

Florida: Party Activists in a Two-Party System

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This article examines the background characteristics of Democratic and Republican party activists, their issue and ideological preferences, patterns of party factionalism, organizational strength and patterns of activity within parties at the county level. The findings demonstrate that underlying Florida's competitive party system are two sets of ideologically polarized and active party activists. While signs of internal party factionalism have not completely disappeared from Florida's political parties, at the beginning of the twenty-first century Florida's party system and party organizations are a far cry from the multifactional chaos that once characterized the old one-party—or no party—system in Florida.

Introduction

This article examines the backgrounds, ideological orientations, activity patterns, and levels of factionalism of Florida Democratic and Republican county executive committee members in the context of the evolving partisan changes in the “Sunshine State.” What distinguishes Democratic and Republican party activists? How have the partisan changes of the 1990s affected party activists in Florida? What is the nature of factional conflict within each party organization in Florida? And overall, how do party activists differ today from a decade ago?¹ These are the major themes discussed in the pages that follow.

The Development of Political Parties in Florida

Party Competition

Always at the vanguard of the partisan changes that have transformed the South from a one-party system (Key 1949) to a competitive two-party system (Black and Black 2002; Lamis 1999), Florida has continued to provide a fascinating tale of party and electoral development over the past two decades. While Florida will almost certainly be remembered for its starring—albeit unwanted—role in the 2000 presidential election, the denouement of that contest was in some ways a predictable one given the dynamic nature of politics and society in the state.

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Since Key (1949) described the multifactionalism that pervaded the “old politics” of Florida, every description of party and electoral politics in the state has stressed how Florida is different from other southern states. Demographic changes have produced a state that in many respects is a microcosm of the nation, and the racial, ethnic, urban-rural and partisan composition of Florida has produced a party system that is one of the most competitive in the nation. Neither Democratic nor Republican party can claim “majority” status. Just when one party appears to be gaining an electoral advantage, the other has struck back with notable victories.

Party development in Florida from 1960 until the end of the 1980s conformed to the *split-level alignment* that had characterized the electoral order of the other southern states. Republicans dominated elections at the presidential level, and while the GOP made gains in contests below the presidency, a Democratic advantage persisted in congressional, state and local elections (see, for example, Lamis 1990, Parker 1992; Scicchitano and Scher 1998; Carver and Fiedler 1999).

The competitive nature of Florida’s two-party system remained evident in the 1990s, although it also demonstrated some new and important patterns. One symbolic victory for the Republican Party was that they controlled a majority of U.S. House seats following the 1990 election. However, it was at the presidential level that provided the major story of the 1990s. The 1992 presidential election saw the most competitive contest in Florida since 1976. Although George H. W. Bush carried the state, he did so narrowly. The closeness of the race was a reflection of the Clinton-Gore ticket, unlike Democratic nominees in the previous two elections, refusing to write-off the state and making several campaign appearances in the state (Hulbary, Kelley, and Bowman 1994). Additionally, Bush’s support was being siphoned off by the independent candidacy of Ross Perot, thus making for the close result on election day. The narrow Bush victory perhaps energized Clinton in 1996 who made a concerted effort to win Florida (Tenpas, Hulbary, and Bowman 1997). Clinton’s efforts worked, as he became the first Democrat since Jimmy Carter in 1976 to carry the state. That Florida had become a “battleground” state at the presidential level was further—and dramatically—underscored in the 2000 presidential contest. After all the counting, recounting and further recounting of ballots was complete George W. Bush bested Al Gore by just 537 votes out of over 6 million cast! (Tauber and Hulbary 2002).

