Political Geography and Regionalism in Florida: An Analysis of Presidential Elections from 1948 to 1996

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In both the character of its population and its economy Florida differs significantly from other southern states. The state's character began to diverge from that of the other states within the region around the turn of the twentieth century. At that time it began to attract people from all over the nation, and even from abroad. When the state first became a part of the United States, it was primarily settled by people from elsewhere in the South who came to raise cotton and tobacco in North Florida. Few ventured far onto the peninsula. The state's capital, Tallahassee, now remote from the center of the state's population, is a historic reminder of Florida's pre-Civil War population distribution. At the time it became the capital it was close to the center of the state's population, but today it is among the most remote. The Peninsula remained almost completely empty until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1860 it held only six percent of the state's population, the majority living in Key West. In 1900 the share had only risen to 28 percent. Today over 80 percent of the state's population live there.

Peninsular Florida began its rapid population growth following the construction of railroads. Later highways and air routes improved its connectivity with the rest of the nation and stimulated even more rapid population growth. Another factor to population growth on the Peninsula was an increase in the number of people elsewhere in the nation who had both the time and the money to take a winter vacation. The coasts of the southern half of the Peninsula were early beneficiaries of tourism. Later a growing share of the nation's population was able to retire from work and had sufficient savings and retirement income to entertain living elsewhere than where they were employed. A growing number chose to move to Florida to enjoy its mild winters. The introduction of air conditioning, now universal throughout the state, made the

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hot and humid summers bearable, and induced many more people to come (Shelley and Webster 1998; Lewis 1990).

Following World War II, Florida's prewar economic and migratory trends intensified, as the state participated in the Sunbelt economic boom (Shelley and Webster 1998; Brennan 1995; Birdsall and Florin 1992; Webster 1987; Phillips 1969). Although Florida's growth was less fueled by manufacturing than other Sunbelt states and more by tourism and services oriented toward retirees, many jobs were created, stimulating a population growth rate that for decades has been among the nation's largest (Knox and Agnew 1998: 230). The Castro revolution in Cuba drove hundreds of thousands of its citizens into exile, most settling in the Miami metropolitan area. Their arrival encouraged hundreds of thousands of Latinos from other politically unstable Caribbean nations to come. (Agnew 1987; Webster 1987). Since most of the population growth took place on the Peninsula, particularly its southern half, a cultural dichotomy has developed between it and that of relatively slow growing North Florida (Shelley and Webster 1998; Birdsall and Florin 1992; Webster 1987).

Social scientists have long recognized this dichotomy between Northern/Panhandle Florida and the Peninsula (Birdsall and Florin 1992; Garreau 1981; Hart 1976; Zelinsky 1973). To Zelinsky (1973) Northern Florida remained an extension of the Lowland or Deep South cultural region, which he stated had its cultural roots in Midland Britain and West Africa. Peninsular Florida, on the other hand, derived its population from many sources besides the South, especially from the Northeastern United States, the Midwest, and Latin America. This led Zelinsky (1973) to identify the Peninsula as culturally a region of uncertain status and affiliation. Garreau (1981) divided Florida along similar lines to that of Zelinsky, and stressed South Florida's ties to the Caribbean and Latin America. Recent scholarship in cultural geography continues to identify this dichotomy between the two regions, but there is general belief that the differences are shrinking (Alderman and Beavers 1999).

Whereas it is readily apparent that Peninsular Florida has undergone an enormous cultural transformation in the past century, the social and economic changes that North Florida has experienced are far less apparent. North Florida's cultural roots remain firmly in the antebellum nineteenth century, a period when cotton and tobacco plantations, using slave labor, were the foundation of its economy. The emancipation of slaves did little to alter the culture, since most slaves became sharecroppers. Although the share of blacks in the

region's population has fallen over time, by the end of the twentieth century there still were some small counties where their share was almost half.

Until approximately thirty years ago the region's politics were elitist, especially in the rural counties. Often the descendents of the plantation aristocracy governed, usually for their economic and social benefit. These conditions did not change until the 1960s, when the federal government began to enact civil rights legislation that made it easier for blacks to vote, receive a better education, and participate more fully in the region's economic life. Although manufacturing came to North Florida, especially to Pensacola and Jacksonville, most of the unskilled labor needed was provided by southern whites from nearby. One leading source of migrants to North Florida from other regions has been military personnel who come temporarily to staff its numerous naval and air bases. Many have chosen to retire there.

