THE U.S. CUBA FOREIGN POLICY CYCLE

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This Chapter demonstrates that in the U.S. there existed a Cuban foreign policy cycle in the post Cold War, between 1992 and 2004. Policy vacillated with the presidential electoral cycle, and not, first and foremost, with shifts in Washington’s foreign concerns. In election years, incumbent Presidents, in particular, used their discretionary powers to implement measures that addressed their opportunistic short-term interests in winning Cuban American votes, only to reverse or leave unenforced in non-election years those policies that conflicted with concerns of state. Shifts between electoral and non-electoral concerns account for inconsistencies, contradictions, and vacillations in U.S. Cuba policy in the twelve year period.

The validity of the policy cycle thesis rests on demonstrating that (1) U.S. Cuba policy varied in election and non-election years; (2) in election years Presidents used their discretionary power to implement policies toward Cuba designed to win Cuban Americans votes, even if they conflicted with concerns of state; and (3) in non-election years Presidents addressed state concerns that called for modification of the measures designed to win votes. The analysis focuses on the so-called personal embargo, in particular on rights of Cuban Americans to visit and share earnings, remittances, with family who remained in Cuba. In that in the post Cold War the Soviet Union, with which Cuba had allied for three decades, had joined the
dustbin of history, and Cuba had dramatically downsized its military, national security considerations no longer drove Washington policy towards the island.

**Brief Summary of Personal Embargo Policies**

U.S. policy toward Cuba vacillated among Presidential administrations. They also varied within individual administrations, and independent of the political party affiliation and political leanings of Presidents.

George H.W. Bush, the first post Cold War President, implemented the Cuban Democracy Act (CDA) in October 1992. The legislation primarily tightened the embargo at the macro level. While not addressing travel rights (other than to grant the Treasury Department civil penalty enforcement authority over visits), at the people-to-people level it restricted remittance-sending to coverage of costs of Cuban immigration to the U.S. (which required hard currency). Having previously decreed that Cuban Americans could send family in Cuba $300 quarterly, in signing the new legislation Bush tightened the personal embargo. The CDA specified that the restrictions should remain in effect until the U.S. President determined and reported to Congress that the Government of Cuba had instituted democratic reforms and moved toward establishing a free market economic system (USDS 1992).

Although Bill Clinton, who defeated Bush in his reelection bid, had supported the CDA during his campaign, once winning the presidency he too vacillated in his stance on the personal embargo. Both in 1994 and 1996 he made travel rights more restrictive. In 1994 his administration announced that Cuban Americans could visit family in Cuba only in cases of “extreme hardship,” and only with a special U.S.
Treasury Department license. Then, in 1996 he both suspended previously permitted U.S.-Cuba charter flights, the only means of direct travel between the U.S. and Cuba, and signed into law the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, popularly known as the Helms-Burton Act after its two sponsors. With respect to the personal embargo, the new legislation specified, in a non-binding “sense of Congress,” that political changes in Cuba were a precondition for the renewal of rights for Cuban immigrants to travel to their homeland. The Cuban government was to release political prisoners and recognize the right of association, and other fundamental freedoms, before Washington would reinstitute general licenses for family visits. Cuban American rights to visit with island family would be a reward for island democratization.

However, in 1995, 1998, and 1999 Clinton relaxed visitation restrictions. In 1995 he reversed the policy put into effect the preceding year and announced that Cuban Americans no longer needed a special license to travel to Cuba. They only needed an affidavit, which airline charter companies could provide. In addition, with Treasury Department authorization Cuban Americans could visit Cuba multiple times a year. Meanwhile, contrary to the rationale given for the Helms-Burton bill the following year, in 1995 Clinton argued that visits would promote democracy and the free flow of ideas, not be a reward for such change otherwise brought about. Then, in 1998 he repermitted the very charter flights he had banned in 1996, and in 1999 he both expanded the number of U.S. and island cities between which Cuban Americans could fly and eased travel license procedures. Clinton legitimated the 1999 travel opening in terms of Pope John Paul II’s historic visit to Cuba in 1998.
When on the island His Holiness had called for the world to open to Cuba and Cuba to the world. Clinton “reverted” to the spirit of his 1995 policy rationale, that cross-border ties would foster Cuban democratization. He claimed they would strengthen civil society.

