



# 2

## Florida Legislators

### Locally Elected State Officials

[The] mobile home park. . . . was fairly large. . . . And I always made it a point to campaign there. I always made it a point to walk there, and I always made it a point to do that in, usually, the last week of the election cycle. . . . And that year I didn't go there . . . because it was gone. Eight hundred units . . . completely wiped off of God's green Earth. . . . We went to, physically, where it was, and it was gone.

1992 state legislator on campaigning after Hurricane Andrew

The first group of officials in this study to face voters after the hurricane was from Florida's legislature. Elected officials from the municipalities, discussed in later chapters, represent small constituencies, with municipal elections held in small districts completely within one of Hurricane Andrew's damage zones. State legislators' districts are larger, potentially more diverse, and sometimes cross municipal or county lines. Some districts also crossed into more than one of Andrew's damage zones. This chapter explores the experience of state legislators seeking reelection after Hurricane Andrew. Although state legislators are state officials, politically they have localized electoral bases.

Districts entirely or partially in Dade County in 1992 were identified using pertinent county election department maps depicting the bicameral state legislature's House and Senate districts and voting precincts. Outcome data for general elections and primaries (including runoff primaries) from 1980 through 2002 were obtained from the Florida Elections Division and the Miami-Dade County Elections Department, whose data also contain county-only vote totals for districts that cross county borders.

These data proved incomplete; they only provide election outcome information, and many incumbent Florida legislators are returned to office without elections because they have no challengers. It is even possible that a strong, experienced candidate (not an incumbent) would enter a race early and draw no challenger. For example, a state senator, city mayor, or county commissioner with a strong electoral track record might run for a house seat and face no competitors.

Accordingly, the journals of the House and the Senate were reviewed to determine who held office and to gather other potentially relevant information (for example, special elections or change of party identification occurring between elections). The 1980 general legislative session was used as a baseline for a review of the membership of each chamber for each new legislature from 1980 to 2000, at the time of the biennial “Organizational Session.” This occurs fourteen days after the November general election and is held to establish committee assignments, officially designate chamber leadership, and establish rules of order. For the 2002 elections, lists of the 2002–4 House and Senate memberships were obtained from the legislature’s Web sites. Finally, Miami-Dade County Elections Department data provided precinct-level results for key districts in the years before and after Hurricane Andrew.

Thirteen state House members and two state senators representing parts of Dade County and in office at the time of Hurricane Andrew sought reelection in 1992. All but one were successful (see table 2.1). In 1990, eight of the thirteen had been unopposed; in 1992, four drew no opposition. Only seven of the thirteen sought reelection in 1994, and six were successful, three unopposed. Both senators who sought to retain their seats in 1992 were unopposed. Indeed, only one had a challenger in even the second (1994) election after Andrew, and he won with more than 77 percent of the vote.

The greatest single decline was for one candidate who garnered 83 percent of the Republican primary vote against one challenger in 1992. He saw his 1994 primary vote share drop to 53 percent, but against two challengers, who captured 32 percent and 15 percent of the primary vote. Note also that the 1992 election cycle was well under way before the tropical system that became Hurricane Andrew formed.

The election cycle includes the decision of a candidate to run for office, the formal process of establishing a campaign checking account and filing qualifying papers, fund-raising, the possibility of primary and runoff campaigns, and the general election campaign. In 1992, the decision to

Table 2.1. Proportion of votes pre- and post-Hurricane Andrew: Incumbents in the Florida Legislature

