



The Political Geography of Virginia and Florida: Bookends of the New South

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This is the fourth in a series of reports on the demographic and political dynamics under way in key “battleground” states, deemed to be crucial in deciding the 2008 election. As part of the Metropolitan Policy Program’s *Blueprint for American Prosperity*, this series will provide an electoral component to the initiative’s analysis of, and prescriptions for, bolstering the health and vitality of America’s metropolitan areas, the engines of the U.S. economy. This report focuses on two major battleground states in the South, Virginia and Florida, which serve as bookends to an emerging New South.

- A. Virginia and Florida have eligible voter populations that are rapidly changing. White working class voters are declining sharply while white college graduates are growing and minorities, especially Hispanics and Asians, are growing even faster. These changes are having their largest effects in these states’ major metropolitan areas, particularly Miami and rapidly-growing Orlando and Tampa in Florida’s I-4 Corridor and the suburbs of Washington, D.C. in Northern Virginia.** Other large metro areas in these states are also feeling significant effects from these changes and will contribute to potentially large demographically related political shifts in the next election.

- B. In Virginia, these trends will have their strongest impact in the fast-growing and Democratic-trending Northern Virginia area, where Democrats will seek to increase their modest margin from the 2004 election. The trends could also have big impacts in the Richmond and Virginia Beach metros, where Democrats will need to compress their 2004 deficits.** Overall, the GOP will be looking to maintain their very strong support among Virginia’s declining white working class, especially in the conservative South and West region. The Democrats will be reaching out to the growing white college graduate group, critical to their prospects in Northern Virginia and statewide. The Democrats will also be relying on the increasing number of minority voters, who could help them not just in Northern Virginia, but also in the Virginia Beach metro and the Richmond and East region.

- C. In Florida, these trends will have their strongest impacts in the fast-growing I-4 Corridor (36 percent of the statewide vote), which, while Democratic-**

trending, is still the key swing region in Florida, and in the Miami metro, largest in the state and home to 27 percent of the vote. The trends could also have big impacts in the South and North, where Democrats will be looking to reduce their 2004 deficits in important metros like Jacksonville (North) and Sarasota and Cape Coral (South). Across the state, the GOP needs to prevent any erosion of support among white working class voters, especially among Democratic-trending whites with some college. They will also seek to hold the line among white college graduates, whose support levels for the GOP are high but declining over time. Finally, the support of the growing Hispanic population is critical to GOP efforts to hold the state, but this group is changing generationally and in terms of mix (more non-Cuban Hispanics), which could open the door to the Democrats.

Both of these states are near the top of the lists of most analysts' list of battleground states for November 2008. Florida was a very closely contested state in both 2000 and 2004 (especially 2000). But Virginia's status as a battleground is new to 2008. Yet in both states the contested political terrain reflects the dynamic demographic changes occurring within them. With 27 and 13 electoral votes, respectively, all eyes will be on Florida and Virginia on election night.

Introduction

This report on the political demography and geography of two Southern states, Virginia and Florida, is part of a series of reports on “purple” states in the 2008 elections. (Previous reports focused on Pennsylvania, in the Northeast region, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona in the Intermountain West, and Ohio, Michigan and Missouri in the Midwest.)¹

Purple states are states where the current balance of political forces does not decisively favor one party or the other, as it does in the solid red (Republican) and blue (Democratic) states. But demographic and geographic trends are constantly testing the balance in these purple states and may nudge them not just toward a particular party in this election but one party decisively over the longer term.

This report provides a guide to the trends that are currently testing and reshaping the balance of forces in these states, determining how they will lean in November 2008 and whether they will remain toss-ups in years to come.

The two states in this report are those in the South that are most “in play” for 2008, despite the fact most of the region (Maryland, Delaware and DC excluded) voted Republican in the last two elections. Ever since George W. Bush beat Al Gore in Florida by a mere 0.01 percent in 2000, the Sunshine State has been near the top of everybody’s swing state list, even though Bush’s margin was a comparatively solid 5 percent in 2004. And the traditionally “red” voting state of Virginia has been showing signs of turning “purple” by electing Democrats in its most recent senatorial and gubernatorial elections.

Unique and turbulent demographic dynamics are part of the reason these states are in political flux. Among all states, Florida and Virginia ranked seventh and 15th in population growth since 2000. In both the growth came from significant migration from other parts of the U.S. as well as immigration (**Table 1**)

Two aspects of this growth are especially noteworthy. One is that their domestic migration gains came from outside the South (**Figure 1**). Both states lost migrants to other parts of the South, especially to North Carolina and Georgia. But even larger net migration gains came from other regions especially the Northeast. In fact, New York and New Jersey are the greatest contributors of all states to migration gains in both Virginia and Florida. Additional large contributors to Florida are Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Illinois—all states that have voted Democratic in previous elections.

The second aspect of recent growth to these Southern states is the growth in their minority populations, including immigrant minorities, Hispanics and Asians—groups whose votes are being highly sought after. Yet Hispanics and Asians are less well represented in the eligible voter populations of these states than in their total populations (**Figure 2**).²

For example, in Virginia, Hispanics comprise 6.9 of the total 2007 population but only 2.6 percent of eligible voters. In Florida, the respective numbers are 21.8 percent and 13.3 percent.

Nonetheless, given the closeness of results anticipated in these states, the votes of Hispanics and Asians, as well as black minority voters could be decisive.

These states' attractions to out-of-state migrants and immigrants are especially crucial in specific magnet regions of each state—the northern part of Virginia, encompassing the suburbs of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area, and the growing I-4 Corridor of Florida, whose electoral results have been shifting with their changing demographics. These within-state shifts and their electoral implications will be discussed in detail below.