In the final years of Clinton’s presidential term momentum also built up in Congress to reverse the restrictive travel regulations emboldened in the Helms-Burton bill: and for all U.S. citizens, not merely for those of Cuban origin. Notwithstanding the momentum, in 2000 Congress legislated a travel cap for the first time. The law specified that Cuban Americans could visit their homeland a maximum of once a year.

Clinton also flip-flopped on his remittance policy, typically in tandem with shifts in his travel policy. In 1994 and 1996 he tightened remittance-sending rights. In 1994 he restricted the right to remit money to humanitarian emergencies, such as when an island relative was terminally ill or in severe medical need, on a case-by-case basis. And in 1996, the Helms-Burton Act, which he signed into law, specified in a non-binding “sense of Congress” that the Cuban government needed to allow the “unfettered operation of small businesses” before the U.S. would reinstate general licenses permitting remittance-sending.

But, in 1998, and even more the following year, Clinton reversed his stance. In 1998 he reinstated the right of Cuban Americans to remit up to $300 quarterly to island family, which Bush had permitted before signing the CDA, and in 1999 he
announced that all U.S. citizens, whether or not they had close family on the island, could send up to $1,200 annually to Cuba.

George W. Bush, Clinton’s successor, similarly waffled in his travel and remittance policies. While Bush initially blocked new momentum in Congress to lift the travel ban (LeoGrande 2005: 23),iv in 2003 he put in place travel rules more permissive than Clinton’s. Bush expanded the range of island kin Cuban Americans could visit, to three degrees of genealogical remove, and ended the Clinton requirement that visits be confined to cases of “humanitarian need.”v Yet, the following year he introduced policies more restrictive than Clinton’s. He limited family visits to once every three years; he narrowed the range of relatives for whom visiting permission could be attained, to immediate kin; and he limited the length of visits to two weeks (the duration not previously capped). He also reinstituted the requirement of a special Treasury Department permit for travel. The 2004 regulations allowed for no humanitarian exceptions, not even to pay final respects to a dying close relative. Bush also blocked a Congressional move to lift the travel ban, through behind the scenes maneuvers.

Bush’s remittance policies vacillated in tandem with his travel policies. His stance on remittances initially also was more permissive than Clinton’s. In 2003 he raised the cap on money Cuban Americans could share with island family. Émigrés could carry up to $3,000 with them on homeland visits, in addition to the $300 they could remit quarterly from the U.S. However, in 2004 he reduced the amount Cuban Americans could take on trips to $300. He also narrowed the range of Cubans with
whom earnings could be shared, to the same immediate kin to whom visits were
restricted that year (and only if their relatives were not senior-level government
functionaries). The 2004 remittance cap officially allowed Cuban émigrés to share
one-third to one-half the amount the average Latin American immigrant at the time
remitted (Economist February 23, 2002: 42; New York Times July 14, 2003: 16 and
May 1, 2008: 17).

In 2004 the Bush administration also restricted in-kind cross-border gift-giving
(see EIU, CCR August 2004: 15; USDS-CAFC 2004). It capped the weight of luggage
travelers could take on trips to forty-four pounds. Before imposing the cap, Cuban
Americans traveled, on average, with sixty pounds of luggage, much of it presents
for island relatives. The Bush administration also limited the range of goods
permissible to send from the U.S., to food, radios, batteries, vitamins, medicines, and
medical equipment, capped at $200 monthly.

Cuban American Views on Cuba Policy

If, as argued, U.S. Cuba policy was embedded in the electoral cycle, and tied
especially to the desire and capacity of incumbent presidents to use discretionary
powers of state to implement reforms they perceived would enhance their
reelection prospects, what were the wants of the Cuban American electorate and of
influential Cuban Americans that might have driven election year policy between
1992 and 2004? Views of ordinary Cuban Americans and of Cuban American
political contributors and lobbyists are described, in turn, below.