Key (1949), attempting to characterize Florida in its entirety and not regionally, defined it as a state that was politically different from the other southern states. He believed that the difference lay in the fact that since blacks constituted a smaller share of its population than other southern states, Florida's politics were less preoccupied with racial issues. In addition, the power of the Democrat Party was not as strong as elsewhere within the region, and the population was dispersed. It should be noted that many political scientists, over time, have come to believe that the South, including Florida, is in the process of becoming politically and socially more like the rest of the nation (Petrocik 1987). This certainly holds true for Florida, whose demographic history has made it a microcosm of the nation's demographic characteristics (Carver and Fiedler 1999). Despite the efforts of some social scientists to make generalities about Florida in its entirety, it cannot be ignored that North Florida remains culturally distinct from the Peninsula.

This essay will examine the political differences between the two Floridas through a statistical analysis of presidential elections held between 1948 and 1996. Specifically, the results will be examined to ascertain the location of county "clusters" which have given Republican candidates varying degrees of support. The Republican Party has gained many registrants in Florida since World War II. Part of the explanation is that many who migrated from other states already had registered with the party. Another explanation is that, beginning during the successful 1968 presidential campaign of Richard Nixon, the Republicans implemented what they called a "southern strategy."

That strategy was used to win over disaffected white southern Democrats, embittered by legislation that sought to give blacks economic, political, and social rights equal to their own.

A Political Subregionalization of Florida

In the interest of understanding the complexity of Florida's political landscape, before an interpretation of the results of the presidential elections is undertaken, a brief political subregionalization of the state will be made. An article in the *Miami Herald* (Fiedler 1996) divided the state into five political regions. They were (1) Dixie (North Florida), (2) the Gold Coast (Southeast Florida), (3) the Linchpin (Central and Northeast Florida), (4) the Barbell (Southwest and East-Central Florida), and (5) Forgotten Florida (South-Central Florida). Fiedler used this regional taxonomy in 1996 to facilitate political analysis, and later with Carver in 1999, for the same purpose (1999).

The political character of Dixie should be obvious to the reader, since Fiedler's definition is very similar to that earlier mentioned in this study. It is politically conservative, with strong southern social characteristics. For the past 40 years many white Democrats living in the region have abandoned the party for the more conservative Republican Party. Also, the arrival of military personnel, many of whom vote Republican, has further increased the number of Republicans. The Gold Coast includes the large cities of Miami, Palm Beach, and Fort Lauderdale, and their suburbs. Approximately one-third of the state's population lives within this subregion. It is home to a large number of northern Jews who are noted for their strong liberal political and social views (Sheskin 1998), highly conservative Cuban exiles, most of whom vote Republican once they become citizens, and the majority of the state's black population, who continue to vote Democrat. The Linchpin is a fast-growing portion of the state that comprises a corridor that begins in Jacksonville, passes through Orlando, and ends in the Tampa Bay areas. This region is called the Linchpin because it has a large voting population that is equally divided between Republicans and Democrats, and hence often decides which party wins the state. It has attracted people from all over the nation and has a rapidly growing Puerto Rican population. The Barbell of Southwest Florida is an old Republican stronghold, since for many years it has attracted Republicans from the nation's Midwest. Forgotten Florida surrounds Lake Okeechobee, a part of the state that has not

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experienced rapid population growth. It has more registered Democrats than Republicans, but in recent presidential elections has leaned toward the Republicans.

Data and Methodology

The data in this study are the percentage of the total vote received by Republican presidential candidates at the Florida county level from 1948 to 1996. The year 1948 was chosen to begin the study because that was the first presidential election in which the Democrat Party in the South began to show weakness, after almost 70 years of virtually complete political domination (Shelley et al. 1996). The 1996 presidential election is the most recent.

Since the purpose of this study is to ascertain the difference between the political landscape of North and Peninsular Florida, a definition of the two was needed. Bartley and Graham's (1975) was chosen. They based their definition on the results of Florida's 1972 presidential primary. Peninsular Florida consisted of 31 counties and Northern Florida comprised the remainder. Their definition is almost identical to that proposed by Phillips (1969), Hart (1975) and Zelinsky (1973). This identification is meant to test, through voting behavior, the degree the politics of the two regions differ over time

Voting behavior in Florida has been the subject of numerous investigations. The *Atlas of Florida* (Fernald and Purdum 1992) identified by county which presidential candidate won in every election from 1848 to 1988. However, this study adopts a more sophisticated approach to analyzing party support throughout the state, one that has been used frequently by social scientists who study electoral geography.

