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How Cubans Transformed Florida Politic and Leveraged Local for National Influence

Susan Eckstein, Boston University

This paper documents how Cuban Americans have become politically influential in Miami, and leveraged local for national political influence. Their influence is shown to peak in years of presidential elections, when candidates seek the votes of Cuban Americans in the largest “swing state,” and Cuban Americans make campaign contributions in which they expect, in exchange, lawmakers to implement policies they believe will destabilize the Castro regime to the point of collapse. But influential Cuban Americans will be shown not to speak either for the growing diversity of interests within the Cuban American community, or for the growing nonCuban American Hispanic community. Rather, they represent the interests of “hardliners” who emigrated in the early years of Fidel Castro’s rule, albeit increasingly less effectively.

Cuban Migration: The Magnetism of Miami

Cubans are among the most demographically concentrated of new immigrant groups.¹ They have mainly settled in Florida, above all in Greater Miami. Hundreds of thousands of opponents of Cuba’s 1959 revolution flocked to the city after Fidel Castro took power. Many thought their stay would be temporary, until Castro was deposed. Not only did they stay, but hundreds of thousands of other Cubans followed in their footsteps.

At the turn of this century over 60 percent of Cuban immigrants, and over half of the approximately 1.2 million in the U.S. who claim Cuban ancestry, which include children and grandchildren of immigrants, lived in the once small winter get-away for northern “snowbirds” and retirees (Eckstein 2009: 46).ⁱⁱ Over the years ever more Cubans gravitated to Miami because they had friends and family, as well as former neighbors, schoolmates, and work colleagues there, who could help them adjust and recreate their life anew in what Cubans came to consider the “Second Havana.”

Washington had tried to disperse the massive influx of Cubans who rejected the revolution by making refugee benefits conditional on settling elsewhere, to reduce local labor market pressures and minimize local resentment with the massive influx of new arrivals. However, after the refugee program ended, in 1973, many Cuban immigrants defied U.S. government pressure and relocated in Miami. The Sunshine State city became, ever more, the destination of choice of Cuban émigrés. Indicative, in **2005** 84 percent of incoming arrivals noted their intention to settle somewhere in Florida, if not in the city.ⁱⁱⁱ

Cubans, in turn, attracted other Latin Americans to the city, such that the city became dubbed not only the “Second Havana” but also “the northern most Latin American city.” By 2000 Miami had become majority Hispanic, and **by 2010** non-Cuban Hispanics outnumbered Cubans (see Table 1). Miami came to have the highest percentage of foreign-born residents of any US. city, and the third largest number of immigrants in total. Only Los Angeles and New York had more.

(<http://www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/5907411.htm>). More significant, nearly all foreign-born in Miami came from south of the Rio Grande.^{iv}

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As Cuban and then other Latin American immigrants made Miami their home, Anglos, non-Hispanic Whites, moved away. Their percentage of the city's population plunged from 79 to 21 percent between 1970 **and 2000** (Table 1). Anglos disliked the city's new feeling of '**otherness**' not merely because of the huge demographic influx of Cubans, but also because Cuban immigrants transformed the city culturally in their own image, or so it seemed to Anglos. A bumper sticker reflected Anglo sentiments: "Will the last American out of South Florida please bring the flag" (García 1996: 74-75).

Cubans made their presence felt all the more by clustering in select neighborhoods and municipalities in Greater Miami where they resisted full assimilation.^v At the time of the **2000 census**, Hialeah and Westchester were over 60 percent Cuban, while Hialeah Gardens, Sweetwater, Coral Gables, Miami City, and South Miami had smaller but still substantial Cuban populations (www.epodunk.com/ancestry/cuban; Boswell 2002: 3). Indicative of how they "stick to their own," even following the influx of non-Cuban Hispanics, Florida International University's Institute for Public Opinion Research (FIU-IPOR) found in their survey in 2004 of more than eighteen hundred Cuban Americans in Miami that only 14 percent reported living in neighborhoods where few Cubans lived (Eckstein 2009: 48). After forty or more years in the U.S., 40 percent of the first

who fled the revolution still lived mainly amongst fellow Cuban Americans,” and nearly 80 percent of all Cuban Americans had Cuban American spouses. Even 60 percent of U.S.-born Cuban Americans married someone who shared their heritage.

Where Cubans settled hinged on their social class, not merely on their country-of-origin. Working class Cuban Americans gravitated to Hialeah, and the poorest to the City of Miami, while moneyed Cuban Americans made Coral Gables and other wealthy communities their home (*Miami Herald* April 24, 2002 www.miami.com/mld/miamiherald/news/locl/3315360.htm). The class-based Cuban American communities also were associated with different immigrant waves. The well-to-do communities became home mainly to the first wave of émigrés (Portes and Shafer 2007: 167).

In essence, Cubans in general kept to themselves, while differentiating among themselves by immigrant wave and social class. In so doing they kept their immigrant, along with socioeconomic, identity alive, and distinctive from other Hispanics, as well as from Anglos in whose midst they had moved. This has affected how they adapted to the U.S. politically.

Voting and the Making of the Cuban American Political Class

Cuban, unlike other, immigrants, enjoy a guaranteed path to citizenship, even if they enter and settle in the U.S. without legal permission. The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 entitles all Cubans who arrive without immigration visas,

as well as those who enter with such visas, to qualify for residency status and five years later for citizenship.