The Ethnic Vote
Survey data reveal that Cuban American voters take ethnic concerns into account when voting. In February 2004 Florida International University’s Institute for Public Opinion Research (FIU-IPOR 2004) found three-fourths of the over eighteen hundred Miami Cuban Americans it queried to concur that the position of a candidate on Cuba influences their vote (Table 1). Two-thirds of the Miami Cuban Americans interviewed supported continuation of the embargo, and slightly more than half of them opposed unrestricted travel rights. It would thus appear good election year politics for presidential candidates to support embargo-tightening measures.

ENTER TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

But Cuban Americans account for less than 1 percent of the U.S. population. Why would Presidential candidates let the concerns of such a small minority shape foreign policy? The reason is that most Cuban Americans reside in Florida, the largest “swing state,” a state that commands one-tenth of electoral college votes. And Cuban Americans account for approximately 8 percent of voters in the state (Pain 2003). Under the circumstances, it is expedient for presidential candidates to curry their vote, and, if running for reelection as an incumbent, to use discretionary powers of state to implement policies that appeal to Cuban Americans.

Ethnic Lobbying and PAC Contributions

U.S. Cuba policy needs to be understood also in the context of Cuban American lobbying and campaign contributions, leveraged to influence policy. In the 1980s Cuban Americans formed a PAC, a Political Action Committee, through which they
channeled funds to elect into office non Cuban Americans as well as “their own,” across the partisan divide, and nationwide as well as in Florida, who defended the embargo and its tightening. They hoped thereby to strangle the Castro-led regime to the point of collapse. Between the 1980s and the turn of the century they channeled political contributions mainly through the Free Cuba PAC, associated with the Cuban American National Foundation, known as the Foundation. Beginning in 2001 Cuban Americans formed a new organization, and then a new PAC, to carry the hard-line torch.

Jorge Mas Canosa, the Foundation’s charismatic chief officer, convinced fellow Cuban Americans who shared in the American Dream to make large annual contributions to the organization. By the turn of the century the Foundation claimed about 55,000 members, with 170 directors and trustees who reputedly contributed between $1,000 to $10,000 annually to the organization (Cuba Information Archives n.d.; Tamayo 2002).vi From the time of its founding until the turn of the century the Free Cuba PAC, associated with the Foundation, accounted for all but 1 percent of Cuban American PAC political donations. It took in nearly $1.7 million, and made $1.3 million in campaign contributions.vii The Foundation became one of the most effective U.S. lobbies, and the second most moneyed ethnic lobbying group (Smith 2000).

Key sponsors of Cuba-related legislation, most of whom did not reside in Florida where Cuban Americans and the Foundation were based, were recipients of Free Cuba PAC funding. This was true of the sponsors both of the 1992 Cuban Democracy
Act and the 1996 Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act. New Jersey Democrat Robert Torricelli, the chief Congressional sponsor of the CDA, was the second largest recipient of Cuban American PAC contributions between 1979 and 2000, and as Cuban American funds flowed to his campaign coffer the former advocate of dialogue championed embargo-tightening (Morley and McGillion 2002: 15-16). His Senate partner in promoting the bill, Florida Democrat Bob Graham, was the sixth largest recipient of Cuban American PAC donations during the same twenty-one year period. As for the two sponsors of the 1996 legislation, Jesse Helms and Dan Burton, they too received substantial Cuban American campaign contributions, either shortly before introducing the legislation or at the time Congress deliberated the bill.

Understanding that passage of embargo-tightening legislation requires broad support, the leadership of the Cuban American PAC strategically channeled funds to candidates nation-wide whose support they sought. Lawmakers who backed the two bills typically received substantially more contributions than those who opposed the legislation, and few recipients of Cuban American dollars voted against the bills. The Foundation also courted presidential contenders. For example, in 1992 George H. W. Bush was the fifth largest recipient of Cuban American political donations. Clinton received far fewer dollars, but he was very transparent in his quid pro quo. After receiving $275,000 at two Miami Foundation-associated fundraising events during his campaign, he announced his support for the CDA, then pending in Congress (before Bush signed it into law).
In 2000, Congress for the first time passed legislation the Foundation opposed. The bill granted an exemption to the general embargo for sale of food and medicine to Cuba. The more powerful agribusiness lobby, committed to expanding sales opportunities for farmers, successfully pressed for access to the Cuban market. However, the Foundation managed to get a proviso inserted into the bill requiring Cuba to pay cash for purchases. It assumed that the fiscally strapped Cuban government could afford little if not bought on credit. Also in 2000, the Foundation successfully lobbied to reverse the move in Congress to lift travel restrictions. It convinced legislators to institute the previously noted once-a-year travel cap for Cuban American family visits.

