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# Beyond Green Chiles and Coyotes

THE CHANGING SHAPE OF NEW MEXICO'S POLITICAL-CULTURAL  
REGIONS FROM 1967 TO 1997

*John Gastil, Hank Jenkins-Smith, and Gilbert K. St. Clair*

## New Mexico's Political Regions

**E**bb and flows in New Mexican history have created a varied cultural landscape. Navajos occupy much of the northwestern corner of the state, and Pueblo Indians have continuously inhabited the central and northern parts of New Mexico for many centuries. The Spanish settled and remained in many towns along the Río Grande corridor, whereas Texan immigrants made their homes along the eastern edge of the state. More recently, national laboratories, military bases, and high-tech industries have sprung up across the state from Los Alamos in the north through Albuquerque in the center to Las Cruces in the south, with sizeable outcroppings in Roswell, Carlsbad, and elsewhere.

These migration patterns and economic shifts have resulted in a complex mixture of political identities. New Mexico has sent both Republicans and

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Democrats to the U.S. Senate, to the U.S. House of Representatives, and to the governor's office in the Roundhouse—the state's distinctive, puck-shaped capitol. New Mexico has also elected Green Party candidates to local offices in Santa Fe, and the Greens attained major-party status in the state by winning significant vote shares in statewide races. New Mexico's unique political character makes the state worthy of careful study.

Paradoxically, the state also warrants examination because of its inexplicable status as the nation's best political bellwether. New Mexico's cities and towns are by no means typical of the United States, yet the state as a whole has provided one of the most reliable gauges of national voting trends in the twentieth century. Since 1912, when New Mexico became a state, its candidate choice in the presidential general election has coincided with the nation's selection all but once, when New Mexico placed a long-shot bet on Gerald Ford in 1976. In 2000 New Mexico's vote matched the nation's popular vote, with Gore winning a plurality by a remarkably narrow margin.

Not only has New Mexico's presidential vote paralleled that of the nation, the distribution of opinions held by state residents closely resembles the views found in the national public. A survey of New Mexicans conducted by the University of New Mexico Institute for Public Policy (IPP) in 1996 compared state and national responses to a series of questions about foreign policy, the economy, and the family. On each issue, there was little difference between the aggregate views of New Mexicans and those of the American public (Institute for Public Policy 1996).

Perhaps because of its eccentric character, few scholars have attempted to understand New Mexico politics in the past three decades. After characterizing New Mexico's political institutions as dated and inadequate, F. Chris Garcia (1990) comments that "the readily available published literature on New Mexico politics is as underdeveloped as its subject" (56). Aside from a government textbook (Hain, Garcia, and St. Clair 1994) and a brief political history written as a background paper for a public forum (Vigil, Olsen, and Lujan 1990), relatively little published scholarship has explored New Mexico's contemporary politics.

Given the dearth of recent scholarship, the most influential work on New Mexican politics remains Jack Holmes's book, *Politics in New Mexico*, published in 1967. Holmes argued that New Mexico was made up of distinct political regions that reflected different migration patterns. Spanish migration northward along the fertile Río Grande Valley created a region of "Hispanic settlement" primarily in the north-central counties of the state. An influx of

Texans settled in ranching and mining counties along the state's eastern edge and created a region Holmes called "Little Texas." Finally, he explained that "Indians" maintain a distinct political culture in New Mexico's reservations and pueblos, and largely Anglo "urbanites" populate Los Alamos, Albuquerque, and other quasi-urban parts of the state (except Santa Fe).

Many of Holmes's observations may still apply to contemporary New Mexico, and the purpose of the present paper is to investigate the character of New Mexico's contemporary political-cultural regions. We begin by reviewing competing empirical methods devised to delineate political regions. We then use recent electoral, demographic, and attitudinal data to create a model of New Mexico's distinct regions. Finally, we test the validity of that model against statewide survey data and examine the explanatory value of the regional approach.

### Approaches to Drawing Regional Boundaries

One common approach to drawing regional boundaries across the United States is to "divide the country into cultural regions as defined primarily by variations in the cultures of the peoples that dominated the first settlement and the cultural traits developed by these people and secondarily by variations in the cultures of peoples that dominated later settlements, as well as cultural traits developed subsequently." Regions are simply "large areas of relative homogeneity" in cultural traits, and regional borders are placed "where there are significant discontinuities" (R. Gastil 1975, 26, 27). This historical approach takes into account both early migration patterns and current demographics and attitudes (Elazar 1970, 1984; Garreau 1981; R. Gastil 1975; Zelinsky 1992).

A second approach focuses squarely on political behavior and public policy. Luttbeg (1971) analyzed dozens of political, economic, and policy variables to reduce the fifty states into manageable groups, so that political scientists "would need only to study the more limited number of classes of states rather than all states" (703). Morgan and England (1987) used a very similar technique to update Luttbeg's findings. This pure statistical approach permits considerable variation in regional mapping over time, as well as chaotic dispersion of states within "regions." Updating Luttbeg's analysis, for instance, Morgan and England found substantially different regions, some of which included discontinuous groupings of states, such as California and Florida.

Both the interpretive and the statistical approaches described above share one common goal: they aim to create the most accurate map of political or cultural regions, and they use any and all available variables. Lieske (1993) recently challenged this approach by arguing that it followed a circular logic: demographic characteristics and political behaviors from the past are used to predict, or at least understand, contemporary demographics and politics. Erickson, Wright, and McIver (1993) make a similar argument when they suggest that strong associations between current state public policies and Elazar's political culture classifications simply validate the classifications, which are partly based upon analyses of past state policies. Such validation, though, is not inconsequential. To the extent that a map of cultural regions is a powerful heuristic device for understanding state or national politics, it is vital that such maps undergo periodic reevaluation to determine whether they still fit the geographic area in question. In 1994 Day and Jones published the results of such an evaluation using 1988–1990 statewide election data to test the continued validity of Meinig's (1969) regional map of Texas politics. Day and Jones found that twenty years after its creation, Meinig's regions still held true for most of Texas. They declared, "Texas is still Texas" (108). Using a similar approach but more varied data, we now ask the same question of New Mexico.