Cuban immigrants take their citizenship rights seriously. By 2000 nearly three-fourths of the Cuban Americans who were eligible, nationwide, and two-thirds of those in Miami, had taken out citizenship (Eckstein 2009: 91). But far more of the earlier than recent émigrés have become citizens. Indicative, in 2010, 92 percent of 1960s, compared to 41 percent of 1990s and 10 percent of first decade of this century immigrants had become U.S. citizens, and thus eligible to vote and elect people to represent their interests. All Cubans who arrived in the U.S. before 2004 were eligible for citizenship by 2010, owing to the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act.

FIU-IPOR Miami survey data show that Cuban American citizens, in turn, take their voting rights seriously. **In 2007**, 91 percent of age-eligible citizens had registered to vote (FIU-IPOR 2007, cited in Eckstein 2009: 93). But registration rates were highest among Cubans who emigrated during the first decade and **one-half** of Castro's rule, an immigration cohort who consider themselves exiles, and who, I, consequently, refer to as Exiles, whatever their reason for emigrating. The voter registration rate among this émigré cohort was higher even than among age-eligible US-born Cuban Americans.

Beginning in the 1980s, Cuban Americans used their vote to elect "their own" to political office. When given the option, Cuban Americans vote for those with their same heritage. Cuban immigrants first won offices in municipalities

where many of them lived. However, with time they have also won office where they are not the numerical majority, with the support of nonCubans, including at the county, Congressional district, and state levels. In Florida they have been elected mayors, City Managers and City Council members, and state and federal assemblymen/ Congressmen and Senators. With only occasional exception, to date they are the only Hispanics who have been elected to public office.

The Cuban Americans elected to office come from families who fled the revolution early on. Either they themselves immigrated, or their parents did. Cubans who emigrated since 1980, including the hundreds of thousands of Cubans who emigrated in the post Soviet era, and who by the turn of the century accounted for about half of the Cubans born on the island, remain at the sidelines of the Cuban American political class (Eckstein 2009: 33).

Cuban American politicians, as well as the Cuban American electorate, remain committed to Cuban affairs, even if they also concern themselves with local matters. In that most of the Cuba-born politicians emigrated at a young age, during Castro's first years of rule, and the second generation Cuban American politicians have yet to step foot on the island, the emergent political class mainly imagines Cuba under Castro. This is true of all Cuban American south Florida congressional Representatives and Senators, national legislators with influence over national politics.^{vi} Their imagined Cuba builds on views their parents' generation inculcated in them since their childhood: views of a paradise lost, which they feel justified in reclaiming, a loss blamed on Fidel and, by implication, his brother, Raul, his right-hand man for decades and, since 2008,

his successor as head of state. Regardless of which side of the Straits they were born, the politicians very publicly oppose Castro. It gets them votes at the polls, and helps them secure campaign contributions.

As of 2000, Cuban Americans also held one-third of the top appointed positions in the county, more than any other ethnic group. Having made such inroads into electoral and appointed office, three-fourths of Miami-Dade residents perceived Cuban Americans as the most politically powerful of the county's ethnic groups (*Miami Herald* September 4, 2000, p. 1).

Thus, Cuban Americans in Florida have become politically engaged in American politics. However, almost without exception only those Cubans who emigrated in the first decade or so of Castro's rule, and, increasingly their U.S.-born children, have been elected to political office.

Leveraging Local for National Political Influence

Wealthy Cuban Americans emigrated soon after the revolution have been instrumental in the electoral success of Cuban Americans. They have done so by organizing and financing political campaigns. But they have been selective in the co-ethnics they support, namely those who promote a hard-line on Cuba, symbolized by an embargo of Cuba as impermeable as possible which they believe would cause Castro's government to collapse. Through adept lobbying, together with political contributions, they also have gained support from nonCuban lawmakers for national legislation furthering their anti-Castro cause, at a time when Washington reestablished diplomatic and economic relations with

other Communist countries, most notably with China and Vietnam. Politically active Cuban Americans never forgot where they came from and why, and for this reason prioritized their anti-Castro mission over immigrant concerns in general and concerns of nonCuban Hispanics in particular.

Cuban Americans wielded influence through the Cuban American National Foundation, commonly called the Foundation, between the early 1980s and early 2000s. The charismatic Jorge Mas Canosa led the Foundation during most of those years. No other Cuban American group matched the Foundation in power-brokering. Prior to the founding of the Foundation, Exiles had been involved in scores of small organizations, some of which operated covertly and used violence, none of which were influential in mainstream American politics.

Ronald Reagan, when President, channeled funds that helped launch the Foundation, through the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Florida Democrat Dante Fascell introduced the enabling legislation to establish the NED, and became the NED's first director. The Foundation, using NED funds to help finance political campaigns, demanded support for its anti-Castro crusade in return for contributions (Fonzi 1993: 11; Haney and Vanderbush 2005: 43-44). Reagan had understood that the new Hispanic group in Florida could help him win reelection and further the Republican Party's new strategy, at the time, to expand its political base in the South. He also recognized that the Cuban Americans would support his efforts to defeat Left-leaning political movements then in the hemisphere, especially in Central America.^{vii}

Quickly establishing a revenue base of its own, the Foundation made campaign contributions that helped elect politicians who furthered their anti-Castro cause. They raised and channeled money through a Foundation-associated political action committee (PAC) that they formed. A core of members made large annual contributions, both to the Foundation and the PAC. At the turn of the century the Foundation claimed 50,000 members, including the “who’s who” of the Miami Cuban American community: mainly Cubans who had emigrated shortly after the revolution, and, by the turn of the century a small number of their U.S.-born children. Its 170 directors, trustees, and associates reputedly contributed \$1,000 to \$10,000 annually to the organization,^{viii} and its PAC, which took in nearly \$1.7 million and made \$1.3 million in political donations,^{ix} accounted for all but 1 percent of Cuban American PAC contributions between 1982 and the turn of the century.