While Virginia and Florida are both fast-growing states with similar migration tendencies, the two states show some differences in their overall demographic and economic attributes (**Table 2**). Long a haven for retirees, Florida ranks first of all states in the elderly share of its population (16.8 percent) compared to just 11.6 percent in youthful Virginia. Yet, unlike Florida, Virginia ranks well above the nation on measures of educational attainment, professional occupations, and household income. The growing government and high tech developments in the northern part of the state are largely responsible for these rankings. Florida, with its more heterogeneous population by race, age, and industry ranks in the bottom half of states on each of the measures displayed here. And the recent housing slowdown and credit crunch has had an especially debilitating effect on its usually strong economy.

For each state in this report, we start by delineating our regions of analysis and discussing population growth patterns for the state as whole and each individual region. We then provide demographic and growth profiles for the state and each region, focusing particularly on the key demographics of minorities, white working age college graduates, the working age white working class and white seniors. We then describe the demographic voting patterns within the state, followed by an extensive discussion of how different regions within the state have trended politically since 1988. We conclude the analysis of each state with an assessment of the key trends and groups to watch as the 2008 campaign unfolds.

Together these analyses will show how rapid demographic and geographic shifts in Virginia and Florida are shifting the political balance in ways that have profound implications for this November's election

Data Sources and Definitions

The demographic, polling and voting statistics presented in this report are the latest available from authoritative sources. The demographic profiles of states and their regions are drawn from U.S. Decennial Censuses through 2000, U.S. Census population estimates for states and counties through July 2007, and the Public Use Micro Sample of the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey. Polling data are drawn from the

CBS/New York Times (1988) and National Election Pool (2004 and 2006) state exit polls. Presidential and congressional election data are drawn from official county level election returns for the two states.

Our analysis of eligible voters—citizens age 18 and above—draws from the 2006 American Community Survey and Census 2000. We examine these voters according to several social and demographic attributes. Special emphasis is given to four key demographic segments of eligible voters: (1) *minorities*—all persons stating something other than non-Hispanic white as their race-ethnicity; (2) *white seniors*—non-Hispanic whites ages 65+; (3) *working age white college graduates*—non-Hispanic whites ages 18-64 with a four year college degree or more; and (4) *working age white working class*—non-college-educated non-Hispanic whites ages 18-64

The sub-state regional definitions that we employ will be discussed in Part A and displayed on maps in each state-specific section. They are typically based on counties or groups thereof, comprising metropolitan areas or other regions that are strategically important in terms of their recent demographic shifts or voting trends. These regions will be used to identify sub-state trends drawn from U.S. census county population estimates and county level election returns. Regions delineated for the analyses of eligible voter demographics presented in Part B of each state-specific section, and in Appendix Tables will sometimes deviate slightly from the regional definitions presented in Part A. This is due to the geography limitations of data available with the 2006 American Community Survey Public Use Micro-Sample, which is used in these analyses. Details about these slight differences in regional definition are available from the authors.

VIRGINIA

A. Virginia's growth is led by suburban Washington, D.C. in Northern Virginia, whose rapidly changing demographic profile is the chief driver of political change in the state. The fastest growing counties in the state are outer suburban counties in Northern Virginia and adjacent counties in adjoining regions.

B. Rapid shifts in Northern Virginia are making its electorate look increasingly like an appendage of the nation's Northeast megalopolis, in contrast to the mostly "homegrown" population in other parts of the state. Unlike the rest of the state, one third of Northern Virginia's electorate is made up of white college graduates, nearly four-fifths are born outside the state and African American eligible voters are outnumbered by the combined Asian and Hispanic electorate. At the other end of the spectrum, the slow-growing South and West region is dominated by white working class voters and has the lowest share of minority voters.

C. The GOP's victory in the 2004 election can be attributed to very strong support among white voters, both men and women. But Jim Webb's victory in the 2006 Senate election indicates that Democrats could potentially do much better among white voters, particularly white college graduate voters.

D. Political shifts in Virginia since 1988 have moved Northern Virginia, the Virginia Beach metro and the Richmond and East region toward the Democrats, with a particularly sharp shift in the Northern Virginia region. The South and West region, in contrast, has maintained and slightly strengthened its strong pro-GOP tilt.

E. Key trends and groups to watch in 2008 include the declining white working class, where the GOP needs to generate very high levels of support; white college graduates, who may be on the verge of tipping toward the Democrats; and rapidly growing minority voters, whose substantial weight in the state's electorate could be increased by high turnout. These trends will have their largest and most important effects in the Northern Virginia region, home to one-third of Virginia's voters.

A. Virginia's growth is led by suburban Washington, D.C. in Northern Virginia, whose rapidly changing demographic profile is the chief driver of political change in the state.

Virginia has not gone for a Democratic presidential candidate since it voted for Lyndon Johnson in 1964. Yet in recent statewide contests, it has elected Democrats, Tim Kaine for Governor and James Webb as U.S. senator. Much of this is related to the changing demographics in the northern part of the state.

Virginia is home to 11 metropolitan areas or parts of metros, shared with other states. The largest three are Washington, D.C. (whose suburbs extend into northern Virginia), Virginia Beach and Richmond, each over a million in population. All 11 metros are

shown in **Map 1**. Overall, 86 percent of Virginia's population is located in metropolitan areas with 69 percent in the three big metros.

Virginia's regional scheme for this analysis is depicted in **Map 1**, with relative size and growth patterns for regions shown in **Map 2** and **Figures 3 and 4**. These regions are defined as follows:

1. Northern Virginia – includes the 15 counties and cities that comprise the Virginia portion of the Washington, D.C. metro with a population of 2,454,486. These include inner suburban areas like Arlington County, Alexandria City, and Fairfax County, the largest in the region and the state. It also includes fast-growing outer suburban counties like Loudon and Prince William. Outer suburban counties such as the latter are changing the most demographically in recent years. More than three of ten Virginians reside in the Northern Virginia region, which grew by 15 percent since 2000, the highest growth rate of the four regions.

2. Virginia Beach – consists of the 15 counties in the Virginia Beach metropolitan area which has a 2007 population of 1,658,754. Located in the southeast part of the state, it includes the Hampton Roads area and the cities of Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Newport News. The Virginia Beach region has about one fifth of the state's population and grew by nearly 5 percent since 2000.

