

*Latinók Trumpért: Trump elnök szavazatszerzése a
latinók között 2016-ról 2020-ra*

*Latinos for Trump: How President Trump Gained
Votes among Latinos from 2016 to 2020*

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ABSTRACT

The 2016 and 2020 presidential elections have been widely regarded as some of the most turbulent and consequential political events in the United States in the past few decades with a record number of citizens turning out to vote in 2020. The Latino (or Hispanic) community was a decisive element over the course of both of these elections, however, there exist various misconceptions about their voting behavior, such as the notion of a uniform “Latino vote”. The objective of this paper is to examine the political preferences and electoral choices of the Latino population in the United States in light of the 2016 and 2020 elections, as well as to ascertain the reasons behind the extensively publicized fact that President Trump succeeded in broadening his Latino coalition from 2016 to his reelection bid four years later.

Keywords: *presidential election, Latino, Hispanic, Latino vote, 2016 election, 2020 election, Donald Trump*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Latino or Hispanic population of the United States has drastically risen over the past few decades, therefore so has the importance of the “Latino vote” in presidential, congressional, statewide as well as local elections. Before this year’s midterm elections on November 8, plenty of analyses were published that pinpointed Latinos as one of the decisive factors in the outcome. A header of the progressive Vox media outlet read “Hispanic voters could swing the 2022 midterms” (Zhou), while an opinion article by a Democratic strategist warned last year that “Latinos are the new swing voters” (Cardona). This claim was repeated by Reverend Samuel Rodriguez on the website of conservative-leaning Fox News, who listed five reasons why he thinks “the left is losing Latinos” since “the Latino vote in America has officially become the quintessential swing vote” (Rodriguez).

It is evident that the Latino vote seems to intrigue many, especially since the 2020 election, when Republicans managed to expand their coalition of Hispanic voters compared to previous years. This trend, even if to a limited extent, continued into the 2022 midterms according to exit polls: “Hispanics saw the second-biggest shift among voters of color, with Democrats’ overall margins dropping 9 points since 2018. (...) Compared to 2020, the Democratic margin among Latinos decreased by 5 points” (Martinez). Despite there being no “red wave” in 2022, Republicans performed exceptionally well among Hispanics in Florida, as the incumbent Republican governor, Ron DeSantis flipped two former Democratic strongholds that had voted for President Joe Biden in 2020: Miami-Dade and Osceola Counties. The outcome in the former could easily be ascribed to its sizeable Cuban American population; however, Osceola County is largely Puerto Rican (Bradner). As this implies, the way Hispanics cast their ballots is influenced by numerous factors, for instance, their country of origin. In what follows, all of these aspects will be presented in the context of the 2016 and 2020 elections.

The objective of this paper is to posit that Latinos’ political allegiances have slightly shifted to the right mainly due to economic policy and social values, as showcased in the 2020 presidential election; however, in the short term, no seismic upheaval is likely to take place. First, the Hispanic population of the United States will be examined, including their voting behavior compared to other ethno-racial groups in the United States and their political partisanship from a historical perspective. In the second section, the results of the 2016 election will be analyzed. In the third chapter, the 2020 election results will be presented and contraposed against those of the previous cycle underlining the major differences concerning the Latino vote. The fifth part displays a comparative database analysis, focusing on former President Trump’s support among Latinos according to various research organizations, most

of them left-leaning, comparing their results and methodology with the objective of producing an estimate as precise as possible. The last section of the paper will include various theories and explanations as to why this shift in Hispanics' electoral preference might have transpired.

Regarding the sources utilized for this paper, due to the recency of the topic and the need for up-to-date data, various news articles feature among the references, while most statistical figures are provided by Pew Research Center, a “non-partisan fact tank” by self-definition (“About Pew”). In most cases, polling data was provided by Pew Research Center as well, however, other estimates are also mentioned at times if available. For electoral analysis, a number of articles are included from FiveThirtyEight, a website mainly engaging in data-driven political journalism. In terms of the Latino vote, the paper heavily relies on the 2020 election survey by Equis Research, a data firm funded by former officials of the Obama administration. In order to gain a historical perspective on Hispanics in the US, Juan González's *Harvest of Empire* is featured along with *Latinos. Remaking America*, edited by Suárez-Orozco and M. Páez. Phillips' *Brown Is the New White*, on the other hand, deals with the political consequences of the “demographic revolution” in the US.