The Foundation began in Miami where most of its membership, leadership, and financial contributors lived. And it was in Miami, and in Florida more broadly, that it built up its initial influence-peddling political base. It did so not only by publicly endorsing and privately funding campaigns of candidates sympathetic to its anti-Castro mission, but also by sponsoring a radio station, *La Voz de la Fundacion* (The Voice of the Foundation), that Mas Canosa oversaw. Exiles brought a tradition of radio-listening with them from Cuba, which Mas Conosa put to his political use.

Once consolidating power within the Cuban American community, the Foundation, under Mas Canosa’s tutelage, went on to extend its influence

beyond their ethnic group, beyond its territorial base in Florida, and across the partisan divide, even though most members were dedicated Republicans in their private lives. Indicative of its commitment to help elect Cuban Americans to political office, irrespective of their party affiliation or where in the U.S. they lived, provided they promoted its anti-Castro mission, the Foundation-associated PAC financed campaigns of all Cuban American Congressional candidates not only in Florida but also in New Jersey, where many Cubans had also settled in the 1960s. Most notably, it financed campaigns of New Jersey Democrat Robert Menendez, who began his political career as mayor of Union City and then went on to be a congressman and Senator. Menendez, in exchange, promoted the Foundation's anti-Castro mission, even to the point of defying the Democratic leadership. In addition to supporting embargo-tightening legislation when up for vote, he publicly opposed President Clinton's efforts in 1999 to improve U.S.-Cuba relations through "baseball diplomacy."^x And the following year he joined the chorus of south Florida Cuban American politicians who publicly criticized the Clinton Administration's decision to return six-year old Elian Gonzalez to his father in Cuba. Elian, brought ashore after his mother died at sea in their effort to enter the U.S. without legal permission, became the posterboy of hard-line Cuban American political activists who fought to keep the boy in America rather than have him reunited with his father who remained in Cuba. Menendez never supported a Cuba-related policy that his mainly Republican Florida campaign financiers opposed.

Modeled after the influential pro-Israel lobby, the Foundation became one of the most effective, and second best financed, ethnic lobby in the U.S. Its first success at the national level occurred in 1983 when it convinced Congress to allot \$10 million to fund Radio Marti, to beam anti-Castro messages to Cubans on the island. The main sponsor of the bill to finance the radio project was Senator Paula Hawkins, a Florida Republican. Although not Cuban American, she was one of the top ten recipients of Cuban American campaign funds between 1979 and 2000.

Even in the post Cold War when Cuba posed no national security threat the Foundation's savvy lobbying, along with campaign donations, contributed to passage of several laws that it believed furthered its anti-Castro cause. In 1990 Congress passed a bill for which the Foundation had lobbied, to establish federally funded TV Marti, to beam anti-Castro programs to Cuba with visual images to complement the work of Radio Marti. Floridian Congressman Fascell, the Democrat who had overseen the NED funding that gave the Foundation its initial financial boost, along with two other key supporters of the legislation, were nonCuban American beneficiaries of substantial Cuban American campaign contributions. Although the Cuban government blocked reception of the televised programs U.S. taxpayers funded, Congress continued to finance the project for decades.

Then, in 1992 Congress passed the Cuban Democracy Act for which the Foundation also lobbied. The bill was designed to isolate, and thereby strangulate and destabilize, the Castro regime economically, by closing embargo

loopholes. In particular, it prohibited U.S. businesses from trading with Cuba through other countries where they had subsidies. The bill was sponsored by New Jersey Democrat Congressman Robert Torricelli, the second largest recipient of Cuban American funding between 1979 and 2000. Until the political contributions flowed to his campaign coffers Torricelli had been an advocate for U.S.-Cuba dialogue (Morley and McGillion 2002: 15-16). His Senate partner in promoting the bill was Democrat Bob Graham of Florida, the sixth largest recipient of Cuban American political donations during the twenty-one year period.

The Foundation secured additional support for the embargo-tightening legislation by courting both 1992 presidential candidates with campaign contributions. George H.W. Bush was the fifth largest recipient of Cuban American political donations. Clinton received far fewer dollars, but announced his support for the pending Cuban Democracy Act upon attending Foundation events in Miami where he received campaign funds.

Another anti-Castro bill that the Foundation backed, in 1996, further tightened the embargo. the Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act, informally known as the Helms-Burton Bill, after its two key sponsors. Helms and Burton received substantial Cuban American campaign contributions either shortly before introducing the legislation or when Congress deliberated the bill. Among its provisions, the legislation laid legal basis for U.S. citizens to sue international investors operating on property the Cuban government had

expropriated, to which they laid prerevolutionary claims. The bill also called for U.S. denial of entry visas for such investors.

Understanding that passage of embargo-tightening measures required wider support than that of legislative sponsors, the directors of the Cuban American PAC strategically channeled funds to candidates nation-wide whose support the lobbyists sought. Lawmakers who backed the 1992 and 1996 bills typically received substantially more contributions than those who opposed the legislation, and few recipients of Cuban American dollars voted against the bills.

The 1996 legislation was the last embargo-tightening legislation for which the Foundation lobbied before Mas Canosa died, in 1997. In 2000, after his son, Jorge Mas Santos, assumed the Foundation helm, Foundation lobbyist failed to block passage of legislation allowing for the sale of food and medicines to Cuba. The success of Foundation influence proved to rest not merely on PAC contributions but also on the astute power-brokering of Mas Canosa.