HOUSE			
Incumbent	1990 share (%)	1992 share (%)	1994 share (%)
Luis Rojas	100	69.0*	75.8*
Willie Logan	87.7	100	100
Elaine Gordon	62.5*	51.2*	N/A
Mike Abrams	100	100	N/A
Bruce Hoffman	50.3	46.4**	N/A
Rodolfo Garcia	100	77.9	82.4
Carlos Valdes	100	82.8*	53.2*
Luis Morse	100	67	100
Art Simon	71	64.6	N/A
John Cosgrove	100	66.2	61.7
Ron Saunders	100	99.7	N/A
Elaine Bloom	100	100	100
Miguel DeGrandy	80.1*	100	N/A
<b>Average (Mean)</b>	<b>88.58</b>	<b>78.83</b>	<b>81.87</b>
<b># Unopposed</b>	<b>8 (62%)</b>	<b>4 (31%)</b>	<b>3 (43%)</b>
SENATE			
Incumbent	Pre-Andrew vote share	1992; first post- Andrew vote share	Second post- Andrew vote share
Roberto Casas	52.5 (1988)*	100	100.0 (1996)
Howard Forman	61.1 (1990)	100	77.6* (1994)
<b>Average (Mean)</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>88.8</b>

\*Primary election data used; no challenge in general election.

\*\*Runoff primary data used; incumbent lost—no general election.

Source: Florida Department of State, Elections Division; Miami-Dade County Elections Department.

(or not to) run was made by the official July filing deadline, well before Andrew. In fact, Andrew struck South Florida just eight days before the scheduled primary election, and campaigning was well under way for those contests. Still, the hurricane could have affected campaigns and/or the election results in 1992 and/or any stage of the 1994 election cycle.

In that light, the pattern of unopposed incumbents in table 2.1 is interesting for reasons other than the hurricane (but turns out not to be hurricane related). In 1990, eight of the thirteen legislators seeking reelection (62 percent) were unopposed, but in 1992 this dropped to four of thirteen (31 percent). In 1994, the number of unopposed incumbents dropped to three, but with only seven seeking reelection, the proportion rose to 43 percent. Because the decision to oppose an official had to be made before

the development of what would become Andrew, the 1992 reduction in unopposed incumbents was no doubt a result of the 1992 redistricting.

Additional analysis of election results is largely inconclusive. To recall, the criteria for including politicians in this study were that they were: (1) in office at the time of Hurricane Andrew; (2) seeking reelection in the first post-hurricane election; and (3) challenged in that contest.

Of the two state senators from Dade County seeking reelection in 1992, neither had opposition in his first bid for reelection. Nine of the thirteen House members from Dade who sought reelection in 1992 had opposition. One (Saunders) was dropped from the study because the district he represented was predominantly in Monroe County (the Florida Keys), and his only opposition was a write-in candidate who garnered just 0.3 percent of the vote.

Eight state legislators, all House members, were included in the study. Three of them were unopposed in 1990, complicating a pre-post comparison. Three of the remaining five incumbents had opposition only in the 1990 primary; all three were from districts entirely in the north section of the county that later suffered only mild damage from Andrew.

### **The Simon Case**

Table 2.2 depicts the 1990 and 1992 results for Art Simon, the only legislator from the group who was opposed in the general elections in 1990 and 1992 and who came from a district that included precincts from the southern (severely damaged) area of the county. Coincidentally, his opponent was the same in 1992 as in 1990. It is an interesting and illustrative case.

One of the purposes of redistricting is to equalize the size of districts. Uneven population growth causes districts to become numerically unequal over time, and redrawing district lines mitigates this inequality by evening out the populations among state legislative districts to comply with the “one person, one vote” principle established by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Reynolds v. Sims* (1964). Thus, Simon’s district, a growing part of the county, had a substantial reduction in the number of registered voters between 1990 and 1992, as several precincts were removed from the district during the redistricting process. The county elections department also periodically purges inactive voters from the rolls. One such purge occurred in May 1991.

