



## The Myers Briggs States of America

RICHARD FLORIDA 11:28 AM ET 20 COMMENTS

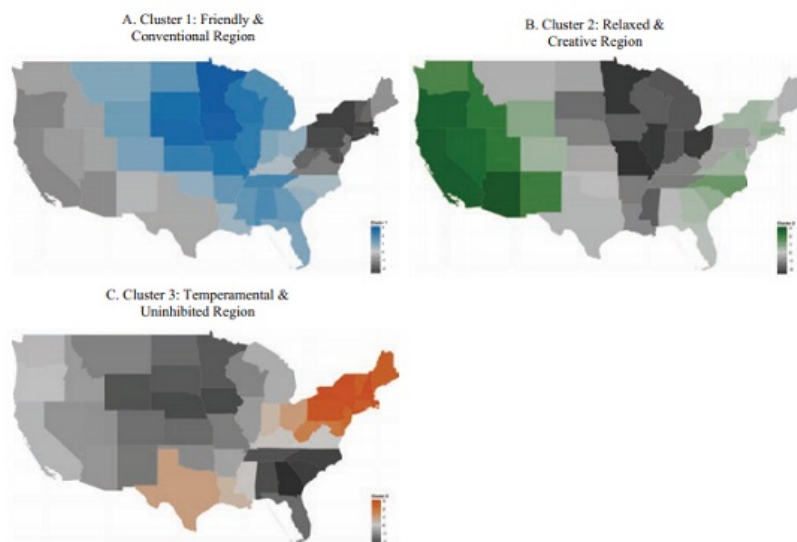
Sunbelt, Rustbelt, Energy Belt – geographers, economists and urbanists have long endeavored to map the economic, political and cultural structures of America's regions. But to what extent do these places have their own distinctive personalities?

We all have our handy stereotypes for regional personalities, of course. Stolid Midwesterners, indolent but mercurial Southerners, and nervous, fast-talking New Yorkers make repeat appearances in pop culture. But can we identify the actual psychology, the deep personality traits that define regional distinctiveness?

Those questions are at the center of a new study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. "[Divided We Stand: Three Psychological Regions of the United States and Their Political, Economic, Social and Health Correlates](#)" is a collaboration among a team of leading social psychologists including Peter J. Renfrow (whose research I have long admired and with [whom I've collaborated](#)), Michal Kosinski, and David J. Stillwell of the University of Cambridge; Markus Jokela of the University of Helsinki; Samuel D. Gosling of the University of Texas at Austin; and Jeff Potter.

The study draws on a wide body of data and information collected from five separate internet survey samples over 12 years, covering 1.5 million individuals across the 48 contiguous states. The primary objective of the study, according to the researchers, was to map the "psychological topography of the United States," composed of "geographically coherent psychological regions." To do so, they used a statistical technique known as "[cluster analysis](#)" to examine how five major [personality traits](#) – openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism – are distributed and cluster across American states and regions.

The study identifies three main regional types: friendly and conventional, relaxed and creative, and temperamental and uninhibited. The maps below, from the study, show how these line up across America's states.



*Figure 2.* Maps of multistate personality clusters. Cluster scores were based on the z-transformed profile correlations between the state-level personality scores from the combine samples and the cluster centers. The colored areas are hotspots derived from the Getis-Ord  $G^*$  statistic.

The shaded areas on the maps above, from the study, show where the three profiles predominate.

1. **The Friendly and Conventional Region is the blue area that runs from Michigan through the**

**Midwest and much of the Sunbelt and traditional South.** This region is defined by low levels of openness (the trait most closely associated with innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship), low levels of narcissism (the counterpoint to which is a high level of emotional stability) and moderate to high levels of extroversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness. This composite of traits shapes a regional personality that is sociable, considerate, dutiful, and traditional.