The presidential elections from 1948 through 1996 have been examined using two statistical procedures. The first is the G_i^* statistic (Ord and Getis 1995; Anselin 1995a; Anselin 1995b) which measures *and identifies* spatial autocorrelation. In this study the statistic indicates the extent to which a county is surrounded by other counties with similar voting behavior, in this case for Republicans. Using Figure 1f for an example, a "cluster" can be seen in the northwest corner of the state where four contiguous counties displayed high G_i^* z-scores in the 1996 presidential election. On the 1996 map, and others, there are also clusters with very low z-scores. This indicates that the counties in the cluster gave uniformly low support to the

Republican candidate. Z-scores were grouped into seven categories (see appendix for the grouping).

Degree of Concentration of Republican Votes in Florida for All Presidential Elections since 1948

Before county clusters of Republican voting are identified it is useful to establish the degree of concentration of Republican voting throughout Florida (Table 1). The results, obtained by submitting the data to the Moran I Test, show that there has been considerable variation in the degree that the Republican vote has clustered when the 13 elections between 1948 and 1996 are examined. The highest degree of clustering took place in the elections between 1948 and 1968, with 1964 being the one exception. After 1968 the z-values, which define the degree of clustering, were lower, especially in the elections of 1972 and 1988.

A broad generalization that explains the decline in the degree of clustering after 1968 is that by then the number of people who registered Republican began to catch up rapidly with the number of registered Democrats. In 1968 there were only 30 registered Republicans for every 100 registered Democrats. In 1976 the number had risen to 41. It reached 57 in 1984, 81 in 1992, and as the 2000 presidential election approaches it has risen almost to 90. Whereas before the 1970s most registered Republicans in Florida lived on the southwest side of the Peninsula, by the 1980s they had become much more uniformly diffused throughout the state. Even North Florida began to experience a significant growth in the Republican share of the electorate.

Another reason for the growth and the diffusion of Republican Party registration in the state is the aforementioned enormous migration of people from elsewhere in the nation who maintained their Republican Party affiliation once they arrived, regardless of where they chose to live. Also mentioned earlier is the success of the Florida Republican Party in its use of the "southern strategy," which has converted many previously firm Democrats to Republicans.

Differences between elections in the z-scores of Table 1 appear to be attributed, at least in part, to variation in enthusiasm for the candidates. In 1948 Thomas Dewey was the Republican candidate for president. He did very poorly throughout Florida. Votes for Dewey were highly clustered in a few contiguous southwest Florida coun-

Table 1
Moran's I Test for Spatial Autocorrelation of the Republican Vote in
Presidential Elections
Florida Counties 1948-1996 Normal Approximation

Year	Moran's I	Mean	Z-value	Prob
1948	0.6628692	24.2	8.239	0.000000
1952	0.5992564	44.7	7.466	0.000000
1956	0.6662499	45.7	8.280	0.000000
1960	0.5844237	44.5	7.286	0.000000
1964	0.3596744	53.4	4.555	0.000005
1968	0.6495923	29.0	8.078	0.000000
1972	0.2277153	78.0	2.951	0.003165
1976	0.4524426	42.0	5.682	0.000000
1980	0.4431861	52.3	5.569	0.000000
1984	0.273029	67.6	3.502	0.000462
1988	0.2292188	64.0	2.969	0.002983
1992	0.3494665	41.4	4.431	0.000009
1996	0.3249399	44.7	4.133	0.000036

Mean is the mean of the Republican vote for Florida's counties.

ties. Concentration weakened in 1964, when Barry Goldwater was the Republican candidate. Goldwater was very successful in North Florida as well as in the traditional Republican concentration on the southwestern side of the peninsula. It is more difficult to interpret variation in the degree of clustering after the 1968 election because Republicans were becoming more numerous throughout the state, and, in several elections many registered Democrats showed no enthusiasm for their candidate and voted Republican. This was especially true when the Democrat party nominated McGovern (1972), Mondale (1984), and Dukakis (1988). The 1976 election pitted Jimmy Carter (Democrat) against Gerald Ford (Republican). Carter, from Georgia, appealed to many Floridians of southern culture, some of whom had begun to vote Republican in earlier elections. He won most counties throughout the state, and as a result the degree of Republican clustering once again became high.