Mas Canosa leveraged influence in part by silencing Cuban Americans who challenged his authority and the policies he advocated. He, for example, orchestrated the dismissal of the first Radio Marti director. Although an opponent of Castro, the director opposed embargo-tightening, TV Marti, on grounds that it violated international agreements, and Mas Canosa's domination of the government-funded media projects. With the director's removal from office, Mas Canosa could use the federally funded media projects, along with the Foundation's local radio station, to consolidate his role as the premier

gatekeeping communicator on Cuban matters. And as gatekeeper he repressed challenges both to his hardline stance on Cuba and to his personal authority.

Thus, under Mas Canosa's leadership, the Foundation leveraged Cuban American financial success to influence U.S. Cuba policy. It astutely made use of interest group politics the U.S. political system permits. But Mas Canosa simultaneously blunted opposition from fellow Cuban Americans who challenged his authority and gate-keeper role on matters pertaining to Cuba.

The Presidential Election Cycle and Exile Policy Influence between 1992 and 2004

Exiles' national level policy influence rested on leveraging Cuban American votes, as well as the savvy targeting of political contributions and lobbying. They mastered brokering votes in exchange for favors. Especially in the post Cold War era, presidential elections provided Exiles with an opportunity to attain political concessions, to convince incumbent presidents and not merely legislators, to champion policies they wanted. Even as Exiles' influence over Congress weakened in the latter 1990s, their influence over presidents, with discretionary power, remained. National level Cuba policy between 1992 and 2004 was intricately linked with the presidential electoral cycle, such that government initiatives (1) varied in election and non-election years; (2) were responsive in election years to concerns and wants of the Cuban American electorate, and (3) were reversed or left unenforced in non-election years, when voter-driven reforms conflicted with non-electoral based concerns of governance.

Even though Cuban Americans account for less than 1 percent of the U.S. population, they benefited from mainly living in the largest electoral “swing state,” Florida. The state-based winner-take-all electoral college system contributed to the importance of their vote in presidential elections. By 2000 Cuban Americans accounted for 8 percent of the Florida electorate, in a state that commanded one-tenth of the electoral college votes.^{xi} While Cuban Americans tend to bloc-vote, in the context of a “swing state” the extent of their bloc-voting impacts on electoral outcomes.

Table 2 summarizes embargo loosening and tightening policies that were implemented in presidential election and non-election years between 1992 and 2004. It documents whether the policies were implemented by an incumbent and whether the incumbent who implemented the embargo policies won the Florida vote. Embargo policies, in the main, became more restrictive in presidential election years, and less restrictive in off-election years when inconsistent with other concerns of governance.

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The post Cold War Cuban American electoral-linked policy cycle began with passage of the Cuban Democracy Act in 1992. George H.W. Bush supported the bill when running for reelection, despite reservations about it,^{xii} to curry Cuban American votes in Florida. He strategically signed the legislation in Miami on the eve of the election, and at the ceremony acknowledged Mas Canosa as one of the key forces behind the new law.^{xiii} Indicative that his stance on the bill was

electoral-driven, he had previously vetoed the Mack Amendment, the precursor to the 1992 legislation, because of its extra-territorial claims. Bush had blocked the Mack Amendment when lobbied by big business, which resented interference with its overseas profiteering, and especially by foreign governments (such as Canada) that resented U.S. interference with their trade dealings (Eckstein 1994: 282, n 33; Morley and McGillion 2002: 43, 49). At the time, appeasing business and foreign allies mattered more to Bush than placating Cuban American hardliners.

It was in the context of his re-election bid that Bush withdrew his opposition to embargo tightening through extraterritorial means. Like the Mack Amendment, the Cuban Democracy Act prohibited U.S. businesses from third-country trade with Cuba. When pressed to choose between backing interests of business and foreign allies, or courting Cuban American Florida votes in an election year, the latter mattered more.

Further indicative that his changed stance was electoral-driven, to get Cuban American votes, Bush continued to permit U.S. companies to trade with other remaining Communist countries, from the United States or via other countries. His stance on the pending legislation was not rooted in overarching opposition to economic relations with Communist countries. Bush's opportunism paid off. Three-fourths of Cuban Americans in Florida voted for him, enough to win the state. However, in that U.S. Cuba policy mattered little to most of the national electorate after the Cold War ended, Bush's support for the Cuban Democracy Act did not suffice to win him re-election.

The 1996 election galvanized yet another Exile-backed policy cycle. Like Bush in 1992, Clinton took advantage of incumbency four years later to support new embargo-tightening legislation, the Cuban Liberty and Democracy Solidarity Act, against the backdrop of his re-election bid. Also following Bush's example, in the reelection context Clinton supported legislation he previously had opposed. Clinton had been especially concerned about the bill's internationally unpopular extraterritorial claims (Morley and McGillion 2002, 52–113). Business leaders, as well as foreign governments, found the Helms-Burton bill even more offensive than the Cuban Democracy Act. They considered it an infringement of their sovereignty and trading rights, and a violation of GATT and WTO principles.

Clinton backed the Helms-Burton bill, despite business and foreign government opposition, after planes flown by the Exile group Brothers to the Rescue were shot down by the Cuban military over the Florida Straits in February 1996. Cuba's action stirred emigré fury in Florida. With most Miami Cuban Americans supportive of the Helms-Burton bill (FIU-IPOR 1997), Clinton reversed his stance on the legislation in the context of the heightened anti-Castro fervor in the election year.