As the authors note, "the psychological profile and all the social indicators betray a region that is marked by conservative social values." This ethos maps onto a region whose residents are primarily white and politically conservative, less likely to move, and more likely to remain close to family and friends. They also have relatively lower levels of education, wealth, innovation, and social tolerance. This region has high levels of social capital and engagement in religious and traditional civic organizations. As the authors conclude, "taken together, the characteristics of this psychological region suggest a place where traditional values, family, and the status quo are important."

2. **The Relaxed and Creative Region is the green area along the West Coast and Rocky Mountains through Idaho, Arizona, and New Mexico.** There is also a weaker concentration, identified by the much lighter green shading in parts of the Sunbelt (especially North Carolina) and some of New England (including Massachusetts). This regional profile is high in openness and oriented toward creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. It is also low in extroversion (less-outgoing, more introverted) and agreeableness and especially low in neuroticism (in other words, it has higher levels of emotional stability).

Demographically, the population includes relatively high levels of college grads, more affluent people and higher levels of ethnic diversity. "Social capital is comparatively low here, but tolerance for cultural diversity and alternative lifestyles is high," the article notes. Befitting its historical origins as the destination for pioneers, it is an "area where significant numbers of people are choosing to settle, as indicated by the positive association with residential mobility.... It is also a place where residents are politically liberal, as well as psychologically and physically healthy."

3. **The Temperamental and Uninhibited Region is the deep orange area that covers the Northeast, New England and Middle Atlantic states.** There are also lighter concentrations in the contiguous areas of Ohio and Indiana, as well as Texas. This region's psychological profile is defined by very high levels neuroticism (hence the temperamental moniker), moderately high levels of openness, low levels of extroversion (or high levels of introversion) and very low levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness. This constellation of personality traits depict a type of person that is "reserved, aloof, impulsive, irritable, and inquisitive," while also being "passionate, competitive, and liberal." This region is highly educated and affluent, with high levels of ethnic and cultural diversity and a liberal political orientation.

Beyond cocktail party chatter and fodder for magazine sidebars—*if Ohio was a celebrity, who would it be?*—the study examined the extent to which these regional personality traits correlate to key economic, political, social and cultural characteristics of states and regions.

The authors suggest that their psychological analysis:

Challenges the standard methods of dividing up the country on the basis of economic factors, voting patterns, cultural stereotypes or geography that appear to have become ingrained in the way people think about the United States. At the same time, it reinforces some of the traditional beliefs that some areas of the country are friendlier than others, while some are more creative.

Take politics for example. While most analysts focus on the concretely measurable attributes of a place (its ethnic and cultural divisions, religious orientation or economic characteristics), these findings suggest that psychological factors play a role. The profile and traits of the Midwest (Friendly and Conventional) implies a regional cluster of personalities that are family-oriented, religious, and thus drawn to more conservative political orientations.

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## There is a psychological dimension to highly

Their research also offers potentially new insights for economic development, specifically for understanding the geographic clustering of talent and innovation. The study suggests "part of the reason why certain regions of the United States are economically vibrant may have to do with the psychological characteristics of residents."

It calls attention to the selective migration of certain regional personality types. People in the Friendly and Conventional Region

# innovative, entrepreneurial and creative places

are more likely to stay close to family and friends. People in the other regional types are much more likely to be drawn to and engage in inventive, entrepreneurial and creative activity as well. This helps explain the cluster of innovative and creative activity in places like Silicon Valley, San Francisco, New York and Boston. The orange shading in Texas also helps explain the high level of innovation and creativity in Austin and around Houston.

This has important implications for regional efforts to bolster creative economic development. Perhaps it's not simply clusters of research universities, entrepreneurial firms, or even high-skill and creative talent that drive entrepreneurial economic growth, but clusters of personality types. In other words there is a psychological dimension to highly innovative, entrepreneurial and creative places that contribute to and reinforce economic dynamism and performance.

Keywords: Maps, Psychology, Geography, Regionalism



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