While Florida had apparently evolved into a competitive state at the presidential level, the Republicans were making a long-awaited breakthrough in contests below the presidency. For example, despite the competitive presidential contest of 1992, Republicans achieved parity with Democrats in the state senate. In 1994 the Republican momentum continued as the

Table 1. Republican Strength in Florida, 1960-2002

Year	Percent of Presidential Vote	Percent of Gubernatorial Vote	Percent of U.S. Senate Vote	Percent of U.S. House Delegation	Percent of State House Delegation	Percent of State Senate Delegation
1960	51.5	40.2		12.5	3.2	2.6
1962			30.0	16.7	5.3	2.6
1964	48.9	41.3	36.0	16.7	8.9	4.5
1966		55.1		25.0	22.2	22.9
1968	40.5		55.9	25.0	35.3	33.3
1970		43.0	46.1	25.0	31.9	31.3
1972	71.9			26.7	35.0	35.0
1974		38.8	40.9	33.3	28.3	30.0
1976	46.6		37.0	33.3	28.3	22.5
1978		44.4		20.0	25.8	27.5
1980	55.5		51.7	26.7	32.5	32.5
1982		35.3	38.3	36.8	30.0	20.0
1984	65.3			31.6	35.8	20.0
1986		54.6	45.3	36.8	37.5	37.5
1988	60.9		50.4	47.4	39.2	42.5
1990		43.5		52.6	38.3	42.5
1992	40.9		34.6	56.5	40.8	50.0
1994		49.2	70.5	65.2	47.5	52.5
1996	42.3			65.2	50.8	57.5
1998		55.3	37.5	65.2	60.0	62.5
2000	48.9		46.2	65.2	61.7	62.5
2002		56.0		72.0	67.5	65.0

party picked up three open U.S. House seats and easily retained a U.S. Senate seat. Gains in the state senate were also consolidated and the party also moved within striking distance of a majority in the state house. The only sour note of the 1994 elections was the defeat of John Ellis “Jeb” Bush, who was narrowly defeated by incumbent governor Lawton Chiles. However, Chiles would govern with a six- member cabinet that contained three Republicans—Secretary of State, Comptroller and Commissioner of Education.

The elections of 1996 and 1998 would prove historic breakthroughs for Florida Republicans. First, Republicans took control of the state house in 1996 and made further gains in the state Senate, thus giving the GOP control of its first state legislature in the South since the Reconstruction era. Despite the strong performance by President Clinton in 1996, it appears that there were no presidential coattails to help Democrats further down the ballot. Two years later Republican growth in subpresidential elections reached its

zenith as Jeb Bush returned to easily defeat Lieutenant Governor Buddy MacKay. Bush was also afforded the luxury of a state legislature that was now dominated by the Republicans.

The most recent election cycles provide further evidence of Florida's competitive party system. Republican strength remains evident at the state level, with the GOP holding large majorities in both the state house and senate. Moreover, Jeb Bush's reelection as governor in 2002 proved much easier than many experts had initially expected. Additionally, the GOP won both contested cabinet office elections, Commissioner of Agriculture and Attorney General, thus holding all three directly elected cabinet offices. Republicans increased their hold on the U.S. House delegation following the 2002 elections, holding eighteen of the state's twenty-five seats. However, the Democrats could take some solace from the fact that the party holds both U.S. Senate seats. Robert Graham has held one seat since 1986, while former Treasurer-Insurance Commissioner Bill Nelson won the other—an open seat contest—in 2000. Future elections in the state, from the presidency on downwards, are likely to be competitive in the years ahead.

Organizational Development of Parties

The organizational development of the Florida Democratic Party and the Republican Party of Florida has run parallel to the evolution of party competition in the state. The electoral success of the Republican Party in the late 1960s spurred the organizational growth of the party, which in turn forced the Democrats to reinvigorate its organization. By the mid 1970s, both parties had established permanent headquarters in Tallahassee, with both state party organizations actively involved in candidate recruitment, training meetings, fund-raising, voter registration drives, campaign-related activities and organizational maintenance (Kelley 1997). Indeed, a comparative study of state party organizations by Cotter et al. (1984) characterized both Democratic and Republican state party organizations to be “moderately strong.”