2. THE LATINO POPULATION AND THE LATINO ELECTORATE

The number of people of Hispanic descent burgeoned from 9.6 million in 1970 to 62.5 million in 2021, now accounting for 19% of Americans as opposed to a mere 5% in 1970 (see Appendix 1). As Jens Manuel Krogstad et al. underline, contrasting 2010 and 2021, the “19% increase in the Hispanic population was faster than the nation's 7% growth rate, but slower than the 23% increase in the Asian population”, notwithstanding, the “US population grew by 23.1 million from 2010 to 2021, and Hispanics accounted for 52% of this increase—a greater share than any other racial or ethnic group” (see Appendix 2) (Krogstad et al., “Key Facts”). This demographic boom and Latinos' consequent status as the largest minority group since around the turn of the millennium contribute to an expansion in their cultural and political influence as well, but before delving into all of that, the very community in question ought to be scrutinized (Kettle).

The Office of Management and Budget of the United States defines the term “Hispanic” or “Latino” as “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (United States Census Bureau). In this paper, the two pan-ethnic terms are employed interchangeably despite the fact that they do not refer to exactly the same groups of people: Hispanic is utilized to describe those who hail from Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexicans as well as Spaniards; while Latino is associated with anyone who is of Latin American origin and resides in the

United States, including even Brazilians or Haitians, who speak Romance languages other than Spanish, Portuguese and French, respectively. Other terms recently popularized are Latinx and Latine, which circumvent the gendered Latino/Latina (in Spanish, often abbreviated as Latin@) expressions and include non-binary identities, even though in Spanish the masculine form is traditionally used to refer to mixed groups as well. Nonetheless, the use of these expressions has not gained much traction so far, as research illuminated last year that 69% of respondents preferred Hispanic, 21% Latino/Latina, 8% something else, and merely 2% favored Latinx to describe themselves (“Los Votantes Hispanos”).

It is also to be noted that outside the realm of United States demographics, Latino is a non-existent term, since people from Latin American countries maintain their national identities; however, so do most Latinos in the US too (Lopez et al.). A survey conducted in 2019 found that 47% of Hispanics most often identify themselves by their country of origin, while 39% prefer the terms Latino or Hispanic and 14% most frequently describe themselves as American (see Appendix 3). With the exception of identifying as Latino, these proportions change substantially from first to second and third generations of Hispanics, with the country of origin waning and a general sense of Americanness gaining importance (Gonzalez-Barrera).

Regarding the question of who can consider themselves Latino, another survey from 2015 highlights the value attributed to a shared understanding of culture, numerically 42% said that being Latino is mostly based on culture, 29% opined that it is mainly a matter of ancestry and only 17% of Hispanic adults said it is chiefly a question of race. Thus, as most researchers concur, being Hispanic is an ethnicity rather than a race since Latinos can be of any race or a mixture of any races: as per the 2020 census, 20.3 million Latinos professed to be of mixed race (a steep rise from 3 million in 2010), 26.2 million identify with being some other race, with only 12.6 million saying they are White (see Appendix 4) (Lopez et al.).

2.1. The Latino Vote

The saying “a Latino turns 18 every 30 seconds” and becomes eligible to vote has nearly become a commonplace to raise attention to the so-called “sleeping giant” that is the Latino vote. Despite the expectations, nonetheless, this giant has remained asleep for the time being, argues Geraldo L. Cadava, a prominent historian specialized in Latino history and the US-Mexico borderlands. He claims that Hispanics “are instrumental to the emerging Democratic majority that Blue America longs for, that Red America fears, and that never quite seems to arrive” (“There’s No Such Thing”). In another interview, Cadava declares that both sides tend to take the Latino vote for granted, as President Reagan was once quoted

saying that “Hispanics are already Republican, they just don’t know it”, while a prominent Senate Democrat publicly expressed his bewilderment as to how even a single Hispanic could be Republican. As Cadava believes, calling Hispanics “naturally liberal or conservative comes from a place of ignorance and not knowing much about who Latinos are as political actors” (qtd. in Escobar).

