

## Anti-Castro Political Ideology among Cuban Americans in the Miami Area: Cohort and Generational Differences

### Introduction

This paper analyses data from polls of Florida residents of Cuban descent, conducted in 2000 by Guillermo Grenier and Hugh Gladwin of Florida International University.

As a self-defined exile community, Cuban Americans differ sharply from other Latino national origin groups in that they have developed a set of unique political institutions and a political culture based on their exile identity. This political culture is stereotypically defined by its right-wing, anti-Castro politics and automatic antipathy toward all things 'leftist'. Unlike most other Latinos, a majority of Cubans have traditionally voted Republican—due largely to the GOP's strong stance against Cuban dictator Fidel Castro (Barreto et al. 2002). Analysts signal Cuban Americans' high voter registration and voting rates as examples of their unique political culture (Highton and Burris 2002; Lopez 2003).

Even though the Florida Cuban American community varies according to generation and the 'wave' of immigration that brought immigrants to the United States, social

- For years analysts have assumed that Cuban Americans share a monolithic political identity based on fervent opposition to Fidel Castro's government.
- Recent data suggest a more nuanced picture: that Cuban Americans' political beliefs vary according to generation and the 'wave' of immigration that brought them to the United States.
- Opposition to Castro is still the norm, but there is a clear trend toward more conciliatory attitudes in dealing with the Cuban state.

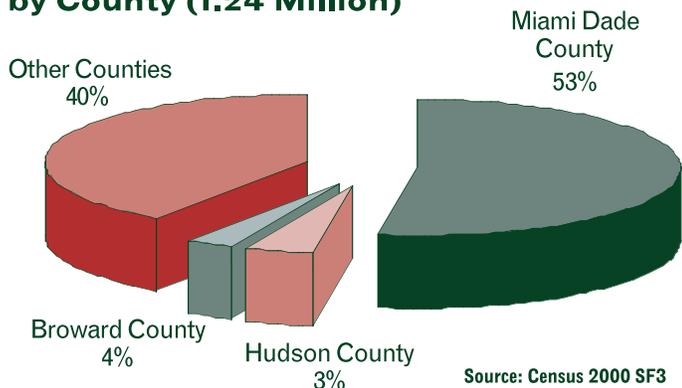
scientists and the public tend to take the community's monolithic political profile for granted and assume that it remains unchanged over time. Yet careful analysis of recent data reveals that while most Cuban Americans in South Florida are anti-Castro, the level of their fervor varies greatly among generational and wave cohorts.

### Cuban Americans' Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile

Cubans make up the third largest Latino group in the United States, behind Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. As Figure 1 shows, 60 percent of the country's 1.24 million Cuban Americans reside in Miami Dade and Broward counties, Florida, and in Hudson County, New Jersey.

Despite their hyper-concentration in Miami Dade County and strong transnational ties to families in Cuba, Cuban Americans have incorporated themselves into

**Figure 1**  
2000 Cuban Population Concentration by County (1.24 Million)



*continued on page 2*

## Demographic and Socioeconomic Profile *continued from cover*

'mainstream' society quite well. Few immigrant groups have structurally assimilated so quickly while simultaneously forging a uniquely bicultural identity (García 1996; Pérez 1992). As Table 1 indicates, Cuban immigrants manifest higher levels of income and education than the aggregate of other Latino groups while exhibiting lower poverty levels (Pérez 1992). Even though they are a community of predominantly first-generation foreign-born immigrants (68.5 percent), their percentage of college graduates and percentage below the poverty line almost equal those of the total population in the United States. The Cuban experience provides a fascinating case study in American immigration and ethnic history, not only because of the federal government's response to their arrival and the role they have played in shaping US foreign policy

Ethnicity	Foreign Born	College Degree or Higher	Below Poverty	Median Household Income
Cuban	68.5%	21.2%	14.6%	\$ 42,642
Hispanic or Latino	40.2%	10.4%	22.6%	\$ 34,397
Non-Hispanic White	3.5%	27.0%	8.1%	\$ 54,698
Total Population	11.1%	24.4%	12.4%	\$ 50,046

Source: Census 2000 SF4

but also because of their adjustment to life in the United States.