The institutionalization of the party organizations continued throughout the 1990s, allowing the state parties to become “more effective service-vendor agencies for candidates” (Kelley 1997, 62). The Republican Party of Florida currently has twenty-eight staff members. These include the state party chairman, executive director, deputy executive director as well as directors of administration, communications, finance, operations and events, House campaigns, Senate campaigns, information technology, member relations/party development. Additionally the state party has three regional field directors. At the county level, the Republicans currently have a county chair in each of Florida's sixty-seven counties, while county party organiza-

tions maintained a headquarters address and/or telephone listings in forty-four counties. The Democrats currently have ten staff members. These include the state party chair, executive director, political director, policy director, communications director and political coordinator. At the county level, the Democrats have a party chair in sixty-four counties. In this respect, Florida remains among those states with the best-organized and most pervasive party organizations in the nation.

Given the competitive two-party system that has developed in Florida, the state parties have been instrumental in elections at all levels. Their ability to engage in campaign-related activities has been greatly enhanced by the state legislature changing state law governing party advertisements, specifically allowing the so-called “three pack” ads that have been so prevalent since the 1998 Governor's race. This allows the parties to run specific ads on behalf of the governor using soft money and then in the last five seconds quickly mention two other statewide candidates.

Finally, it should be noted that the Republican state party organization was very effective in its efforts to secure a GOP majority in the state legislature in the 1990s. It identified winnable legislative districts, played an important role in recruiting candidates and ensured that resources were channeled to “winnable” districts. In contrast, the Florida Democratic Party spent much of the 1990s distracted by a fair degree of factional in-fighting within the state party organization. While much of the division in the party was caused by ideological tensions between liberals and conservatives (Kelley 1997), conflict also arose from divisions between elected and party officials. This was demonstrated when in 1992 party activists retained Simon Ferro as state party chair, much to chagrin of Governor Lawton Chiles. Eventually Ferro stepped aside and was replaced by Chiles's preferred candidate Terrie Brady (Carver and Fiedler 1999, 373). However, Brady resigned in 1998 just at the time that the party's divisions on race were exposed when black state Representative Willie Logan was replaced as minority leader by Anne MacKenzie, a white moderate. Logan complained that the move was racially motivated, and, indeed, subsequently endorsed Jeb Bush in the 1998 gubernatorial election (Tauber and Hulbary 2002). While the state party recovered somewhat with Broward county party chair Mitch Caesar as state party chair, and an active party organization almost delivering the state to Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election, the factionalism of the 1990s goes some way to explaining the weak position that Democratic Party finds itself in at the state legislative level.

Florida Grassroots Party Activists, 1991-2001

Demographic Patterns

With regard to the standard socioeconomic and demographic variables, Democratic and Republican grassroots activists share several common characteristics that render them unrepresentative of the general population (Table 2). In this sense there is continuity in the profile of party activists today as compared to ten years ago. For example, in both parties the racial composition of party activists was overwhelmingly white. While racial minorities continue to be underrepresented on county committees, among Democrats there has been an increase in the proportion of black activists, 10 percent in 2001 as compared to five percent in 1991. Black Republican party activists remain negligible, although there are more Hispanics to be found among the ranks of Republican activists than among Democratic activists. The racial gap is especially stark when one just considers county party chairs, with all Republican chairs and virtually all Democratic chairs being white.

As in 1991, majorities of the activists in 2001 are migrants to Florida, and this is especially true of Republican activists. However, committee chairs were more likely than members to be native Floridians. Interestingly, it appears that in 2001 the Republican activists have who moved to Florida were previously residents of other *southern* states, rather than from other regions of the United States. Thus, while the Republican Party in Florida traditionally benefited from in-migrants from the Northeast and Midwest (Kelley 1997), it would seem that *intra-regional* migration patterns have helped party growth in the 1990s. This might also be a reflection of the realignment that has taken place among native southern whites in the 1990s (Stanley and Niemi 1995; Black and Black 2002; Knuckey 2002), that is, whites who migrate to Florida from other southern states are now more likely to hold Republican rather than Democratic partisan identifications.