In 2001 hard-liners broke with the Foundation to form a new organization, the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC). Two years later they formed a new PAC, the U.S.-Cuban Democracy PAC, to defend the embargo and advocate its further tightening, including at the people-to-people level. By 2004 the new PAC came to take in over half a million dollars, double the amount the Free Cuba PAC raised in its peak money-raising year. In contrast, in 2004 the Free Cuba PAC took in a mere $5,000 in contributions. The financially weakened Foundation had to close down its Washington, D.C. lobbying office and shut down its Miami radio station, through which it had influenced public opinion among Cuban Americans. The Foundation became a shadow of its former self following Mas Canosa’s death in 1997, when his U.S.-born son, Jorge Mas Santos, replaced him at the organization helm. Mas Santos lacked his father’s charisma.
While under Mas Santos’ tutelage the much-weakened Foundation became a voice for moderation and U.S.-Cuba bridge-building, the new PAC funneled money to help elect pro-embargo candidates, to defeat pro-embargo-loosening candidates, and to create an anti-Castro constituency among Congressmen who might otherwise have been indifferent on Cuban matters. It determinedly fought to maintain and tighten cross-border barriers at a time when Washington improved relations with other Communist countries, especially with China and Vietnam, and generally promoted global trade liberalization, and when momentum built up in Congress for relaxing the Cuban embargo. In 2004 all but four of the seventy-five Congressional candidates the new PAC supported won their electoral bids. Recipients of its funds included twelve Congressmen who in the recent past had consistently supported embargo-loosening measures, but voted against all 2005 amendments pending in Congress to further relax the embargo; six Congressmen who had previously waffled in their support for embargo-loosening measures, but who voted against all of the 2005 amendments; fifteen Congressmen who reversed their stance on at least one of the embargo loosening proposals before Congress in 2005; and nineteen newly elected legislators who voted against all the proposed amendments (Cuban American Alliance Education Fund 2005).

The CLC, together with its hard-line South Florida political allies, also influenced policy at presidential discretion. In particular, they influenced Bush’s decision in 2004 to tighten the personal embargo (Eckstein 2009a: Chapters Three, Four and Six).
Accordingly, Cuban American lobbyists, backed by campaign contributions, influenced Congressional legislation and Presidential initiatives. They pressed for embargo-tightening, which most Cuban Americans supported. Yet, the same Presidents who at certain times responded to the organized, moneyed Cuban American interests, and accordingly tightened the embargo, at other times loosened it. How to explain their contradictory policies?

**The Presidential-Linked Ethnic Policy Cycle**

If a Cuban policy cycle existed, tied to the presidential electoral cycle, the influence of Cuban American lobbyists and voters should peak in election years, when they had votes as well as political contributions to leverage. Ethnic concessions should have been especially likely in years when incumbent Presidents, with access to discretionary powers of state, sought reelection. In turn, if election considerations drove policy, in non-election years incumbents should have reversed or not enforced policies that conflicted with non-electoral concerns of state.

