacking. For example, the Medicare prescription drug plan is poised to explode the deficit and jeopardize the long-term solvency of entitlement programs while diverting funds from other public priorities. Attempts to contain costs by moving beneficiaries to managed care have been offset by an unwillingness to use federal leverage to contain pharmaceutical costs. In this situation, the benefits of passing a big government drug
program and appeasing a crucial voting block superseded a long-term catastrophe in the making. Medicare and Social Security are classified as Florida special interests despite the national implications of policy for these programs (Edwards, 2004). Cuba Policy is another example of trying to gain support among a group concentrated in large electoral battlegrounds. Rigid anti-Castro policy has been counterproductive economically and is not consistent with Cuba’s threat to America. This propensity to give preferential treatment to Florida’s Cuban population over competing interest groups is exemplified by the passage of the Helms-Burton Act and had a lot more to do with “who wins Florida” than foreign policy pragmatism (Ohaegbulam, 1999). In the Electoral College “swing states” special interest groups have an unequal impact on public policy in battleground states. Politically motivated Cuba policy is also responsible for enabling looser immigration rules for exiles (Edwards, 2004). Presidents’ Clinton and Bush could assert that they were able to fulfill their promises on Cuban policy and meeting their entitlement commitments. Abstract promises without specifics enabled these administrations’ to establish their own parameters for success. Conflict aversion prevented the controversial implementation of programs beneficial to long-term foreign policy goals. Instead, they favored temporary solutions that delivered on campaign pledges. Despite reliance on conflict-avoidance tactics, state politicians see a direct linkage between public problems, issues, and policy.

Electoral Model

Policy makers view Florida politics as conforming to an “electoral model” of governance. Special interests and campaign propaganda are dismissed as major factors influencing administrative action. This approach is based on appealing to the masses
considered the base of the model. Thus, funding priority lies with the electorate. Policy outcomes are solely limited by the electorate’s ignorance of state problems, ideological dogmatism, and the ability of the mass media to reshape public opinion (DeHaven Smith, 1995). This model contributes to the reinforcement of preexisting beliefs regarding the electorate’s policy preferences. Political apathy and citizen’s limitations on understanding complex problems preserve the status quo under the “electoral model”. Newcomers, especially immigrants, are less likely to participate in the process due to limited political roots in the state. The media has an influential role in enhancing familiarity with the problems facing the state. In theory, newspapers, television, and radio provide an outlet for politicians to mobilize support for the state’s public needs. However, the dynamism of the electorate undermines the efficacy of the media to build a consensus to proactively address issues that are capable of becoming the next social service crisis.

Media markets are another mechanism that intensifies divisions among Floridians. Public priorities in Pensacola are not always concerns in Miami. The geographic and ideological divide between these cities often creates divergent factions. A narrow community perspective typically fails to grasp the complexities of statewide issues. These new residents are not familiar with the state’s challenges. Oftentimes, the media diffuses biased information to these persuadable voters. These groups are seen as prime targets for campaign advertising due to weak partisan ties and limited loyalty to incumbents. These residents account for a large proportion of non-affiliated voters and shift from candidates to undecided frequently. An assumption that all newcomers exhibit this fluid political behavior is inconsistent with reality.
A retiree in Naples is unlikely to share common goals with a Puerto Rican immigrant in Orlando. While a new immigrant is probably a net beneficiary of government funds, the retiree is more inclined to cast a ballot. Therefore, elected officials focus on the implementing programs consistent with the public policy preference of the senior. High turnout rates among seniors create an environment conducive to their anti-tax demands. Unlike the Puerto Rican family the retiree’s support for limited funding increases in crime prevention and health care supersedes education. Among non-Cuban Hispanics participation increases with age and foreign born Puerto Ricans have lower turnout rates than natives and is substantially smaller than Cuban Americans (Stokes, 2003). Candidates viewing Hispanics as a monolithic group underestimate the ideological diversity of this population.

Cuban Americans tend to be more conservative than Hispanics from other nations. Dismissing the role of special interests is a major deficiency for the “electoral model” approach. The influence of formal lobbyists has a profound impact in shaping public policy in Tallahassee. Also, the political clout of seniors and wealthy Floridians gives them an enormous advantage over groups that are less reliable voters. The poor, young, and minorities typically are underrepresented at the ballot box. As African Americans are 12 percent of the voting age population (VAP) they accounted for 15 percent of the electorate in 2000. Despite aberrantly high turnout among blacks, Latinos were 16 percent of the VAP and only 11 percent of the electorate. Relatively low participation by Latinos results in disproportionate African American minority influence (Lublin, 2004). Nevertheless, Hispanics tended to exert greater political clout due to the perception that they are a “swing vote” in Florida contrary to overwhelming black
Democratic support. The susceptibility of new residents to propaganda through advertisements or media coverage of rallies generates candidate-centered votes. Utilization of this approach perpetuates the misconception that Floridians are unwilling to fund vital public priorities. The implications are continuing a trajectory that placates voters on core issues to avoid confronting the political and demographic realities.

Realignment/Dealignment

Dramatic partisan changes in the second half of the 20th century made Florida a unique case study. Numerous scholars attempted to characterize state political developments. Beck (1982) cited Florida as being in the midst of a realigning process during Reagan’s first term. Dismissing population growth as the primary factor in state politics, Beck cited the unparalleled magnitude of the Republican surge as verifying realignment in the state. The divergence from national trends was seen a key component of the mass party coalition shifting allegiances. The rarity of realignments failed to deter scholars from charting the phases of ideological conformity. While the strength of the Republican presidential tide in Florida confirmed the elimination of the one-party Democratic South, Beck’s speculation was quite premature. In retrospect, this “crucial election” was actually the zenith of modern presidential Republicanism. The transformation of the Florida electorate resulted from a combination of forces. There was a steady in-migration of traditional Northern Republicans. Also, partisan conversion of native Southerners, alienated by Democratic liberalism, intensified the GOP tide. The increasing correlation between party and ideology began reversing traditionally weak connections. Associations between race issues and partisanship shifted in Florida. The GOP platform appealed to racial conservatives that had favored “Dixiecrats”.

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Focusing solely on the racial foundation of the one-party south proved to be an incomplete analysis. Unlike the Deep South, the New Deal order had already been disrupted by a streak of three consecutive GOP presidential wins before the watershed 1964 election. Cowden (2001) repudiates the racial realignment hypothesis. Instead, Cowden observes a racial issue evolution in the South reversing the precedent of white Southern Democrats being more racially conservative than their GOP counterparts. Injecting civil rights issues into American ideological discourse failed to reduce the New Deal issue split outside the region. Public policy preference among Floridians had shifted prior to 1964. In-migration and economic development increased the resonance of Republican fiscal conservatism. Extending beyond in-migrant controlled areas the growing native middle class began to see antiquated civil rights protocols as being detrimental to continued economic prosperity.

Dealignment theory is applicable to Florida’s modern political environment. Dealignment is characterized by the erosion of traditional party coalitions occurs without a comparable political replacement (Craig, 1998). Variances in parameters utilized to determine realignment undermine a shared understanding of the phenomenon among political scientists. Florida premature realignment classification in the early 1980s is a prime example. The state exceeded the initial threshold for this theory with is dramatic shift in voting patterns. However, the fact that these election outcomes requires a governing coalition to implements a new policy agenda (Paulson, 2000) eliminates Florida’s political trajectory from consideration. Dealignment, on the other hand, is captured is the general distrust of government among Floridians, diminishing partisan loyalties, and the proliferation of independent registrants. These voters are exhibiting a
tendency to support Democratic candidates in national races while providing overwhelming GOP state margins. This trend is inversely related to the top-down Republicanism initiated in the state by Eisenhower.
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the mechanisms responsible for partisan change in Florida. Conventional wisdom suggests that an evenly balanced electoral landscape has replaced several decades of solid presidential Republicanism. The rapid politics transformation has intensified the battle for Florida between major party presidential nominees. Candidates use issue positions to maximize their appeal to the Florida voters (Shaw, 1996). A disproportionate allocation of scarce campaign resources highlights efforts to secure the crucial 27 electoral votes. The capital and labor intensity of an “all-out” battle for Florida fails to deter heavy ad spending. Florida’s decisive role in the past two presidential contests has made frequent candidate visits and costly media buys a necessity. Understanding the state’s demographic profile is an essential component of maximizing limited funds.