3. Richmond and East – includes the 20 counties of the Richmond metropolitan area as well as 9 nonmetropolitan areas to its east. The Richmond metro has a 2007 population is 1,212,977 and grew at 10.3 percent since 2000. Among its fastest growing counties are suburban counties that border outer counties of the Washington, D.C. metro, such as King George, Louisa, and Caroline which grew by 33 percent, 24 percent, and 23 percent respectively since 2000. The region comprises 17.6 percent of the state's population and grew by 9.9 percent since 2000.

4. South and West – includes the remaining counties in the state, including those that make up 8 metropolitan areas or parts thereof, of which the largest are the Roanoke, Lynchburg, Charlottesville, and Blacksburg metros. The West is the least urban of the four regions, with metropolitan areas comprising only 58 percent of its population. Overall the region has 29.3 percent of the state's population and grew by a modest 4.2 percent since 2000.

B. Rapid shifts in Northern Virginia are making its electorate look increasingly like an appendage of the nation's Northeast megalopolis, in contrast to the mostly "homegrown" population in other parts of the state.

The profile of Virginia's key eligible voter segments, shown in **Table 3**, indicates that 40 percent of the state's electorate is comprised of working class whites; 27 percent are minorities and there are substantially more white college graduates (21 percent) than white seniors (13 percent). This differs somewhat from the total U.S. profile where white college graduates are only 18 percent of the electorate. Yet the other categories do not

differ quite as much: 42 percent of U.S. eligible voters are working class whites, 26 percent are minorities, and white seniors are 14 percent.

Virginia's high profile of white college grads is bolstered by recent high growth in this segment, far exceeding the minimal growth in its numbers of white working class eligible voters. Indeed, as the Appendix shows, Virginia outpaces the U.S. in its share of voters who are postgraduates as well as college grads, two categories which increased appreciably since 2000. The state's white senior eligible voter population has also grown since 2000, representing both retiree movement to the state and "aging in place"

While Virginia's minority eligible voter population has grown substantially since 2000, especially among Hispanics and Asians, it is still heavily dominated by African Americans, who make up 19 percent of the state's electorate, compared with 3.4 percent for Asians and 2.7 percent for Hispanics

One other significant aspect of Virginia's electorate is highlighted in the Appendix: its high share of citizens who are born out-of-state, 53 percent. This reflects draw of Virginia for migrants from other parts of the country.

Drilling below these statewide demographics, Figures 5 and 6 show that the most significant dynamic occurring within the state is the sharpening difference between the electorate of fast-growing Northern Virginia and the rest of the state. Of the four regions, Northern Virginia is distinguished by its far higher share of white college graduates (34 percent) than any other region of the state (ranging from 12-19 percent). Moreover, Northern Virginia leads all others in their numeric increase of white college graduates between 2000 and 2006.

In stark contrast, all other regions showed far higher shares of white working class eligible voters than white college graduates—ranging from two to one ratios in the Virginia Beach and Richmond and East regions to four to one in the South and West region, where the white working class constitutes 53 percent of eligible voters. But even in the South and West, growth among white working class voters has been anemic since 2000 and the share of white working class voters in this region's electorate has actually fallen over the time period, as it has in all other Virginia regions (the sharpest declines have been in the Northern Virginia region and the Virginia Beach metro, where the share of white working class voters has declined by a little under 4 points since 2000).

With respect to minority eligible voter populations, Northern Virginia also stands out because of its large recent gains—gaining more minorities since 2000 than the rest of the state (the share of minorities among Northern Virginia eligible voters increased by 4 points over this time period). In addition, the race-ethnic composition of its minority voting population is distinct (**Table 4**). It is the only region where the African American share of the electorate (11.6 percent) is smaller than combined share of Asians (8 percent) and Hispanics (5.6 percent). While both the Virginia Beach and Richmond and East regions have higher overall minority shares than Northern Virginia, the dominant

minority group of their electorates is African Americans—comprising about three in 10 of all voters in each.

One final demographic attribute which characterizes the change and distinctiveness in Northern Virginia is its share of residents who do not have Virginia (or even other Southern roots). Clearly the large out-of-state population flowing to Virginia is heavily concentrated here. As **Table 6** indicates only about one fifth (22 percent) of Northern Virginia residents were born in the state and only 45 percent were born in the South. Indeed there is roughly the same share of Northern Virginia's electorate born in the nation's Northeast region as born in Virginia, and fully one in seven were born abroad. In contrast, more than 60 percent of the eligible voters of the Richmond and East and South and West regions were born in Virginia and more than 75 percent were born in the South. The Virginia Beach region lies in between with two out of five eligible voters born in Virginia and 55 percent born in the South.

C. The GOP's victory in the 2004 election can be attributed to very strong support among white voters, both men and women.

So far we have documented the basic demographic and geographic shifts that are reshaping Virginia and sketched a brief portrait of Virginia's electorate. Now we turn to how Virginians have been voting in recent elections. The results and analysis show how Virginia arrived at its current political coloration and indicate how Virginia's politics might change in the future as demographic and geographic shifts continue.

Table 7 displays some basic exit poll data from the 2004 presidential election and 2006 Senate election. In 2004, Virginia voted Republican in the presidential election, just as it has done in every election since 1964, and by roughly the same margin as in 2000 (8 points). The data in the table show how Bush carried the state. He received 68 percent to 32 percent support from white voters, 72 percent of all voters according to the exit polls. That more than compensated for his large deficit among blacks (87 percent Democratic and 21 percent of voters) and smaller ones among Hispanics (51 percent Democratic and 3 percent of voters) and Asians (65 percent Democratic and 2 percent of voters).

Bush carried men by 19 points but split women evenly. A large gender gap can also be seen when comparing white men and white women, whom he carried by 45 and 29 points, respectively. By age, Bush lost young (18-29) voters by 8 points and seniors by 2 points, but carried all other age groups.