In terms of the political influence of the Latino population, their share of the electorate has skyrocketed in recent decades. The number of voting age Latinos grew from 8,778,000 during the 1992 presidential election to 30,627,000 in 2020, a growth from 5.1 percent of the US electorate to 13.2% (see Appendix 5) (Bergad and Miranda 11). As Ruth Igielnik and Abby Budiman detail, naturalized citizens as well as young people reaching voting age have been essential to this process, and the “12.4 million Hispanics who turned 18 between 2000 and 2018 accounted for 80% of the growth among the population’s eligible voters during those years”. However, no matter how large this increase seems to be, it still fails to reflect the actual Latino population because “only about half of the nation’s 60 million Hispanics are eligible to vote – the smallest share of any racial or ethnic group”, which is due to the fact that “many Hispanics are young (18.6 million are under 18 years old) or non-citizen adults (11.3 million, more than half of whom are unauthorized immigrants)”. In short, out of the 60 million Latino population only 30 million are eligible to cast a ballot (Noe-Bustamante et al.).

With regards to the geographic distribution of the Latino vote, it mainly concentrates in a relatively small number of states. Most of them live in areas that once formed part of the Spanish empire: in the states of Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada as well as California, which “alone holds roughly a quarter of the nation’s Latino electorate”, around 7.9 million voters. Texas is second with 5.6 million, with Florida coming in third place due to its 3.1 million Hispanic voters. The northeastern state of New York stands out with its 2 million eligible Latinos, chiefly thanks to the Puerto Rican and Dominican communities concentrated in the New York City metropolitan area (Noe-Bustamante et al.). In terms of the share of Hispanic voters, New Mexico is first with 43%, followed by California and Texas (both 30%), Arizona (24%), Florida and Nevada (both approximately 20%), Colorado (16%), New York and New Jersey (both 15%), and Connecticut and Illinois (both around 12%) (“Mapping the 2020 Latino Electorate”).

2.2. Political Activity

“The political influence of Hispanic Americans has grown at breakneck speed”, notes Juan Gonzalez, underscoring the fact that over 40 years, between 1976 and 2016, the number of Latinos registered to vote surged from 2.5 million to 15.2 million, accounting for a rise of

more than 500 percent, while nationwide voter registration figures merely climbed by 61 percent (241). Although the number of Hispanics registered to vote has soared and Hispanics' political participation rose to record highs in 2020, it still falls short when measured up to other ethno-racial groups.

As Laird W. Bergad and Luis A. Miranda highlight, both Latino voter registration and turnout reached record levels: 61.1% of all Latino citizens registered to vote, an increase from 57.3% in 2016; what is more, turnout “also rose to a historic high of 53.7% in November 2020, increasing from 47.3% in 2016”. The spike in the number of Latino votes is dubbed an “extraordinary increase” mainly due to younger voters, comparing 12.7 million ballots cast in 2016 with approximately 16.5 million in 2020. In addition, Hispanic voters “accounted for 10.2% of all votes cast in the 2020 presidential election, an increase from 9.2% in 2016”, meaning that every 10th voter was Hispanic, a proportion that still fails to amount to Latinos' 19% share of the US population (Bergad and Miranda 5).

This underperformance can be observed if Latinos' political activity is compared to that of other races and ethnicities, as “there is much room for even further improvements in formal electoral political participation. Latinos still had the lowest registration and voting rates among the major race/ethnic groups in the US in 2020, as was the case in 2016 and before” (Bergad and Miranda 14). In 2020—which was the first year in US electoral history that more than half, 53.7% of Latinos voted in a presidential election—59.7% of Asians, 62.6% of non-Hispanic Blacks, and 70.9% of non-Hispanic Whites cast their ballots. With respect to voter registration, these percentages paint a similar picture: 61.1% of Hispanics, 63.8 of Asians, 69% of African Americans, and 76.5% of Whites (see Appendix 6) (Bergad and Miranda 15). Hence it is apparent that other ethnicities and races are more likely to participate in the political process than Latinos are. It is worth noting that not only is it the case that only half of the 62.5 million Latino population is eligible to vote due to their young age or immigrant status; out of those eligible (30.6 million), only half decided to participate in the electoral process in 2020 (16.5 million). This is why the ‘sleeping giant’ has not woken up yet.