### Past Descriptions of New Mexico's Political Regions

To understand the continuity or change in New Mexico's political landscape, it is necessary to review past understandings of the state. Holmes (1967) used the historical approach to argue that New Mexico had distinct cultural regions (see figure 1). The eastern part of the state had been settled by Texans and other western Anglos, and Holmes dubbed the state's six southeastern counties Little Texas. Centuries earlier, successive waves of Spanish emigration had shaped central and northern New Mexico, and he called a cluster of twelve contiguous counties the area of "Hispanic settlement." Finally, Holmes referred to "urbanites" and "Indians" as other significant cultural/geographic groupings, although those aggregations were not identified spatially in the same way as Little Texas or the area of Hispanic settlement.

The regional classifications of the United States mentioned previously bear some correspondence to Holmes's regional map in figure 1. Coming closest to his map is Raymond Gastil (1975), who placed most of New Mexico and Arizona in their own cultural region, the "interior Southwest." Gastil further

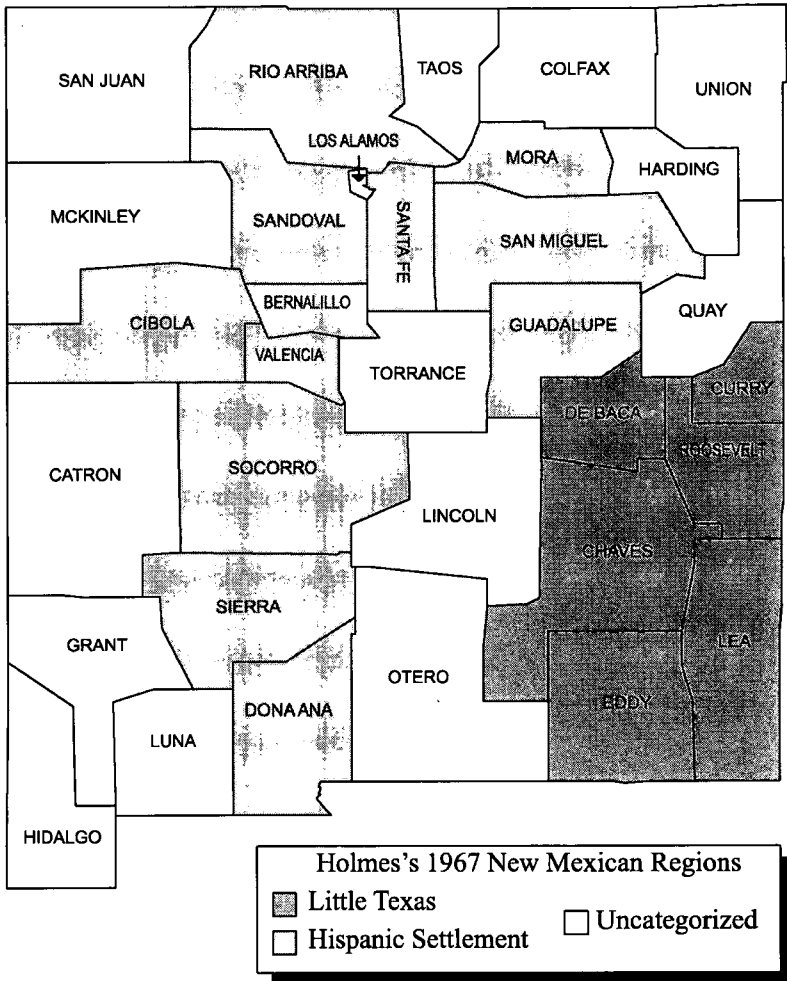


FIGURE 1

subdivided New Mexico into three subregions: the High Plateau inhabited by Navajos; the Upper Río Grande District of Spanish and Pueblo settlement; and the Texan District encompassing southern and eastern New Mexico. Although Garreau's (1981) classifications are generally far more aggregated, he does manage to subdivide New Mexico in a similar manner by placing the bulk of the state in Mexamerica, the northwestern (Navajo) corner in the Empty Quarter, and the eastern edge of the state with Texas in the Breadbasket. Zelinsky (1992) places New Mexico in the West but makes

special acknowledgment of Spanish influence by placing New Mexico's Río Grande corridor (Taos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, Las Cruces) in its own Upper Río Grande Valley subregion.

These historical-interpretive schemes, however, do not closely resemble statistically derived regional maps. Lieske's (1993) analysis of county-level demographics broke New Mexico into three parts, each of which was part of larger national regions: the Border region encompassed two southwestern New Mexico counties (Catron and Sierra); the "Rurban" region included two northwestern counties (San Juan and McKinley), two southern counties (Otero and Lincoln), and two eastern counties (Curry and Roosevelt); and the Hispanic region encompassed the remainder of the state. Lieske's description of New Mexico bears only a vague resemblance to Holmes's (1967) regions, but his classifications are far more plausible than Luttbeg's (1971) placement of New Mexico in the South and Morgan and England's (1987) location of New Mexico in the Industrial Northeast.

### Mapping Modern New Mexico's Political Regions

Because a purely statistical approach to regional classification has its pitfalls, we drew upon both historical accounts and survey data to develop a preliminary classification of New Mexico's political regions. Our goal was to design a regional map of the state that would incorporate traditional understandings of the state with contemporary information about demographics, voting behavior, and political attitudes. Our starting point was Holmes's (1967) analysis of early migration patterns and political behavior through the 1960s, as described above. In this section, we complement this historical view with two sets of data. First, we review 1988–1996 registration and voting data, which show New Mexicans' political allegiances broken down by county. Second, we use a moderately sized data set from 1993–1995 to look at demographics and political attitudes broken down by county and zip code (the available geographic identifiers in the data). After integrating these diverse forms of data to draw a regional map of New Mexico, the next section will use a separate dataset to illustrate the differences among the regions.