The fluidity of the electorate complicates efforts to target the large number of non-affiliated voters. Effective targeting of FL voters requires extensive polling. The results divide the electorate in an attempt to assess the number of persuadable voters. Florida’s “large swing” vote ensures that the cost of diverting resources from other battlegrounds is outweighed by its potential impact in a decisive state. In a national political environment characterized by increasing regional polarization the regional uniqueness of Florida’s population has caused it to divert from the partisan trajectory of other southern states. The mechanisms behind changing presidential voting patterns include a large non-native population, racial and ethnic diversity, and a highly service-oriented economy. These factors will be assessed in terms of their propensity to generate partisan change.
An emphasis is placed on the dynamics contributing to an era that has been characterized by GOP presidential dominance since 1948. A time-series approach is utilized to better comprehend the factors influencing the state’s contemporary role in elections. The emphases on Southern political conversion, which characterize a majority of the existing literature, are largely avoided. Shortcomings of trying to study Florida’s political trajectory in the context of the South is overcome through analysis of the unique characteristics of the state. This paper focuses on the migration generated demographic and economic factors that are contributing to the state’s political transformation.

Population growth has resulted in Florida becoming the least Southern state politically and culturally. This regional divergence is highlighted by Florida’s status as the sole contested former confederate state over the past three elections. While Tennessee and Arkansas, Gore and President Clinton’s home states, were unsuccessfully targeted in 2000 they received little attention with a Massachusetts Senator leading the ticket in 2004. Florida was classified as a one of a dozen battleground states in 2000. The 27 electoral votes remained “too close to call” during the 2004 election. The Sunshine State received more candidate visits, 61, than any other electoral battleground in 2000 (Hill, McKee, 2005). Unprecedented media spending and campaign stops were a dramatic departure from the largely one-party dominated 20th century. This attention is due to Florida being the largest electoral prize “in play”.

Voter dynamism is attributable to lack of political roots for the vast majority of non-native residents. Oftentimes, partisan and candidate loyalty is left behind in their states of origin. This phenomenon contributes to the lack of a statewide identity. For
most newcomers, there is a limited knowledge about and interest in Florida politics. Presidential nominees are required to allocate substantial funds to target these voters across numerous media markets (Paulson, 2002). The capital intensity of an “all-out” battle for Florida is due to the need for frequent polling and the significance of persuading independents in an evenly divided state. These pivotal voters are heavily concentrated along the I-4 corridor from Daytona to Tampa. It is necessary for a candidate to maintain enthusiasm among the base while appealing to these voters. Democrats are dependent on heavy turnout along the densely populated Gold Coast to accumulative margins necessary to win statewide. Republicans, on the other hand, are forced to develop widespread GOTV strategies since their strongholds are in North Florida and the Gulf Coast retirement communities. The distance between these core voters requires a dispersed grassroots organization. Regional voting patterns are in sharp contrast to the bastions of presidential Republicanism in prior decades.

**Study Procedures**

The level of GOP presidential support since 1948 is the dependent variable in this study. Statewide election results are complied to trace the origins of two-party competitiveness in Florida. There is an examination of county outcomes to assess shifting electoral foundations. Variations in the rate of change are due to the sectional concentration of partisan change mechanisms. These include partisan realignment, population mobility, and generational replacement. Regional variance in the applicability of these theories is significant. As expected, there is a strong correlation between rates of in-migration and inclination toward partisan change. Regional discrepancies in GOP support mirror the origin of residents. The Panhandle, least impacted by population
growth, is essentially an extension of neighboring Georgia and Alabama. Erosion of Democratic loyalty was a gradual process where the party had deep Southern roots. This accounts for the Panhandle being unified behind Kennedy and Stevenson despite statewide GOP wins. The crucial 1964 election was the impetus for two-party competition in North Florida. Today, the region is home to the state’s most lopsided Republican margins.

A growing elderly population and income are the independent variables in this study. Composition of the Florida House, growth rate and GOP voter registration percentages are also examined as casual factors in establishing sustained two-party competitiveness. The applicability of conventional theories linking demographics and partisanship are not verified by the available data. Increasing minority representation, educational attainment, and the U.S. House partisan makeup are frequently cited as forces shaping the modern political trajectory. Nevertheless, Florida’s racial and ethnic diversity failed to achieve statistical significance. The partisan tendencies of Hispanics are not monolithic. Based on limited census data, without pre-1980 Latino classification, the pragmatism of extracting the former Cuban American majority of the population from other liberal leaning minorities is marginal. The lack of major party financing records undermined incorporating mechanisms to assess campaign intensity. This would have been a valuable tool in assessing the implications of pre-1980 elections.

The aberrant GOP presidential performance in 1948, 1968, and 1992 was due to strong third party candidacies. Contrary to pure total vote percentage approaches, the two-party electoral proportion strategy dilutes the impact of these candidates. Campbell (1992) asserts that third party vote totals are randomly siphoned from candidates in both
parties in the long-term. While major party nominees can be the clear beneficiaries of peripheral candidates, there is an assumption that the net impacts are marginal through multiple elections. This methodology eliminates the inherent speculation of trying to allocate minor party support to the probable second choice nominee. Since there is no general consensus among political scientists on how to distribute these votes the most practical approach is calculating the GOP percentage of the major party vote. In 14 elections there is sufficient change in voting patterns to offset contests with third parties taking a disproportionate share of ballots cast for either Republicans or Democrats.

For example, the 1948 Thurmond candidacy probably cost Democrat Truman votes in “yellow-dog” Panhandle counties. Deep southern roots generated an irrational Reconstruction based opposition to supporting the “party of Lincoln”. However, the 1968 election proved to be a transitional contest which enabled many of Governor Wallace’s supporters in 1968 to begin regularly voting for GOP presidential candidates in 1972 (Phillips, 1969). In a two candidate election Nixon probably would have received a majority of Wallace’s votes. While Perot’s 1992 candidacy is assumed to favor Bush in the state, the decisive 2000 proportion of the Gore vote obtained by Ralph Nader probably siphoned enough liberal votes to influence the election. These modern Florida contests provide evidence that presence of third-party candidates doesn’t favor either Democrats or Republicans in the long term. As a result, GOP presidential performance is measured by the percentage of their major party support.

**Data Collection**

The Office of Economic and Demographic Research of the Florida Legislative and the FedStats websites were the primary resources for this study. These sites enabled
a reconstruction of data in four-year increments since 1952 for levels of urbanization and median age. *Politics in Florida* (1998) provided information on the performance of presidential and gubernatorial candidates in Florida prior to its publication. *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (1999) and *Government and Politics in Florida* (1998) were also used for pre-1972 voter registration and state legislative partisan makeup statistics.

Journal articles were utilized to obtain data that was not located in other sources. The facts on voter registration were obtained from the Florida Department of State’s Division of Elections Internet database. The statistics for recent elections were found at this site.

*America at the Polls 2* and the myflorida.com website were used to integrate county specific voting results. These resources provided insight into the underlying sectional electoral trends. Metropolitan areas, with growing influence, served as the foundation for presidential Republicanism in Florida. The 1948-1964 elections reflect conventional wisdom that the Panhandle emerged as the last bastion of the Old South in the state. Loyal native Democrats continued to provide overwhelming support for their presidential nominee. This trend was reversed with the perceived extremist racial, economic, and foreign policy platform of Goldwater. The framework for modern voting patterns in the state was established during this contest.