Moreover, Clinton, like Bush, signed the legislation in Florida. He timed it to coincide with the opening of the political primary contest in the state (Morley and McGillion 2002, 105), and he had influential Cuban Americans invited to the signing ceremony (Schoultz 2009, chap. 13). Clinton's approval of the legislation helped him garner about a third of the Cuban American Florida vote that November, insufficient to break the Republicans' lock on the state's Cuban

American electoral bloc but sufficient for him to win the state's electoral college votes and his presidential re-election bid in turn. He was the first Democrat to win Florida in 20 years.

In his memoir, Clinton acknowledged that his support for the bill involved good election-year politics in Florida, but that it undermined whatever chance he might have had in a second term to negotiate a lifting of the embargo in exchange for political and economic change in Cuba (Clinton 2004, 701, 727). The Helms-Burton bill, among its measures, restricted presidential authority to lift the embargo without congressional approval. Having considered Florida critical to his re-election bid, Clinton had worked for four years to cultivate support in the state, including among Cuban Americans. Although he had an interest in making improved U.S.-Cuba bilateral relations and changes in Cuba a hallmark of his presidency, when pressed to choose, he prioritized his re-election.

Further indicative that his support for the 1996 legislation was voter-driven, after winning a second term Clinton never enforced a provision of the law that foreign governments and investors found especially egregious: the clause that gave U.S. citizens the right to sue international investors who "trafficked" in property they had owned before the revolution. But the very enactment of the legislation, with its extraterritorial reach, so angered the international community that country votes in the United Nations General Assembly to condemn the embargo subsequently increased substantially. The United States paid an international price for passing legislation that was never enforced.^{xiv} What was good for winning an election in Florida proved bad for U.S. foreign relations.

In addition, after winning reelection, Clinton never honored provisions of the Helms-Burton legislation that required political and economic change in Cuba before the U.S. government would allow Cuban Americans rights to visit family on the island and send them remittances. He relaxed restrictions on what Cuban Americans called the personal embargo, even though the requisite changes had not transpired in Cuba. Whereas the Helms-Burton bill was premised on the rationale that a people-to-people “wall” across the Florida Straits would induce change in Cuba, Clinton, once reelected, argued that cross-border personal ties could lay groundwork for improved bilateral relations. In essence, Clinton, like Bush before him, reversed policies promoted to win votes that conflicted with government priorities.

The 2000 election did not result in new embargo-tightening measures. To the contrary; that year, before the election, Clinton signed into law the legislation that allowed U.S. food sales to Cuba. Agribusiness, with economic interests in numerous farm states, had been lobbying to lift export barriers since the early 1990s, to expand its market opportunities (Castro 2008, 22; Schoultz 2009, chap. 13; LeoGrande 2005, 9). Clinton supported loosening the embargo in an election year, when Democrats faced lobbyists more moneyed and influential than Cuban Americans, and when the President was not running for re-election, so that he was not personally concerned with the Florida vote. While Cuban American lobbyists in the process suffered their first major post–Cold War foreign policy legislative defeat, they managed to get a stipulation inserted into the trade bill that Cuba pay in cash for purchases, to limit what the country could

import. Also in 2000, the Cuban American lobbyists succeeded in getting Congress to legislate a once-a-year cap on Cuban American homeland visits, at a time when congressional momentum had mounted for lifting travel restrictions for all Americans, not merely for Cuban Americans with island relatives.

The controversy over whether six-year old Elián should stay in the United States or be returned to his father in Cuba instead became the focal point of the 2000 Cuban American policy cycle. The controversy revealed the political price a presidential candidate incurred by defying Cuban American yearnings. That year Cuban Americans helped George W. Bush win the electoral college vote, with Florida decisive to the election outcome. Officially, Bush won the state by slightly more than five hundred votes, with over 80 percent of Cuban Americans backing him. Elián innocently contributed to Bush's exceptionally strong support among Cuban Americans that year. Despite the community's tendency to vote as a bloc, never before had it used the ballot box in such large numbers and in such unity-- and in a Florida election won by so few votes.

Cuban Americans opposed President Clinton's intervention to honor parental custody rights and return Elián to his father in Cuba. Seventy-nine percent of Miami Cuban Americans felt that Elián should remain in the United States with Miami relatives (FIU-IPOR 2000). The Cuban American National Foundation financed Elián's Florida relatives' fight for claims to the boy.

Al Gore, the Democratic presidential nominee in 2000, had been Clinton's vice president. He was damned by association with the Clinton White House

even though he very publicly broke with the President and sided with Elián's Miami relatives.^{xv} In his memoir, Clinton (2004: 905) acknowledged Gore's stance to be understandable, given the importance of Florida in the election. Outrage with the Clinton administration's handling of the Elián case was so strong, however, that Gore did not dare campaign in Cuban American neighborhoods for fear of facing protests (Flores et al. **forthcoming**).

Gore's experience reveals that when incumbent presidents implement policies unpopular among key constituencies, even a vice president running for the highest office may pay a price at the polls. Cuban Americans were so enraged with the Clinton administration's sequestering of Elián to return him to Cuba that they defended Bush when his victory was disputed. They intimidated the local officials in charge of the recount to the point of helping to shut down the effort to validate the vote (Finnegan 2004, 70).