#### Registration and Voting by County, 1988–1996

First, to understand the differences in the political behavior of New Mexico's counties, we reviewed the past ten years of voter registration. Figure 2 shows the ratio of registered Democrats to Republicans, averaged across the 1988–

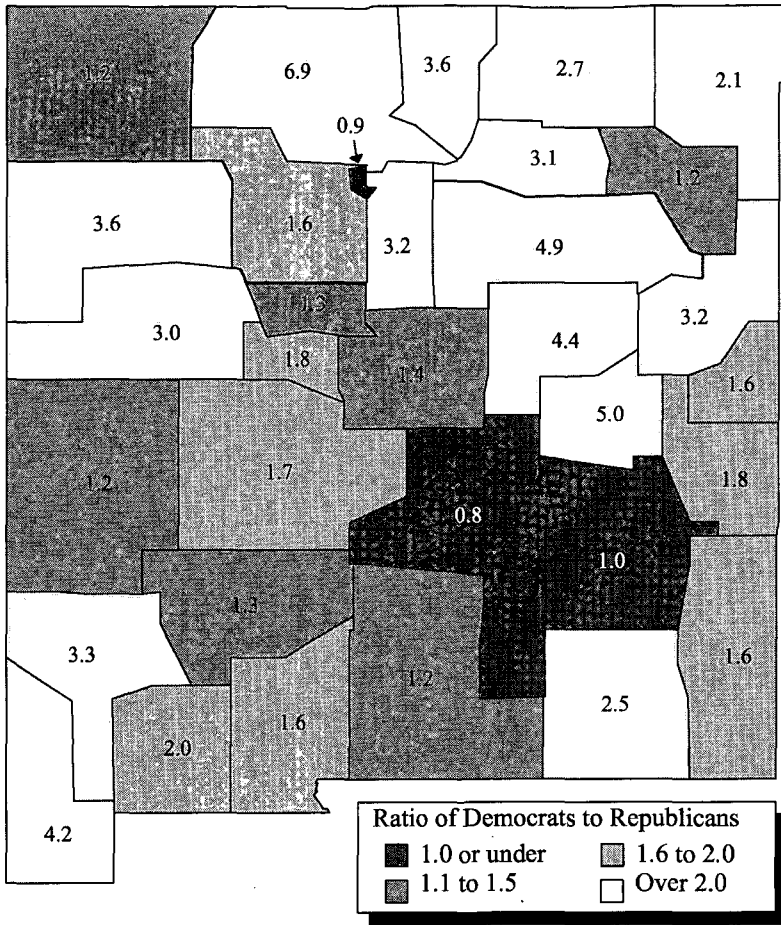


FIGURE 2

1996 general-election periods, in New Mexico counties. The clearest patterns demonstrate Democratic-registration dominance in the north and the relative balance of party-registration percentages in some central and eastern counties. In Holmes's (1967) terms, the Democratic dominance is in the northern half of his Hispanic Settlement region, and the two-party balance is in Little Texas to the east and other counties to the west.

Party registration and voting, though, do not always go hand-in-hand. We examined recent voting trends by studying the average Republican vote across the 1988–1996 elections for governor and president. This case includes the 1988 presidential election in which Bush carried New Mexico with 52%



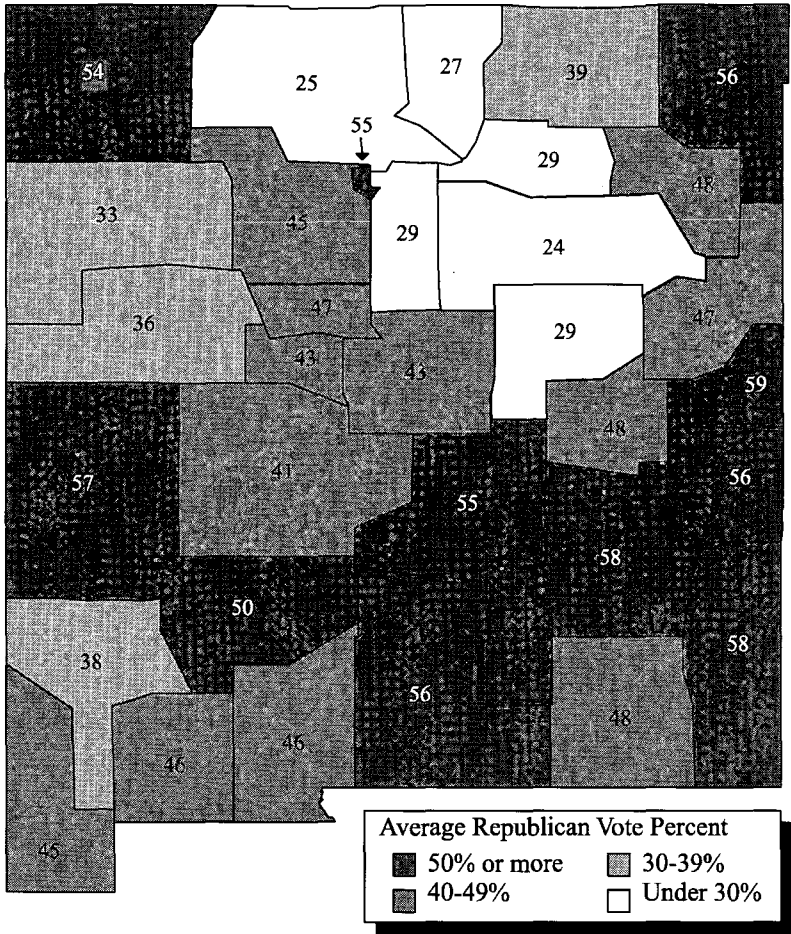


FIGURE 3

of the vote, the 1992 presidential election that Bush lost with 37% of the vote, and the 1996 presidential election that Dole lost with 42% of the vote. The overall averages also incorporate two gubernatorial elections—a 1990 Republican loss in which Bond garnered 45% of the vote, and a 1994 Republican victory in which Johnson won 50% of the vote (with 10% going to a Green Party candidate). Across those five elections, Republicans averaged 45% of the vote statewide.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 3 shows that the percentage of Republican vote is clearly lowest in northern counties, highest in the southern and eastern counties, and relatively moderate in the state's two largest counties (43% in Bernalillo County