The 2006 Senate election was a different story with Democrat Jim Webb defeating incumbent Republican George Allen by 51-47. Webb's victory was consistent with other changes that have taken place in Virginia recently which suggest a purpling of the state in this decade. In 2005 Democrats elected their second straight governor, Tim Kaine, succeeding the very popular Mark Warner. And in 2007 they took control of the state senate and made significant gains in the state house.

In Webb's 2006 Senate victory, exit polls show he did substantially better than Kerry among white voters, including among both white men and white women. He lost white voters by 14 points, a far smaller deficit than for Kerry who lost these voters by 36 points, and he lost white women by just 6 points (down from 29 for Kerry) and white men by 24 points (down from 45 for Kerry). In terms of age, he did remarkably better than Kerry in the 30-39 year old age group, carrying them by 18 points, while Kerry lost them by 14.

Webb presumably did better than Kerry among both white working class and white college graduate voters, though, since the Virginia 2004 exit poll contained no education data, we can make no direct comparison. Webb did particularly well among white college graduates, losing them by only 6 points, a result of particular significance since this group is growing so rapidly.

D. Political shifts in Virginia since 1988 have moved Northern Virginia, the Virginia Beach metro, and the Richmond and East region toward the Democrats, with a particularly sharp shift in the fast-growing Northern Virginia region.

Maps 3A-3C show how patterns of Democratic and Republican support played themselves out geographically in 2004, 1996 and 1988. In each map, counties are color-coded by their margin for the victorious presidential candidate (deep blue for a Democratic victory of 10 points or more, light blue for a Democratic victory of less than 10 points, deep red for a Republican victory of 10 points or more, light red for a Republican victory of less than 10 points). In addition, our four Virginia regions are shown on each map by heavy black lines.

Looking at the 2004 map, only a modest number of counties are light or dark blue, indicating counties carried by the Democrats. But these counties include Virginia's most populous, Fairfax, as well as the closely associated areas of Arlington County and Alexandria and Falls Church cities. The Democrats also carried Albemarle and Nelson counties and Charlottesville city in the Charlottesville metro, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Hampton and Virginia Beach city in the Virginia Beach metro, Richmond city in the Richmond metro and a smattering of rural counties in the South and West region.

The rest of the map—the overwhelming majority of it—is colored red, in fact, dark red. The fact that Bush only managed an 8 point margin in the state reflects the weight of all those metro counties, small in land area but large in population.

Turning to the 1988 map—when Republicans carried the state by an overwhelming 21 points—the most important contrast, albeit not the most visually striking is in Northern Virginia. Here Arlington and Alexandria are light blue, not dark blue and Fairfax is dark red instead of light blue. In addition, Prince William County is dark red, not light red. Outside of Northern Virginia, Newport News in the Virginia Beach metro is dark red, instead of blue as are Albemarle and Nelson counties in the Charlottesville metro. And Henrico County in the Richmond metro is dark red not light red. Finally, a cluster of

rural counties in the far southwestern corner of the state indicate change in the other direction: they are dark blue instead of dark red, as they were in 2004.

In 1996, Clinton lost the state by 2 points, substantially closer than Dukakis' 1988 performance. In this election, we see increased Democratic strength in the Northern Virginia metro, with Arlington and Alexandria becoming dark blue and Fairfax and Prince William becoming light red. There is also more blue and light red in the Virginia Beach metro, as well as in the Richmond and East region, both in the Richmond metro and nearby rural counties. And there is a remarkable lightening of the color scheme in South and West region, including not just the Charlottesville metro, but many more light red and light blue counties in rural areas. By 2004, most of these rural gains had slipped away (including most of that dark blue southwestern corner), but Democratic strength remained in key counties in the Northern Virginia, Richmond, Charlottesville and Virginia Beach metros and even intensified in such key counties as Fairfax in Northern Virginia and Henrico around Richmond.

Map 4 provides a visual representation of where political shifts took place over the 1988-2004 time period. Counties that are dark blue had margin shifts toward the Democrats of 10 points or more, light blue counties had margin shifts toward the Democrats of 10 points or less, light red counties had margin shifts toward the Republicans of 10 points or more and dark red counties had margin shifts toward the Republicans of 10 points or less.

The pattern of change varies greatly by region of the state. In the Northern Virginia metro, every county but one—far exurban Warren—is dark blue and even Warren is light blue. There are particularly sharp shifts in Fairfax (30 points), Fall Church (30 points), Arlington (28 points), Prince William (27 points), Alexandria (27 points) and Loudoun (21 points). These trends powered an overall shift of 23 points toward the Democrats in the region (**Table 8**).

The Richmond and East region had a more mixed pattern with strong Democratic shifts in Richmond city (27 points) and populous counties like Henrico (31 points) and Chesterfield (26 points) balanced by pro-GOP shifts in less populous counties to their east. This produced a net 14 point shift toward the Democrats over the time period.

In the Virginia Beach metro, there were also a mixed pattern of change, with GOP-trending counties, light blue counties, indicating a weak Democratic trend and dark blue counties, indicating a strong Democratic trend. The biggest pro-Democratic shifts were in Hampton (27 points), Newport News (25 points), Virginia Beach city (20 points) and Norfolk (14 points). These helped produce an overall shift of 12 points toward the Democrats in the region.

Finally, the South and West shows a pro-Democratic trend in the Charlottesville metro (every county moved toward the Democrats) and in a belt of counties just south and west of Northern Virginia. But almost all of the rest of the region was GOP-trending over the time period. This produced a net shift of 1 point toward the Republicans, in contrast to the sizeable pro-Democratic shifts in the other three regions.

Comparing the political shifts in Map 4 to the population growth map (Map 2), it is striking that the one region that has had an overall pro-GOP shift, the South and West, is also the region with the overwhelming majority of Virginia's declining counties. And pretty much every declining county in that region has, in fact, shifted toward the GOP. In contrast, the Democratic-trending counties in this region, the Charlottesville metro and the counties south and west of Northern Virginia are all growing counties.