## Wave Cohorts among Cuban Immigrants

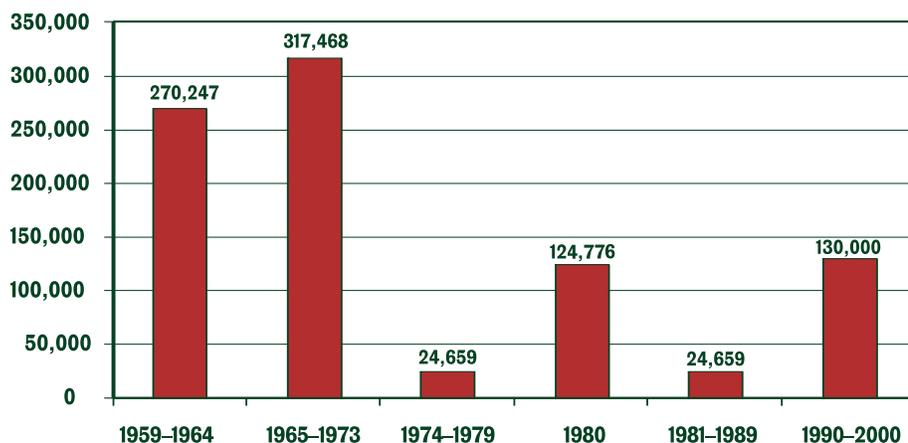
Before the 1959 Cuban Revolution the United States maintained economic and political control over Cuba's governance (Poyo 1989). Many Cubans who emigrated to the United States before the revolution were laborers, attracted to New York by the region's factories and service industries (Pérez 1992). While it is safe to say that all migration flows

initiated after the revolution have had a decidedly political character, they can be categorized into separate waves. In each wave migrants had a distinct historical motivation for leaving the island and were received in a different socioeconomic and political context from that of other waves. As Figure 2<sup>1</sup> reveals, a majority of the Cubans who arrived after 1959 came during six distinct periods (Grenier and Pérez 2003).

The first wave of 270,000 Cubans arrived immediately after the revolution and the Cuban Missile Crisis, from 1959 to 1964. The second wave of about 300,000 arrived during the 'freedom flights', from 1965 to 1973. Table 2 (next page) shows that the 1965–73 cohort was socioeconomically less privileged than the directly postrevolutionary wave (1959–64). More technical workers, such as skilled manual workers, and fewer professionals arrived in the 1965–73 cohort than in the earlier group. Only 22 percent of the second wave have household incomes of \$50,000 or

*continued on page 3*

Figure 2  
Cuban Migration by Wave of Arrival



<sup>1</sup> The numbers of Cuban migrants during each wave were recalculated from Table 1 in Nackerud et al.'s article (1999). The number of Cuban immigrants from 1998 to 2000 was counted as 20,000 per year, assuming that the immigration pact between the United States and Cuba in 1994, which allowed 20,000 Cubans per year to emigrate to the United States legally, continued to be in effect.



**Table 2 Socioeconomic Profile by Wave Cohorts among Cuban Americans**

Wave of Arrival	Mean age	1.5 Generation*	College graduates and more	Household income below \$20,000	Household income \$50,000 and more	Professionals	Skilled manual workers
Before 1959	67	29%	31%	30%	33%	31%	3%
1959–1964	60	34%	38%	28%	44%	39%	7%
1965–1973	62	20%	21%	36%	22%	26%	10%
1974–1979	55	21%	39%	8%	17%	30%	6%
1980	54	8%	21%	43%	23%	22%	14%
1981–1989	52	12%	27%	44%	17%	25%	22%
1990–2000	41	2%	29%	49%	1%	25%	20%
US Born	32	NA	51%	1%	65%	59%	8%

\*1.5 Generation refers to those who came to the United States between the ages of 1 and 14.

Source: 2000 Cuban Poll

above, compared to 44 percent of 1959–64 cohort households. As with most revolutions, the first people to be affected, and thus the first to leave, were those in the middle and upper classes (Eckstein and Barberia 2002; García 1996; Grenier and Stepick 1992; Pérez 1990). The first two cohorts laid the foundation for the creation of a viable Cuban economic enclave in south Florida. The enclave absorbed all subsequent arrivals from Cuba and transformed South Florida into a magnet for immigrants from all over Latin America (García 1996).