Table 2.2. Pre- and post-Andrew election results for Representative Art Simon, District 116, Florida House of Representatives

Region*	Registered	Total votes**	% turnout	Incumbent votes***	%	Challenger votes***	%
1990							
Middle	41,806	21,213	50.74	14,823	69.9	6,390	30.1
South	8,657	4,760	54.98	3,540	74.4	1,220	25.6
M/S overlap	6,711	3,450	51.41	2,530	74.4	920	25.6
Absentees	0	1,022	—	722	70.6	300	29.4
Total or average	57,174	30,445	53.25	21,615	71.0	8,830	28.9
1992							
Middle	29,325	17,618	60.08	11,237	63.8	6,381	36.2
South	5,716	3,635	63.59	2,454	67.5	1,181	32.5
M/S overlap	3,691	2,582	69.95	1,634	63.3	948	36.7
Absentees	0	1,835	—	1,254	68.3	581	31.7
<b>Total or average</b>	<b>38,732</b>	<b>25,670</b>	<b>66.28</b>	<b>16,579</b>	<b>64.6</b>	<b>9,091</b>	<b>35.4</b>

\*Region depicts the geographic region of the damage zones created by Hurricane Andrew: The middle, moderate damage zone north of SW 112th Street, the southern, severely damaged zone south of SW 112th Street, and those precincts that overlapped the two zones.

\*\*Ballots, reported in county elections data, are more than the actual number of votes cast for the two candidates. This is due to: (a) individuals casting ballots on which votes for the top offices in the election (that is, the governor in 1990 and the president in 1992) are cast, while votes for offices further down on the ballot (the state legislator) are skipped over; and (b) punch-card ballots not recording votes in some contests because of hanging, pregnant, or dimpled chads. Thus, the “votes” column reflects the total of the votes recorded for this race.

\*\*\*Percentages of votes shown are calculated from the total number of votes recorded for this race, the lower numbers from the “votes” column. Ballots were cast by 55.81% of registered voters in 1990 and 80.83% in 1992, but there were substantially fewer votes cast for the District 116 races, especially in 1992.

Source: Compiled from Miami-Dade County Elections Department data.

Voter turnout varied significantly between 1990 and 1992. The year 1990 marked a midterm election with the race for governor heading the ballot, but 1992 was a presidential election year, with the independent candidacy of Ross Perot infusing even more excitement into the contest. The percentage of registered Dade County voters actually participating in the November 1992 general election was thus the highest ever recorded, a pattern seen throughout Florida and several other states. Simon received 71 percent of the vote in 1990 and nearly 65 percent in 1992. Although this is a marked reduction, the 1992 vote share still reflects a safe seat for the representative, considering adjustment of the district, the presidential election, and the Perot factor (he brought out many usual nonvoters).

Simon initially announced that he would not seek reelection because of the substantial changes to his district after the redistricting process (Silva and Filkins 1992). The new district was mostly Latino/a, and Simon, despite speaking fluent Spanish, apparently believed that ethnic voting would result in his defeat (Holly and Branch 1992). Legal battles over the redistricting went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, however, and resulted in redrawn district lines. With a more even ethnic mix in his district, Simon decided at the last minute to enter the race, which he won handily.

In Simon's case, it should be noted that although the population of his new district was approximately 47 percent Latino/a (Holly and Branch 1992), many of those people were either too young to vote, not yet citizens, or simply unregistered. Indeed, of the district's registered voters as of August 17, 1992 (just one week before the hurricane), 67 percent were non-Latino/a white, while only 30 percent were Latino/a. Partisan registration was nearly evenly divided between Democrats (46 percent) and Republicans (43 percent). Thus, although it was a changing district, Simon, a Spanish-speaking non-Latino white incumbent Democrat, would seem to have been favored against most challengers, absent an issue that would cause the electorate to favor his removal.

### **An Evolving Region Encounters Disaster**

Three of the 1992 state legislative incumbents included in this study were challenged only in the September primary. Four were in contests in the November general election. The only incumbent who lost in 1992, Bruce Hoffman, was a white non-Latino in an increasingly Latino/a area. After the 1992 redistricting, he represented a district that was about 66 percent

Latino/a and faced three Latino/as in the September Republican primary (Garcia 1992a, 1992b; Branch 1992d). He came in second, and the leading candidate in September won in an October runoff (Nickens 1992b; Garcia 1992e). Note that the Cuban-American population in Dade County tends to be heavily Republican, and the Cuban-American challenger reminded voters of his ability to better represent the district. Ethnicity and family values (the incumbent did not have children) were the issues, not the hurricane (Garcia 1992d, 1992e).