In Northern Virginia, the region with the sharpest Democratic trend, all the counties and cities are growing and, outside of Fairfax and its associated cities, all counties are light or dark green, indicating a growth rate of 10 percent or more. The Richmond and East region is almost all growing counties, with the Democratic-trending counties around Richmond city showing rapid growth, as well as the GOP-trending counties to the west and north of that area. In the Virginia Beach metro, the Democratic-trending counties are slow growing at rates of under 10 percent, and one county (Newport News) is declining.

Overall, the correlation of pro-Democratic trends with population growth appears to favor the Democrats in Virginia. It tends to pit the faster-growing, Democratic-trending east and north of Virginia (particularly Northern Virginia and the Richmond and East region) against the slower growing, GOP-trending South and West region.

E. Key trends and groups to watch in 2008 include the declining white working class, where the GOP needs to generate very high levels of support; white college graduates, who may be on the verge of tipping toward the Democrats; and rapidly growing minority voters, whose substantial weight in the state's electorate could be increased by high turnout.

The long-range trends may favor the Democrats, but the GOP has still managed to win every presidential election in Virginia since 1964. Whether the Republicans can keep their victory streak alive or whether the Democrats can win the state for the first time in 44 years will depend greatly on the demographic groups and trends we have reviewed in this report. Here are some things to watch out for in the 2008 election.

First, will the declining white working class maintain its very high levels of support for the GOP? Even in 2006, when Democrat Jim Webb narrowly won Senate election, he still lost these voters by 32 points. It seems likely that the GOP needs a margin that high or higher, driven by strong performance among white working class voters in the South and West region, to keep their hold on the state this election.

The political leanings of the fast-growing white college-educated group could perhaps be even more critical. Webb lost this group by only 6 points in 2006, suggesting this group may be on the verge of tipping toward the Democrats. Should this happen in the 2008 election, it would boost to the Democratic vote in all areas of the state, but particularly in the Northern Virginia region.

A third group to watch, of course, is minority voters. They were 28 percent of voters in 2004 and voted heavily Democratic. In this election, given high growth rates among minority eligible voters and high voter interest, minority turnout and support for the Democrats could both go up significantly.

In terms of regions, the Northern Virginia area is the most important. It is the richest area in terms of votes (a third of the statewide total). Webb in 2006 took Northern Virginia by 15 points, carrying not only Fairfax, but also Loudoun and Prince William, suggesting the kind of performance the Democrats will need to be successful.

Democrats will also seek to continue the pro-Democratic trends in the Richmond and East region (18 percent of the vote) and the Virginia Beach metro (20 percent of the vote). Based on Webb's performance in 2006, carrying the Richmond and East region may be a stretch but carrying the Virginia Beach metro (Kerry lost it in 2004 by just 6 points, while Webb won it by 3 points) is a realistic goal.

Finally, the South and West region of Virginia, 29 percent of the overall vote, is the GOP's bulwark in the state. They will seek to drive up their margin as high as possible in this Republican-trending area to counteract possible losses in Northern Virginia and the rest of the state.

Florida

A. As home to the state's fastest growing large metropolitan areas, Orlando and Tampa, Florida's I-4 Corridor could hold the greatest potential for deciding the results of this year's election. But the Miami metro, while growing more slowly, is still far and away the state's largest.

B. The eligible voter population in Florida is in a state of flux, especially in the rapidly growing I-4 Corridor region, where big gains in minority voters and white college graduates are transforming the electorate. The Miami metro is experiencing even greater growth in its share of minority voters, while the share of white working class voters is declining in all regions.

C. The GOP's victory in the 2004 election can be attributed to strong support among both white working class and white college graduate voters, as well as solid support from Florida's Hispanics. But the former two groups have been trending toward the Democrats, especially in the Miami metro.

D. Political shifts in Florida since 1988 have moved all regions toward the Democrats, with the sharpest shifts in the Miami metro and the populous I-4 Corridor. The smallest shift was in the relatively conservative North region.

E. Key trends and groups to watch in 2008 include the sharply declining white working class, where the GOP needs to prevent any erosion of support, especially among Democratic-trending whites with some college; white college graduates, whose support levels for the GOP are high but declining over time; and the growing and changing Hispanic population, whose continued support for the GOP is critical to their efforts to hold the state. These trends will have their largest effects in the Miami metro and the swing I-4 Corridor region.

A. As home to the state's fastest growing large metropolitan areas, Orlando and Tampa, Florida's I-4 Corridor could hold the greatest potential for deciding the results of this year's election.

Florida's recent rapid growth has gained it two additional Electoral College votes after the 2000 census (for a total of 27), and it is projected that the state could gain another 2 after the 2010 census. The growth is not spread uniformly across the state, however. The unevenness in different areas, coupled with the demographics of its newcomers, has made it a difficult state to get a precise political fix on.

Florida is very much a "metropolitan state" as it is home to 19 metropolitan areas of which four—Miami, Tampa, Orlando, and Jacksonville—have populations that exceed one million. All 19 metros are shown in Map 1. Overall, 94 percent of Florida's population is located in metropolitan areas with 63 percent in the four metros with one million or more in population.

The analysis presented here is based on the regions designated in **Map 5**, along with population and growth statistics shown in **Map 6** and **Figures 7 and 8**. The regions are as follows.

1. Miami Metro. – consists of the counties Miami-Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach. With a 2007 population of 5,413,212, it is the seventh largest metro in the U.S. (behind Houston and ahead of Washington, D.C.). Nearly three of ten Floridians live in metro Miami, and its growth rate was 7.7 percent from 2000 to 2007.