When George W. Bush ran for re-election in 2004, after the Elián affair had been put to rest, his support among Cuban Americans in Florida dropped from 82 to 77 percent (Flores et al. **forthcoming**). Yet, even to gain support of three-fourths of Floridian Cuban Americans, Bush acceded to pressure from influential Exiles to tighten the personal embargo, one of the few remaining loopholes in the embargo (see Eckstein 2009: Chapter 3, 4, and 6). Bush took advantage of his discretionary powers as president to reduce dramatically Cuban American rights to travel to see and to send remittances to island family, rights he had expanded the preceding year. His clampdown placated demands from Cuban American Florida Republican state representatives, Miami Cuban American municipal and

county officers, the Miami Cuban American Congressional delegation, and hardline Cuban American groups, such as Mothers and Women Against Repression, the Cuban Liberty Council, and Unidad Cubana (San Martin 2003). Bush argued that the tightening of the personal embargo would hasten regime change on the island (USSD-CAFC 2004), the opposite of Clinton, who had argued that a loosening of travel restrictions would lay bedrock for improved U.S.-Cuban bilateral relations. Bush invited influential high-ranking Cuban Americans to be present when he gave speeches about strengthening the personal embargo.

George W. Bush's tightening of the embargo in an election year, and loosening it in a nonelection year, further suggests that Cuban American policy was electoral-driven. Bush, like Clinton before him, had expanded Cuban American travel and remittance-sending rights in an off-election year. When not running for office, the presidents were less accommodating to Cuban American hardliner wishes and more responsive to bipartisan congressional voices, and business and humanitarian interests, that favored relaxation of travel restrictions (Schoultz 2009, chap. 13; LeoGrande 2005, 36–44). In nonelection years they also were more willing to respect U.S. commitment to freedom of travel and family values.

Between 1992 and 2004 there was one instance of personal embargo tightening in a non-election year. In 1994, Clinton restricted travel and remittance sending to instances of "extreme hardship" and "extreme humanitarian need," on a case-by-case basis. He did so in the context of an immigration crisis (Masud-

Piloto 1996). That year, Castro allowed tens of thousands of Cubans to leave the island without U.S. entry permission. Clinton initially refused them admission. Exiles turned in outrage on the President, believing that Cubans fleeing Castro were entitled to special immigration privileges. Against this backdrop, Clinton agreed to a request from Mas Canosa to tighten the personal embargo, in exchange for him not opposing a revision of the Cuban Adjustment Act, to require that Cubans found at sea be returned to their home country and not allowed rights to U.S. entry. Cubans who managed to make their way to U.S. shores continued to be entitled to emigration rights. In his memoir, Clinton (2004: 615) admitted that even in this off-election year, he had his 1996 re-election bid in mind when making the deal with Mas Canosa.

Breakdown of the Cuban American Policy Cycle

In the early 2000s the Cuban American community continued to increase in size, with the annual emigration (by law) of 20,000 Cubans, most new arrivals settled in Florida, and Florida continued to be important to Presidential elections. However, by 2008 the political context had changed. Ordinary Cuban Americans became increasingly divided in the policies they coveted, and influential Cuban Americans ceased to speak in a single voice to leverage votes for policy initiatives. Also, in the 2008 presidential election no candidate ran as an incumbent, able to use the highest office to implement vote-getting policies, and momentum had built up among legislators, other than among Cuban American legislators, both to lift travel restrictions for all Americans and to end economic sanctions against Cuba (Sweig 2007).^{xvi}19 Against this backdrop, presidential

candidates focused more on whether to maintain or loosen Bush's restrictions than on embargo tightening.

By the 2008 election Cuban Americans had come to differ increasingly in their stance toward the personal embargo, toward continuing the basic embargo, toward selling medicine and especially food to Cuba, and toward reestablishing diplomatic ties and engaging in a dialogue with the Cuban government (FIU-IPOR 2007); see Eckstein 2009: 98). They differed depending on when they had emigrated. Those who I refer to as the New Cubans, post-Soviet era arrivals, contrast markedly in their views with earlier emigrés with regard to cross-border relations> They differ especially with those who first fled the revolution, the core of Exiles from which the Cuban American political class and most campaign contributors emanate (Eckstein 2009: Chapter 3).

The varying views of Cuban immigrants are traceable to their different lived experiences in Cuba. The revolution was the defining experience of the first who fled the revolution, and a politically negative experience at that (Pedraza 2007; Eckstein 2009: Chapter 1). It continued to shape their views on Cuban matters even after having lived for decades and most of their lives in the United States. Their hard-line on Cuba symbolized their continued opposition to Fidel, which they refused to put to rest, even with the transition of rule to his brother, Raúl.

The defining experience for the post Soviet era arrivals was the traumatic economic crisis caused by the abrupt ending of Soviet aid and trade. Often emigrating for economic reasons (Eckstein 2009: Appendix), to improve not only

their own lot but, through remittances, that of family they left behind, they wished to maintain ties with Cubans on the island. By the start of this century they accounted for about one-fourth of the island-born in the United States, outnumbering the core of Exiles, who emigrated between 1959 and 1964 (Eckstein 2009: Table 1.3).

On the personal embargo, the emigré waves are especially divided. They hold opposing views. In Miami in 2007, on the eve of the 2008 presidential election, approximately three-fourths of the New Cubans (including 80 percent of the 1995–2007 emigrés) favored unrestricted travel rights, approximately the same number who favored restrictions among the first émigrés (Eckstein 2009: 97).^{xvii}

With contrasting views toward the personal embargo, the emigré cohorts differed in their views on Bush's 2004 tightening of travel and remittance-sending restrictions. Distinguishing only between pre-and post-1980 emigrés, Bendixen and Associates found, in their 2006 Miami-Dade and Broward County survey, that 63 percent of pre-1980 emigrés approved, while almost the same percent (55) of 1980s and later arrivals disapproved, of Bush's clampdown on cross-border people-to-people rights (Bendixen and Associates 2006). Differentiating years of arrival in more detail, FIU-IPOR found in its 2007 Miami survey that more than twice as many New Cubans as Exiles favored a return to the pre-2004, less restrictive travel and remittance policies.