The third cohort included Cubans who came to the United States between 1974 and 1979, when migration diminished. The third wave was also highly educated and included more professionals than post-1980 cohorts.

The seven-year period of reduced migration came to an abrupt end during the Mariel Crisis of 1980. After thousands of Cubans rushed into the Peruvian Embassy

in Havana seeking asylum, Cuban officials opened the port of Mariel to allow all who wanted to leave the island to do so in an orderly fashion. While the exodus proceeded rather chaotically, 125,000 Cubans did leave from the port of Mariel, and most of them ultimately settled in the South Florida region (Grenier and Stepick 1992; Nackerud et al. 1999; Pedraza-Bailey 1996; Pérez 1990; Poyo 1989). Unlike the earlier cohorts, these 1980 Cubans had lived most of their adult lives in Cuba's new revolutionary society. This has prompted some analysts to conclude that this migration included more individuals 'pushed' by economic necessity rather than by political motives (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). Although felons comprised less than 3 percent of the Mariel Cubans, this cohort received a hostile reception in the United States (García 1996; Pedraza-Bailey 1985; Portes and Stepick 1996). Yet they demonstrated patterns of adaptation similar

to those of the Cubans who arrived earlier (García 1996).

From 1981 to 1989 migration from Cuba to the United States dropped dramatically. The Cuban Americans who came to the United States during this period constitute the fifth wave cohort.

The sixth cohort consists those who came to the United States between 1990 and 2000. After the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989 Cuba's strategic importance to the United States diminished, and in 1994 a large influx of migrants from Cuba catalyzed the historic policy change that officially ended the preferential open door for Cuban immigrants (Nackerud et al. 1999). The United States introduced the current 'wet-foot/dry-foot' policy (immigrants found at sea are returned to the island while those who make it to land are granted asylum) and equalized the number of annual visas for Cuba to that of other countries of the world at 20,000 (Nackerud et al. 1999). The sixth cohort is different from previous Cuban immigrants in that they left their homeland with tacit approval from the Castro government (García 1996). Black and mixed-race Cubans are well represented in this cohort, as are many who considered themselves revolutionaries for many years until the opportunity to emigrate presented itself. Consequently, the cultural diversity within the Cuban community is now more extensive than ever (García 1996).



# Cohort Differences in Hardline Anti-Castro Political Ideology among Cuban Immigrants

Just how prevalent and uniform is the hardline anti-Castro political ideology among the various waves of Cubans arriving in the United States? Data from polls conducted by scholars at Florida International University in 2000 make it possible to measure this in a nuanced fashion.<sup>2</sup> Three sets of variables operationalize key characteristics of the “exile ideology” (Pérez 1992), and they are related to each other in the historical context of the Cuban community: 1) uncompromising attitude of opposition to the government of Cuba; 2) support for the Republican Party; and 3) opposition to unrestricted travel to the island.

## 1) Uncompromising Attitude toward the Cuban Government

Since 1960 the United States has maintained an economic embargo against Cuba, part of a broad strategy to isolate the Castro regime and deprive it of US dollars. Despite mounting pressure in Congress to loosen the embargo, support for it constitutes the most important tenet of many exiles’ uncompromising attitude toward the Cuban government. In the view of hardliners, the embargo has been

the most important instrument for driving Cuba toward reform. But others suggest that the embargo contributes to keeping the country poor, thus hurting the people Cuban Americans are trying to help. Moderates also encourage the initiation of a dialogue between Cuban Americans and the Cuban government, as well as the sale of medicine and food to the island. Meanwhile, some hardliners oppose both dialogue and the sale of medicine and food to Cuba, arguing that such assistance and recognition would serve only to sustain the Castro regime.

Table 3 suggests that not all Cuban Americans are in agreement about how to deal with the island. Overall, 64.4 percent of all respondents favor continuing the US embargo of Cuba, emphasizing that a strong anti-Castro attitude exists among Cuban Americans. However, there are significant differences among the cohorts in the support

for some of the restrictions imposed by the embargo. For example, 76.7 percent of the 1965–73 cohort favor continuing the US embargo policy, compared to 40.7 percent of the 1990–2000 cohort. Only 35.6 percent of all respondents oppose the sale of medicine and 46.4 percent oppose the sale of food to Cuba. In addition, the community is split right down the middle on the issue of initiating a dialogue between Cuban exiles and the Cuban government.