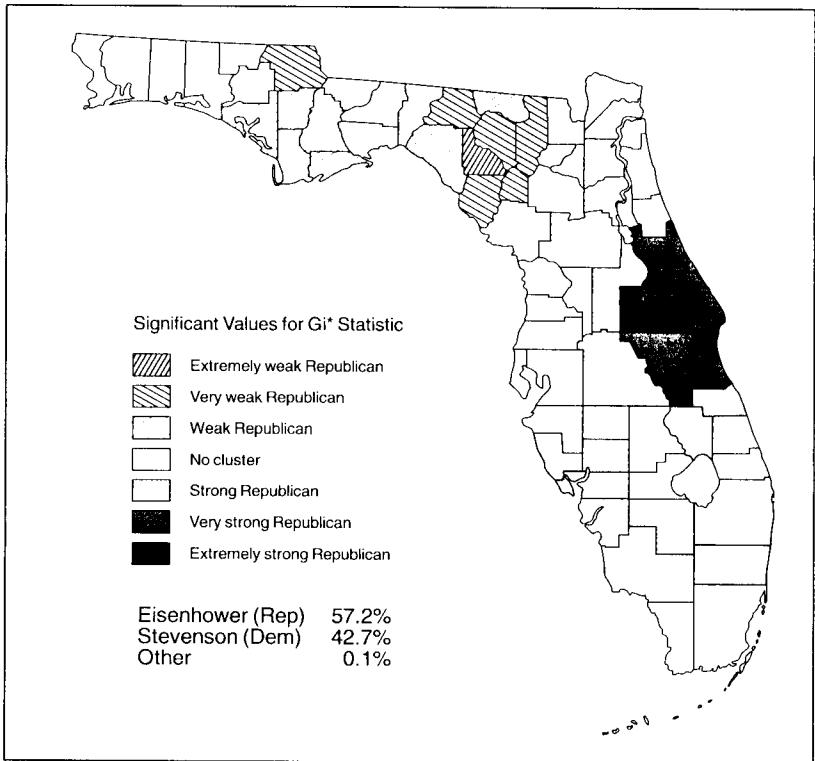**County Clusters in Which the Republican Vote was Especially High and Low**

It is now appropriate to interpret the clustering of the Republican vote in Florida at the county level (Figures 1a-f). In 1956 Dwight Eisenhower (Republican) opposed Adlai Stevenson (Democrat) for the presidency. This election took place at a time when only a small number of Florida's electorate had registered Republican, few blacks voted, and the Democrats held indisputable power at the local, county and state levels. Although Eisenhower overwhelmed Stevenson in the total state vote and won virtually every county on the Peninsula, North Florida went firmly for Stevenson. There were two especially weak Republican areas in North Florida, both intensely rural and politically extremely southern conservative. The strongest cluster of strong Republican support was in the Orlando area, whose economy then was in rapid transition. This transition was largely stimulated by the nation's space program, which was heavily concentrated in Brevard and Orange counties. Space-related industry was opening, employing thousands of skilled workers. The Space Center also was a major employer, as was the military bases in the area that were rapidly expanding. Eisenhower, a general of enormous prestige throughout the nation, was the obvious choice for president of many directly or indirectly involved in the space program. Two other, weaker Republican clusters included counties with high percentages of retirees.

In 1964 Lyndon Johnson (Democrat) opposed Barry Goldwater (Republican). Johnson, who assumed the presidency after the assassination of John Kennedy, had already firmly established himself as an advocate for black voting rights, as well as their greater equality in employment and education. Goldwater ran on perhaps the most conservative platform of any candidate, regardless of party, during the last half of the twentieth century (Lind 1995). His appeal to North Floridians, although most continued to be registered Democrats, was enormous. In most of the counties within the North Florida cluster that were "strong" Republican or even higher (Figure 1b) Goldwater won with over 60 percent of the vote. In two counties he received more than 70 percent of the vote. Counties in the South Florida cluster showed low support for Goldwater.