There might be various explanations for the dormant status of such a large part of the Latino vote. First, Hispanics may not feel involved in the political process. A Latino Decisions poll found that 64% of Latinos reported not having been contacted by any campaign up until the beginning of August 2020 (“Somos Unidos”), however, according to a survey by Pew Research Center, by the end of the election, 75% of Latinos said they were contacted, a percentage still lower than 87% of Caucasians, 82% of African Americans, and 74% of Asians declaring the same (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante). As Cadava put it,

“Latinos have argued for a long time that American politics and electoral politics wasn't made for them” (“There’s No Such Thing”). Carlos Odio, co-founder of Equis Research, referred to Hispanics’ “guest complex” as well, claiming that “many Latinos do not fully participate in the process because they are still made to feel like guests in this country” (FiveThirtyEight). On the whole, Hispanics are more likely to feel on the sidelines of US politics, which is reflected in their participation too.

Another explanation might be that a great number of Latinos live in non-battleground states, such as California, New Mexico, New York, and New Jersey. The votes of Hispanics as well as other individuals living in such states is not that eagerly sought after as those in swing states, as a consequence they feel less incentivized to vote. That said, many Latinos live in states such as “Arizona, Texas and Florida, critical battlegrounds. So Latinos in those states are hyper-visible, while Latinos everywhere else are ignored and invisible”—emphasizes Cadava (qtd. in Escobar). In 2020, only 10% of the population of battleground states was Hispanic, while 15% of the population of non-swing states was Latino. “By contrast, White and Black Americans accounted for a higher share of eligible voters in battleground states (71% and 14%) than non-battleground states (65% and 12%)” (Krogstad and Noe-Bustamante). In brief, Latinos are underrepresented, while Caucasians and African Americans are overrepresented in swing states, which constitute the centers of political action during elections.

A third reason might be the demographic composition of the Latino electorate. Hispanic Americans’ median age is 29.8 as opposed to the median age of the entire US population, which is 38.5 (“The Hispanic Population Has Quadrupled”). In addition, “in 2019, for instance, 30.8 percent of the country’s Hispanic population was under the age of eighteen, compared with only 18.6 percent of white Americans” (Gonzalez 282). The youth of the Latino population is a disadvantage when it comes to voter turnout, since younger as well as first-time and Spanish-dominant voters in particular are traditionally harder to energize before elections, so it costs more for campaigns to reach out to them than to Whites or Blacks (Suarez). However, the question of age will naturally be ameliorated with the passage of time, which might entail the eagerly expected awakening of the “sleeping giant”.

Additionally, it is also imperative to point out the significance of socioeconomic status apart from age and language, since

“the young, the less well educated, and the low-income are less likely to vote. All of these groups are disproportionately represented among Latinos. (...) Community-wide mobilization, such as that which the African American community experienced as a result of the civil rights movement, can overcome these impediments to participation. Without such mobilization,

however, Latinos are likely to continue to experience lower-than-average rates of participation, despite the steady growth in the number of Latino voters from election to election” (DeSipio and O. de la Garza 399).

2.3. Partisanship

As previously introduced, there have been multiple claims that categorize Hispanics as naturally Democrats or Republicans on both sides of the aisle. Nevertheless, as Nathaniel Rakich and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux highlight, neither party can take the Latino vote for granted due to its size and diversity. “On the one hand, many of the political divides we see play out among Latino voters—along lines of gender, age and religion—are similar to what we observe in other big groups in the electorate, but there are unique considerations here, too, like how long Latino voters have lived in the US or their specific place of origin”.

That said, Latinos’ political affiliation is normally described with the following generalization: “Hispanic voters have (...) historically been more likely to support Democrats than Republican candidates, though their support has not been as consistent as that of Black voters” (Igielnik and Budiman). As of September 2022, 64% of Latinos say they identify with or lean toward Democrats as opposed to 33% aligning themselves with the Republican Party, an almost two-to-one margin that has not undergone substantive variation over the past few years (Krogstad et al., “Most Latinos”). In comparison to Hispanics, only Whites show a more balanced partisan split: around 53% consider themselves or lean Republican, while 42% are Democrats or lean Democratic. In other ethno-racial groups, like among all minorities, Democrats have the upper hand: as mentioned before, African Americans strongly lean toward Democrats (83%) as opposed to merely 10% affiliating with the GOP. With 72%, Asian Americans have been trending toward Democrats as well, yet 17% of them support Republicans according to a survey among registered voters by Pew Research Center (Igielnik and Budiman) (see Appendix 7). When one inspects, nevertheless, how Latinos voted in the past few decades, it is apparent that there have been limits to both Democrats and Republicans’ success.