Census textbooks were used to obtain demographic information unavailable via Internet archives. The African American percentage of residents since World War II was calculated based on data retrieved from *Historical Statistics of the South 1790-1970*. Statistics on income, aging, and housing costs were extrapolated based on linear distribution of the 1940, 1950, and 1960 census figures. Per capita earnings are measured as a percentage of U.S. averages. This enhances the reliability of the data and captures
the post-World War II nationalization of wages in Florida. Comparative housing affordability has been a major attraction for the state’s popularity among in-migrants. Real estate prices have been stated in constant 1999 dollars to minimize inflation generated fluctuations in values.

Population growth has been the primary contributor to the changing demographic state profile. Numerous migration scholars have credited it with facilitating partisan realignment in the south (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2001). Florida’s distinction as a regional precursor to presidential Republicanism coincides with the beginning of rapid growth following World War II. While the first major wave of newcomers was predominately white northerners and Cuban immigrants, subsequent in-migrants have originated from a wider variety of states and nations. The regional composition of interstate transplants has expanded beyond the northeast and Midwest and is increasingly reflective of U.S. geographic cleavages. The proportions of African American and Hispanics in the state evolved into an American microcosm. With the possible exception of Texas the racial and ethnic diversity of Florida is unrivaled in the south. The Latino populations in the Sun Belt states are aligned with national averages distinct from their maldistribution in the rest of the south.

Beck (1982) dismisses rapid growth as the impetus for partisan changes and believes that its impact on affiliation is trivial. The state’s voting patterns contradict an assumption that migration is ultimately politically neutral. The demographic composition of newcomers contributed to the rise of two-party competition in the state. Migrants were considerably more Republican than both immigrants and natives prior to the 1990s.
(Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). A combination of political conversion and generational replacement gradually lead to a realignment of natives similar to their southern peers. My hypothesis is that rapid population growth facilitates political shifts. Influxes of regionally and ethically diverse newcomers are more likely to reflect national partisan trends than existing voting patterns.

Retirees from the Northeast and Midwest have contributed to the aging of the population. Today, the state has the highest percentage of residents over 65. The “graying of Florida” is likely to continue with the imminent retirement of the Baby Boomers. Selective older in-migrants are generally more affluent than their generation that remained “back home”. Thus, they tend to favor the economic conservatism of the GOP. This inclination is stronger with anti-tax state politicians since education and social welfare programs have limited direct benefits for the voters. Senior presidential voting patterns display greater volatility since the federal government is viewed as a protector of entitlement programs. Selective retirees are less likely to incorporate the ideology of younger community members. Initially, seniors were among the most reliable GOP presidential supporters in the state. Governor Thomas Dewey, Eisenhower, and Nixon benefited from elderly growth after World War II. In recent elections Republican advantages among this group is overshadowed by solid native GOP support.

Voter registration was a poor barometer of electoral outcomes in an era when GOP presidential nominees carried Florida in 8 out of 10 elections. From 1952 to 1992 Republicans consistently won the state by comfortable margins despite continued disadvantages in terms of partisan affiliation. Virtual registration parity did not materialize until the end of a decade which represented the zenith of 20th century GOP
electoral support. Newcomers perceived Democratic registration as the only way to participate in primaries. Natives remained Democratic registrants despite a propensity to vote for Republican presidents. Therefore, ideology proved to be significantly more accurate in forecasting voter behavior. Ultimately Reagan’s popularity finally convinced many younger Floridians and residents that consistently backed GOP presidential candidates to change party affiliation.

**Statistical Evidence**

Factor estimates are derived from the ordinary least squares (OLS) method. The findings are based on the compilation of seventeen sets of data. Multicolinearity is an issue for the variables in this research. The strength of the relationship between urbanization and the other variables undermines the efficacy of the analysis. A correlation between urbanization and population growth warrants omission of the former concept. Oftentimes, these variables measure similar phenomenon. Urbanization and median home prices are strongly linked to population growth and income. Thus, these variables are less theoretically important for final interpretation of the results. The racial and ethnic diversity of the state, measured by Hispanic and African American populations, appeared to be offsetting factors in this study. Efforts to recode the variables were unsuccessful. For this study, the origins of state presidential Republicanism is traceable to the establishment of its core metropolitan areas. The clustering of newcomers in major cities reinforced urban settlement patterns. Based on Census data, the remaining independent variables are quite straightforward and reflect anticipated components of political change. In summary, median home prices, urbanization, and median age were more accurately measured by other variables.
A primary objective of this study is to determine factors that initially lead to presidential Republicanism. Florida’s contemporary partisan balance is a recent development. According to the empirical testing, the equation provides a close fit for the data. The $R^2$ indicates that 87.9 percent of the variation in presidential Republican voting is explained by variation in all of the independent variables. This finding provides a basis for a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing Florida elections. The Florida of the 1990s was a state moving toward two-party competition a few years earlier than regional trends (Carver & Fielder, 1999). This is reflected in the correspondence between per capita income, rate of growth, and the dependent variable. The partial regression coefficient indicates the change in the Republican presidential voting if all the independent variables in the equation were held constant.

Since significance in this model occurs at the .1 threshold, per capita income and the growth rate were the only variables to achieve this prerequisite. For every one unit change in income and growth rate there would be corresponding increases of 3.233 and 1.235 respectively for the percentage of major party votes received by the GOP presidential nominee. The results shown in Table 1 indicate that these independent variables have a positive and statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. Hypothetically, this could have major implications for campaign strategy in Florida if past performance indicates future results. A one unit increase in the rate of population growth, say from five to four percent, would generate substantial gains for Republican presidential support. The magnitude of GOP ascendency has tripled with a similar boost in per capita income. The economic fortunes of Floridians, measured as a percentage of
national per capita income, was a vital component of the solidifying presidential
Republicanism in the state.

Table 1: Regression Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R Square</th>
<th>Adjusted R Square</th>
<th>Std. Error of the Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>.879</td>
<td>.773</td>
<td>.647</td>
<td>4.71222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Predictors: (Constant), FLHOUSE, INCOME, GRWRTE, RES65, RPPERTOT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>-244.228</td>
<td>61.876</td>
<td>-3.947</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRWRTE</td>
<td>1.235</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>.816</td>
<td>3.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INCOME</td>
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<td>.755</td>
<td>1.796</td>
<td>4.284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RES65</td>
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<td>1.800</td>
<td>-.604</td>
<td>-.713</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPPERTO</td>
<td>-.467</td>
<td>.587</td>
<td>-.719</td>
<td>-.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLHOUSE</td>
<td>.227</td>
<td>.138</td>
<td>.629</td>
<td>1.650</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Dependent Variable: GOPMPV

**Empirical Findings**

The interstate variations in group voting behavior diminish the efficacy of utilizing traditional indicators of partisan strength. For example, Florida Hispanics are less inclined to favor Democratic presidential candidates than Latinos in other states. The conservative Cuban American population typically provides landslide GOP support. Non-Cuban Hispanics tend to be more aligned with the liberal platform of the national Democratic Party. Since Cuban Americans account for a plurality of Florida’s Latino population, they exert greater influence on electoral outcomes. An inability to separate the diverse ideologies of this minority is an obstacle to utilizing this variable for assessing Florida’s political trajectory. Differentiating the more recent influx of non-Cuban Hispanics from the overwhelmingly conservative first wave is necessary to enhance the validly of a time-series study. While the initial influx of immigrants accelerated the state’s presidential Republicanism the arrival of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and
Columbians have been a major factor in restoring two-party competitiveness. Existing data limitations prevent quantifying the implications of an increasingly pro-Democratic minority population. Consequently, this regression analysis focuses on economic factors and broader population growth themes as the primary drivers of Florida’s presidential Republicanism. The influence of an overwhelmingly Democratic African American and an evenly split Latino voting population is mitigated by disproportionate senior turnout and a per capita income that has reversed historical national underperformance.