Although the emigré cohort divide was already in the making at the time of the 2004 election, Bush, running for re-election as an incumbent, used his discretionary power to tighten the personal embargo to accommodate to political pressure from hard-liner groups, political contributors, and South Florida Cuban American politicians. The New Cubans were not organized as a force unto themselves, and the Foundation, which by then opposed the personal embargo, had become too weak to lobby effectively, for reasons explained below.

When tightening the personal embargo in 2004, Bush undoubtedly understood where his votes would come from. Only 31 percent of registered voters felt restricted by the clampdown, compared to 57 percent of unregistered voters (FIU-IPOR 2007). Most Soviet-era emigrés were U.S. citizens and therefore likely to vote, whereas only one-fourth of New Cubans were U.S. citizens (Eckstein 2009: 93). Politically active Soviet-era emigrés who advocated tightening the personal embargo were indifferent to the impact the clampdown had on recent arrivals.

By 2008, an incipient generational divide also was in the making, between those born in Cuba and those born in the United States. By then, about half of all Cuban Americans were U.S.-born, and on U.S. Cuba policy many of them shared the views of New Cubans (Eckstein 2009: 98, 134). For example, two-thirds of U.S.-born Cuban Americans all, by definition, U.S. citizens eligible to vote if old enough, disapproved of Bush's 2004 tightening of the personal embargo. However, U.S.-born Cuban Americans and the New Cubans differed in their reasons for opposing the personal embargo. The New Cubans' views were

shaped by their continued commitment to friends and family on the island. In contrast, the views of the U.S.-born were shaped by their U.S. upbringing. They were schooled in U.S. values of compromise and tolerance, even if, at home, their Exile parents socialized them to a hardline stance toward Castro's Cuba.

Disputes over policy that were, at their core, generation-based, led the hardline immigrant generation to leave the Foundation to form both a new organization, the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC) and a new PAC, after which the Foundation became a shadow of its former self. The new PAC raised more money than the Foundation ever had, while the Foundation lost its financial base, to the point that it needed to downsize its staff, close its Washington lobbying office, and shut down its radio station. Second-generation Cuban Americans, who dominated the faction that continued to affiliate with the Foundation, remained committed to their parents' battle with Castro, but they favored a more conciliatory approach to dealing with Cuba that was consistent with their U.S. upbringing. With no charismatic leader comparable to Mas Canosa, the CLC never attained the influence the Foundation formerly had, despite the PAC money it raised. Meanwhile, the organization divide highlighted how the Cuban American community no longer spoke in a single voice.

In turn, a partisan divide began to surface in 2004 among the Cuban American leadership ranks in Miami, for the first time since Republicans had consolidated their hold over the Cuban American electorate in the 1980s. By 2008, the partisan divide deepened. In the run-up to the 2004 presidential election, U.S.-born Joe García left his post as executive director of the

Foundation to join the New Democratic Network, an organization formed to recruit, promote, and fund a new generation of Democratic candidates. Four years later, he ran for Congress on the Democratic ticket. Also that year, Raúl Martínez, the longtime mayor of Hialeah, who had been a Democrat since the days before Cuban Americans became entrenched in the Republican Party, also ran for Congress. The two of them contested the Miami congressional seats of the staunch hardliner brothers, Mario and Lincoln Díaz-Balart, who never before faced serious Congressional electoral challenges. Although the Democratic candidates lost, they appealed to the Cuban American “generation gap,” by focusing less on Raúl and Fidel Castro and more on ending Bush’s 2004 restrictions, and on domestic matters (Nooruddin 2008).

Against the growing divide in views among the electorate and the breakdown of hardliner hegemony at the leadership level, a presidential candidate in 2008 spoke out for the first time for loosening the embargo, although only at the people-to-people level. While John McCain, the Republican candidate, publicly supported continuation of Bush’s policies, Barack Obama, the Democratic nominee, announced that he would lift Bush’s restrictions to allow Cuban Americans to visit their relatives more frequently and to send more remittances if they so desired. Obama argued that Bush’s policies left Cubans too dependent on the Castro-led regime and too removed from the transformative message that Cuban Americans carry. While the CLC, and the PAC associated with it, backed McCain, Obama, without Cuban American PAC money, was not beholden to moneyed Cuban Americans committed to the

personal embargo. Under the circumstances, he took the political risk of alienating the most hardline, while appealing to the half of registered Cuban American voters in Miami, mainly U.S.-born Cuban Americans and New Cubans who had become citizens, who favored a return to the travel and remittance policies in place before Bush's 2004 crackdown (FIU-IPOR 2007).

In Sum

Hardliners regrouped organizationally in the early 2000s and they continued to dominate Cuban American PAC contributions. They also continued to be the main Cuban American voters. However, by the time of the 2008 election their influence over national policy declined. The Cuban American community had become divided in their views, and hardliner hegemony was challenged at the leadership and organizational level as never before. The changes brought an end to the Cuban American electoral policy cycle that wealthy, well-organized, and politically active Cubans who emigrated after the revolution had masterfully engineered. Florida remained important to presidential electoral outcomes, but hard-line Exiles lost their capacity to leverage the Cuban American vote and financial policies to press for their "narrow" self-defined interests.

Nonetheless, in Greater Miami Cuban Americans continue to be a political force. Ever more Cuban Americans are elected to political office. But they do not, to date, press for the concerns of the New Cubans who constitute a growing percent of the Cuban immigrant community or for major concerns of other

Hispanics, who now outnumber Cuban Americans in the city. Cuban American politicians do not, for example, advocate for immigration reform. Indeed, Cuban American Senator Mario Rubio opposed the Dream Act, designed to give children of undocumented parents a path to permanent residency. And Cuban Americans do not, in the main lend financial support to help elect other Hispanic candidates to office. Politically, Cuban Americans consider themselves distinctive from other Hispanics, despite their shared cultural heritage and immigrant origins.