**Election Years**

Table 2 summarizes presidential and non-presidential election year embargo policies, between 1992 and 2004. It also denotes whether the policies were implemented by an incumbent, and whether the incumbent won the election in Florida, home to most Cuban Americans. It highlights that the personal embargo became more restrictive in 1992, 1994, 1996, and 2004. All but 1994 were presidential election years.
Noteworthy, the Presidents who in 1992 and 1996 tightened the embargo in general, and the personal embargo in particular, previously had opposed promulgation of new restrictive measures. George H.W. Bush had vetoed the Mack Amendment, the precursor to the Cuban Democracy Act, when lobbied by big business, which resented U.S. interference in its overseas profiteering, and by foreign governments, such as Canada’s, which resented Washington interference in their trade dealings (Eckstein 1994/2003: 282, fn. 33; Morley and McGillion 2002: 43, 49). The Mack Amendment aimed to restrict third country trade with Cuba. At the time, placating business and allies mattered more to Bush than placating Cuban American hard-liners. However, when running for reelection he withdrew his opposition to embargo-tightening through extra-territorial means. Cuban American Florida votes then mattered more to him. At the CDA-signing ceremony, strategically staged in Miami at the eve of the 1992 election, Bush acknowledged Mas Canosa to be one of the key forces behind the new law (Schoultz 2009: Chapter Twelve). Bush’s flip-flop paid off. Three-fourths of Cuban Americans in Florida voted for him, enough to win the state. However, with U.S. Cuba policy mattering little to most of the national electorate in the post Cold War, his support for the CDA did not suffice to win him reelection.

Similar to Bush in 1992, Clinton in 1996 took advantage of incumbency to support new embargo-tightening legislation that he previously had opposed. Business leaders and foreign governments found the Helms-Burton bill even more
egregious than the CDA (Morley and McGillion 2002: 52-113). Like Bush, Clinton reversed his stance and supported embargo-tightening against the backdrop of his reelection bid. Clinton signed the pending legislation immediately after the Cuban downing, in February of 1996, of planes flown by the exile group Brothers to the Rescue. The shoot-down had stirred émigré fury in Florida. With 75 percent of Miami Cuban Americans supportive of the Helms-Burton bill (FIU-IPOR 1997), Clinton not only reversed his previous opposition to the legislation but followed Bush’s example and signed the new law in Florida. Clinton timed the signing with the opening of the primary contest in the state (Morley and McGillion 2002: 105), and invited influential Cuban Americans to the signing ceremony (Schoultz 2009: Chapter Thirteen). Clinton’s approval of the legislation helped him garner about one-third of the Cuban American Florida vote that November, sufficient to win the state’s electoral college votes and his presidential reelection bid in turn. A Democrat had not won Florida in twenty years.

In his memoir, Clinton (2004: 701, 727) acknowledged that his support for the bill was good election-year politics in Florida, but that it undermined his chances of making improved U.S.-Cuba relations and changes in Cuba a hallmark of his presidency. When pressed to choose, he prioritized his reelection over foreign policy accomplishments. Further indicative that his support for the 1996 legislation was driven by his preoccupation with reelection, after winning his second term of office he never enforced the provision of the bill that foreign governments and investors found especially egregious: the entitlement of U.S. citizens to sue international investors who “trafficked” in property they had owned before the
The very enactment of the legislation had so angered the international community that there followed a dramatic increase in annual votes in the United Nations General Assembly condemning the embargo. Legislation helpful for winning an election proved bad for U.S. foreign relations. It conflicted with state concerns unrelated to elections.\textsuperscript{ix}

The tightening of the personal embargo in 2004 occurred in yet another election year, when George W. Bush ran for reelection as an incumbent. The CLC, as well as influential Florida Cuban Americans, had pressed for strengthening the “wall” across the Florida Straits. In that Cuban Americans had been central to Bush winning the 2000 election in Florida, and to winning the presidency in turn (detailed below), he was under particular pressure to respond to their demands.

The only election year in the period under study when no presidential initiative was introduced to strengthen the embargo was 2000. Indeed, in 2000 Congress legislated a lifting of agricultural export restrictions. Not running for reelection, and therefore not personally preoccupied with winning the Florida vote, Clinton supported the measure promoted by farm lobbyists, more powerful than the Cuban American lobby. Yet, consistent with the policy cycle thesis, in 2000 Cuban American lobbyists succeeded in getting Congress to legislate the once-a-year travel cap, at a time when Congressional momentum had mounted to lift travel restrictions for all Americans, not merely for Cuban Americans with island relatives.