2. I-4 Corridor – consists of the large metropolitan areas of Tampa and Orlando (populations of 2,723,949 and 2,032,496) as well as the Lakeland, Palm Bay, and Deltona-Daytona metros (all greater than 500,000). Only two small counties, Citrus and Sumter, in the region are not in metro areas. Orlando is the 8th fastest growing large metro in the U.S. and the counties of Osceola and Lake (in metro Orlando) and Pasco (in metro Tampa) are among the fastest growing in the state, with each growing by more than one third since 2000. The I-4 Corridor region has 36 percent of the Florida’s population and grew by a brisk 16.6 percent from 2000-7

3. South – this region is the only one of the four that does not contain a “million plus” population metropolitan area. It includes the southern Gulf Coast which is a traditional haven for retirees, and Gulf Coast metro areas of Sarasota, Cape Coral, Naples, and Punta Gorda and Vero Beach and Port St. Lucie on the Atlantic Coast. Seven smaller nonmetropolitan counties comprise the remainder of the region; the region is 87 percent metropolitan overall. Of the metro areas, Cape Coral grew by more than a third since 2000, while Port St. Lucie and Naples grew by nearly a quarter. The South region, the smallest of the four, has a mere a 14.3 percent of the state’s population, but due to its fast-growing small metros, it grew by nearly 20 percent since 2000.

4. North – this region comprises a broad swath of northern Florida from the large Jacksonville metro (population 1,300,822) in the east to the Panhandle in the west. It also includes Pensacola, the “college town” metros of Tallahassee and Gainesville, rapidly growing Ocala, and the small metros of Fort Walton Beach and Panama City. The North has the lowest metropolitan percentage (83 percent) of the four regions, though its population gains are being driven by metro Ocala and fast-growing suburban counties in the metros of Jacksonville, Pensacola, and Tallahassee. The North region has 20 percent of the state’s population and grew by a robust 14 percent from 2000 to 2007.

B. The eligible voter population in Florida is in a state of flux, especially in the rapidly growing I-4 Corridor region, where big gains in minority voters and white college graduates are transforming the electorate.

Looking at Florida’s key eligible voter segments, we find a slightly higher minority share (29 percent) than for the nation as a whole (27 percent) and a smaller share of working class whites (38 percent versus 42 percent for the U.S.) (**Table 9**). Yet the bigger differences for Florida’s eligible voters are its higher shares of white seniors (19 percent versus 14 percent for the U.S.) and lower shares of white college graduates (14 percent versus 18 percent). This is despite the recent strong growth in white college

graduates. Indeed when looking at age groups regardless of race, Florida's eligible voters age 65 and above comprise nearly a quarter (23.3) of the electorate.

Florida's minority eligible voters are also growing rapidly, among each of the major groups, Hispanics, Blacks, and Asians (see Appendix). Unlike most southeast states, Florida has almost equal shares of Hispanics and Blacks among its eligible voter population, with many non-Cuban Hispanics now moving into the state from abroad and other parts of the U.S..

And even more so than Virginia, Florida's electorate is comprised to a large degree of out-of-state transplants. Only a quarter of its eligible voters are Florida-born and nearly 60 percent were born outside the South or abroad. About two-fifths of Florida's electorate was born in the Northeast and Midwest and 15 percent are foreign born.

These statewide patterns mask significant regional differences which highlight sharp distinctions between Miami and the other regions and new demographic shifts in the growing I-4 Corridor (**Figures 9 and 10**). The Miami metro region is notable because minorities comprise fully half of its electorate. This includes about 30 percent who are Hispanics and 17 percent who are blacks (**Table 10**). Yet white seniors comprise nearly one-third, and the white working class over 40 percent of the remaining white population, signaling both the region's legacy as a retirement community and resort center. The non-Florida and immigrant roots of its eligible voter population are indicated in **Table 12**, which shows that fully one third of metro Miami's electorate was born abroad and another 46 percent were born outside the state.

The I-4 Corridor is not as demographically distinct as Miami but it is changing rapidly in significant ways. Since 2000 it has gained more minorities, white college graduates, and white working class eligible voters than any other region. Its electorate has a higher share of white college graduates than other regions and a higher share of Hispanics than regions other than Miami (**See Table 10**). It also has larger young and smaller old eligible voter shares than Miami or the South region (**See Table 11**). While not as racially and ethnically diverse as Miami, it is growing more rapidly from migrants arriving from all parts of the country and abroad: 12 percent of its electorate is foreign born and 65 percent were born in another U.S. state, largely from those in the Northeast and Midwest.

The smaller South region is also growing rapidly. But the distinctive aspect of its demographic is its high proportion of white seniors—comprising 30 percent of eligible voters. The South is also the whitest region in Florida, with minorities comprising only 15 percent of its population. And as a retiree magnet, the share of its eligible voters who are Florida born (17.3 percent) is the lowest of any region.

Lastly, the North region shows a demographic profile that is not as out-of-state oriented as the other three. Perhaps due to the presence of the state capital, Tallahassee, and the two large state universities, nearly 40 percent of its electorate was born in state and more than 60 percent were born in the South, with less than 6 percent born abroad (**Table 12**). The region's growth includes an increase in the absolute numbers of working class whites—more than the South and, especially, Miami where their numbers are declining.

But even in the North, the share of white working class voters is declining because growth in this group is lagging growth among all eligible voters in the region.

Overall Florida is in a state of rapid demographic flux this decade. The white working class has declined as a percentage of voters in all regions, with the sharpest declines in the Miami metro and the I-4 Corridor (a little over 3 points in each case). Minority voters on the other hand are surging, increasing their share of voters by 6 points since 2000 in the Miami metro and by a little less than 5 points in the I-4 corridor.

C. The GOP's victory in the 2004 election can be attributed to strong support among both white working class and white college graduate voters, as well as solid support from Florida's Hispanics.

So far we have documented the basic demographic and geographic shifts that are reshaping Florida and sketched a brief portrait of Florida's electorate. Now we turn to how Floridians have been voting in recent elections. The results and analysis illuminate how Florida arrived at its current political coloration and provide some hints about how Florida's politics might change in the future as demographic and geographic shifts continue.