Again cohort differences are very significant in all three policy measures against Cuba. As expected, those arriving in the earlier waves hold the most intransigent views while the most recent arrivals reveal a more conciliatory perspective. The 1980 and 1981–89 cohorts fall in-between. It is evident that the time of arrival in the United States is an important variable in understanding the disagreements about how to deal with Cuba among Cuban Americans.

**Table 3: Cuban American Hardline Ideology by Wave Cohorts**

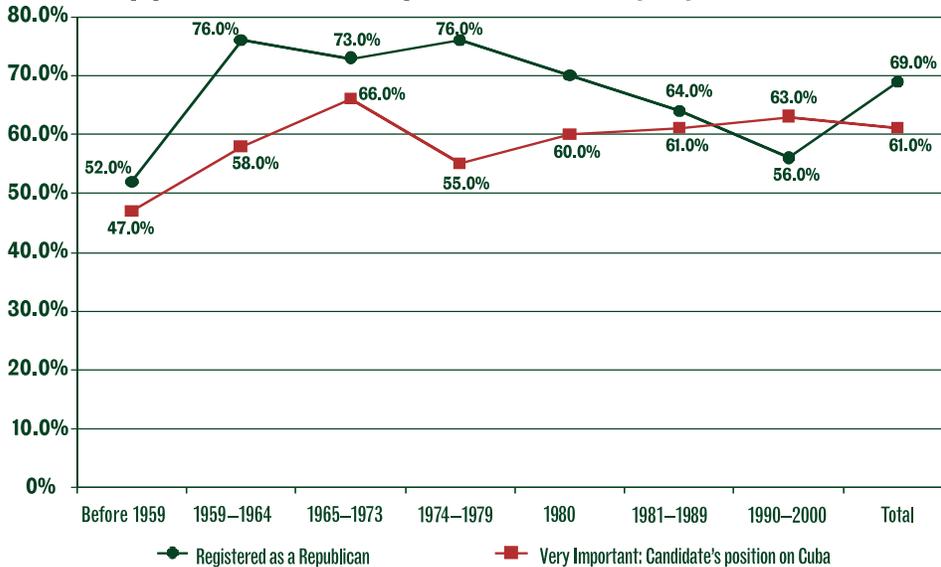
Wave of Arrival	Favor Continuing the US embargo of Cuba	Oppose sale of medicine to Cuba	Oppose sale of food to Cuba	Oppose dialogue between Cuban exiles and the Cuban government	N
Before 1959	62.5%	34.3%	44.2%	42.0%	35
1959–1964	71.3%	41.9%	55.7%	57.1%	172
1965–1973	76.7%	47.0%	62.5%	61.0%	211
1974–1979	62.1%	41.9%	51.7%	62.5%	31
1980	67.1%	36.5%	43.3%	53.0%	85
1981–1989	63.3%	37.3%	44.1%	45.4%	59
1990–2000	40.7%	14.9%	22.9%	33.3%	127
US Born	57.1%	24.8%	31.1%	32.0%	109

Source: 2000 Cuban Polls, Florida International University

<sup>2</sup> The 2000 Cuban polls were conducted by Guillermo Grenier and Hugh Gladwin at Florida International University with a sample of 1,175 Miami-Dade County residents of Cuban descent. Data were generated from a telephone survey using standard random-digit-dialing procedures, which ensured that each residential phone had an equal chance of being chosen for the sample (<http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba2000>).

Figure 3

**Importance of Candidate's Position on Cuba and Support for the Republican Party by Wave Cohorts**



**2) Support for the Republican Party**

As already noted, Cuban Americans tend to support the Republican Party because of its perceived 'stronger' stance against the Cuban government (Pérez 1992). Their party preference stands in contrast with other Latino voters who have traditionally been Democratic. In Florida Cuban Americans often play a crucial role in determining election outcomes.