Party activists in Florida also continue to conform to the standard social and economic status model of political participation (Verba and Nie 1972) that suggests it is the elites in society who participate in political activities beyond voting. In 2001, as in 1991, large majorities of activists in both parties had family incomes of at least \$50,000, and a substantial number had family incomes of over \$70,000. In addition, activists in both parties were more likely than the general population to hold college or graduate/professional degrees. Overall, Democratic activists *were less likely* than Republicans to have not finished high school, although this maybe a consequence of Republican activists being older than Democratic activists.

Table 2. Selected Demographic Characteristics of Florida Party Activists, 2001

Demographic Characteristic	Democrats			Republicans		
	All	Chairs	Members	All	Chairs	Members
Age						
Under 40	12.9	6.5	13.7	16.4	5.4	18.0
40-49	19.0	22.6	18.6	12.2	21.6	10.9
50-59	29.3	48.4	27.0	25.3	16.2	26.6
60-69	18.4	9.7	19.4	29.6	37.8	28.5
70 and over	20.4	12.9	21.3	16.4	18.9	16.1
(N)	(294)	(31)	(263)	(304)	(37)	(267)
Gender						
Male	56.3	73.3	54.4	62.3	73.0	60.8
Female	43.7	26.7	45.6	37.7	27.0	39.2
(N)	(296)	(31)	(263)	(305)	(37)	(269)
Education						
<High school	4.8	3.2	4.9	13.5	11.1	13.8
Some college	22.1	32.3	20.9	25.7	22.2	26.1
College degree	33.0	38.7	32.3	41.8	44.4	41.4
Graduate degree	40.1	25.8	41.8	19.1	22.2	18.7
(N)	(296)	(31)	(265)	(306)	(36)	(268)
Income						
<\$25,000	9.6	—	10.7	9.6	3.1	10.5
\$25-49,999	34.0	44.8	32.8	25.0	28.1	24.6
\$50-74,999	22.3	24.1	22.1	29.6	21.9	30.6
\$75-99,999	16.3	13.8	16.6	17.9	25.0	16.9
≥\$100,000	17.8	16.9	17.8	17.9	21.9	17.3
(N)	(282)	(29)	(253)	(280)	(32)	(248)
Religion						
Protestant	50.9	56.7	50.2	67.8	69.4	67.5
Catholic	17.2	13.3	17.6	23.7	19.4	24.3
Jewish	15.5	16.7	15.3	2.6	5.6	2.2
Other	3.8	6.7	3.4	2.0	—	2.2
None	12.7	6.7	13.4	3.9	5.6	3.7
(N)	(291)	(30)	(261)	(304)	(36)	(268)

Notes: Entries are the percent who share the designated characteristic (e.g., 12.9 percent of Democrats are under 40 years of age). Ns are in parentheses.

Although both parties are required by state law to select a committeeman and committeewoman from each precinct to serve on county executive committees, as in 1991, men continue to outnumber women. Over the past decade, this gender gap has become less evident among Democratic party activists than Republicans. However, almost three-quarters of county executive chairs in both parties are men. With respect to age, as a group Florida

party activists tend to be older than the general population. While a sizeable minority of activists in both parties were *over* 70, less than one-third of activists in either party were *under* 50. One interesting difference between the parties is the age of chairs. Republican chairs were by far the oldest group, with 57 percent being over 60. However, among Democratic chairs, just 23 percent were aged 60 or over.

Protestants continue to constitute a majority among the ranks of activists in both parties, although not to the extent that they were in 1991. Overall, both mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations were more numerous among Republican activists than Democrats. Florida's party activists are distinguished by having significant numbers of non-Protestants—especially Catholics and Jews—among their ranks, again reflecting the diversity of the state. Catholics were more numerous among Republican activists than Democratic activists, while more Democratic activists were Jewish. Also, Democratic activists were more likely than Republicans to be non-believers.