and 46% in Doña Ana County). Again comparing these data to Holmes's (1967) regions, Democrats fare best in the northern half of the region of Hispanic Settlement, and Republicans win the highest percentages in Little Texas and counties to the west and north, plus San Juan County in the northwestern corner of the state. The most noteworthy finding is that both figures 2 and 3 show that the Democratic stronghold of Hispanic Settlement appears to have shrunk since Holmes's observations thirty years ago. On the other hand, earlier observers, such as Gastil (1975), drew tighter boundaries around this subregion of New Mexico than did Holmes.

The difference between registration and voting percentages is an interesting statistic, and we examined such gaps by calculating the degree to which Republican electoral success exceeded registration percentages in each New Mexico county. Averaged over 1988–1996, the “expected” Republican voter percentage for a given county is equal to Republican registration plus one-half of all other non-Democratic-registered voters, divided by total registration. The actual Republican vote percentage minus this expected vote percentage is what political consultants sometimes call “overperformance.” In every county but one (Lincoln), average Republican vote outperformed registration. This phenomenon was most dramatic in the three eastern counties and one southwestern county: Republican vote percentages exceeded expected results by 23% in Union, 22% in Quay, 31% in De Baca, and 25% in Hidalgo. In each of those four counties, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by at least two to one, yet Republicans won at least 45% of the vote in gubernatorial and presidential elections.

With the exception of De Baca County, these counties lie outside Holmes's (1967) Little Texas, which was noted for its preponderance of conservative Democrats. If Republican vote percentages exceeding party registration are due in part to Democratic defections to Republican candidates, such behavior suggests that either the political views or the residents of Little Texas have migrated north and west across New Mexico in the past three decades. On the other hand, this northern and western spread of “Texan influence” is more consistent with Meinig's (1969) characterization of the strong influence of Texan political culture beyond just the eastern border counties of New Mexico.

### **Demographics and Political Attitudes by County and Zip Code, 1993–1995**

After examining these registration and voting data, we then drew upon New Mexico data from IPP surveys conducted in 1993, 1994, and 1995.<sup>2</sup> These data

are helpful because they provide additional demographic and political information, but they are also valuable because they permit analysis at a smaller geographic unit—the zip code area. New Mexico’s thirty-three counties vary tremendously in density. Some rural counties are sparsely populated, whereas Bernalillo County accounts for nearly one-third of the state’s population. Within Bernalillo and some other counties, looking at internal political-cultural variations among zip codes can be fruitful. As a result, some of the forty geographic units in the survey analyses were as small as a single zip code (for instance, the zip code 87108, Albuquerque North Valley), whereas units covering the largest geographic areas combined counties that were too small by themselves to provide adequate survey samples (for example, Luna-Hidalgo).

Following the general method of Lieske (1993), we began by factor analyzing a large set of demographic variables measured for each of these geographic units. For each unit, we recorded the percentage of residents born in New Mexico, the average number of years residents had lived in New Mexico, the average age of residents, the percentage of residents with an income under \$30,000, the percentage of residents who were male, the percentage of Hispanic residents (and the percentage identifying themselves as “Spanish American”), the percentage of residents of Native American ethnicity, the percentage of residents registered as Democrats, the percentage of residents registered as Republicans, and the percentage of residents with college degrees. Factor analysis reduced these variables to six factors: traditional New Mexican (born in New Mexico, Hispanic, Spanish American), Native American, age, sex, and partisanship (Democratic and Republican registration).

The six factor scores derived from these analyses were then used to cluster the forty different geographic units. The hierarchical cluster analysis provided in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used with squared Euclidean distance and between-groups linkage. This form of analysis clusters together units based on the similarity of their factor scores until it finally converges on a single forty-unit cluster. One by one, each unit is added to a cluster (or clusters are joined together), and with each addition, the expanded cluster loses some of its homogeneity but the number of clusters is reduced by one. The result was a six-cluster solution, which will be discussed below.

In addition, we performed a second cluster analysis using four political-orientation variables that were present in the 1994–1995 IPP surveys: a standard seven-point ideological scale, which ranged from “very liberal” to “very

conservative,” and multiple-item political-cultural indices of individualism (e.g., “Even if some people are at a disadvantage, it is best for society to let people succeed or fail on their own”), egalitarianism (e.g., “What our society needs is a fairness revolution to make the distribution of goods more equal”), fatalism (e.g., “Life is a matter of chance”), and hierarchism (e.g., “One of the problems with people today is that they have lost their respect for authority”). Average scores on these variables were used to cluster the geographic units, and the result was a six-cluster solution.

Despite the clear differences in the variables put into the two separate cluster analyses, they produced two similar regional maps of New Mexico. The main clusters were roughly analogous to Holmes’s (1967) regions. A large but sparsely populated rural region extended north and west from Little Texas on the eastern border of the state. A Spanish region included northern counties, but, unlike Holmes’s area of Hispanic Settlement, this region included an inconsistent mix of only a few geographic units south of Santa Fe. The northwestern counties with large Indian populations formed their own cluster. And urban populations from Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Las Cruces, and smaller cities clustered together, although the cluster analyses split them in thirds by variation in socioeconomic status or political beliefs.