For Florida, the presidential race of 1968 (Figure 1c) was the most unique in its history. Three strong candidates ran for office: Richard Nixon (Republican), Hubert Humphrey (Democrat), and
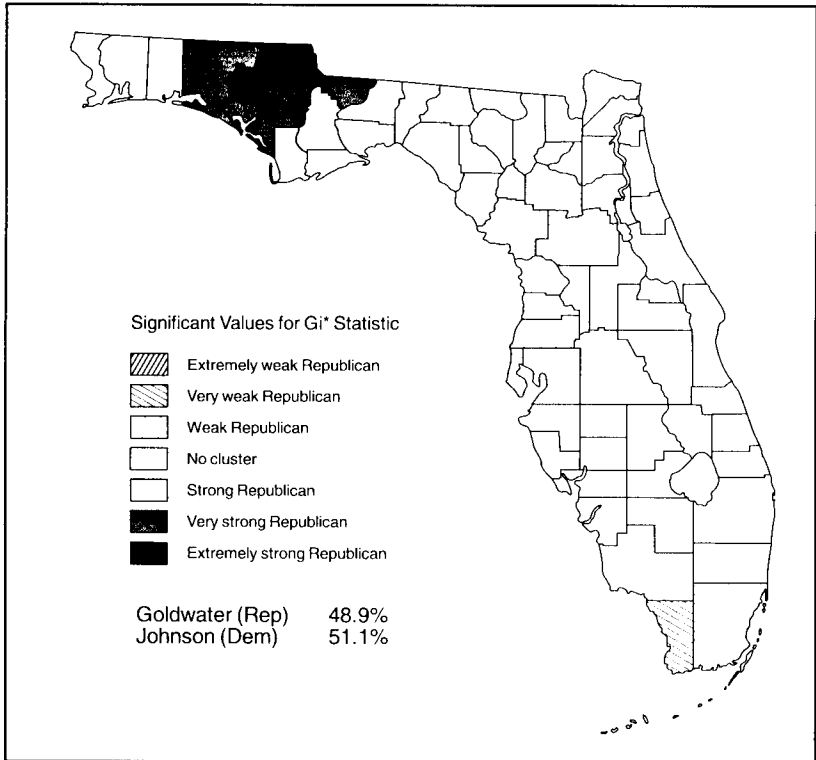
Figure 1a
1956 Presidential Election

Significant Values for Gi* Statistic

Extremely weak Republican
Very weak Republican
Weak Republican
No cluster
Strong Republican
Very strong Republican
Extremely strong Republican

Eisenhower (Rep)   57.2%
Stevenson (Dem)   42.7%
Other   0.1%

George Wallace (American Independent). The latter, the governor of Alabama, enjoyed enormous popularity among southern white voters throughout the South because of his strong objection to Federal intervention, initiated by President Johnson, in racial policies in his state. Wallace's platform was solidly "state's rights." This policy appealed to many conservative white Democrat voters. As a result, Wallace took every North Florida county except Alachua, the home of the University of Florida. He also won in a number of rural peninsular counties. Had Wallace not run for the presidency many of those who chose him would have voted for Nixon, who actually won the state, but with only 40.5 percent of the popular vote. His absence undoubtedly would have meant that clusters that were at least "strongly" Republican would have appeared in North Florida. Instead, the large Wallace vote meant
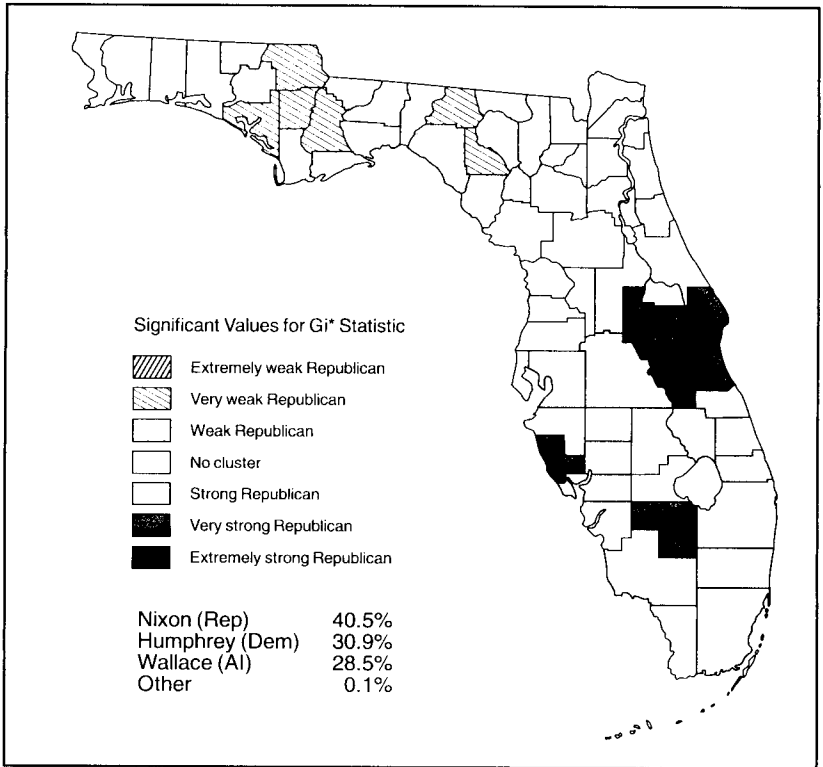
Figure 1b
1964 Presidential Election