When one moves from religious denomination to variables that measure “religiosity” some important differences are evident among the activists of both parties. Republican activists were much more likely to be regular churchgoers than Democrats, with a majority of Republicans reporting that they attended a church service almost every week or more frequently. In contrast one in five Democratic activists reported that they never attended a church service. The “religiosity divide” is also evident in two other items. Activists were asked what role religion played in guiding their day-to-day lives, and whether they have had a “born-again” experience. While a bare majority of Democrats said that religion guided their daily life either a “great deal” or a “fair amount” almost two-thirds of Republicans said the same. Finally, Republicans were more likely than Democrats to claim to have had a “born again” experience. Thus, the documented importance of religiosity or religious traditionalism as a new cleavage in both national and southern politics (see, for example, Layman and Carmines 1997; Green et al. 1998) also appears to distinguish party activists in Florida, although it would be something of an exaggeration to suggest that the state now possesses a “religiously committed” Republican party and a “secular” Democratic Party.

Ideology and Issues

Over the past decade the party activists in Florida that have become highly polarized along ideological lines. The “ideological sorting” of southerners has been central to the realignment of the South (Carmines and Stanley 1990; Knuckey 2001; Black and Black 2002). This process has clearly been at work in Florida (Table 3). Even in 1991 Republican activists were

Table 3. Position on Issues and Political Philosophy for Florida Party Activists, 2001

	Democrats			Republicans		
	All	Chairs	Members	All	Chairs	Members
Issues						
Fewer government services to reduce spending	8.6	13.0	8.0	74.9	81.1	73.9
Equal role for women	96.6	93.6	97.0	94.5	94.6	94.4
Legalized abortion	91.5	96.8	90.8	40.2	37.8	40.5
School prayer	35.4	41.9	34.6	91.1	97.2	90.2
Government aid to minorities	86.2	87.1	86.1	33.7	32.4	34.0
Death penalty	44.4	42.0	44.8	77.0	86.1	75.8
Government regulation of health care	86.5	86.3	86.0	17.9	8.3	19.1
Government efforts to help women	85.0	87.1	89.3	32.7	22.2	34.1
Stricter handgun control	81.8	77.5	82.4	20.7	5.6	22.8
School vouchers	3.5	—	3.8	75.9	91.6	85.1
Hiring preferences for blacks	36.4	45.2	35.4	2.6	—	3.0
Flat tax system	36.7	29.0	37.6	88.7	91.7	88.3
Job discrimination protection for gays	84.5	83.9	84.5	24.2	19.4	25.1
Government protection of jobs and good standard of living	62.7	76.7	61.1	8.9	16.7	7.8
Minimum N	(285)	(30)	(255)	(301)	(36)	(265)
Ideology						
Very liberal	28.6	38.7	27.4	—	—	—
Somewhat liberal	34.8	19.4	36.7	1.6	—	1.9
Moderate	27.9	32.3	27.4	11.5	5.4	12.3
Somewhat conservative	7.6	6.5	7.7	54.1	56.8	53.7
Very conservative	1.0	3.2	0.8	32.8	37.8	32.1
(N)	(290)	(31)	(259)	(305)	(37)	(268)

Notes: Entries are percentages of those agreeing with the designated position. Ns are in parentheses.

homogenous with respect to their self-identified political philosophy. This remains the case in 2001, with an overwhelming majority of Republicans saying that they were either “somewhat” or “very” conservative. Liberals were almost non-existent among the ranks of Republican activists, but even the proportion of moderate Republicans has become smaller over the last decade. In 1991, Democratic activists possessed greater ideological

diversity. However, over the past decade, Democrats have become a much more cohesive liberal party, with a clear majority saying they were either “somewhat” or “very” liberal. Moderate Democrats are still a presence within the party, but less than 10 percent of Democratic activists said they were conservatives. Thus, at least at the level of party activists, the ideological center of gravity in the Democratic Party has shifted decidedly toward the left, and this is true whether one examines committee chairs or members.