A correlation between population growth and the emergence of presidential Republicanism is hypothesized. This relationship is verified by the regression analysis. Steady in-migration is responsible for accelerated partisan change. The erosion of Democratic Solid South partisan affiliation was expedited by the influx of affluent retirees and conservative Cubans. At mid-century, the realization of a non-native majority began to exert enough power at the ballot box to offset continued Democratic loyalty among natives. Contrary to states with stagnant or declining populations, Florida was a prime example of the greater propensity toward electoral change in fast growth areas. By 1964, the partisan conversion of Southern whites augmented the systematic advantages for presidential Republicans. The composition of newcomers and top-down party switching of natives provided the foundation for a state that was classified as an “impenetrable GOP bastion” after Reagan’s term. During the period of Republican presidential ascendancy steady in-migration continued to be favorable to continued dominance. The extensity and intensity of this political movement was unparalleled in the South. Steady population growth became the defining characteristic of Florida politics during the second half of the 20th century. This demographic transformation
facilitated the modernization of the economy and resulted in an expanding middle class.
Social mobility enhanced the inclination of Floridians to align themselves with traditional
GOP economic conservatism.

The composition of newcomers during the past decade has not been politically neutral. While the predominately white influx of northern retirees and middle class workers favored GOP gains, the recent wave of new residents has been primarily minorities. Astronomical rates of non-Cuban Hispanic and Asian immigration have once again transformed the state’s political landscape. Democratic presidential nominees have benefited from increasing minority populations. The rapid transformation of the electorate generated an unexpectedly abrupt transition from a “safe GOP” state to a highly competitive political environment. In 1992, Clinton aides relied on past performance to concede the Sunshine State early in the campaign. Democratic strategy focused on the strong correlation between Florida’s deviation from the national popular vote and a deviation from the last election (N=.68) (Campbell, 1992). This mentality was consistent with his previous nominees that wrote off the state. Defying expectations Florida was ultimately decided by less than two percent. Conventional wisdom was contradicted by underlying dynamics trending toward a restoration of competitiveness. In retrospect, the uniqueness of the state’s modern electorate presents a “moving target” for candidates that undermine the efficacy of traditional forecasting methods. High stakes Florida campaigns inspire numerous campaign visits and unrivaled media advertising expenditures.

Florida’s role as the largest state that is considered “in play” is responsible for costly and labor intensive battles. The large number of non-affiliated voters creates a
perception that the outcome is dependent on persuadable voters that frequently switch allegiances. Weak partisan ties are derived from a churning electorate. This fluidity is in sharp contrast to the strengthening GOP loyalty in the rest of the region. The reemergence of the solidly Republican South of the 1980s was clear in the first two elections of the new millennium. Florida’s core role ceased despite the South continuing to be the strongest GOP region as evidenced by Bush’s consecutive decisive victories (Bullock and Rozzell, 2003). While Southern politics is the frequently emphasized in government literature there has been limited Florida specific research. The significance of Florida in presidential elections is seldom the topic of comprehensive empirical studies. Perhaps, this is attributable to the inability of research to forecast the unique dynamics of the Florida electorate. According to voter registration statistics, the state is currently split 40/40/20 between Democrats, Republicans, and Independent voters. This fragile partisan balance is dependent, as always, on offsetting tendencies among newcomers. Minor shifts to the demographic or economic structure have the potential to radically alter the state’s trajectory. The fluidity of the state mitigates the accuracy of scientific forecasts. However, the decisive role played by the state in the past two elections has the potential to generate the resources to enhancing the available literature on the topic.

This study might have been enhanced by more relevant datasets. The size of grassroots organizations, campaign expenditures, and Presidential visits to the state has vast potential in this field. Assessing this information is crucial to refining the reliability and validity of measurements for this topic. Population growth and median age did not have a significant influence on the proliferation of independent voters. Despite being major factors in contemporary Florida, the implications of these variables failed to verify
my theory. There are preconditions for eroding GOP presidential support. These are believed to include the astronomical growth in the Democratic leaning non-Cuban Hispanic population. Quantifying this information may prove to be a fruitful survey area. The demographic components of change may be exaggerated as being the impetus for trends. Excessive interpretation of the components of recent electoral struggles may contribute to fallacies in studying Florida politics. Newcomer induced volatility is possible to expedite transfers of power; it is feasible that the 2000 election was an aberration. Regardless, the current bellwether status of Florida enhances the significance of studying state political dynamics.

Heavy in-migration was the defining characteristic of 20th century Florida politics. It is not yet clear whether Florida is indicative of future Southern or national trends. Numerous campaign visits to the state reflect the attention given to the shrinking number of persuadable voters in the state. In retrospect, the use of voters with “other” registrations may not be the most accurate measure of presidential competitiveness in the state. As Lewis-Beck justifiably argues, “a very important property of any forecasting model is that it permits a forecast well before the event” (Campbell, 1992). Limitations of the time series approach have the potential to undermine its applicability in a state as politically fluid as Florida. Lagging data presents a handicap which reduces the efficacy of the approach. The deficiencies of this model are exacerbated by the unique characteristics of Florida’s population. Consideration of different research models perhaps will benefit future scholarly examinations of this topic.
Chapter 4 Codebook

Dependent Variable-
1. GOPMV - Republican percentage of the major party Florida presidential vote. This method reduces the dilution of vote due to third party candidates.
Ratio. Range 40.79-72.12. 1948-2004

Independent Variables-
1. GRWRTE - rate of net migration growth in four year intervals preceding presidential contests.

2. INCOME - per capita income in Florida as percentage of national average.
Ratio. Range 87.5-101.09.

3. FLHOUSE - partisan makeup of Florida State House, the percentage of Democratic representatives.
Sources: Division of Elections, Florida Department of State, 2002.
http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/legislators.aspx, 2004
2) Older data in A.P. Lamis. Southern Politics in the 1990s.

4. RES65 - proportion of Florida’s residents over the age of 65. These retirees provided a foundation for presidential Republicanism.
Ratio. Range 7.1-18.28

5. RPPERTOT - Republican registration as a percentage of total voters. Also, incorporated GOP as percentage of Democrats and major party registered voters. The other mechanisms for evaluation were utilized to compensate for the top-down lag in registration. Still, GOP partisans as proportion of total was the most effective measurement of increasing presidential advantages.
Ratio. Range 5.6-40.92.
2) Post-1970 statistics were retrieved from the Florida Department of State; http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voterreg/history.asp on July 25, 2005.
CHAPTER 5: PROJECTIONS AND CONCLUSION
The 1952 election had a profound impact on the trajectory of Florida politics. Eisenhower’s breakthrough victory reversed a century of single party dominance. The pivotal contest established a trend of three consecutive Republican wins. Providing evidence that Ike’s two Florida victories were not solely due to the candidate’s personal popularity, Nixon carried Florida’s electoral votes in 1960. For the first time, this GOP electoral win failed to correspond with a national victory. Presidential voting advantages were the first indicator of the state’s gathering Republican tide. Population growth and social mobility provided the early foundation for sustained GOP electoral advantages. Selective retiree migration, especially Midwesterners, and Cuban immigration fostered two-party competition and an environment conducive to conservatism. The gradual conversion of formerly loyal Democrats in the “Old South” remnants of Florida complemented population growth inspired partisan change. As a result the state’s Republican electoral dominance achieved its 20th century zenith in the 1980s. From 1952-2004 Democrats carried the state only three times. Scholars refer to a trickle-down pattern of GOP gains in the South. Presidential Republicanism gradually inspired the grassroots organization necessary to promote state and local inroads. The systematic partisan transformation of the state gradually penetrated state and local offices. Currently, overwhelming GOP legislative majorities and absolute control of statewide offices are unrivaled in the region.

The rapid pace of this electoral transformation in the state distinguished Florida from former confederate states. The state’s evolution from a traditional Southern role, emphasizing regional heritage, to a Sunbelt state more aligned with the national
mainstream accelerated following in the second half of the century. Diminishing southern roots were not replaced by a distinctive political culture. This state is now characterized by a volatile electorate. Florida is seen as a place where the ideology from “back home” trumps any state unity. Partisan ties were imported from everywhere; Cuba, Central and South America, and states including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. The two-thirds of Floridians that are in-migrants are exhibiting political rootlessness. These voters are more persuadable and heavily influenced by the mass media shifting candidate preferences frequently (Dye, 1998). The composition of these newcomers fluctuates almost yearly. Population growth in Florida is seldom politically neutral. The disproportionate stream of immigrants and interstate transplants in the 1990s was the impetus for the unexpected restoration of presidential competitiveness. These voters halted a seemingly inevitable tide toward GOP registration advantages leading to partisan balance. The recent distinction of Florida as a “swing state” in elections is a departure from early concessions of the electoral treasure.