Significant Values for Gi* Statistic

Extremely weak Republican
Very weak Republican
Weak Republican
No cluster
Strong Republican
Very strong Republican
Extremely strong Republican

Goldwater (Rep)   48.9%
Johnson (Dem)   51.1%

that many were "very weak." The strongest cluster of the Republican vote, as in 1964, was in the Orlando area.

In 1984 Ronald Reagan (Republican), then the incumbent, was challenged by Walter Mondale (Democrat). Reagan, as he did in 1980, ran on a conservative platform, Mondale ran on a more liberal one. Reagan won the state, gaining almost a two-thirds share of the total vote. In fact, Mondale only won in one county, Gadsden in North Florida, whose electorate by then was heavily black. The success of Reagan throughout Florida in 1984 was such that only one strongly Republican cluster developed (Figure 1d). That cluster was comprised of three counties on the western side of the Panhandle. Within these three counties live many military personnel, as well as military retirees. The military in that election strongly supported Reagan, since he favored a large military
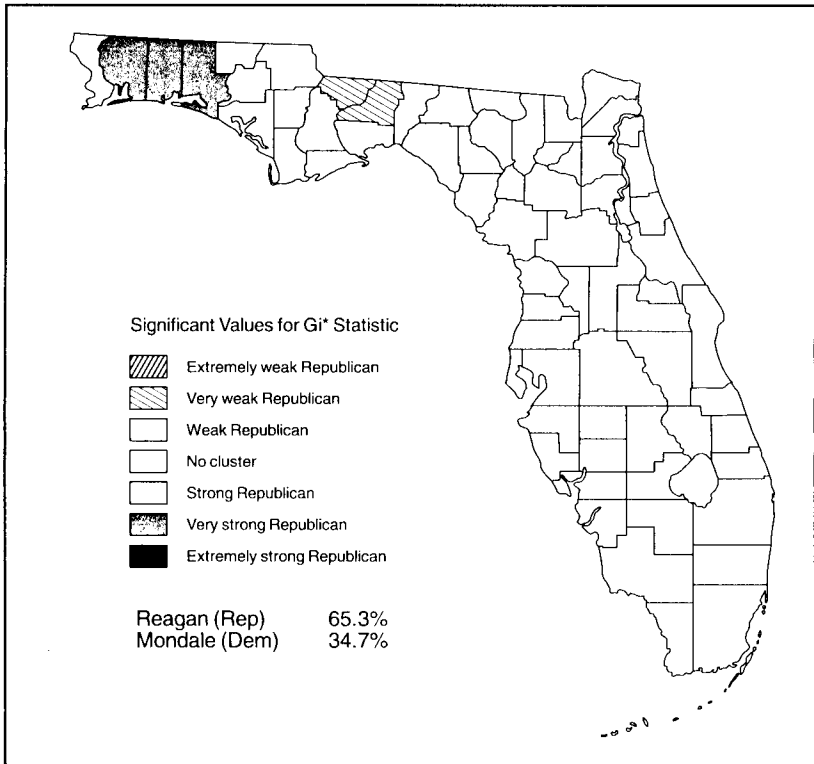
Figure 1c
1968 Presidential Election

Significant Values for Gi* Statistic

Extremely weak Republican

Very weak Republican

Weak Republican

No cluster

Strong Republican

Very strong Republican

Extremely strong Republican

Nixon (Rep)	40.5%
Humphrey (Dem)	30.9%
Wallace (Al)	28.5%
Other	0.1%

budget. Counties in the "Big Bend" region of the Panhandle formed a cluster where Republican support was unusually weak. All these counties have large black populations, or, in the case of Leon County, large student populations as well.