TABLE 1

RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF MIAMI IN CENSUS YEARS 1970-
2010

	Cubans	Non-Hisp White	Non-Hisp Black	Other
Hispanic				
Year				
1970	4	79	14	
3				
1980	26	45	18	
11				
1990	31	31	19	
20				
2000	30	21	20	
28				
2010				

Source: Ruggles and Sobek, et al, 2003, cited in Eckstein 2009: 46.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF U.S EMBARGO TIGHTENING AND LOOSENING MEASURES IN THE
POST COLD WAR, AND WHETHER INCUMBENT PRESIDENT WON FLORIDA WHEN
RUNNING
FOR REELECTION

	<u>Personal Embargo</u>		<u>Macro Embargo</u>		<u>Incumbent</u>	
	Loosening	Tightening	Loosening	Tightening	Wins FLA	Loses FLA
1992		X	X	X		
1994		X				
1995	X					
1996		X	X	X		
1998	X					
1999	X					
2000 [Elián](a)	X(b)		X		X(c)	
2003	X(d)					
2004		X		X		

Note:

a Elián González returned to Cuba amid Cuban American opposition

b Codification of travel cap, amid pressure to lift travel restrictions (but no change in frequency of permitted visits)

c Incumbent vice president runs for office, associated with incumbent president's policy regarding Elián

d Loosening of restrictions for Cuban Americans, though tightening of restrictions for other Americans

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NOTES

ⁱ Island-born immigrants typically refer to themselves as Cuban. Immigrant children are more likely to self-identify as Cuban American. I refer to the Cuba-origin people as they would, except when usage of the term "Cuban" confuses people on the island with immigrants.

ⁱⁱ This is a remarkable degree of concentration. There are more than 4,000 counties in the U.S., and less than 1 percent of all Americans are of Cuban origin. Boswell 2002: , ii, 3, 25, 27, 28. See also www.epodunk.com/ancestry/Cuban (*New York Times* April 11, 2000: B-1; and *Miami Herald* September 17, 2001 (cited in www.miami.com/herald/September 20, 2001).

ⁱⁱⁱ Data personally obtained from the Department of Homeland Security.

^{iv} Cubans were joined by Puerto Ricans, Nicaraguans, and Colombians, and in smaller numbers by Mexicans, Central Americans other-than-Nicaraguans, and others from the Caribbean (Boswell et al 2001: 13, 14, 17, 21; United States Census Bureau state and County QuickFacts, Miami-Dade County, Florida

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12025.htm>). Latin Americans were lured by the city Cubans remade, at the same time that deteriorating conditions in their home countries induced them to uproot. Not only revolutions, but civil wars, natural disasters, deteriorating economic conditions, and stepped up crime and insecurity, led rich and poor alike to follow the Cuban example and make Miami their home.

^v The metropolitan area encompasses almost the entire county of Miami-Dade. It includes over two dozen municipalities that range substantially in size.

^{vi} The one exception is Senator Marc Rubio. Born in the U.S., his parents emigrated before the revolution. However, when launching his political career he claimed his parents to be exiles who had emigrated in the first years after Castro assumed power. His dishonesty, which became public after his election to the Senate in 2010, reveals how important exile claims are even to second generation Cuban Americans who are politically ambitious in Miami.

^{vii} Earl Black and Merle Black. 2002. *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

^{viii} Eckstein 2009: 107, fn 55.

^{ix} Eckstein 2009: 108, fn 56.

^x The “baseball diplomacy” involved an exchange of games between Cuban All-Stars and the Baltimore Orioles, in Cuba and the U.S., to promote cross-border good-will. After failing to prevent the games, Menendez helped organize opposition at the U.S. stadium site, in Baltimore. He helped arrange for a large bus caravan to transport protesters from the New York-New Jersey area to the Baltimore game, where they were joined by a smaller contingent from more distant Miami. Exiles associated with the Foundation, an important contributor to his political campaigns, orchestrated the effort to obstruct the play-offs.

^{xi} www.cubanet.org/CNews/y03/ago03/15e4.htm.

^{xii} Morley and McGillion 2002: 45-46.

^{xiii} Schoultz 2009: Chapter 12.

^{xiv} The percentage of countries that condemned U.S. Cuba economic sanctions rose from 33 in 1992 to 73 after the Helms-Burton bill went into effect, and then to 88 in 2001. (Dominguez 2008, 206).

^{xv} While Gore could distance himself from the 2000 legislation that exempted farm exports from the embargo,

Elián became such a heated Cuban American controversy that the vice president believed that neutrality on, and indifference to, the issue would cost him the Florida vote. Because it is highly unusual for a vice president to disagree publicly with the president he serves, Gore is unlikely to have broken with the President had he not been campaigning for the presidency at the time, no matter what he privately thought.

^{xvi} While momentum built up in Congress for partial lifting of the embargo, including travel restrictions, a core of legislators remained loyal to maintaining it. Bush allied with these legislators, many of whom were recipients of PAC funds and some of whom, as noted, became more supportive of embargo tightening after receiving those funds.

^{xvii} Although FIU-IPOR included 1985-89 emigrés in the same wave as post-Soviet-era arrivals in its 2000 and 2004 surveys, few Cubans (and few in the FIU-IPOR surveys) moved to the United States in the latter 1980s.