This ideological polarization between the activists of both parties is also evident when one moves from general ideological orientations to specific issue preferences. On a whole range of economic, social and cultural issues one finds considerable ideological differentiation between the activists of both parties. As Table 3 shows, on only one issue—women having an equal role as men in society—was there agreement among party activists. On *every* other issue, Democrats took the more liberal position and Republicans took the more conservative position.

There were some issues, however, where a significant minority of party activists took positions that were at odds with the general orientation of their parties. These issues are defined as those where at least one-third of party activists take a position that is contrary to that of the majority in the party. Among Democrats the issues that may prove divisive for the party were support for school prayer, support for the death penalty, hiring preferences for blacks, and support for a flat tax. The first three are typical “wedge issues” that Republicans have used in Florida, and elsewhere in the South, to induce defections among Democratic ranks. The flat tax issue is interesting, in that on other economic issues Democrats tended to be much more liberal. Perhaps the traditional aversion of Floridians to taxes of any kind is reflected in this support of a key Republican idea even among Democratic party activists. The issue that is likely to cause division among Republican activists is abortion, with a sizeable minority supporting a women’s legal right to an abortion. This issue is, of course, central to the struggle in state and local Republican parties between moderates or economic conservatives and social conservatives. Although the influence of the Christian Right has not been as evident in Florida as in other southern states (Wald and Scher 1997; Carver and Fielder 1999), the Republican division on this issue indicates that any Republican candidate with ties to the Christian Right running on a pro-life platform would risk alienating a sizeable minority of the party base. The other two issues where at least one-third of Republican activists took a position that was at odds with the dominant party position were support for government efforts to help women and for government aid to minorities. The latter is interesting, as while one-third of Republican activists supported government aid to minorities, only a very small number were in favor of quotas or affirmative action.

Party Factionalism

Traditionally Florida’s party politics has been characterized by high levels of factionalism. While this factionalism was originally contained within the Democratic Party (Key 1949), it also afflicted the early stages of Republican growth in the state (Kelley 1997). Table 4 shows that in 2001 factionalism remains evident within both parties. Overall, Democrats were more likely than Republicans to perceive that there was a “fair amount” or a “great deal” of factional conflict in the state party. Interestingly, Democratic county chairs perceived *less* factionalism than committee members. On the other hand, Republican county chairs were more likely than members to perceive at least moderately high levels factionalism in the state party. Activists of both parties perceived less factional conflict within their own *county* party organization, although again Democrats were more likely report at least moderately high factionalism than Republicans.

When asked to identify the sources of state party factionalism, geographic-based factionalism (i.e., between different regions of the state and between urban and rural parts of the state) was the most common form cited by Democrats. Given the size and diversity of Florida this is not surprising, and indeed scholars have noted the geographic nature of factionalism since Key (1949). Even though Democrats are not as ideologically diverse as they

Table 4. Perceptions of Party Strength, Florida Party Activists, 2001

Party Strength	—Democrats—			—Republicans—		
	All	Chairs	Members	All	Chairs	Members
Overall party organization	48.5	40.0	49.6	85.0	89.2	84.4
Party’s campaign effectiveness	45.9	53.3	45.0	80.1	86.5	79.1
Party’s ability to raise funds	44.0	43.4	44.0	72.6	78.4	71.8
Party’s role in candidate recruitment	34.1	40.0	33.5	66.8	59.4	67.9
Party’s effort to develop organizational skills	41.0	58.6	38.9	70.1	75.0	69.4
Party’s use of media	32.5	37.9	31.9	48.6	35.1	50.6
Party’s use of opinion polls	28.9	34.4	28.3	53.9	44.4	55.3
Party’s use of computer technology	72.0	73.3	71.8	90.8	89.2	91.0
Party’s strength among county voters	51.3	50.0	51.4	80.1	78.3	80.3
Minimum N	(275)	(29)	(245)	(291)	(36)	(255)

Note: Party strength cell entries are the percentages of those respondents saying that the party was either “significantly stronger” or “somewhat stronger” than 10 years earlier. Ns are in parentheses.