The presidential campaign of Ronald Reagan, former Republican governor of California, for example, attracted more than a third of Latinos in 1980 as well as 1984 with 35% and 37%, respectively, which constitutes a relatively narrow, 21% and 24% gap between him and the Democratic candidates (Lopez and Taylor). As Cadava writes, Reagan’s “Latino campaign was able to articulate the core characteristics of Latino conservatism: family values, work ethic, patriotism, and anti-Communism” (“The Deep Origins”). The record-holder of the GOP remains to be former Texas governor George W. Bush, who received 35% and 40% of

Hispanics' votes in 2000 and 2004, respectively; a difference of only 18 points in the latter case (see Appendix 8).

On the Democratic side, the presidential candidates who excelled with Latinos in the past few decades include Michael Dukakis in 1988 with 69% of the Latino vote, Bill Clinton with a whopping 72% of the Hispanic vote in 1996 as well as Barack Obama, who gained the support of 67% of Hispanics in 2008 and 71% upon his reelection bid in 2012. It is also interesting to note that Obama performed worse among Latinos against well-known senator John McCain (31%) from the 24% Hispanic state of Arizona in 2008 than against Mitt Romney (27%) of Massachusetts in 2012 (Lopez and Taylor). Based on this data, it is indisputable what the previous statement described: "Latinos continue to exhibit a long-standing pattern of strong, primarily Democratic partisanship" (DeSipio and O. de la Garza 402), but Republicans have a fighting chance with a candidate who is well-established in Latino communities and if they implement targeted political messaging toward Hispanics—precisely what they did in 2004, for instance (Phillips 161-165).

As mentioned earlier, Hispanics tend to maintain the national identity of their country of origin, a fact that also impacts their partisanship. For instance, Mexican Americans, an overwhelming 63% of the Hispanic population, heavily lean toward Democrats: 81% of them supported Hillary Clinton as opposed to Donald Trump's 15% in 2016. As a consequence, since the majority of US Latinos is Mexican American and they mostly reside in battleground states like Arizona, Nevada, and Texas, these characteristics "basically singlehandedly drive the narrative that Latinos are core Democratic voters" (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux).

One of the most salient cases contradicting this misconception is Cuban Americans' partisanship: in 2020, "58% of Cuban registered voters say they affiliate with or lean toward the Republican Party, while 38% identify with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic", which is in stark contrast with the political affiliation of non-Cuban Latinos, two-thirds of whom identify as or lean Democratic and merely 32% align themselves with the GOP (Krogstad). Even though Cuban Americans constitute only 4% of the entire Latino population, they are present in disproportionately high numbers in the state of Florida making up 29% of Hispanics, which renders them an exceptionally influential group in this critical swing state. Their party affiliation evolved differently since Republicans were "perceived as tougher on communism throughout most of the Cold War; in addition, many Cuban Americans blamed Democratic President John F. Kennedy for the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961" (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux). As a consequence, they are more responsive to anti-communist and anti-socialist messaging; nevertheless, just like nationwide, age is also a factor, since Cuban Americans who fled Cuba remain staunch Republicans, while younger

Cuban Americans, who were born in the US are more inclined to lean Democratic at large – write Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux.

The second largest Latino group, Puerto Ricans, who make up 9% of US Hispanics, also show clear-cut preferences: as per Latino Decisions, 79 percent of them voted for Hillary Clinton compared to 19 percent backing Trump in 2016. Central Americans, that is Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, and Nicaraguan Americans also trend Democratic to a similar degree due to their more recent experience with immigration in general – an aspect that impacts the partisanship of all Hispanics (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux).

All in all, it is appropriate to claim that the partisanship of Latinos as a whole is impacted by various factors, some of which have already been discussed, while other aspects will be scrutinized further on in the context of the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections.

3. THE 2016 ELECTION

The presidential election campaign of 2016 was widely described as “tumultuous” and “abrasive”, which “defied established political norms” (Beckwith). The Democratic Party nominated former First Lady, New York senator, and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, while Republicans selected real-estate mogul and businessman Donald John Trump as their nominee at their convention.