The 1992 election is of special interest because, once again, a third party candidate emerged to challenge those nominated by the two major parties. George Bush, the Republican incumbent, won Florida, but with only 40.9 percent of the vote. Bill Clinton (Democrat) won a 39 percent share, and Ross Perot (Independent), a 19.8 percent share. Perot was particularly popular among voters in politically conservative West Florida and in the Jacksonville area, but not enough to prevent "strong" Republican clusters to form. Perot appears to have taken votes away from Bush, whom

Figure 1d
1984 Presidential Election

Significant Values for Gi* Statistic

Extremely weak Republican
Very weak Republican
Weak Republican
No cluster
Strong Republican
Very strong Republican
Extremely strong Republican

Reagan (Rep)   65.3%
Mondale (Dem)   34.7%

many conservatives perceived as being too liberal. Perot, however, lost in every Florida county, although in three he gained more votes than did Clinton.

In 1996 Bill Clinton, the Democrat incumbent, ran against Bob Dole (Republican) and Ross Perot (Independent). Clinton won Florida, but only gained a 48.3 percent share of the total vote. Clinton increased his share of the vote from that of 1992 by almost 10 percentage points. Ross Perot's share fell by almost 11 percentage points. In 1996, it would appear, many people who voted for Perot in 1992 returned to the Republican candidate. It also should be noted that in the 1996 election Perot's vote was less than that of Clinton in every Florida county. The two "strong" Republican clusters that emerged from the analysis of the 1996 returns were
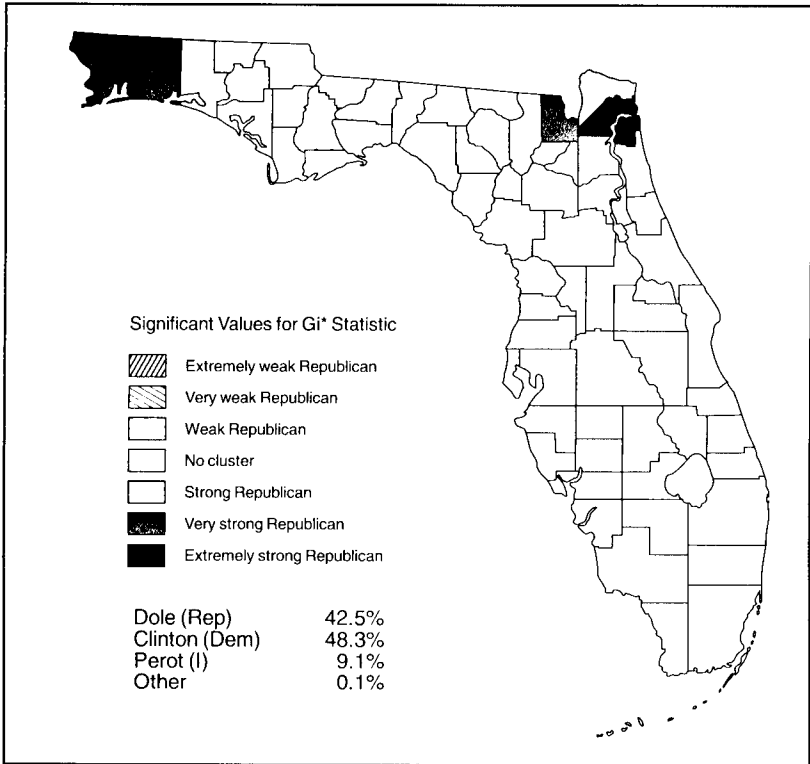
Figure 2e
1992 Presidential Election
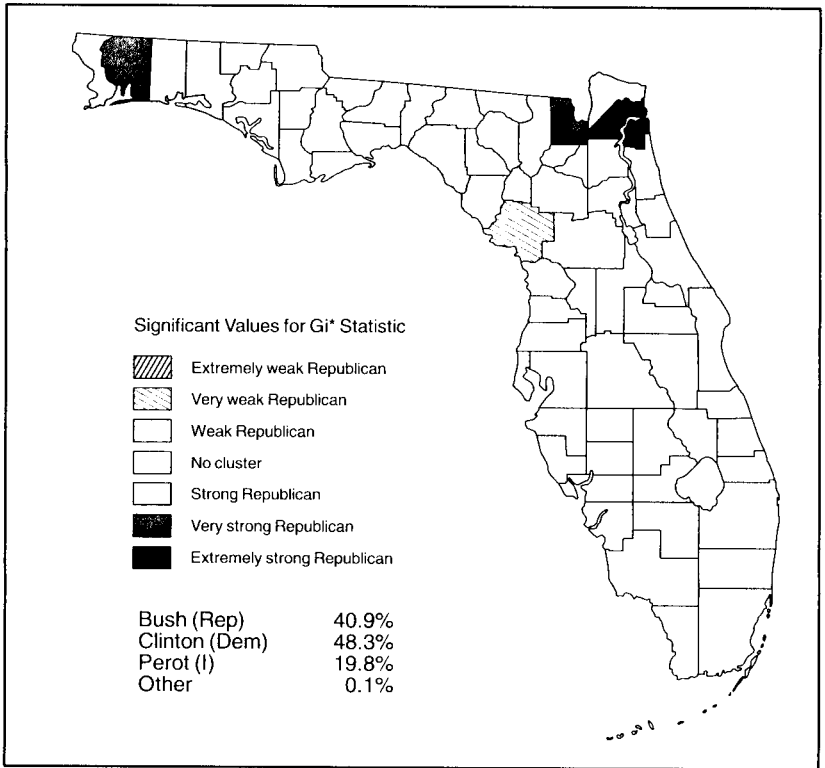
identical to those that resulted from the 1992 electoral analysis, which adds further support to the view that North Florida, at least in part, remains politically different from the Peninsula.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through an examination of the degree of clustering of the Republican vote in presidential elections between 1948 and 1996, and the location of specific clusters on the county level in 1956, 1964, 1968, 1984, 1992, and 1996, the concept of two cultural-historical regions in Florida can still be supported. Northern Florida continues to fit firmly within "Dixie," a significantly larger percentage of its electorate voting for socially conservative presidential