More important in shaping the election outcome in 2000 was the controversy over whether six year old Elian Gonzalez should be allowed to stay in the U.S., after
his mother died at sea when they tried to emigrate without an entry visa, or be returned to his father in Cuba. The controversy revealed the political price a presidential candidate incurred when defiant of Cuban American yearnings. That year Cuban Americans helped George W. Bush win the electoral college vote. Florida proved decisive in determining the election outcome. Officially Bush won the state by slightly more than five hundred votes, with a record number of Cuban American votes. Eighty percent of Cuban Americans supported Bush. They resented Clinton’s intervention to return Elian to his father in Cuba. The Cuban American National Foundation, still the preeminent Cuban American organization at the time, financed Elian’s Florida relatives’ fight for claims to the boy.

Al Gore, the Democratic presidential nominee, had been Clinton’s vice president. He accordingly was damned by association with the Clinton White House, even though he very publicly had sided with the Cuban American effort to keep Elian in America. Outrage with the Clinton Administration was so intense that Gore dared not campaign in Cuban American neighborhoods in Miami, for fear of facing protests (Flores, Ilcheva, and Moreno 2008). Gore’s experience revealed that even a vice president running for the presidency, associated with a policy Cuban Americans opposed, paid a price at the polls. Indeed, Cuban Americans were so enraged with the Clinton Administration’s intervention to return Elian to Cuba that they defended Bush when his victory was disputed. They intimidated the local officials in charge of a recount, to the point of helping to shut down the effort to validate the vote (Finnegan 2004: 70). Thus, the 2000 election was a negative case that proved the rule. A conciliatory stance on Cuba was electorally costly. The Clinton
Administration had collaborated with the Cuban government to defend Elian’s father’s paternity rights. Mere association with an Administration that negotiated with Cuba turned the Cuban American community in record numbers against a presidential candidate.

**Non-Election Years**

Further validating the electoral policy cycle thesis, in off-election years Presidents reversed and left unenforced the policies they had advanced to win votes that conflicted with concerns of state. The personal embargo violates U.S. commitment both to freedom to travel and to family values.

It was in 1995, 1998, 1999, and 2003 that Presidents relaxed travel and remittance restrictions. Only in one non presidential election year, 1994, did a President tighten the personal embargo. That year Clinton restricted travel and remittance-sending in the context of an immigration crisis (Masud-Piloto 1996). Faced with a deep economic recession when Soviet aid and trade ground to an abrupt halt, and political tensions so rooted, Castro allowed tens of thousands of Cubans to make their way to the U.S. by sea, often in rafts, without U.S. entry permission. Desiring to halt the illegal exodus, Clinton sought to change U.S. policy and require Cubans found in the Florida Straits to be returned to Cuba. Since 1966 the U.S. government had extended immigration rights to Cubans picked up at sea, as well as to Cubans on U.S. soil who had entered illegally or legally but without immigration permits. No other foreign-born enjoyed such immigration privileges. In exchange for getting Mas Canosa’s support for the policy change, Clinton agreed to
the influential Cuban American’s demand to tighten the personal embargo. In that Clinton admitted in his memoir that he already had his 1996 reelection bid in mind when negotiating with Mas Canosa (Clinton 2004: 615), the President responded to the immigration crisis in a manner consistent with his election interests. And if Clinton already in 1994 responded to a bilateral crisis with his reelection bid in mind, this was even truer in 1996, when the Cuban government downed planes flown by Brothers to the Rescue in the throes of his reelection campaign. Cuban American hardliners influenced Clinton’s response to both crises.xii

The Breakdown of the Policy Cycle in 2008

By 2008 conditions that had sustained the Cuban American policy cycle unraveled. Demographic, leadership, and organizational changes eroded hard-line hegemony.

For one, by 2008 the demographic composition of the Florida Cuban American community had changed. The old émigrés were dying off, all the while that approximately 20,000 new Cubans, with very different island experiences than the first who fled the revolution, and different yearnings in turn, had arrived annually since the mid-1990s, in accordance with the bilateral accord the Clinton Administration had signed in response to the 1994 rafter crisis. The post Soviet era arrivals opposed the personal embargo earlier émigrés supported (see Table 1). Thus, Cuban Americans became increasingly divided in their views toward cross-border relations. Also, by 2008 a growing number of children of Cuban immigrants had reached voting age. Influenced by their parents’ generation, but also by their
experiences in the U.S., they were more tolerant of cross-border ties. Furthermore, by 2008 Cuban Americans accounted for a declining percentage of the Florida Hispanic electorate, as other Latin American immigrants, indifferent to the Cuban embargo, took out citizenship and registered to vote. Under the circumstances, Cuban American hard-liners had proportionally fewer votes “to deliver.”