### Integrating Historical, Electoral, and Survey Data

The results of the cluster analyses were used in conjunction with the electoral data and Holmes’s (1967) historical observations to create a single regional map of New Mexico, which is shown in Figures 4 and 5. Following Lieske (1993), we did not require that the regions consist of contiguous geographic units. The Urban Conservatives exist on a series of islands stretching from Farmington through Los Alamos and Albuquerque to Clovis and the southeastern corner of the state. Urban Liberals exist on two islands—the city of Santa Fe and a part of Albuquerque near the University of New Mexico (zip code 87106). Although unidentified by Holmes, this region fits with contemporary understandings of Santa Fe’s uniqueness among New Mexico cities (Wilson 1997). Spanish Americans largely reside in a northern stretch of counties, but they also appear in downtown Las Cruces (zip code 88001), Valencia County, and southern Albuquerque. The Urban Mixed group is centered in western and southeastern Albuquerque, but it also appears in Carlsbad and most of Doña Ana County. Finally, the Native American region is solely in the northwestern quadrant of the state, and Rural Conservatives

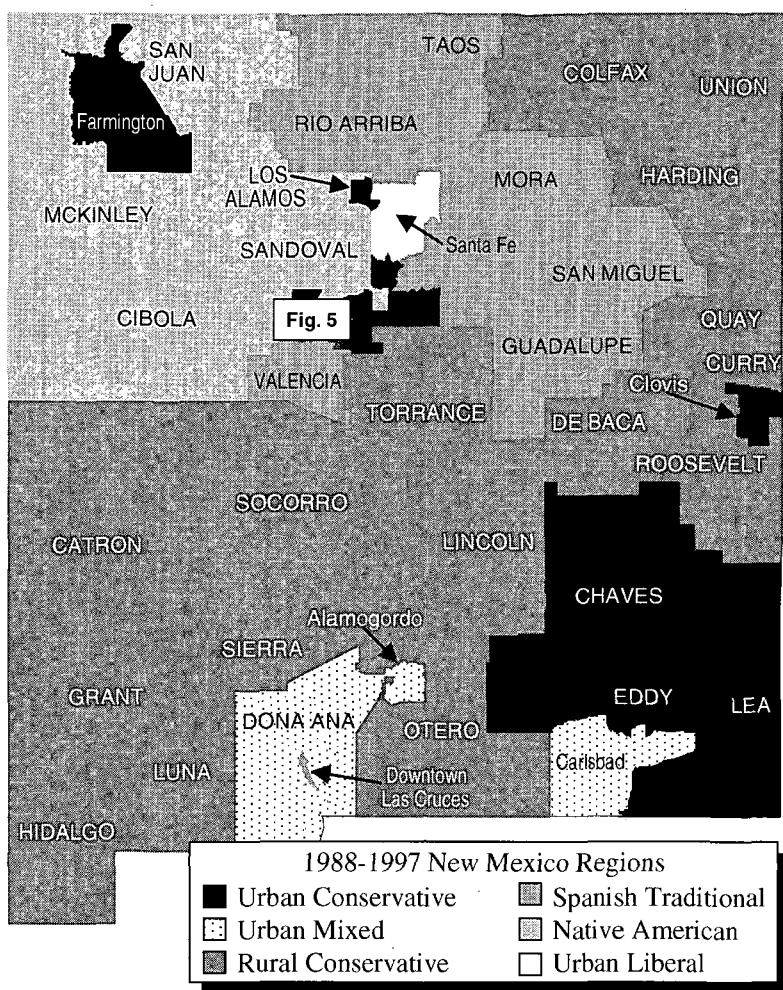


FIGURE 4

are a band of counties extending diagonally across the state from the southwestern corner to the far northeastern part of New Mexico.

Using a large set of statewide survey data (Institute for Public Policy 1997), we estimated the percentage of the New Mexico population in each of these political-cultural regions, weighting the figures by size of household. Table 1 shows that Urban Conservative accounts for more than a third (34%) of the New Mexico population. The Urban Mixed group accounts for another quarter of the population, followed by Rural Conservative (13%), Spanish Traditional (12%), Native American (9%), and Urban Liberal (8%).