3.1. The Campaigns of Donald J. Trump and Hillary R. Clinton

In July 2015, upon announcing his candidacy for the presidency, Trump raised an issue that predominantly affects Latinos and had been an unresolved matter for a long time: immigration. He declared that

“[w]hen Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best. (...) They’re sending people that have lots of problems, and they’re bringing those problems with us. They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people. (...) I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I’ll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall” (“Donald Trump’s Announcement”).

A great number of public figures condemned Trump’s controversial statement and proposal to compel Mexico to build a wall on the southern border saying it was demeaning; Gonzalez deems it a part of the future president’s “war on immigrants” (279). The Clinton campaign, in order to attack his character and undermine his support among Latinos, referred to these remarks of his abundantly along with others, such as “[t]his is a country, where we

speak English, not Spanish” (Goldmacher). An advertisement was even published with the title “Latino voters have the power to stop Trump” focusing on his polemic assertions about Hispanics (Hillary Clinton). Clinton, speaking at a fundraiser, went as far as alleging that half of Trump’s backers were deplorable. “Racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, you name it”, claims that forced her to apologize later (Beckwith).

However, Clinton, who chose a Spanish-speaking Senator from Virginia, Tim Kaine as her running mate, was criticized for her approach toward Latinos too after her blog published an article about her being just like “your abuela”. The article resulted in numerous people posting with the hashtag #notmyabuela owing to her record on immigration policy, as well as to highlight what they perceived as “hispandering”; that is pandering to Latinos in an inauthentic and condescending way without actually taking their interests into account (Ayuso). During the campaign, not only Trump’s personality and fitness to be president was called into question, but Clinton was lambasted too for her use of a private email server while Secretary of State between 2009 and 2013, entailing an FBI investigation which was reopened eleven days and then concluded two days before election day (Beckwith). On the eve of the election, however, the result bringing a turbulent campaign period to a close turned out to be even more astounding.

3.2. The Latino Vote in the 2016 Election

Out of the two candidates, both of whom had historically high disapproval ratings (54 percent for Clinton and 61 percent for Trump), Donald Trump emerged victorious with 304 electoral votes to Clinton’s 227 (Beckwith). As Álvaro J. Corral and David L. Leal mention, Trump’s win came as a surprise for almost all since Clinton “was thought to demonstrate the power of demographic change to bring about a Democratic winning coalition of minorities, immigrants, and liberal whites” (“Latinos por Trump” 1115). Still, Clinton won the popular vote with 48% to 45.9%, but Trump managed to flip the states of Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Florida, which proved to be indispensable for his path to the White House (“2016 Presidential”).

With regards to the Latino vote, 66% of Hispanics voted for the Democratic candidate and 28% of them opted for the Republican one in 2016, according to a survey by Pew Research Center (“For Most Trump Voters”). Clinton’s 66% misses the mark of Barack Obama’s 71% among Hispanics in 2012, what is more, Trump apparently did not lose support but went on to overperform Mitt Romney’s 27% among Hispanics four years earlier. Thus, Corral and Leal conclude that Trump’s performance was unexpected “in light of his campaign

rhetoric, Democratic Party efforts to highlight this rhetoric, and media coverage that accentuated the divide between Latinos and Trump” (“Latinos por Trump” 1128).

Another section of Latino voters which Trump managed to persuade more than Romney is lower- and middle-income citizens, a phenomenon that was apparent in the case of the non-Hispanic White electorate as well. His populist messaging prioritizing blue-collar jobs and traditional industries convinced many lower- and middle-class voters, albeit alienated high earners, as “Latinos in the highest income bracket were more supportive of Romney than of Trump, which also parallels the general trend among white voters” (Corral and Leal, “Latinos por Trump” 1123).

Among Hispanics too, religion turned out to be a decisive factor on election day. Regarding Latinos’ religious affiliation, a little less than half of Hispanic adults professed to be Catholic in 2018, while 24 percent identified as Protestant and around the same were unaffiliated; with the latter group being on the rise, mostly to the detriment to Catholicism (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux). Latino Protestants, whose numbers are also growing, were much more likely to back Trump than Latino Catholics, despite not being heavily Republican, rather a swing group (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux). Corral and Leal underscore that although support for Clinton among Latino Catholics only marginally dropped to 69% from Obama’s 73.4%, in the case of Latino Protestants, the decline is considerably larger: “about 61 percent of Latino Protestants expressed support for Obama just prior to his reelection, that figure fell to about 45 percent for Clinton in 2016” (“Latinos por Trump” 1123). This might not only be owing to the fact that Latino Protestants tend to be more conservative (“Latinos por Trump” 1117), but also because their congregations have been at the center of Republican outreach and are more close-knit communities than their Catholic counterparts (“Latinos por Trump” 1126). On the whole, the rising share of Protestant Latinos may benefit Republicans, while the growth in the number of unaffiliated Hispanics might aid Democrats “since nonreligious voters are moving steadily into the Democratic camp” (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux).