As Figure 3 shows, 69 percent of Cuban immigrants are registered as Republicans but significant differences exist among wave cohorts. The 1959-64 cohorts and 1974-79 cohorts are most likely to support the Republican Party, whereas the pre-revolutionary and 1990-2000 cohorts are least likely. The commitment to the Republican Party by the earlier cohorts can have a significant impact on elections. Their turnout in presidential elections can be as high as 90 percent, while only 50 to 60 percent of recent younger cohorts vote (Roman 1996).

Cuban Americans' active participation in the Republican Party has been motivated by their desire to influence policy towards the island (De la Garza and Desipio 1994). As Figure 3 demonstrates, Cuban Americans still consider a candidate's position on Cuba to be of primary importance. A total of 61 percent of all respondents say that a candidate's position on Cuba is "very" important when casting their vote. The 1965-73 cohorts again show the highest percentage among wave cohorts.



The Inter-University Program for Latino Research (IUPLR) is a nationwide consortium of 18 Latino studies centers with its headquarters at the Institute for Latino Studies, University of Notre Dame.

IUPLR's purpose is to strengthen its centers' capacity, expand the pool of Latino scholars and leaders, increase the availability of policy-relevant, Latino-focused research, and advance the national intellectual presence of Latino scholarship.

This report is one of a series of investigations into the current status of Latinos according to various social and economic indicators, which was carried out by a team of IUPLR researchers with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

### 3) Opposition to unrestricted travel to Cuba

Prohibiting US travel for pleasure to Cuba is another of the restrictions imposed by the embargo. In 2003 the Republican-led House and Senate voted to end the travel ban but later dropped the measure after President Bush threatened a veto (*USA Today*, 10 February 2004). Figure 4 shows that half of respondents oppose unrestricted travel to Cuba and, as expected, there are differences among the wave cohorts: 62 percent, 59 percent, and 56 percent of each of the first three wave cohorts oppose unrestricted travel to Cuba, while 46 percent of the 1980 cohort, 43 percent of the 1981–89 cohort, and only 23 percent of the 1990–2000 cohort oppose this policy. As with other hardline measures, far fewer of the more recent émigrés opposed unregulated visitation rights.

Over the last decade Cuban American travel to Cuba reached its highest level. Travel increased from approximately 7,000 persons annually to over 140,000, with an estimated minimum of 100,000 immigrants visiting annually between 1996 and 1999 (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). The US-Cuba Trade and Economic Council estimates that 156,000 US travelers made authorized trips in 2003 while as many as 25,000 Americans traveled illegally to Cuba via a third country (*USA Today*, 10 February 2004).

However, Figure 4 reveals that the actual percentage of Cuban Americans who have traveled to meet their families is still relatively