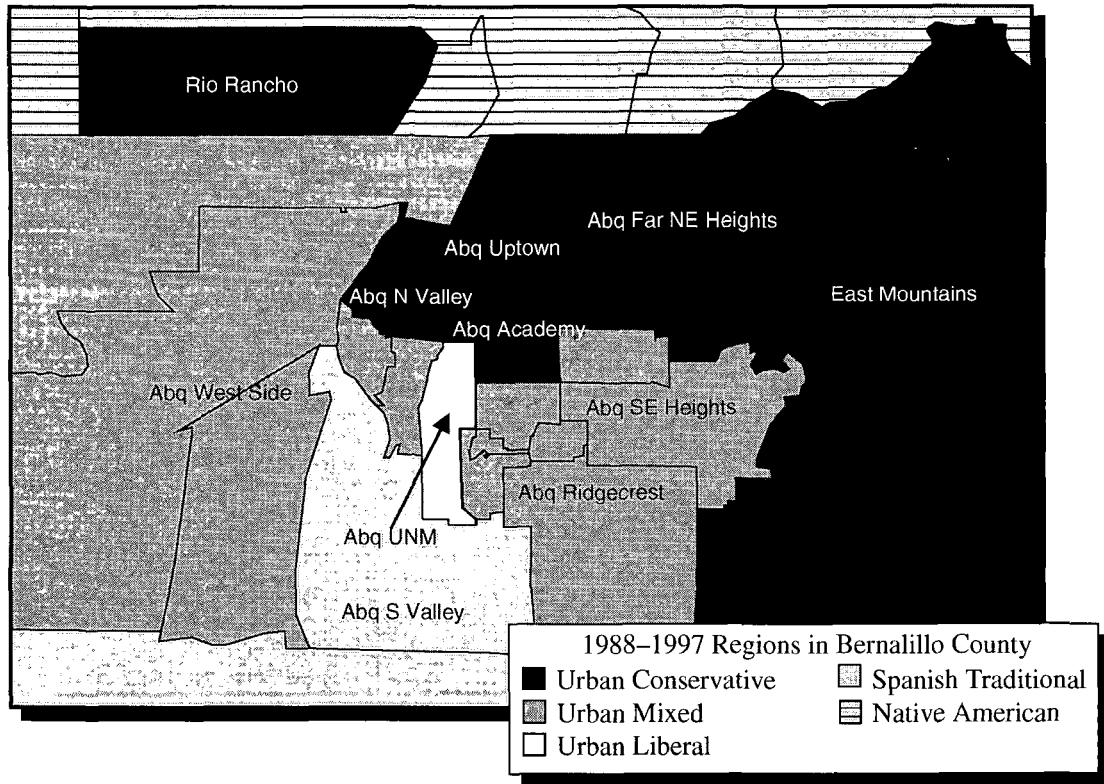


FIGURE 5

**Table 1 Distribution of New Mexico Population in Six Regions**

Region	Percent of New Mexico Population	Region	Percent of New Mexico Population
Urban Conservative	34%	Spanish Traditional	12%
Urban Mixed	25%	Native American	9%
Rural Conservative	13%	Urban Liberal	8%

Percentages based upon 1988–1997 *Quarterly Profile* respondents, weighted by household size (Institute for Public Policy 1997).

### Evaluating the Cultural Regions

Because this map of modern New Mexico's political-cultural regions is based upon both demographic and political data, we would be disingenuous if we attempted to test the validity of the regions by comparing their scores on the same or similar political variables (Lieske 1993). It would be hard to falsify a regional map using nearly the same measures that were employed to develop it. On the other hand, given that our map of modern New Mexico was strongly influenced by a limited set of survey data, we can use a separate dataset to attempt something analogous to a replication of the regions. In addition, with this second aggregate of survey data, we can compare the regions to confirm that they have meaningful differences.

We culled the data in this section from the thirty-four *Quarterly Profiles of New Mexico Citizens* conducted by the IPP from 1988 to 1997. The combined *Profile* dataset includes 21,099 respondents, and the margin of error for the full sample is less than  $\pm 1\%$ . The *Profile* series' rigorous telephone interview methods resulted in a very steady cooperation rate (60–75% for each *Profile* survey). Moreover, previous analyses have demonstrated that the *Profile* survey samples appear to represent accurately the demographics of the 86% of New Mexico households that have working phones and at least one English-speaking resident. The *Profile* samples, which include unregistered voters, are not biased in favor of Democrats, Republicans, or nonvoters (Institute for Public Policy 1997).

### Cluster Analysis Replication

To confirm the six-region political-cultural map in figures 4 and 5, an analogous set of both demographic and attitudinal variables were factor analyzed. The result was a set of four factors that we labeled age, traditional (high per-

centage of residents self-identified as Native American or Spanish American), educated liberalism (high level of formal education, liberal ideology), and Hispanic egalitarian (high percentage of residents self-identified as “Hispanic” and high scores on egalitarianism). To cluster the factor scores of each geographic unit, we employed K-Means cluster analysis with squared Euclidean distance and between-groups linkage. This form of analysis was used because it permits the specification of the number of clusters, and we wanted to compare our map with a six-cluster solution.

The clusters produced by this analysis were similar to regions in figures 4 and 5. The Native American cluster consisted of San Juan and McKinley Counties, although Sandoval County was placed elsewhere. The Rural Conservative cluster was nearly identical to our own, although this cluster added Carlsbad and the unit comprised by Lea, Eddy, and Chaves counties. The Spanish American cluster had the same northern counties, but it also included the city of Santa Fe and parts of Albuquerque. The Urban Mixed cluster in this analysis was small, and included the University of New Mexico zip code in Albuquerque. Finally, this analysis produced two Urban Conservative clusters that together encompassed the same string of cities from Farmington to Roswell, although this cluster included some units we had placed in the Urban Mixed region. We could label the smaller of these two clusters strong-conservative, for it included New Mexico’s true Republican strongholds—Los Alamos, Río Rancho, and the Albuquerque Academy and Far Northeast Heights zip codes in Albuquerque.

Despite the general similarity between this set of clusters and our own regional map, there was one clear difference: the replication found an especially strong Urban Conservative region and no region consisting of Urban Liberals. This second analysis split up our Urban Liberal region, with the city of Santa Fe joining the Spanish American cluster and Albuquerque’s university district dissolving in the Urban Mixed cluster.

The discontinuity between the first and second analysis necessitates a comparison of the demographics and attitudes of the residents in the six regions. If the identification of the Urban Liberal region, for example, was in error, that region should not appear to be distinctive relative to the other regions in the following analyses.

### Demographic Comparison of the Six Regions

The six regions, however, do appear quite distinct when profiled with a variety of demographic variables. Table 2 compares the regions by ethnicity,



**Table 2 Demographic Percentages for Six New Mexico Regions**

Demographic Category	Regions					
	Native American	Rural Conserv.	Spanish Traditional	Urban Conserv.	Urban Liberal	Urban Mixed
Anglo	48%	64%	40%	67%	54%	58%
Native Amer.	26%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%
Hispanic	20%	27%	52%	23%	33%	32%
Catholic	40%	37%	53%	30%	49%	37%
Born in New Mexico	53%	46%	57%	36%	41%	37%
HH Income < \$20K	34%	40%	37%	25%	27%	30%
HH Income > \$50K	18%	12%	16%	25%	26%	21%
High school or less	44%	43%	39%	34%	22%	34%
Has college degree	21%	23%	26%	30%	46%	29%

Percents based upon 1988–1997 *Quarterly Profile* respondents (Institute for Public Policy 1997). Except for household income, all responses were weighted by household size.

religion, nativity, household income, and formal education. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and chi-square tests of statistical significance for the regional comparisons were all significant, and many of the two-region comparisons were also significant. Those differences are highlighted in the following summary, which shows the similarities and differences among each of the six subgroups of the New Mexico population.

