



# The 'Big Sort' Is On: How COVID, Crime, and Cost Drive Americans to Florida

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**T**he rush into Florida continues full steam ahead. Will those rushing in bring their home states' politics with them? If they do, is the Sunshine State destined to become the next California, a once conservative state that attracted an avalanche of left-leaning residents, who in turn turned the Golden State into a Leftist "utopia" of crime, corruption, and COVID craziness?

Tens of thousands of Americans are making the move to Gov. Ron DeSantis' "free" state – almost 1,000 people a day, he says. Other reports suggest the precise figure is around 900 new residents daily. Since 2015, Florida has numbered among the top 12 destination states for interstate moves, according to North American Moving Services. In both 2017 and 2018, the Sunshine State ranked #1 among top

destinations of those from other states looking to move, separate studies have concluded. In fact, the latter year, a towering 12.4 percent nationwide of all mortgage requests for out-of-state movers were for Florida. By 2020, the state had climbed in destination rank every year for half a decade. Finally, many companies are also making the move, setting up shop in less costly – and warmer – places, in turn drawing more workers with them.

The concern would be that those fleeing other states would bring beliefs that wrecked their prior communities. After all, all five of the most expensive places in the country to live are controlled by Democrats. In part as a result, the top financial fear of those in the Northeast is that they will live in debt forever – the only region of the country where that's true.

For example on taxation, before his ignominious ouster from office, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, D-N.Y., specifically mentioned Florida as an attractive alternative for New Yorkers unhappy with higher taxes. “New Yorkers fleeing to Florida need to leave their terrible blue state policies behind as well,” one wag warned. Indeed, according to the Wall Street Journal, “Preliminary data show a jump in Florida home purchases by buyers from high-tax states.”

Likewise on crime, Polk County Sheriff Grady Judd asked those moving in, “Do me a favor...don't vote the way the majority of the people voted from where you came or you'll

have here what you had there. Guaranteed.” Compare and contrast: Whereas in the Sunshine State, Gov. DeSantis has signed an anti-riot bill he called “the strongest anti-rioting, pro-law enforcement piece of legislation in the country,” the Portland City Council last year voted to cut at least \$15 million from the police bureau, effectively eliminating 84 positions in the department. As one might expect, this year Portland's murders saw an increase of 600 percent compared to the same period last year – at the same time Florida's crime rate dropped for the 50th straight year.

Florida State House Rep. Blaise Ingoglia (R) agrees with Sheriff Judd on New Floridians: “I can only hope that they leave any liberal ideology at the border.” Ingoglia pleads, “Please don't ‘New York our Florida.’ Don't turn this great state into the state you fled from.”

On the other hand, perhaps the new Floridians in particular are part of the decades-long “Big Sort,” in which Americans left neighborhoods where others on average disagreed with them, moving to locales that better matched their politics. (Granted, some contend such a sort is not taking place, or if it is that its effects would be less important than those concerned about it fear.) Such a sort would help explain increasing ideological polarization in the U.S. Senate, for instance, which unlike the House does not have a gerrymandering problem driving a wedge between the aisles.

So, are new Floridians simply sorting

themselves away from the COVID-crazed Chardonnay Antifa increasingly commandeering coastal communities in the Northeast and West? DeSantis seems to think so, reporting anecdotally that those moving to Florida are “overwhelmingly” registering as Republicans.

According to Florida’s Governor, at the pandemic’s outset, media outlets overwhelmingly howled, “Florida’s bad,” to damage both him and the then-president, insisting, “Florida is doing worse than New York.” In fact, said DeSantis, “New York was like 10 times worse.” As a result, “The people that buy those phony narratives for these media, they probably aren’t coming to Florida,” DeSantis argued. Moreover, the governor contended, “I also have come across a lot of people who, quite frankly, were Democrats. The lockdowns turned them into Republicans.” Their argument? “I was a Democrat because of education, and I’m in California, and they’re locking my kids out of school. I come to Florida, they’re in school. People are free. People are happy.” Concluded DeSantis, “If you have a political party that puts the interest of teachers’ unions over the interest of kids being able to just access an education at all, that tells you all you need to know about the modern Democrat Party.”

Again, Representative Ingoglia agrees: “We are definitely seeing the trend of people fleeing blue ‘lockdown’ states for the ‘free state’ of Florida.”

What do the data tell us? In the long

term, they suggest that Florida GOP registration has gained significant ground on the state’s Democrats, who tend to have higher numbers of partisans but lower turnout. Specifically, since 2017, the number of registered Sunshine State Republicans rose over 13 percent, while Democrats rose only eight percent.

Granted, in 2021 in particular, registration of both Democrats and Republicans has dropped, with No Party Affiliation (NPA) and minor parties increasing more than 46,000. Still, Democrats dropped by more than 48,000, faster than Republicans, who lost under 41,000. This means overall registration actually dropped in the state this year, despite the influx of new Floridians – likely an artifact of voter rolls being cleaned up earlier in the summer. Regardless, the result has narrowed Democrats’ historic registration lead to the lowest in Florida’s history.

This evidence in turn thus suggests new Floridians, on average, have seen the light: Not just of the sunshine, but of the wisdom of prudential conservative governance.

Will the Sunshine State’s newcomers leave their old state’s politics behind? It does appear to be the case, and that should be a relief to anyone in Florida who wants low taxes, less crime, and fewer masks forced on three-year-olds.