Table 13 displays some basic exit poll data from the 2004 presidential election. In 2004, Florida voted Republican in the presidential election, just as it (controversially) did in 2000, but by a considerably wider margin (5 points in 2004 versus one-hundredth of a percentage point in 2000). The data in the table show how Bush carried the state. He received 57 percent support from white voters, 70 percent of all voters according to the exit polls. He also carried Florida's Hispanic voters, 15 percent of voters, by 56-44, thanks to strong support among the sizeable contingent of traditionally GOP-leaning Cuban-Americans, That more than compensated for his large deficit among blacks (86 percent Democratic and 12 percent of voters).

Bush carried men by 7 points and women by a single point. The identical gender gap can be seen when comparing white men and white women, whom he carried by 19 and 13 points, respectively.

By education, Bush carried all education groups above high school graduate, with his best group being those with a four year degree only, whom he carried by 12 points. Bush lost young (18-29) voters by 17 points and 30-39 year olds by 2 points, but carried all other age groups.

Looking at the white working class vote, in 2004 this group (defined here as whites without a four year college degree) supported Bush over Kerry by 16 points. This is significantly less than Kerry's nationwide deficit of 23 points among these voters. Kerry also lost Florida's white college graduates by a 16 point margin, but in this case, the 16 point figure is *more* than Kerry's nationwide deficit (11 points).

Kerry's support among white working class voters varied dramatically regionally. Kerry actually carried white working class voters in the Miami metro by 13 points, while losing

them in every other region of Florida, with his worst performance by far in the exit poll North region (identical with our North region) where he was clobbered by 32 points. The pattern was even starker for white college graduates: Kerry carried them in the Miami metro by 45 points, but lost them in the North by 41 points.

Looking back to 1988, in that election Bush senior ran 33 points ahead of Dukakis among Florida's white working class voters, so Kerry's 16 point deficit in 2004 actually represents a considerable improvement among those voters—indeed, it more than halves that earlier deficit (this shift was heavily driven by whites with some college, who moved sharply toward the Democrats by 24 points). White college graduates had an even larger shift toward the Democrats over this time period, going from a 37 point advantage for Bush senior over Dukakis in 1988 to his son's 16 point margin in 2004—a swing of 21 points. Looking at these shifts regionally, by far the biggest change took place in the Miami metro where white working class voters moved Democratic by 33 points and white college graduates moved in the same direction by a stunning 89 points (going from a 44 point Democratic deficit to a 45 point Democratic advantage).

The trend among white college graduates may be worth special attention since it is this group that is maintaining and even increasing its share of voters in an increasingly diverse Florida (up by 2 points since 1988 according to the exit polls). The share of white working class voters, on the other hand, has declined by 15 points since 1988.

D. Political shifts in Florida since 1988 have moved all regions toward the Democrats, with the sharpest shifts in the Miami metro and the populous I-4 Corridor.

Maps 7A-7C show how patterns of Democratic and Republican support played themselves out geographically in 2004, 1996 and 1988. In each map, counties are color-coded by their margin for the victorious presidential candidate (deep blue for a Democratic victory of 10 points or more, light blue for a Democratic victory of less than 10 points, deep red for a Republican victory of 10 points or more, light red for a Republican victory of less than 10 points). In addition, our four Florida regions are shown on each map by heavy black lines.

Looking at the 2004 map, only a modest number of counties are light or dark blue, indicating counties carried by the Democrats. But these counties do include every county in the populous Miami metro: dark blue Palm Beach and Broward and light blue Miami-Dade. The others are light blue Monroe and St Lucie (Port St. Lucie metro) in the South region, light blue Orange (Orlando metro), and Volusia (Deltona metro) in the I-4 Corridor and dark blue Alachua (Gainesville and the University of Florida) plus Gadsden, Leon, and Jefferson (Tallahassee metro) in the North region.

The rest of the map—the great majority of it—is colored red yet Bush only won the state by 5 points. This is because the three counties they carried in the Miami metro account for 27 percent of the statewide vote and they carried these counties by an overall 18 point margin. That result kept the race fairly close, counterbalancing their 8 point loss in the I-4 corridor (36 percent of the statewide vote) and their more lopsided losses in the South

(17 points and 12 percent of the statewide vote) and the North (20 points and 25 percent of the statewide vote).

Turning to the 1988 map—when Republicans carried the state by an overwhelming 22 points—the contrast is stark. Here there is only one county in the entire state colored blue and light blue at that: Gadsden in the North region. And there are only a handful of counties that are light red—Broward in the Miami metro plus Alachua, Jefferson and Leon in the North. All the rest are dark red.

But 1996 was a very different story. In that year, Clinton won the state by 6 points for the Democrats. In this election, we see the emergence of Democratic strength in the Miami metro (all dark blue), Monroe, and St Lucie, as well as a number of other non-metro counties in the South region, part of the Orlando metro (but not Orange), Volusia and all counties of the Tampa metro in the I-4 corridor and Alachua and the Tallahassee metro, plus quite a few non-metro counties, in the North. In addition, the I-4 Corridor, South and North regions all show a number of counties that move to light red from dark red in this election. By 2004, all these gains had slipped away except in the Miami metro and the handful of other counties enumerated earlier. Interestingly, however, there is one county that moved against the receding tide trend, the very important county of Orange, fifth largest in the state, which flips from light red to light blue between 1996 and 2004.

Map 8 provides a visual representation of where political shifts took place over the 1988-2004 time period. Counties that are dark blue had margin shifts toward the Democrats of 10 points or more, light blue counties had margin shifts toward the Democrats of 10 points or less, light red counties had margin shifts toward the Republicans of 10 points or more and dark red counties had margin shifts toward the Republicans of 10 points or less.