Not surprisingly, the Native American region had the highest concentration of Native American residents, who made up 26% of the region's population. This region had the second-highest percentage of residents born in New Mexico (53%), and the region had the highest percentage of residents with only high school degrees or less formal education (44%), as well as the lowest percentage with college degrees (21%).

The Rural Conservative region was similar in its high percentages of high school-only residents (43%) and residents with college degrees (23%). What distinguished this region was its concentration of Anglos, who made up nearly two-thirds (64%) of all residents. Also, 40% of households in the Rural Conservative region had annual incomes under \$20,000, and only 12% had incomes of \$50,000 or more.

The population of the Spanish Traditional region shared relatively little formal education and low household incomes, but residents of this region were distinguished by nativity, religion, and ethnicity. This region had the

highest percentage of residents born in New Mexico (57%), and it was the only region that was majority Catholic (53%) and majority Hispanic (52%).

Just as the three relatively rural regions shared much in common, so did the urban regions share similarly high incomes, educational levels, and concentrations of Anglos and newcomers. Nonetheless, the urban regions had clear demographic differences. The Urban Conservative region stood apart from the others for having the highest percentage of Anglos (67%) and the lowest percentage of Catholics (30%). The Urban Liberals distinguished themselves by having a near majority of Catholics (49%), the lowest percentage of residents with only high-school degrees (22%), and the highest percentage of residents with college degrees (46%). Finally, the Urban Mixed region fell between the other two urban regions on many variables. The Urban Mixed areas were neither clearly liberal nor strongly conservative. In other words, they were as diverse and indistinctive as their name implies.

### Political Comparison of the Six Regions

Tables 3 and 4 show additional differences among the regions, suggesting that they do capture some of the differences in New Mexicans' political orientations. Table 3 shows party self-identification and the percentage of respondents placing themselves on either of the two poles of the ideology scale. Table 4 shows residents' average scores on the ideology scale, the egalitarianism scale, a Reaganism scale (which combines the individualism and hierarchism scales), and the standard internal political efficacy scale (Niemi, Craig, and Mattei 1991).

Most striking is the distinctiveness of the Urban Liberal region of New Mexico. This region had the highest concentration of both Democrats (57%) and independent/third-party identifiers (22%). It had the highest percentage of respondents identifying themselves as at least "somewhat liberal" (29%) and the lowest percentage who self-identified as at least "somewhat conservative" (17%). The respondents from that region expressed the most liberal ideological views, had the lowest Reaganism score, and the highest efficacy score. In other words, the Urban Liberal region is truly liberal but also more likely to be politically active and engaged. That higher efficacy score may mean that this small region, which makes up only 8% of the state's population, has a disproportionate impact on New Mexico politics.

The Spanish Traditional region shared with the Urban Liberal region the highest concentration of Democrats (57%). This region also had the highest

**Table 3 Party Registration and Ideological Self-Identification  
Percentages for Six New Mexico Regions**

Demographic Category	Native American	Rural Conserv.	Spanish Traditional	Urban Conserv.	Urban Liberal	Urban Mixed
Democrat	52%	50%	57%	41%	57%	45%
Republican	32%	35%	27%	43%	22%	37%
Other/independent	17%	15%	16%	16%	22%	18%
At least somewhat liberal	13%	12%	19%	15%	29%	16%
At least somewhat conservative	25%	31%	24%	27%	17%	25%

Percents based upon 1988–1997 *Quarterly Profile* respondents weighted by household size (Institute for Public Policy 1997).

egalitarianism score, and it had the second-lowest ideology and Reaganism scores. Unlike their Urban Liberal counterparts, however, Spanish Traditionals had only a moderate-to-low political efficacy score.

The Rural Conservative region was distinguished by having the most conservative average ideology score, the highest Reaganism score, and the lowest efficacy score. In terms of percentages, this region boasts the lowest percentage of self-identified liberals (12%) and the highest percentage of self-identified conservatives (31%). Although strongly conservative, this group was relatively disengaged from the political process. Defying conventional wisdom, the views of this group were not the most inequalitarian, possibly reflecting a sympathy for less fortunate neighbors in rural New Mexico.

The Native American region had no distinguishing scores and, in general, shared much with the Rural Conservative region. Respondents from the Native American region had a somewhat conservative ideology score and a moderate-to-high Reaganism score, but they also had a relatively high egalitarianism score, suggesting a conservative individualism tempered with sympathy for those who are less affluent. Like their Rural Conservative counterparts, respondents in this group also tended to register low political-efficacy scores.

Only one category distinguished the Urban Conservative from the Urban Mixed regions. The two regions shared the lowest average score on the egalitarianism scale, had identical and high efficacy scores, and very similar Reaganism scores. The difference was that the Urban Conservative region was the only one with a plurality of Republicans (43%).

**Table 4 Average Ideology and Political Culture Scores  
for Six New Mexico Regions**

Region	Ideology	Reaganism	Egalitarianism	Efficacy
Native American	4.33	5.39	4.35	2.40
Rural Conservative	4.48	5.56	4.22	2.39
Spanish Traditional	4.17	5.26	4.49	2.42
Urban Conservative	4.37	5.39	4.15	2.47
Urban Liberal	3.68	4.88	4.18	2.55
Urban Mixed	4.25	5.42	4.15	2.47

**Conclusion**

These findings have many implications for understanding New Mexico’s present character and its political future. First, New Mexico’s political landscape has changed significantly since Holmes’s (1967) era, yet the continuity in political culture is equally apparent. Holmes focused on how the state’s distinct political cultures derived from each region’s settlement history. The counties of Hispanic settlement along the Río Grande were most influenced by Spanish settlers, and Little Texas reflected the values of Texas emigrants into eastern New Mexico. Likewise, Holmes based his identification of urban and Indian areas, respectively, upon recent urbanization and early Native American settlement.