Figure 4  
Travel to Cuba by Wave Cohorts

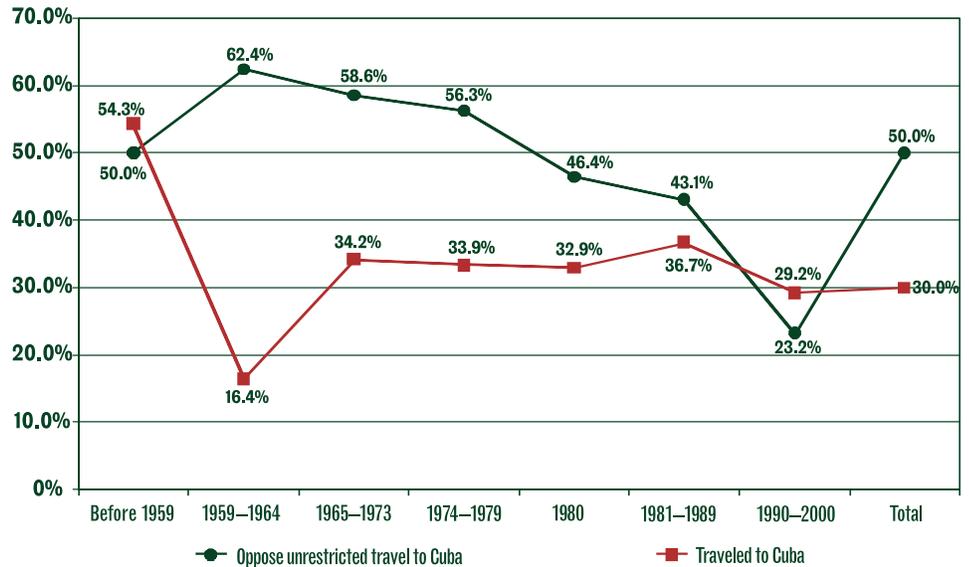
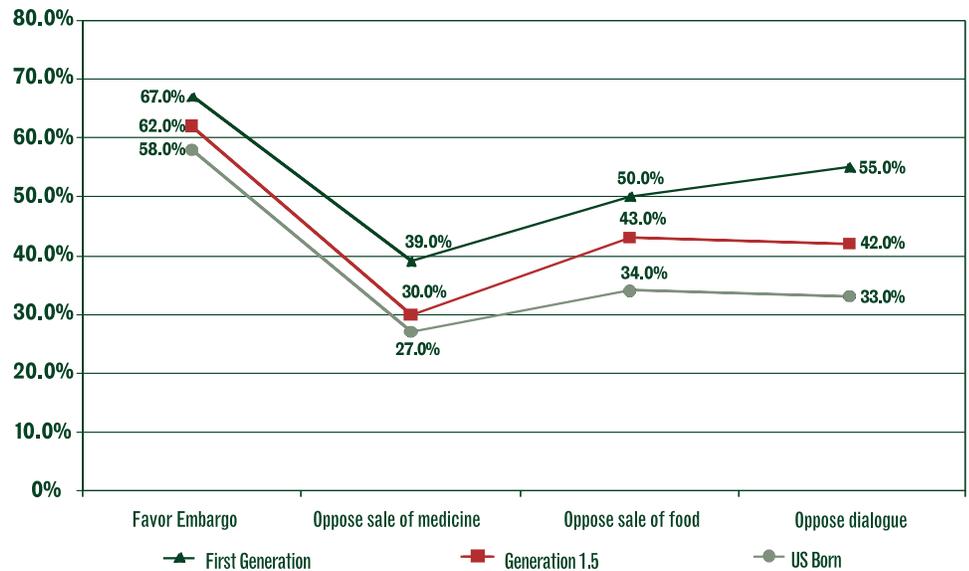


Figure 5  
Generational Differences in Uncompromising Attitude toward Cuba



low, with the highest proportion of visitors (54 percent) coming from the pre-revolutionary cohort. The Cuban government held an extremely restrictive entry policy for those leaving the country in 1980 and 1994. These restrictions applied to the 1980 cohort until the end of the 1980s and

for those leaving in the raft exodus of 1994 until 1999 (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). Interestingly, only 16 percent of the 1959–64 hardline cohort have made visits to Cuba since they left their homeland, while around 30 percent or more of each of the other cohorts have traveled to Cuba.

# Generational Differences in Hardline Anti-Castro Political Ideology among Cuban Immigrants

Age on arrival and place of nativity are also important generational variables influencing political culture in the Cuban community. A growing number of the members of the Cuban American community were not born in Cuba. According to the 2000 census SF4, US-born Cuban Americans make up 31.5 percent of the Cuban population in the United

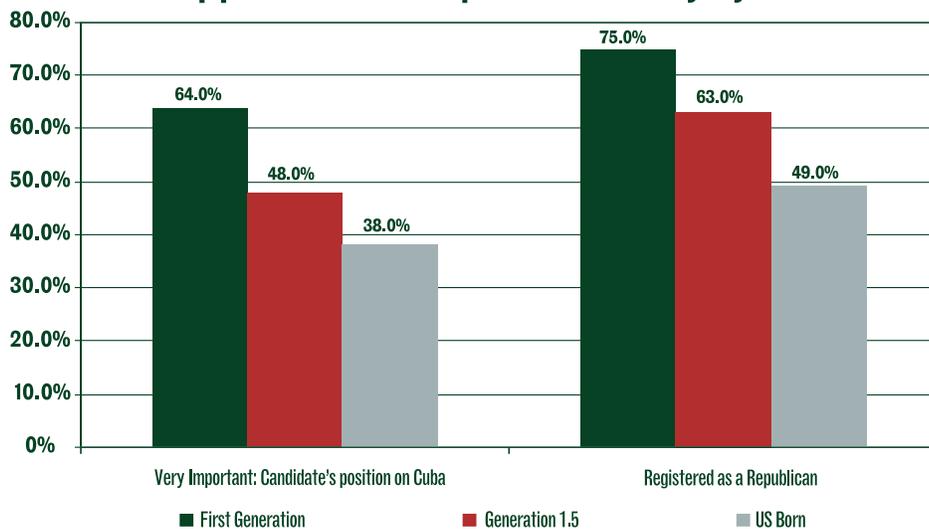
States. They can be expected to have a different political ideology from that of their first-generation parents. Previous research has failed to distinguish the situation of immigrants who came to the United States as children (the 1.5 generation) from that of those who came as adults (the first generation) and the US born. Rumbaut (1994) found that