Conventional wisdom suggests that the 2000 presidential contest verified the formation of a new battleground. The attention given to Florida in this historic election creates a self-fulfilling prophecy that the state will continue to be decisive in competitive presidential elections. Candidates invest unprecedented resources to fund television ads and stage campaign visits. The virtual tie in 2000 displayed the limited margin of error in securing Florida’s 27 electoral votes. While it is feasible that this contest was merely an aberration for a state that has become a GOP stronghold, the unique partisan balance suggests that the likelihood of a sustained presidential battleground is greater. Recent outcomes are evidence that Florida has become more aligned with national voting
patterns than the traditional bellwethers of Missouri and Ohio (Appendix 7, pg.138). As a result of its electoral share and competitiveness Florida is arguably the single most important state in determining presidential winners.

**Applicability of Presidential Bellwether Label**

Bellwether status has been granted to states that are assumed to be accurate predictors of national trends. The efficacy of relying on a single electoral barometer has been criticized by elites. Skeptics of applying a bellwether label often refer to their inherent deficiencies in predicting electoral outcomes. Tufte and Sun (1975) assert that the media is responsible for hastily designating new bellwether contenders based on impeccable accuracy from a limited set of primarily county results. These smaller scale studies are inherently more volatile measures of candidate strength. However, state level research is vulnerable to similar changes in voter behavior. In the past century, state indicators of future political tendencies included Illinois, Maine, Delaware, Missouri, and Ohio. Reclassification of a majority of these former bellwethers resulted from deviant election results. Eventually a majority of these states ceased being bellwethers due to results inconsistent with the nation. Missouri and Ohio emerged from this group due to the longevity of virtually prefect records in awarding their electoral votes to the winner.

Ohio and Missouri were acknowledged as national bellwethers due to an accuracy rate exceeding 90 percent in the past century. Ohio’s electoral votes were carried by the winner in 23 of 25 elections. Despite capturing the Buckeye state, Republicans Dewey and President Ford’s campaigns were unable to capture the White House. Therefore, Ohio received the distinction as being a “must-win” for GOP nominees. Remarkably, Missouri only awarded its electoral to the loser once during this period. In 1956,
Stevenson, Illinois’ Governor, was able to capitalize on his regional ties. Still, conventional political wisdom is that as Missouri votes, so goes the Electoral College. Both of these states reflected America’s economic modernization, black percentage, and distinctive geographic partisanship in the first half of the 20th century. However, these traditional bellwethers failed to keep pace with changing American demographics. In 2000, Latino populations in these electoral battlegrounds were approximately 2 percent of residents or less than 1/6th of their national representation. The pragmatism of continuing to utilize Missouri and Ohio as predictive indicators is jeopardized by outdated demographic and economic realities.

Currently, Floridians’ ethnic and regional diversity provides the foundation for its contemporary emergence as a presidential bellwether. Cumulatively, the steady influx of newcomers have contributed to a virtual American microcosm. Based on census data, the population of whites, African Americans, and Hispanics all fall within five percent of U.S. averages. Socioeconomic and demographic consistency with national trends is historically a prerequisite for forecasting White House inhabitants. Paulson (2002) concluded that, “Florida has become a ‘bellwether state,’ as the 2000 presidential election so clearly demonstrated.” The predictive accuracy of Florida is evidenced by its strong correlation with the national popular vote during the past decade. This illustrates an underlying partisan balance. The state uniquely possesses comparative advantages due to mirroring America’s population. Florida has almost completely detached from its Southern roots and is increasingly aligned with trends in fast growing Sunbelt states.

The 2000 election outcome placed the Florida voter in the national and global political spotlight. This “perfect tie” highlighted the underlying dynamics that are caused
by the integration of many states and cultures into one. Florida, like the nation, had become so divided that standard “red-blue” classifications failed to apply. Perhaps, the most distinctive feature of the state’s population is the fact that residents from all U.S. regions are clustered in one state. Missouri’s central location enables an assimilation of political culture from across the U.S. The Show-Me-State blended a regional balance of North, South, East, and West due to its position at the U.S. geographic crossroads (Suellentrop, 2004). The disproportionate influence of Hispanics and seniors is magnified due to media scrutiny.

Skeptics of applying presidential bellwether status to the state often cite the disproportionate influence of senior voters and Hispanics. The median age deviation, four years older than the nation, is an aberration for a state that is consistent with demographics in almost every category. Ironically, this demographic reality perhaps will enhance leadership in the political realm since today’s Florida population will be essentially as old as the nation in 15 years (Fielder & DeHaven Smith, 1998). Paradoxically, the highest senior population in the U.S. actually enhances the predictive capacity of the state. The “graying of Florida” is a precursor to the Baby Boomer induced aging of America. This atypical exception to otherwise unrivaled microcosm credentials is significant in the context of the accuracy threshold established by Missouri and Ohio. Hispanic growth accelerated during the 1990s. According to the 2000 Census this minority constitutes about 17 percent of the population versus 13 percent in the U.S. The diversity of the Latino population extends into the political realm. This is in sharp contrast to Democratic-leaning Hispanic blocs in other states; Florida’s sizeable Cuban American constituency creates a politically balanced minority. This split is visible in exit
polling. While disproportionate Hispanic and elderly influence are cited as an inherent 
shortcoming for bellwether legitimacy, the predictive capacity of these specific groups 
are important. U.S. population estimates show that Florida is well positioned to be a 
leader in forecasting trends. Hispanics and seniors are projected to dramatically increase 
as a proportion of U.S. citizens during the next couple decades. The state not only 
mirrors the current population better than any other large state. It is poised to remain a 
microcosm in 20 years.

**Sustainability of Electoral Competitiveness**

Recent state political history proves that partisan balance is capable of being 
altered by small migratory pattern changes. The longevity of Florida’s role as the 
quintessential battleground state is dependent on, not limited to, the composition of future 
in-migrants. Past voter alignments are evidence that Florida politics are dominated by 
change. While seventeen million residents inherently provide a buffer to electoral 
volatility, the partisan balance is still capable of abrupt transformations. The current 
equilibrium among registered Republicans and Democrats can be misconstrued as 
fulfilling a precondition for sustained presidential competitiveness. This reluctance to 
apply this label is attributable to a potentially transitory partisan balance and a tradition of 
unanticipated variations. Despite favorable demographics it is premature to elevate 
Florida to bellwether status. Sustained consistency is required to transform public 
perceptions about the forecasting accuracy of the state.

The surprising rate of partisan shifts in the 20th century surprised many political 
scientists at mid century and in 1992. Republican penetration of the solidly Democratic 
south began in an environment that few expected Democratic loyalty to subside among
natives. This assumption was partially correct. The expedited trajectory toward GOP presidential dominance was not generated primarily by internal forces. This Republican tide was accelerated by the influxes of affluent white Northerners and Cuban immigrants. These groups formed the base of metropolitan GOP support in the state. By 1992, Democratic campaign aides were surprised by the competitiveness of the Florida electorate. Inaccurate assessments of the political environment were caused by relying on past performance data. In retrospect, the enormous GOP landslides in the 1980s deterred the allocation of resources to the state. Candidates failed to utilize public opinion surveys to target “swing voters” that were becoming a necessity for reliable real-time assessments of the electorate.