were ten years ago, a majority of party activists still perceived divisions between different ideological viewpoints. Additionally, a majority saw differences between supporters of different leaders. On the other hand, only on the issue of abortion did a majority of Republicans perceive there to be at least a “fair amount” of disagreement within the state party. Again, this demonstrates the potency and potential divisiveness of that particular issue for the party. A sizeable minority of Republicans also viewed geographic divisions as generating a “fair amount” or “great deal” of factionalism, although a *majority* of Republican chairs did so. It should be noted that although Republicans in Florida are ideologically homogenous, almost one-third of activists cited differences in ideological viewpoints as a source of factionalism within the state party. Given the previous findings about the abortion issue, this ideological factionalism might be considered as being less one of moderates against conservatives, but rather one of economic conservatives against social conservatives.

Organizational Strength and Patterns of Activity

Although the decline of the party-in-the-electorate has been central to the academic treatment of American political parties since the 1970s (see, for example, Burnham 1970, Broder 1971; Nie, Verba and Petrocik 1979; Wattenberg 1991, 1996), several studies have documented the revitalization of party organizations at the grassroots level (see, for example, Gibson et al 1985; Gibson, Frendreis and Vertz 1989). The extent of party organization at the grassroots level can be addressed by examining how party activists perceived the strength of the party organization over the past decade, as well as focusing upon the patterns of activities performed.

With respect to the organizational strength of the political parties, Table 5 shows that with the exception of one item—the party’s use of the media—a majority of Republican activists said that the party was performing either “significantly” or “somewhat” stronger than ten years ago. In contrast, majorities of Democratic activists said that the party was performing “significantly” or “somewhat” stronger in just two areas, use of computer technology and the party’s strength among county voters. It is interesting to note that there was a perception among both sets of party activists that their own party had increased its strength among county voters! While some of this may represent a degree of optimism among activists, it is possible that the continuing split-level alignment evident in Florida is responsible for these perceptions. Republicans could point to success in state legislative elections throughout the 1990s; Democrats could take solace in the party being competitive in presidential balloting. It is also likely that there are some counties, especially the rural counties in the panhandle where the Republican Party has attracted greater support, just as there are some urban and suburban

Table 5. The Extent and Nature of Party Factionalism, Florida Party Activists, 2001

	Democrats			Republicans		
	All	Chairs	Members	All	Chairs	Members
State Party Factionalism						
Very high	9.4	6.5	9.8	6.4	11.4	5.7
Moderately high	38.4	29.0	39.6	29.8	34.3	29.2
Moderately low	46.4	51.6	45.7	52.2	45.7	53.0
Very low	5.8	12.9	4.9	11.7	8.5	12.1
(N)	(276)	(31)	(245)	(299)	(35)	(264)
County Party Factionalism						
Very high	7.1	3.2	7.5	3.0	2.8	3.0
Moderately high	29.0	16.1	30.6	19.7	19.4	19.7
Moderately low	40.6	35.5	41.3	43.7	36.1	44.7
Very low	23.3	45.2	20.6	33.7	41.7	32.6
(N)	(283)	(31)	(252)	(300)	(36)	(264)
Sources of State Party Factionalism						
Ideological viewpoints	54.0	54.9	53.8	32.6	27.0	33.5
Party leaders	55.0	48.4	56.0	27.4	50.0	24.5
New vs. old residents	45.9	35.5	47.2	22.4	37.8	20.3
Region	67.1	54.8	68.6	41.4	54.0	31.7
Urban-rural	66.2	60.0	66.9	46.4	58.3	44.7
Taxes	41.7	38.7	42.1	13.0	13.5	12.9
Abortion	39.4	45.2	48.2	52.8	54.0	52.6
Racial issues	38.3	29.1	39.4	8.6	8.4	8.7
Government spending	43.9	38.7	45.5	13.6	18.9	11.7
Minimum N	(272)	(30)	(242)	(300)	(36)	(263)

Notes: Entries are percentages. Percentages for the sources of factionalism are those who believed that an item contributed a “great deal” or a “fair amount” to disagreement in the state party. Ns are in parentheses.

counties were support for the Democrats has increased over the past decade (Carver and Fielder 1999).