Meanwhile, by 2008 hard-line hegemony at the leadership level fractured. With no charismatic leader replacing Mas Canosa, Cuban American politicians began to support cross-border dialogue and people-to-people ties. The leadership divide even took partisan form for the first time. Some key hard-line Cuban American Republicans faced serious challenges from co-ethnic Democrats. Reaching out to second-generation Cuban American and to recent émigrés, Democratic candidates campaigned for removal of travel and remittance restrictions. This was true at the Congressional level.

Against this backdrop, a Presidential candidate, also for the first time, questioned the embargo, although only at the people-to-people level. John McCain, the Republican candidate, supported continuation of Bush policies. He had the backing of the CLC and was a recipient of Cuban American PAC contributions. Noteworthy, though, he proposed no new embargo-tightening. In contrast, Barak Obama promised, if elected, to end the personal embargo. Refusing PAC contributions, he was not beholden to hardliners. Undoubtedly he recognized both that he had little prospect of winning hardliner votes, and votes to gain by supporting a relaxation of the personal embargo. Polls in 2007 showed Bush’s 2004
tightening of the personal embargo to be so unpopular among recent émigrés and U.S. born Cuban Americans that most of them wanted a return to Bush’s pre-2004 policy. Understanding the changing political tide, Obama managed to win Florida, with about one-third of the Cuban American vote (but with about two-thirds of the Hispanic vote).

**Conclusion**

In sum, between 1992 and 2004 there existed a Cuba foreign policy cycle. It rested on policy variance in presidential election and non-election years. In election years, incumbents made use of their discretionary powers to implement policies that helped them win reelection. When the policies conflicted with concerns of state, in non-election years Presidents reversed or left unenforced the election year initiatives.

Viewed from the vantage point of Cuban Americans, elections provided an opportunity to influence policy. Through lobbying and PAC contributions, high turnout rates at the polls, and demographic concentration in a key electoral “swing” state, they convinced Presidential candidates and Congress to strengthen the embargo of Cuba, at a time of bridge-building with China and Vietnam, other Communist states. The Cuban American hard-liners were most influential when not challenged by interests of more moneyed, well-organized constituencies, such as the farm lobby.

The Cuban American policy cycle, nonetheless, was neither inevitable nor irreversible. Ultimately, it was contingent on Presidential discretionary power, and
use of discretionary power shifted as political conditions changed. Political conditions of consequence included bilateral crises. Yet, the logic of the ethnic electoral policy cycle even influenced presidential responses to the crises.

Presidential reversal and non-enforcement of election year policies in non-election years point to how the logic of presidential electoral opportunism and concerns of state may conflict. The extra-territorial claims of the 1992 and 1996 legislation for which Cuban American hard-liners had lobbied, so incensed U.S. foreign allies that they publicly broke with the U.S. and opposed the embargo, even though the U.S. never implemented the provisions of the laws allies found especially egregious. And without foreign support, the embargo could not be effective. Washington could not on its own strangulate the Castro-led regime economically to the point of collapse.

Meanwhile, the policy cycle also proved contingent on specific electoral and leadership conditions. By the time of the 2008 election, Cuban American influence remained, but U.S. Cuba policy had become contested terrain. The debate centered on retention of the status quo versus embargo-loosening at the people-to-people level. Embargo-tightening had ceased to be a political issue. With no candidate running as an incumbent, and with one presidential contestant refusing PAC money, including Cuban American PAC money, conditions conducive the refueling of the policy cycle had weakened.