The demographic profile of distinct periods shaped electoral trends. Florida’s remarkable transformation from the least populated southern state in 1940 to the fourth largest state in the nation was precipitated by new citizens. The composition of the first major influx of newcomers and the 1990s wave consisting of primarily minorities clearly favored opposing parties. The net impact of steady migration is the most evenly balanced political state in the nation (Barone & Cohen, 2004). The split electorate means that shaping a winning message is a challenge even to mobilize party faithful. The proliferation of non-affiliated voters often is the decisive factor in state elections. These persuadable residents are a major target for media efforts and typically remain undecided longer and drift between candidates. Conversely, natives have become the most reliable supporters of GOP presidential candidates in the past decade.

The shrinking native minority exhibits voting patterns similar to regional trends. Forces of generational replacement and conversion have been the primary factors in
transforming areas that are politically and culturally extensions of Alabama and Georgia. The conversion of natives, accelerated by Reagan, was premised on the realization that Democrats abandoned the ideological conservatism of many of these voters. Younger voters were raised in an environment that Republicans were the sole party of the right. In 1996 and 2000, there was an almost double digit gap between natives (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003) and the statewide GOP vote. Since only a third of Florida voters are native their influence in state elections is lower than any state except Nevada. The base of GOP loyalists has shifted from urban to rural areas due to altered sectionalism.

**Population Projections**

The contemporary balance of Florida’s electorate is vulnerable to migration patterns that favor one party. Hispanics and senior citizens are cited as the fastest growing segments of the population. Minorities are expected to account for 40 percent of residents by 2025 including Latinos becoming $\frac{1}{4}$ of Floridians (Colburn and deHaven Smith, 2002). Non-Cuban Hispanics are projected to compose a vast majority of the immigrants. Higher immigration outside of Dade County is likely to expand their political clout. The “Blue Dog” Panhandle voters, often registered Democrats, formed a presidential coalition with registered Republicans expanding their base. Their dilution, composing of a third of residents, is likely to continue as pro-Democratic blacks, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans continue to expand their proportional advantage (DeHaven-Smith, 2005). The steady decline in Cuban percentages of the Hispanic population and moderate gains in African American populations is likely to result in net gains for Democrats. Cuban American are forecast to experience the largest proportional decline among state minorities.
Forecasting growth among Cuban Americans is increasingly complex due to the uncertain impact of Fidel Castro’s departure from office. It is feasible that the flow of these immigrants will cease upon transferred political control. The decline of pervasive anti-Castro sentiment perhaps will alter the partisan inclinations of Florida’s existing population. The obsessive focus on a hard-line Cuba foreign policy is likely to subside as a key issue. As a result the prioritization of economic issues perhaps will become consistent with other U.S. urban minorities. Speculation that the current levels of overwhelming Republican support will drop is due to an assumption that their margins are unsustainable. Increased economic focus will allow traditional Democratic advantages in the realm of domestic services. Higher turnout among Cuban Americans has mitigated the political impact of astronomical gains in the voting age Latino population from other Latin regions. Since younger voters and Hispanic newcomers are notorious for low turnout, it is feasible that GOP gains could be realized at a 2:1 growth ratio. This is due to the underlying dynamics of the imminent Baby Boomer retirement.

The “graying of Florida” is set to accelerate in the 21st century. By 2030, Floridians over 65 are projected to constitute over 27% of residents as those under 18 accounts for only 1/5th. Currently, the younger age group is 5 percent larger than the elderly (Census, 2005). It is feasible that the aging population will solely achieve majority status in state and local elections. This trend is attributable to the consistent disproportionately high voter turnout among this demographic group. Current retiree populations, “pale in significance to the “age wave” that will wash across the state in the next three decades…in non-presidential elections, “seniors could well determine the
outcomes with no help from other groups” (Coburn and Smith, 2002). Overall, the impact of reduced participation by New Deal voters and increasing economic diversity are contributing to partisan changes. Increasing Republicanism perhaps will result from this restructuring. This phenomenon has the potential to offset recent Democratic gains among younger voters and non-Cuban Hispanics even at lower levels of population growth for seniors. Impacts from generational replacement are mitigated by the constant influx of new retirees to the area. Based on demographic models, the continuation of disproportionate senior electoral power will highlight Florida’s 21st century political landscape. The influx of Baby Boomers, beginning in 2008, will account for nearly half of the state’s growth. Newcomer induced budgetary stress perhaps will derail Florida’s progress.

**Florida’s Political Future**

History indicates that the composition of newcomers is a major contributor to the state’s electoral landscape. It is safe to assume that Florida’s political trajectory will continued to be influenced by a steady influx of newcomers. There is no indication of growth trends subsiding. The imminent retirement of Baby Boomers is poised to increase their already significant political clout. A financial catastrophe in the making is probable if long-term structural issues for entitlement programs are not addressed. The budget constraints, precipitated by Medicare and Medicaid, jeopardize the availability of scarce federal resources needed for national defense, debt repayment, transportation, and the environment. The inclination to favor age-based funding prioritization is attributable to the traditionally high turnout among seniors. Increased life expectancy and the size of the Baby Boom generation are factors contributing to an aging nation. From 1940-2010
the quadrupling of Florida’s electoral votes will enhance political influence if competitiveness persists. Based on estimates the Sunshine State is expected to gain 3 electoral votes after the 2010 census increasing its total to 30 (Polidata, 2005). Texas is the only other state projected to gain this many seats. Since Florida will account for over 11 percent of the threshold necessary to win the White House, there will a significant federal deterrent to implementing painful entitlement reform measures. Fear of alienating senior voters undermines dealing with complex issues In addition, state priorities including stopping offshore oil drilling, federal Hurricane aid, and Hispanic special interest issues are likely to be emphasized. Funding for Florida’s public priorities may top the agenda in Washington. This is attributable to the electoral ramifications of inaction. Federal officials will be forced to look beyond their self-preservation motivated propensity to favor symbolic politics or inaction.

Hispanics, and other minorities, will exert greater political force due to substantially higher growth rates than whites. Realization of their electoral potential requires higher voter participation in future elections. Similar to other Democratic leaning groups, their turnout is consistently lower than conservatives. Both parties have expanded outreach programs assuming that Hispanics will eventually vote in numbers closer to their percentage of the voting age population. The concentration of pro-Democratic Hispanics in Texas, California, and New York has resulted in these groups possessing less leverage in safe electoral states. However, the growing Mexican American, Puerto Rican, and Central American presence in battleground states including Nevada, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona and Florida is likely to mitigate inattention to the safe five most populous states. The development of majority-minority states is
conducive to Democratic gains if ballot box potential is realized. Hurricane Katrina
induced exoduses into Texas contributes to solidifying combined Hispanic and black
majorities in the second largest electoral prize with 33 electoral votes in 2012. Texas
provides a current example of the projected minority increases in a megastate. Unlike
Florida, the Lone Star State has been able to assimilate newcomers into their traditional
culture (Gimpel and Schuknecht, 2003). Minority political gains are likely to intensify
cleavages with whites. Florida’s increasing diversity presents a challenge to presidential
candidates’ ability to implement effective statewide campaigns that forge coalitions of
voters that have conflicting social and economic interests.

It is clear that fragile partisan balance that currently exists in Florida is vulnerable
to migration patterns advantageous to one political entity. The economic fortunes of
newcomers are poised to dictate electoral advantages. Educational improvements are
necessary to ensure social mobility in a globalized workforce. A continued reliance on
low-skill service occupations is assumed to benefit Democrats. The lack of Fortune 500
companies in the state exemplifies the weaknesses of the modern economy. In 1999,
there were only 17, or 3 percent of America’s elite corporations in the state ranking 11th
in the nation (Morgan, 1999). This representation is more consistent with the size of
Florida’s population in 1970. Today, a doubling of the top tier of revenue generating
businesses would be required to merely reach national averages. Large corporations
seldom relocate to Florida due to challenges associated with training a less educated pool
of labor. This negative perception of the public school system’s quality is an obstacle to
economic modernization and closing the income disparities in Florida. Structural
impediments to class mobility are simply the result of the state getting equitable dividends based on its investments, or lack thereof, in education.