Thirty years later, the four groups Holmes identified are still present. However, their borders have shifted, and the urbanites have come to the forefront in New Mexico. The Native American region remains largely unchanged, although the northwestern city of Farmington no longer fits squarely within it. The Spanish Traditional region has contracted to its northern core, with a sliver in downtown Las Cruces as its only southern portion. We have renamed Little Texas—no longer so little and not so unambiguously Texan—the Rural Conservative region to emphasize its entirely rural geography. The largest area, the Urban Conservative region, has spread outward from Albuquerque to smaller cities and surrounding areas noted for their military bases and weapons laboratories. Falling into the Urban Conservative region are the southeastern corner of Little Texas and Farmington, the latter once lying within the Native American region. Although the isolated pockets that make up this Urban Conservative region are geographically dispersed, they share a relatively conservative ideology and higher levels of education and household income. Although sharing similar demographics, the Urban Liberal

region is distinguished by its solidly liberal ideology and strong sense of political efficacy. Concentrated solely in Santa Fe and near the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, this cultural group has spawned the New Mexico Green Party and exerted significant influence on New Mexico politics and culture. Finally, the Urban Mixed region is something of a residual category for Bernalillo and Doña Ana County residents who are neither as affluent nor as conservative as the Urban Conservatives.

Future research on New Mexico's regions should attempt to clarify the forces that drive the state's shifting cultural patterns. There are at least three likely explanations for the changes that have occurred since Holmes (1967) surveyed the New Mexico landscape: new migration patterns, changing cultural traditions, and external political or economic changes. First, shifts in regional boundaries could be due to migration patterns. For instance, the emergence of the Urban Liberal pockets of the state may result from an influx of liberals with relatively high incomes and advanced degrees to Santa Fe and neighborhoods near the University of New Mexico. Whatever its initial cause, that migration pattern might become self-reinforcing as liberal migrants seek a like-minded community. Second, some of the regions may be changing shape because of changing cultural traditions. For example, the contraction of the Spanish Traditional region may be directly related to a weakening of Spanish American cultural traditions in areas located farther from the region's core. Third, the cause of shifting regional borders might be changing external economic and political factors. Thus, in those parts of the state that now fall within the Rural Conservative region, people might be starting to identify themselves with a newly emerging and conservative ranching ideology that stands in opposition to federal intrusion. There are other explanations for regional shifts, and these are only intended as speculative examples. The point is that future research on New Mexico's political culture should consider a range of possible explanations for the changing shape and number of regions.

Regardless of the outcome of such research, the rough boundaries of the regions identified herein have considerable practical significance for anyone interested in New Mexico politics. One application concerns the redistricting process. Every ten years, after the collection of U.S. Census data, the New Mexico Legislature attempts to redraw the boundaries of the state's congressional districts, state House and Senate districts, and other elected offices. One of the legislature's guidelines for redistricting reads, "To the extent feasible, districts shall be drawn in an attempt to preserve communities of

interest and shall take into consideration political and geographic boundaries” (New Mexico Legislative Council Service 2001, 16). An updated and objective political-cultural map of New Mexico may assist the redistricting process by giving legislators a geographic portrait of major “communities of interest” in the state.

These six regions, however, are no mere descriptions of contemporary New Mexico culture and politics. Their shape and movement augur New Mexico’s political future. New Mexico has always harbored political complexity, shifting its presidential vote in step with the nation and electing both Democrats and Republicans to the offices of U.S. senator, U.S. representative, and governor. The state also has a tradition of status quo-oriented politics, but the regions we have identified indicate that the state is shifting toward a more solidly conservative political posture. A full third of the state falls in the Urban Conservative region, which is experiencing the greatest growth and prosperity. If the Sandia and Los Alamos National Laboratories continue to flourish and New Mexico attracts more high-tech business, the Urban Conservative region will continue to increase its share of the state’s population and wealth. Another quarter of the state’s population inhabits the Urban Mixed region, which shares ideology and political culture with the Urban Conservative region. The Urban Mixed areas lack a distinct cultural and political identity, and if they align themselves with the Urban Conservatives, the two would create a solid majority (59%) of the state population. Likewise, the Urban Conservatives’ politics are complemented by the politics of the Rural Conservative counties, which comprise another 13% of the New Mexico population.

Liberal candidates for public office might look to the other areas of New Mexico for support, but the three remaining regions make up only 29% of the state population and are all problematic political bases. The Spanish Traditional region has shrunk considerably since 1967, although it continues to exert a powerful influence on New Mexican politics and culture (Garcia 1990; Wilson 1997). The Native American region has also shrunk, with Farmington becoming more conservative, and the residents of that region being the second least politically efficacious of any group of New Mexicans. Finally, the Urban Liberals are politically skilled and motivated, but they identify most strongly with solidly liberal candidates, whom the majority of the state’s Democrats may reject.

In conclusion, New Mexico’s political future will depend upon the alliances that are built among New Mexico’s different political-cultural groups.

Most importantly, Urban Liberals and Urban Conservatives may compete to woo the pivotal Urban Mixed sections of Bernalillo and Doña Ana Counties. The outnumbered Urban Liberals may only win the political support of that urban swing group if they can forge a meaningful alliance with the Spanish Traditional region, which continues to define New Mexico's cultural self-image and to maintain footholds in both southwestern Albuquerque and downtown Las Cruces. The prospects for such an alliance are uncertain, but without it, New Mexico may lose the mysterious political balance that it has maintained throughout this century.

## Notes

1. We chose to use Republican because the third-party vote appears to be relatively liberal in New Mexico and makes Democratic vote percentages more sensitive to variations in the intensity of third-party campaigning.
2. These surveys are archived at the IPP as LANL93, LANL94, PRA94, and Culture95. The LANL surveys included oversamples of northern New Mexico counties, and the Culture95 survey was only a survey of Bernalillo County. Cooperation rates for all of the surveys were over 60%.

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