Table 6 provides some detail about the nature and extent of party activities performed. Given the intensely competitive nature of statewide elections in Florida, it is no surprise that majorities of both party’s activists identified campaign related activities as being most important. One noticeable difference was in the percentages of Democratic and Republican county chairs who identified campaigning as being a very important part of their job. Overall, county chairs in both parties were more likely than members to stress organizational or managerial activities as “very important.”

Table 6. Most Important Party Activities Performed, Florida Party Activists, 2001

	Democrats			Republicans		
	All	Chairs	Members	All	Chairs	Members
Contacting voters	69.3	87.1	67.2	61.5	56.8	62.1
Raising money	39.4	67.7	36.0	34.9	59.5	31.4
Registering voters	67.6	67.7	67.6	56.3	67.6	54.7
Campaigning	63.4	75.9	62.1	52.3	27.0	55.9
Public relations	45.7	74.2	42.2	35.5	48.6	33.7
Contacting new voters	60.6	74.2	59.0	57.3	56.8	57.4
Participating in party meetings	56.4	80.0	53.6	55.0	86.5	50.6
Recruiting and organizing workers	41.3	90.3	35.3	41.0	80.6	35.6
County party organizational work	39.4	90.3	33.3	49.2	91.9	43.2
Providing information	51.9	67.7	50.0	55.1	62.2	54.2
Policy formulation	30.8	60.0	27.4	37.9	51.4	36.0
Recruiting candidates	38.3	58.1	35.9	48.2	51.4	47.7
Nominating activities	13.8	22.6	12.7	21.2	29.7	20.0
Developing party website	11.7	22.6	10.4	5.6	5.4	5.7
Minimum N	(286)	(31)	(255)	(300)	(37)	(263)

Notes: Cell entries for most important activity performed are the percentages of those respondents who said that a particular activity was “very or somewhat” important as part of their job. Ns are in parentheses.

When asked about activities performed in recent election campaigns, majorities in both parties had performed campaign-related activities, i.e., sending mail to voters, distributing campaign paraphernalia, and contributing money. Overall chairs tended to be more active than members, even Republican chairs, only one-quarter of whom had identified campaigning as an a very important part of their job! County chairs also were more likely to play organizational or leadership roles in election campaigns as well as being more likely to deal with the media. Overall, the findings presented in Table 6 indicate two sets of party activists that are highly active and engaged in state and local party politics.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Florida has a mature two-party system that is a far cry from the multifactional chaos that characterized the politics of the state in the early decades of the twentieth century. From

top to bottom, Florida has perhaps one of the most competitive party systems in the South, and perhaps in the nation. At the fulcrum of this party competition are two party organizations whose members are both committed and active in the political arena. These elites provide the backbone of the party effort in the state as well as offering a pool of potential candidates for political office. Additionally, the issue and ideological orientations of Florida's party activists means that the state's voters are likely be presented with a clear choice between candidates of both parties in congressional, state and local elections. In the years ahead, Florida's two political parties and their activists will continue to provide the resources and the context of competitive two-party politics in the Sunshine State.

NOTES

¹Comparisons made between Florida party activists in 1991 are based on the findings of the original Southern Grassroots Party Activists Project as reported by Hulbary, Kelley, and Bowman (1995).

²The number of elected cabinet offices was reduced in 2002. Only the Attorney General, Agricultural Commissioner and Chief Financial Officer are now directly elected.

³This is based on information obtained from the Florida Democratic Party website at <http://fldem.com/DECCConnection.html>.

⁴This is based on information obtained from the Republican Party of Florida website at <http://www.rpofdonations.org/elected>.

⁵In this sense Florida party activists are not representative of the state. Florida has a black population of 14.1 percent and a Hispanic population of 13.2 percent.

⁶Among the general population the median family income in 2000 was \$34,244, while 22.5 percent held a college or graduate/professional degree.

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