Soaring real estate values and enhanced availability of higher wage jobs creates affluence that motivates self-interested voters to support Republicans. Housing appreciation perhaps will be a “double-edged sword”. The new affluence is positioned to augment opposition to redistributive tax policies. An increased wealth effect is aligned with the GOP’s market mechanism oriented “lassiez-faire” economic approach. Florida’s comparable housing price edge is diminishing in some regions. Midwestern retirees and younger occupational transfer prospects may be deterred by the high prices for real estate. The affordability of a Florida lifestyle has been a major driver of steady population growth. If the rates of in-migration originating from states like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan is dramatically slowed this is capable of altering Florida’s political trajectory. The southwest Gulf coast, heavily settled by Midwesterners, has been a consistent bastion of GOP support. The historical offset of liberal Northeastern retirees by relatively conservative has been a factor contributing to the state’s unrivaled electoral balance. This scenario would create a surplus of liberals, assuming continued heavy non-Cuban Hispanic migration, shifting the balance in presidential contests from “swing state” to leaning Democrat. Economic prosperity, on the other hand, reducing the uneven distribution of capital, inherently dilutes the liberal base of low-income voters.

Presidential voting patterns in Florida are a national microcosm. Analysis of county results mirrors the transplantation of U.S. regional “red-blue” polarization to sections of the state. The distinctive settlement patterns of in-migrants and immigrants undermine political assimilation in the state. For all practical purposes New Yorkers
maintain their native state’s culture when moving to condominiums in Broward County. Florida is perceived as merely a transitory residence and moves seldom generate a distinct mindset. The southwest coast, from Bradenton to Naples, despite offering new surroundings is essentially a relocation of politics from the suburbs of Chicago, Detroit, and Indianapolis. Little Havana moves Cuban culture to Miami and Puerto Ricans has established independent communities near Orlando. This concentration of Puerto Ricans has shifted the balance of power in Orange County. Several decades of GOP county wins were reversed by the Democratic tendencies of this minority. Orlando provides a small scale example of how integrating a liberal group into a community without offsetting conservative gains alters overall partisanship.

The varying political roots in Florida are typically imported from elsewhere. Voter mentality is linked to states or nations of origins. This is a key factor in Florida’s emergence as a prime national microcosm. Diversity is guaranteed when unique regional behaviors continue in communities that mirror the values of the major states of origin. Statistics verify the perception that a vast majority of residents come from someplace else. They are seldom assimilated into the state culture due to a clustering in South Florida. Newcomers are hardly ever exposed to the state’s southern roots since this diminishing influence is concentrated in retreating Panhandle remnants of the Old South. This pattern undermines perception of a shared destiny since neighbors were also born outside of Florida. This mentality generates the lack of a statewide identity. The geographic and political separation of Florida’s numerous metropolitan areas isolates newcomers from areas with native majorities. Thus, few Floridians remain committed to preserving a Southern heritage. This is not an inevitable externality of growth. Georgia
and Texas, also experience substantial in-migration, have largely been able to protect their heritage. The state’s uneven political trajectory is not exclusively the result of population mobility.

The divisions among the electorate are not solely geographic. Seniors and younger residents are forced to compete for scarce resources. An antiquated tax structure is incapable of meeting public demands. Age rationing of services is a viable solution to a senior induced fiscal crisis. Nevertheless, this strategy is rejected due to the political ramifications of cutting senior programs or raising taxes. Historically, Hispanics and African Americans have been unable to forge the consensus necessary to solve the state’s imminent problems. The lack of a united minority population, attributable to historic Cuban advantages, is another unique characteristic in Florida. In other states these groups display similar partisanship due to common economic self-interests. It is possible that a crisis in education, the environment, or crime perhaps will unite Floridians behind a common objective. The ensuing fiscal threat presented by escalating Medicaid costs has the potential to unite the elderly, receiving disproportionate funding for their long-term care, and the increasing number of predominately lower class residents without health care coverage. Similarly, minorities perhaps will rally behind educational issues given that their children are now a majority of pupils in public schools. Politicians face the challenge of mobilizing public support for social service priorities in an anti-tax environment. Unprecedented coalitions of the poor and the elderly or minorities are within the realm of possibility and may be the impetus for overdue structural reform. Although these alliances seem unlikely, these coalitions are feasible because these voters’ best interests’ are lined. In 1990, the alliance of African Americans and Republicans
appeared to be a longer shot than these scenarios. However, they both adamantly fought for new majority-minority districts as a result of mutual political benefits.

Political conversion and generational replacement have increased ticket-splitting among natives which are still capable of having a pivotal role in tight elections. In Florida, forces of partisan change have worked in combination to transform the electoral landscape. While there is a limited sense of a shared fate among a fragmented electorate, Floridians are responsible for confronting the same problems. Internal divisions among citizens often perceived as selfishness has been unable to provide resources necessary to elevate the state from bottom tier social service rankings. While population mobility was the dominant force in the 20th century, the fluidity of the electorate means that a combination of forces will continue to impact partisan change in Florida. The demands of Baby Boomers will have profound implications on the trajectory of Florida politics. Painful solutions, which are necessary to overhaul entitlement programs, are often avoided to prevent widespread backlash among influential seniors. However, national candidates who implement structural remedies to Medicare and Social Security ensuring solvency are likely to obtain advantages at the ballot box. The complexity of the dynamic Florida electorate has confounded political scientists since traditional rules are not applicable. The only constant factor in state politics has been change. Forecasting the state’s partisan balance, as evidenced by numerous premature assumptions, is imprudent due to the inherent volatility of a churning electorate.

**Conclusion**

There have been a variety of factors that have contributed to Florida’s contemporary political landscape. The Sunshine State is prime example of how electoral
composition can be altered by the numerous forces of partisan change. Partisan conversion occurred as a result of a diminishing linkage between the underlying conservatism of native Floridians and the increasingly liberalism of national Democrats. Generational replacement, the dominant source of partisan change in the rest of the South, has been mitigated in Florida due to the influx of newcomers, especially seniors. Population mobility has generated a new demographic landscape characterized by an older population, Hispanics becoming the largest minority, and the lack of a common statewide identity. The uniqueness of the electorate has transformed Florida from a virtual GOP presidential lock to a state positioned as a national bellwether. The longevity of this distinction is heavily reliant, as always, on the composition of newcomers.
References


Appendices
### Table 2: Population Growth Rate, 1940-2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Net Increase</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>North</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>SW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>1,897,414</td>
<td>429,203</td>
<td>29.2(30-40)</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>74.6%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>2,771,305</td>
<td>873,891</td>
<td>46.1(40-50)</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>79.3%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>4,951,560</td>
<td>2,180,255</td>
<td>78.7(50-60)</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
<td>89.7%</td>
<td>113.5%</td>
<td>105.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>6,791,418</td>
<td>1,839,855</td>
<td>37.2(60-70)</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>9,746,961</td>
<td>2,955,543</td>
<td>43.5(70-80)</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>75.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>12,397,926</td>
<td>3,190,965</td>
<td>32.7(80-90)</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>15,982,378</td>
<td>3,044,307</td>
<td>23.5(90-00)</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005(est)</td>
<td>17,509,827</td>
<td>1,527,449</td>
<td>9.6 (00-05)</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
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</table>

Note: Regional information is provided on pg. 152.