The great majority of the map is colored light or dark blue indicating a shift toward the Democrats over the time period and most of that is dark blue, indicating a strong shift. The largest overall shift was in the dark blue Miami metro which moved toward the Democrats by 26 points over the time period (**Table 14**). In the I-4 corridor, every county but one is blue and there are particularly sharp shifts in the large metro counties of Orange (37 points), Brevard (Palm Bay metro, 25 points), Hillsborough and Pinellas (Tampa metro, 14 and 16 points, respectively), Volusia (16 points) and Polk (Lakeland metro, 16 points). These changes powered an overall shift of 18 points toward the Democrats in the region. In the South, it is also the case that every county but one is blue with the larger metro counties showing the strongest shifts: St. Lucie (33 points), Sarasota (25 points), Collier (Naples metro, 19 points), Indian River (Vero Beach metro, 19 points), Charlotte (Punta Gorda metro, 16 points), and Lee (Cape Coral metro, 15 points). This pattern produced an overall 17 point pro-Democratic shift in the region.

The North presents a more mixed pattern of shifts, with 15 of the 17 GOP-trending counties in the state located in this region. The great majority of these are rural counties, however, and they are balanced a pattern of solid pro-Democratic shifts in a number of the large metro counties: Leon (27 points), Marion (Ocala metro, 16 points), Alachua (14 points), and Duval (Jacksonville metro, 10 points) as well as some smaller shifts in the

very conservative Pensacola and Panama City metros. This pattern yielded an overall 10 point move toward the Democrats over the time period, the smallest among any of our regions.

It's useful to compare the political shifts in Map 8 to the population growth map (Map 6). Florida, of course, is a very fast-growing state with just three declining counties. Even the slowest growth category (yellow) represents growth up to 9 percent, while light green is 10-19 percent and dark green is a very rapid 20 percent more. The region with the highest concentration of relatively slow growth yellow counties is the strongly Democratic and Democratic trending Miami metro, where two of the three counties (Miami-Dade and Broward) are yellow. The other end of the spectrum, however, is in the I-4 corridor where every county except Pinellas is light or dark green. And all these green counties, with one exception (rural Sumter County) are also Democratic-trending.

The South and North regions present a different growth pattern with a fair number of yellow, light green and dark green counties in each. In the South, the strongest growth counties (Lee, Collier, and St. Lucie) are larger metro counties that have had substantial swings toward the Democrats since 1988. The slowest growth counties in the region tend to be smaller, rural counties with a more mixed pattern of political changes. In the North, in contrast, many of the slower growing counties tend to be in the most Democratic-trending areas (the Tallahassee metro and its environs, Duval county in the Jacksonville metro), while some of the fastest growth is in a belt of GOP-trending counties in the northeast corner of the state that includes parts of the Jacksonville metro and various rural counties to the west and south (though even here some larger metro counties such as Alachua and Marion are both fast-growing and Democratic-trending).

Overall, the frequency with which strong pro-Democratic trends and strong population growth are coupled in Florida provides the Democrats with some grounds for optimism, particularly in the I-4 corridor. On the other hand, patterns in the North are less favorable for the Democrats, as is the fact that growth in their bulwark region, the Miami metro, tends to be relatively slow.

E. Key trends and groups to watch in 2008 include the sharply declining white working class, where the GOP needs to prevent any erosion of support, especially among Democratic-trending whites with some college; white college graduates, whose support levels for the GOP are high but declining over time; and the growing and changing Hispanic population, whose continued support for the GOP is critical to their efforts to hold the state.

Despite the trends described above, the GOP has managed to win the last two presidential elections in Florida (albeit just barely in the case of 2000). Whether the Republicans can keep their victory streak alive or whether the Democrats will win the state for the first time since 1996 will depend greatly on the demographic groups and trends we have reviewed in this report. Here are some things to watch out for in the 2008 election.

First, will the declining white working class maintain its level of support for the GOP? In 2004, they gave Bush a 16 point margin, which, while solid, was actually below Bush's nationwide performance. If this margin shrinks into single digits—and here whites with some college, who have been trending sharply Democratic, could play a critical role—it will be difficult for the Republicans to hold the state.

The political leanings of the growing white college-educated group will also be critical. The GOP's 16 point margin among these voters in 2004, while relatively large by nationwide standards, represents a substantial decline in margin since 1988. Stopping or reversing this trend would make a large contribution to a Republican victory this year.

A third group to watch is Hispanic voters. This group is growing rapidly, even as it changes generationally and in terms of mix (more non-Cuban Hispanics), and may not be as naturally conservative as in the past. This raises the possibility of improved Democratic performance among this group in November, which, combined with high black turnout, would provide a big boost to Democratic efforts to capture the state.

In terms of regions, the Miami metro will, of course, be of huge importance. It is this area that has seen the sharpest shift toward the Democrats, powered by dramatic gains among white working class and college-educated voters. But Democrats will probably need to do significantly better than their 18 point margin in this area in 2004 to carry the state.

The fast-growing I-4 Corridor could be even more important. Richer than the Miami metro in terms of votes (36 percent of the statewide vote versus 27 percent in the Miami area), this region can fairly be characterized as Florida's swing region. Should the Democrats carry this region or just come close to breaking even—which depends primarily on their performance in the Tampa and Orlando metros—they will likely carry the state.

Finally, the North of Florida, 25 percent of the overall vote, is the GOP's bulwark in the state. They will seek to drive up their margin as high as possible in this area to counteract possible losses in the Miami metro and I-4 Corridor.

¹ See Frey and Teixeira, "The Political Geography of Ohio, Michigan, and Missouri: Battlegrounds in the Heartland," "The Political Geography of the Intermountain West: The New Swing Region," "The Political Geography of Pennsylvania: Not Another Rust Belt State," and "The Political Geography of Virginia and Florida: Bookends of the New South." (Brookings: 2008).

² William H. Frey, "Race, Immigration and America's Changing Electorate" in Ruy Teixeira (ed) *Red, Blue, and Purple America: The Future of Election Demographics*. Washington: The Brookings Institution. 2008 pp. 79-108)