the 1.5 generation's pre- and post-immigration experiences and adjustment to US culture differed from those of both their first-generation parents and US-born individuals. Once again, the 2000 Cuban polls enable us to investigate how Cuban Americans' political ideology is affected by the age at which they came to the United States.

## 1) Uncompromising Attitude toward the Cuban Government

Figure 5 presents the generational variation of anti-Castro attitudes among Cuban Americans. As expected, first-generation Cuban Americans are more likely to favor continuing the embargo, to oppose the sale of medicine and food to Cuba, and to oppose the establishment of dialogue than 1.5-generation and US-born Cuban Americans. For their part, the 1.5 generation exhibit stronger measures of an uncompromising attitude than their US-born counterparts.

Figure 6  
Importance of Candidate's Position on Cuba and Support for the Republican Party by Generation



## 2) Support for the Republican Party

US-born Cubans are less likely to evaluate a candidate's policy on Cuban issues as very important and are less likely to support the Republican Party than the first generation and 1.5 generation. In addition, 1.5-generation Cubans are less likely to evaluate a candidate's policy on Cuban issues as very

important and are less likely to support the Republican Party than the first generation. Figure 6 demonstrates that the margin is significantly large.

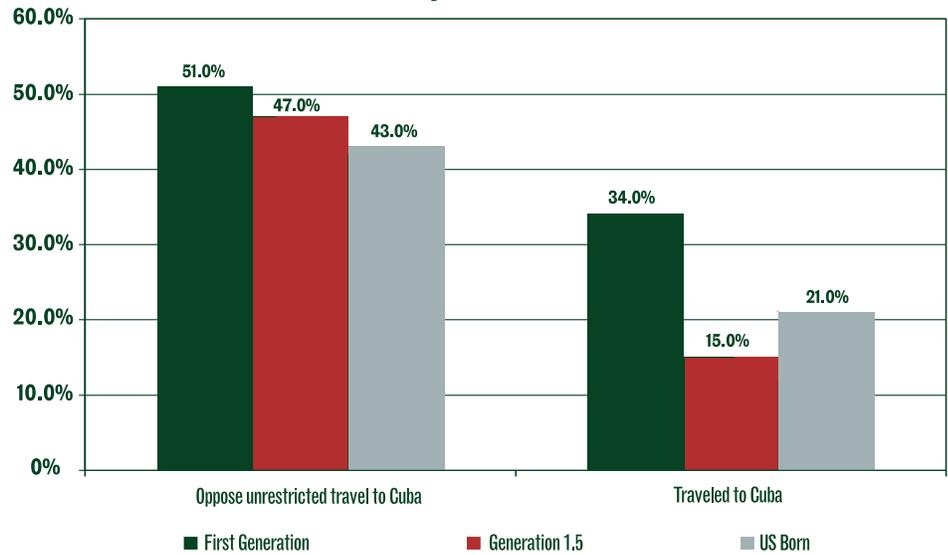
While further analysis is necessary to flesh out the reasons for generational differences, the 2000 poll does show that US-born Cuban

Americans are more likely to get their news about Cuba from English-language newspapers, as opposed to Spanish-language radio or print media. As a result they are much less exposed to many of the opinions and public discourses that shape the political behavior of older Cubans.

### 3) Opposition to unrestricted travel to Cuba

Figure 7 reveals the generational differences in opposing unrestricted travel to Cuba. First-generation Cuban immigrants are more likely to oppose unrestricted travel to Cuba than 1.5-generation and US-born Cuban Americans. In addition, the 1.5 generation is more likely to oppose unrestricted travel than their US-born counterparts. Figure 7 also shows that more first-generation Cubans (who are more likely to oppose unrestricted travel to Cuba) actually have visited Cuba. Interestingly, however, US-born Cuban Americans were more likely to travel to Cuba than their 1.5-generation counterparts.