As already alluded to, distance from the immigration experience also impacted Latinos’ electoral choice. Trump garnered a greater share, 30% of votes among third-generation Latinos than among Hispanics as a whole, a figure that is significantly higher than Romney’s 22%. This might mean that Hispanics who probably do not speak Spanish and had “deeper familial ties to the United States were less offended by Trump’s anti-immigration and anti-Mexico messages”—suggest Corral and Leal (“Latinos por Trump” 1124). Therefore, first-generation Latinos were 12 percentage points more inclined to vote for Clinton than their third- or higher-generation counterparts (84 percent vs 72 percent), which is not unexpected,

since the former group was most targeted by Trump's rhetoric (Rakich and Thomson-DeVeaux).

In conclusion, it is safe to say that Latinos turned out in very significant, yet not record-high numbers to cast a ballot for Clinton, the first female presidential nominee of either major party, however, Trump managed to make inroads among certain groups: working class voters, Latino Protestants—whom he also pleased by choosing Mike Pence as his running mate—and native-born third-generation Hispanics.

4. THE 2020 ELECTION AND WHY IT WAS DIFFERENT

The 2020 presidential election was in many ways similar as well as entirely different to the previous one. It took place after a nationwide wave of protests against police brutality following George Floyd's murder, and during a global pandemic claiming the deaths of millions as well as causing social upheaval and economic uncertainty—extraordinary circumstances that raised the stakes of the election outcome. Consequently, national voter turnout increased by 7 percentage points to 66%, and as already discussed in the second chapter, Latino participation reached record highs too. After the failed bid of Hillary Clinton, a swathe of Democratic hopefuls intended to clinch the nomination to be able to face Republican incumbent President Donald Trump in the general election. In the end, Barack Obama's former vice president and longtime senator from Delaware, Joe Biden managed to gather sufficient support as “the most electable” unity candidate (Igielnik et al.).

4.1. The Campaigns of Joseph R. Biden and Donald J. Trump

During the campaign, Biden attacked Trump for what he called his mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic, pointing to his controversial claims and downplaying of the virus' spread. The former vice president also argued that he would be able to “save the soul of America,” that is bridge the social divisions and partisan animosity through leading with integrity and by example. In turn, Trump ran on his economic record and employment figures; in addition, he took a hard stance in favor of law and order amidst the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. He also criticized the 77-year-old Democratic candidate for his old age and mental fitness for office despite being merely three years Biden's junior. Moreover, he warned of Democrats' allegedly socialist agenda tying Biden to the legacy of Latin American communist dictators (“United States presidential election of 2020”). Biden's campaign, however, was not devoid of faux pas: at a Hispanic Heritage Month event in Florida, the candidate commenced his speech by playing the song “Despacito” on his phone. As Corral

and Leal opine, “Biden’s awkward dancing was reminiscent of other times that Democrats engaged in ‘Hispandering’: non-Latino candidates trying (and often failing) to connect with Latinos on cultural grounds” (“One in Four Latinos”).

All in all, the vitriol present in everyday American politics did not vanish from 2016 to 2020, quite the opposite, which led to another election campaign in turmoil with the legality and legitimacy of its outcome drawn into question. However, one candidate’s approach to the Latino community differed: Trump, after not engaging with voters in Spanish in 2016 (Goldmacher), had a great deal of advertisements published that were aimed at Latinos underscoring family and religious values as well as his economic achievements, targeting Cuban and Venezuelan Americans mainly living in Florida as well as Tejanos living by the Southern border in particular.