Six incumbent legislators were interviewed for this study. In addition, five secondary subjects were identified by the primary subjects as key campaign aids/advisors and interviewed. These eleven interviews included two women and nine men (three white non-Latino/as and eight Latino/as).

The south Dade area was growing at least as fast as the county as a whole before Andrew, and county population growth was substantial. The population was also “highly mobile” (MDC Planning Department 1993, 1994), with the 1990 Census revealing that 54 percent of the county population (56 percent in south Dade) had moved within the previous five years.

Then Hurricane Andrew removed a total of 48,904 housing units—nearly all of that in south Dade, according to property tax data—resulting in the relocation of over 100,000 people. Approximately 57,000 of those moved out of the county (MDC Planning Department 1994). Nearly two years later, the total population of south Dade was still approximately 29,000 people lower than pre-disaster estimates, despite the fact that 76 percent of the housing losses (65 percent in the hardest hit area) had been repaired or replaced (MDC Planning Department 1994).

The more catastrophic an event, the more impact it is likely to have on the affected population and voters. Horrific flooding in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina in 2005, for instance, disrupted living arrangements even more severely than did Andrew. A pre-Katrina population of approximately 450,000 dropped to about 201,000 a year after the storm, and the population three years later was only 72 percent of what it had been before the floods (Logan 2009). Caution should be used in generalizing about impacts on people in general and voters in particular after what are often referred to as “equal-opportunity destroyers.”

Lower income populations generally fare worse, in the long run, than middle- and upper-class demographic groups, and minority populations are often disproportionately poor. A year after Katrina, the white

population of New Orleans was reduced by about two-thirds and the black population was reduced by about three-fourths. Demographic analysis is often important in order to understand changes in voting patterns.

Hurricane Andrew struck on August 24 and the primary election was scheduled for September 1, but at least two hundred polling places had been destroyed or severely damaged. Electricity was out, telephone service was weakened, many power lines were down in the south part of the county, transportation was difficult at best, and workers scheduled to staff the precincts (as well as voters) were struggling to find food, water, and shelter.

The day following the storm, the *Miami Herald* reported that the primaries, already predicted to have a low turnout due to their unusual scheduling before the Labor Day holiday, might be “messed up” (Bousquet and Ishoy 1992). On August 27 the newspaper reported that Dade elections officials had requested a postponement of the election, but the governor did not believe that he had the authority to issue such an emergency order (Fiedler 1992a). The governor also heard from Florida’s other sixty-six counties that a delay in the scheduled vote would cause them problems. The state arranged to send emergency workers to assist Dade County, but they would arrive the day before the primary—insufficient time to train and place them in a disaster zone, which was in truth more like a war zone (Haner 1992).

Dade County then filed suit (Holly 1992c), and on August 30, two days before the scheduled election, a state court postponed the Dade primary by one week and ordered elections supervisors in other counties not to publish results of races that included Dade precincts before Dade balloting was concluded (Holly and Bousquet 1992). On August 31, just one day before the primary in sixty-six out of sixty-seven counties, the Florida Supreme Court reversed the order requiring the withholding of results from the other sixty-six counties (Fiedler and Silva 1992).

Indeed, one of the primary contests included in this study covered parts of Dade and Collier (west of Dade) counties. That election was thus held on two days: September 1 in Collier and September 8 in Dade. The 1992 primary elections for the state legislature occurred on September 1 and September 8, and the general election on November 3 (eight days, fifteen days, and seventy-two days—approximately ten weeks—after Andrew). If the scheduling of the elections thus appears confusing (and it was), how was campaigning affected?