Figure 2f
1996 Presidential Election

Significant Values for Gi* Statistic

/////	Extremely weak Republican
\\\\\	Very weak Republican
	Weak Republican
	No cluster
	Strong Republican
▨	Very strong Republican
■	Extremely strong Republican

Dole (Rep)	42.5%
Clinton (Dem)	48.3%
Perot (I)	9.1%
Other	0.1%

candidates than on the Peninsula, although in some elections not necessarily for the Republican.

Alderman and Beavers (1999) believed that the Southern cultural influence in Northern Florida may be shrinking. However, this does not appear in the region's voting patterns, particularly in the western Panhandle, and in the Jacksonville area. The western Panhandle consistently votes conservative, and to a lesser extent the same is true for the Jacksonville area, which had strong Republican clusters in both 1992 and 1996. Southern traditional values are usually given as the major reason for this conservatism, but the type of conservatism that is often associated with military personnel plays a major role as well. Of course, on the Peninsula live many people who share the same views of North Florida social

conservatives. However, there are many others living there who are more pragmatic in their views of society. Within this group are Republicans as well as Democrats. They will be the "swing" vote in the 2000 presidential election.

As the nation proceeds toward the 2000 presidential election Florida's electorate will once again be given the opportunity to redefine its spatial political behavior. If the political climate of the state of Florida on November 7, 2000 is the same as it was in July of that year, when these conclusions were written, the electoral data will probably produce spatial results similar to those obtained from electoral data in 1992 and 1996. The strong Republican clusters in the state will once again be in West Florida and the Jacksonville area. Here being a Republican has its origin in the southern Democrat tradition. No clusters will be found on the Peninsula, where the popularity of the Republican Party is so great that so-called "Republican strongholds" have long disappeared. It also should be noted that many people on the Peninsula support Republican presidential candidates for entirely different reasons than do the majority who vote for these candidates in North Florida.

Appendix

G_i^* z-scores of the seven categories used on the maps (Figure 1a-f) were: (1) Extremely weak Republican clusters (negative z-score with significance level of $p<0.001$; (2) Very weak Republican clusters (negative z-score with significance level $0.001<p<0.01$); (3) Weak Republican cluster (negative z-score with significance level $0.01<p<0.05$) (4) No cluster (positive or negative z-score with significance level of $p>0.05$; (5) Strong Republican cluster (positive z-score with significance level $0.01<p<0.05$); (6) Very strong Republican cluster (positive z-score with significance level $0.001<p<0.01$); (7) Extremely strong Republican clusters (positive z-score with significance level of $p<0.001$)

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