Whether 2008 proves a turning point in U.S. Cuba policy remains to be seen. However, in that Obama used his discretionary power, once elected President, to
end the personal embargo, which has been politically popular among the growing number of post Soviet era Cuban immigrants, a reinstitution of the personal embargo is unlikely. The question remains whether the build-up of cross-border ties at the people-to-people level becomes bedrock for bridge-building at the state-to-state level as well.
### TABLE 1

**VIEWS TOWARD U.S. CUBA POLICIES AMONG CUBAN AMERICANS IN MIAMI IN 2004 AND 2007 (percent)**

(data for 2007 in parentheses, other data for 2004)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year of Emigration</th>
<th>1959-64</th>
<th>1965-74</th>
<th>1975-84</th>
<th>1985-2004</th>
<th>US-born</th>
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<td>1. candidates’ position on Cuba important in determining how vote</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>2. Favor continuation of embargo</td>
<td>75 (78)</td>
<td>77 (79)</td>
<td>68 (68)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54 (54)</td>
<td>66 (58)</td>
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<td>3. Favor return to Bush policies until 2003</td>
<td>(36)</td>
<td>(52)</td>
<td>(49)</td>
<td>(1985-94: 71)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
<td>(64)</td>
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<td>4. Favor unrestricted travel</td>
<td>28 (23)</td>
<td>30 (33)</td>
<td>41 (34)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>51 (57)</td>
<td>46 (55)</td>
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N=1811 in 2004, and 1,000 in 2007

**sources:** FIU-IPOR 2004 and 2007

(www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba2004/years.html and www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba8/pollsresults.html)
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a  Elian returned to Cuba, amidst Cuban American opposition
b  Codification of travel cap, amidst pressure to lift travel restrictions (but no alteration of frequency of permitted visits)
c  Incumbent vice president runs for office, associated with incumbent president’s Elian policy.
d  Loosening of restrictions for Cuban Americans, though tightening of restrictions for other Americans
REFERENCES


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### References


At the macro level, the Cuban Democracy Act also banned ships that landed in Cuba from U.S. ports for six months, and called for the withholding of U.S. aid to countries that traded with Cuba. These measures were designed to give third countries disincentives to engage in business dealings with Cuba under Castro.

At the same time, the legislation included a set of provisions, known as Track Two, which allowed for improved cross-border people-to-people engagement, including through improved telephone and mail service. Émigrés who wished communicate with island friends and family, as a result, were able to do so more easily than in the preceding thirty years of Castro’s rule. Only briefly under President Carter, during the Cold War, had émigrés been granted the right to visit island family. On visits, see Eckstein and Barberia 2002.

The legislation also granted U.S. citizens permission to sue foreign investors trafficking on property to which they laid pre-revolutionary claims, and denied foreign investors in such properties U.S. entry rights.

The Congressional move had the strong backing of farm state representatives whose constituencies wished expand their agricultural exports to Cuba.

The Bush administration, however, clamped down on other-than-family travel, e.g. on education groups, which Clinton had permitted.

On the Cuban American National Foundation, see also Haney and Venderbush 2005 and Fonzi 1993

Unless otherwise indicated, my discussion of Cuban American PACs draws on the multitude of superb data prepared by the Center for Responsive Politics (including in separate files at ubsl/cubareport.asp.publcubareport/appendix.asp and pubs/cubareport/legislation.asp.

This suggests that the Cuban American lobby was most successful when not faced with a powerful opponent to the policies it advocated.

The percentage of countries that condemned U.S. Cuba economic sanctions rose from 33 in 1992 to 73 after the Helms-Burton bill went into effect, and then to 88 in 2001. Dominguez 2008: 206.

While Gore could distance himself from the 2000 legislation that exempted farm exports from the embargo, Elian became such a heated Cuban American issue that the vice president felt neutrality on, and indifference to, the issue would cost him the Florida vote. In that it is highly unusual for a vice president to disagree publicly with the president he serves, Gore is unlikely to have broken with the President had he not been campaigning at the time for the Presidency, not matter what he privately thought.
According to the 1995 agreement, the U.S. continued to grant Cubans who touched U.S. soil, with “dryfeet,” rights to stay, in accordance with the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, but required the return to Cuba of Cubans found in the Straits with “wetfeet,” attempting to emigrate without entry permission. Cuban American lobbyists failed to block implementation of the new “wetfeet” policy. Dominguez 2006.

For a discussion of other developments in Cuba that influenced U.S. Cuba policy, see Eckstein 2009b.