Figure 7  
Travel to Cuba by Generation



## Discussion

Anti-Castro hardliners who came to the United States between 1959 and 1974 have been a powerful resource of political mobilization in the Cuban community, guiding the community's political orientation and involvement and seeking to influence US policy against the Castro regime. Analysis of the 2000 Cuban polls reveals that a majority of Cuban immigrants and their offspring still share a right-wing anti-Castro political ideology. This uniformity has been driven by the exile experience of 43 years and has been handed down as part of the Cuban American identity to new arrivals and the second generation in the form of a distinct "exile ideology" (Pérez 1992).

Over time, however, Cuban Americans became diverse politically. In the 1970s the first signs of diversity began to sprout in the community, with the first leftist Cuban American organizations growing as steadily as the Cuban enclave. The process of dialogue with Cuban authorities was offered as an alternative to the hardliners' solution to the Cuba problem, but hardliners struck back with violence against those who supported dialogue. Conflicts between these groups contributed to a heated and often violent political climate in south Florida (Grenier and Pérez 2003).

While Cuban immigrants' attitudes toward the Castro regime have not changed much, their

methods have. As Cuban immigrants became more involved in domestic politics, they applied the skills they learned in the American political arena to their attacks on Castro. As a result, hardliners' strategy shifted in the 1980s towards a focus on the US political arena with the goal of gaining power and influencing US foreign policy. Some hardliners have even come to favor rapprochement, supporting the normalization of US-Cuban relations as a means of provoking democratic change in Cuba (García 1996).

Similarly, the 1990s saw the acceptance among hardline exiles of the legitimacy of opposition movements on the island. Some immigrants have abandoned exile politics altogether and immersed



themselves in local or ethnic politics (García 1996). With time, many of the old guard who had established the hardline exile ideology and its concomitant norms have passed away (Grenier and Chun 2003).

Evidence from the 2000 Cuban polls points to a more diverse community than most analysts thought existed. Diverse wave cohorts from Cuba, as well as the generational dimension, explain much about Cuban Americans' increasingly diverse political attitudes. Each wave cohort and generation share correspondingly nuanced pre- and post-immigration experiences in a new country (Eckstein and Barberia 2002). While opposition to Fidel Castro's government is the norm of the community, there is a clear trend towards a more conciliatory attitude in dealing with the Cuban state.



The three wavy lines shown throughout this publication are a symbol from ancient times representing the human intellect in action. From *The Book of Signs*, collected, drawn, and explained by Rudolf Koch (London: The First Edition Club, 1930, page 8).

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## About the Researchers



Born in Seoul, Korea, research scientist *Sung-Chang Chun* received

his PhD from the University of Notre Dame. He was involved in creating the Chicago Fact Finder and conducting the Chicago Area Survey ([www.nd.edu/~latino](http://www.nd.edu/~latino)). He has written about Latino-origin group population underestimates, Latinos in distressed communities, wave effect on Cuban political ideology, and Black Latinos. He is now conducting research on the remittance behavior, religious

participation and ministry needs, and geographical mobility of Latinos.

*Guillermo Grenier* is a professor of sociology at Florida International University and was, until recently, the director of the Florida Center for Labor Research and Studies. Born in Havana, Cuba, Dr. Grenier received his undergraduate education at Emory University and Georgia State University in Atlanta. He received his PhD from the University of New Mexico.

Grenier is the author of *Inhuman Relations:*



*Quality Circles and Anti-Unionism in American Industry* (Temple University Press, 1988); *This Land Is Our Land: Immigrants and Power in Miami* (University of California Press, 2003); and, with Lisandro Pérez, *Legacy of Exile: Cubans in the United States* (Allyn and Bacon, 2002).

### Research Assistants

*Jonathan Kwon* graduated from the University of Notre Dame's Department of Sociology this year.

*Joo Young Park* graduated from Northwestern University's Industrial Engineering Department this year.

*Joshua Rah* is a senior in psychology at the University of Missouri at Columbia.

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