### Table 3: Demographic Change, 1940-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>over 65</th>
<th>under 15</th>
<th>median age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>72.8</td>
<td>27.1</td>
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<td>0.1</td>
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<td>50.3</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<td>50.7</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>30.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>31.2</td>
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<td>1970</td>
<td>84.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>51.8</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>85.4</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>51.6</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>51.4</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>39.3</td>
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</table>


African Americans, Hispanics and Seniors as Percentage of total FL population
Table 4: Primary States of Origin for Florida In-Migrants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1965-70</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number 75-80</th>
<th>Number 85-90</th>
<th>Number 95-00</th>
<th>Number 1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>189,446 NY</td>
<td>364,450 NY</td>
<td>361,295 NY</td>
<td>308,230 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>83,347 OH</td>
<td>135,219 NJ</td>
<td>150,954 NJ</td>
<td>118,905 NJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>71,210 NJ</td>
<td>134,150 OH</td>
<td>120,121 GA</td>
<td>99,225 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>70,868 PA</td>
<td>104,710 Texas</td>
<td>114,454 CA</td>
<td>94,265 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>69,653 IL</td>
<td>102,192 IL</td>
<td>102,286 PA</td>
<td>92,385 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>67,813 MI</td>
<td>95,246 MI</td>
<td>99,552 OH</td>
<td>90,833 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>60,715 GA</td>
<td>75,596 PA</td>
<td>99,491 IL</td>
<td>86,354 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>53,247 MA</td>
<td>63,383 CA</td>
<td>94,940 TX</td>
<td>77,072 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>43,067 CA</td>
<td>60,531 GA</td>
<td>91,891 VA</td>
<td>75,955 NY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>42,235 VA</td>
<td>57,794 MA</td>
<td>81,684 MI</td>
<td>74,949 NY</td>
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</table>

Table 5: Top 15 U.S. Birthplaces among Florida In-Migrants, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1,489,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>573,173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>517,705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>444,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>415,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>400,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>386,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>325,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>264,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>251,541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>235,615</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>197,498</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>177,679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>176,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>164,694</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>California</td>
<td>8,864,255</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>3,868,133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>2,899,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>2,670,828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1,529,058</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 7: Presidential Voting Results in Florida, 1948-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Republican Votes</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Democrat Votes</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Other Votes</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>194,280</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>281,988</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
<td>Thurman-Dixiecrat</td>
<td>199,755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>544,036</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
<td>444,950</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>H.Wallace</td>
<td>11,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>644,901</td>
<td>57.2%</td>
<td>480,371</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>795,476</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>748,700</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>948,540</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>904,313</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>886,804</td>
<td>40.5%</td>
<td>676,794</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>Wallace</td>
<td>624,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>1,857,759</td>
<td>72.1%</td>
<td>718,117</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>1,469,531</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>1,636,000</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>2,046,951</td>
<td>55.5%</td>
<td>1,419,475</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>Anderson</td>
<td>189,099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>2,730,350</td>
<td>65.3%</td>
<td>1,448,816</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>2,618,805</td>
<td>60.9%</td>
<td>1,656,701</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>2,173,316</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>2,072,709</td>
<td>39.0%</td>
<td>Perot</td>
<td>1,053,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>2,244,164</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>2,546,600</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>Perot</td>
<td>483,841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,192,790</td>
<td>48.846%</td>
<td>2,192,253</td>
<td>48.837%</td>
<td>Nader</td>
<td>97488</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3,964,522</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>3,583,544</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


GOP Percentage of the Florida Vote, 1948-2004
Table 8: Florida Voter Registration, 1948-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election</th>
<th>Democrats</th>
<th>Republicans</th>
<th>Ind./Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1,006,580</td>
<td>60,665</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>1,215,085</td>
<td>116,794</td>
<td>7,659</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>1,384,447</td>
<td>210,797</td>
<td>11,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>1,656,023</td>
<td>338,390</td>
<td>22,223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>2,009,842</td>
<td>458,156</td>
<td>33,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>2,090,787</td>
<td>466,605</td>
<td>55,467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>2,394,604</td>
<td>974,999</td>
<td>117,855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>2,750,723</td>
<td>1,138,751</td>
<td>204,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,087,427</td>
<td>1,429,645</td>
<td>292,649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3,313,073</td>
<td>1,895,937</td>
<td>365,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>3,264,105</td>
<td>2,360,434</td>
<td>422,808</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>3,318,565</td>
<td>2,672,968</td>
<td>550,292</td>
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<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>3,728,513</td>
<td>3,309,105</td>
<td>1,040,259</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>3,853,524</td>
<td>3,474,438</td>
<td>1,552,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>4,261,249</td>
<td>3,892,492</td>
<td>1,866,013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Post-1970 statistics were retrieved from the Florida Department of State; http://election.dos.state.fl.us/voterreg/history.asp on July 25, 2005. 

Key: Series 2- Democrats        Series 6-Independents        Series 4-Republicans
Table 9: Presidential Vote Compared to Nation, Ten Most Populous States \(^1\), Traditional Bellwethers, and South \(^2\) 1988-2004.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Bush</th>
<th>FL</th>
<th>MO</th>
<th>OH</th>
<th>CA</th>
<th>NY</th>
<th>IL</th>
<th>PA</th>
<th>MI</th>
<th>NJ</th>
<th>South</th>
<th>TX</th>
<th>GA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>44.5</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerry</td>
<td>48.2</td>
<td>47.1</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>54.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>51.2</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>38.2</td>
<td>41.4</td>
</tr>
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¹ Based on 2000 US Census figures. Ranked by population, these states are: California, Texas, New York, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, and Georgia.
² The Southern region consists of: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.


Table 10: Demographic Profile of Florida versus Nation, 2004.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>General Characteristic</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Rank</th>
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<td>Total Population, 2004</td>
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<td>Population Growth 1990-2000</td>
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<td>23.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Population Growth 2000-2003</td>
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<td>3.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent 65 years and older, 2004</td>
<td>2,810,756</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<td>Median Age, 2004</td>
<td>39.3</td>
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<td>36.3 (age)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Female, 2004</td>
<td>8,734,456</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African Americans, 2004</td>
<td>2,564,935</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
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<td>Hispanics, 2004</td>
<td>3,250,768</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
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<td>Asian Americans, 2004</td>
<td>348,112</td>
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<td>Foreign born, 2004</td>
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<td>Speak a language other than English at home</td>
<td>3,857,169</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
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<td>Percent born in same state, 2000</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
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<td>60%</td>
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<td>Percent urban, 2000</td>
<td>89.3%</td>
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<td>79.00%</td>
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<td>Percent of High School Grads (25%)</td>
<td>84.5%</td>
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<td>83.90%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Percent of College Grads (25+)</td>
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<td>27%</td>
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<td>Percent in Labor Force,2004</td>
<td>8,324,022</td>
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<td>Median Household Income,2004</td>
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<td>Per capita income, 2004</td>
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<td>$24,020</td>
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<td>Families below poverty level, 2004</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
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Table 11: Regional Characteristics of Florida’s Population

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<th>Central</th>
<th>North</th>
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<td>1999 Per Capita</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>$24,614</td>
<td>$22,561</td>
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<td>23.8%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
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<td>11.3%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>33.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt; 65 Years Old</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
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<td>&lt;15 Years of Age</td>
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<td>19.5%</td>
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<td>20.1%</td>
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<td>Urban</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>98.9%</td>
<td>88.8%</td>
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<td>Foreign Born</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>College Grads (25+)</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
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* See page 141 for regional breakdown of Florida counties.


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<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
<th>Under 15</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Over 65</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Over 85</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
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<td>3,034,565</td>
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<td>17,509,827</td>
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<td>3,017,357</td>
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<td>3,411,428</td>
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<td>17.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2025</td>
<td>25,912,458</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>4,430,907</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>6,387,843</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>752,768</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2030</td>
<td>28,885,769</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>4,817,783</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>7,769,152</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>943,675</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>45.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: 1952 and 1960 Presidential Election Results Map

1952 Election Results

- Stevenson (D)
- Eisenhower (R)

10-31-05

Florida

- Wilson (R)
- Kennedy (D)

10-31-05
Figure 2: 1964 and 1968 Presidential Election Results Map

1968 Florida Presidential Results

- Nixon (R)
- Humphrey (D)
- Wallace

Figure 3: 1980 and 1992 Election Results

1980 Presidential Election

- Ronald Reagan (R)
- Jimmy Carter (D)

1992 Presidential Election

- Bill Clinton (D)
- George H. W. Bush (R)
Figure 4: 1996 and 2000 Elections

1996 Presidential Election

- Bob Dole
- Bill Clinton

2000 Florida Presidential Results

- George W. Bush
- Al Gore

11-4-00

11-7-00

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Figure 5: 2004 Election Results and Regional Map

2004 Florida Presidential Results