Acadiana votes for candidates instead

Looking back from the distances of history, it appears that today's voters might recognize the issues that helped shape Louisiana's first presidential vote.

Louisiana was admitted to the union April 30, 1812, and its people cast their first presidential ballots that year. The candidates were the incumbent Democrat-Republican James Madison and the Federalist backed Republican DeWitt Clinton.

The War of 1812 dominated the national campaign, and early failures of the American army gave Clinton a lot of ammunition to fire at the incumbent. In the end, however, the nation rallied around the president, including the voters of Louisiana, who gave Madison the state's three electoral votes.

1832 was the first election in which the candidates were nominated by national nominating conventions. Democrats nominated Andrew Jackson, Republicans picked Henry Clay. Louisiana voted Democrat, giving Jackson 1,506 votes to 2,439 for Clay. That was the beginning of a trend.

In the 43 elections since 1832, Louisiana has voted for the Democrat 29 times. Most of the deviations have come since 1948, when Strom Thurmond's State's Rights Party carried the state. Republicans carrying the state since then were Dwight Eisenhower (1956), Barry Goldwater (1964), Richard Nixon (1972), Ronald Reagan (1980 and 1984), George H.W. Bush (1988 and 2000). In 1968, American Party candidate George Wallace claimed the most heavily in the blue-collar parishes along the Mississippi and in southwest Louisiana. Reagan won statewide.

In 1980, the region was almost solid for Reagan, with only two parishes going to Democrat Fritz Mondale.

Lafayette and the parishes to the south voted for George H.W. Bush in 1988, but Democrat Michael Dukakis carried a plurality of parishes. Four years later, Bush held on to Lafayette, Terrebonne and St. Charles. Bill Clinton swept the rest.

In 1996, the Clinton sweep was even cleaner. Only Lafayette Parish, of all 22 in south Louisiana, gave the edge to Republican Bob Dole. In 2000, the river parishes in southeastern Acadiana favored Al Gore, but George W. Bush carried the rest of Acadiana.

(Jim Bradshaw is a columnist for TheAdvertiser. He can be reached at 289-6315 by fax at 289-6443, or by e-mail at jbradshaw@theadvertiser.com.)