4.2. The Latino Vote in the 2020 Election Compared to 2016

As the polls closed, results started pouring in showing a record turnout as well as Joe Biden’s lead in various states of critical importance. In total, the Democratic candidate garnered 306 electoral votes surpassing Trump’s 232, additionally, he won the popular vote with 51.3% as opposed to the incumbent’s 46.9%. Joe Biden ascended to the presidency having gained the most votes in American history, over 81,284,000, with Trump in second place on this list having received more than 74,221,000 votes. Biden became the 46th President of the US by carrying various Rust Belt states that previously formed part of Trump’s column: Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania; moreover, he flipped Arizona and Georgia, the former state being the home of a great number of Latino voters (Lewis).

If one contrasts Hispanics’ votes in 2016 and 2020, the first thing that becomes apparent is that even though Biden managed to win most of the Latino vote, Trump’s performance considerably improved from 2016 to 2020. As per Pew Research Center’s poll of validated voters, in 2016, 28% voted for Trump, which grew to a whopping 38% in 2020. Simultaneously, the Democratic candidate’s support among Latinos dwindled from 66% to 59%, a significant decline (see Appendix 9) (Igielnik et al.).

In terms of the votes of different subgroups of the Latino electorate, their tendencies match those on the national level. Concerning the gender gap, women tend to lean more Democratic than men, and the divergence between who Latino and Latina citizens voted for narrowed from 2016 to 2020, closely tied to the fact that it shrank from 15 percentage points to 11 nationwide as well (Igielnik et al.). The Latino gender gap was estimated to be around 11 percentage points in 2016, the highest in two decades (Lavariega Monforti 238). In contrast, a survey before the 2020 election indicated “67% of Hispanic women and 59% of

Hispanic men supporting Biden”, a more modest gap of 8 points compared to 2016 (Naishadham). As per another set of data presented by Igielnik et al., the Latino gender gap was even smaller than that: a mere 4 percentage with 61% of women and 57% of men voting for Trump. Thus, it can be deduced that Biden managed to narrow the gender gap among voters of all ethno-racial backgrounds, Hispanics included. The gender gap among Latinos, mirroring national trends, is more of a question of gender than of ethnoracial background, yet

“Latinos made up nearly 21% of male-dominated federal law enforcement agencies in 2016 such as Customs and Border Protection, which is almost 40% Latino, according to Justice Department data. Latino men are a growing share of local law enforcement agencies and the U.S. military, (...) which all lean Republican. And in recent years, more Hispanic women have graduated from college than men. (...) The gender gap tends to benefit Democrats as Hispanic women have voted in some recent elections at higher rates than men (Naishadham).

Jennifer Medina also enumerates a number of reasons for the appeal of Trump among men, Latinos included: “[t]o them, the macho allure of Mr. Trump is undeniable. He is forceful, wealthy and, most important, unapologetic. In a world where at any moment someone might be attacked for saying the wrong thing, he says the wrong thing all the time and does not bother with self-flagellation.”

As already established, religion also plays an important role in Hispanics’ partisanship, since Protestants tend to be more Republican than Catholic Latinos. According to a poll conducted before the 2020 election, Biden, a Catholic himself, had a convincing lead of 42 points among Catholics (67% vs 25%) and also was ahead, if not so significantly, among Protestants (52% vs 39%). Nevertheless, Trump had a marginal advantage over Biden with Evangelicals (46% vs 48%) (Molina). This can be ascribed to Trump’s overt efforts to win them over with campaign events at Evangelical churches, often hosted by his religious conservative Vice President, Mike Pence, who lauded Trump as “the most pro-life president in American history” at one of these rallies (Lush). Trump’s popularity among religious groups was also bolstered when he nominated conservative-leaning Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court, a devout Catholic and mother of seven children, weeks before election day (Holland et al.).

As Igielnik et al. also highlight, just like in the case of the national population, a wide education gap can be observed among Latino voters too, which reflects voting preferences in terms of income as well. President Trump performed substantially better among non-college educated voters in general than among college educated ones: 50% of non-college educated voters backed him as opposed to only 36% of voters with a college education in 2016, while in 2020, 53% of non-college educated voters and 37% of college educated people supported

him, meaning there was no essential change to his numbers. However, this education divide was even more salient among Latinos during the last election. “In 2020, Biden won college-educated Hispanic voters 69% to 30%. At the same time, Biden’s advantage over Trump among Hispanic voters who did not have a college degree was far narrower (55% to 41%).”

Geographical differences were also at play in the 2016 and 2020 elections, which manifested themselves in Latinos’ preferences too. In 2016, Democrats had a striking 46-percentage-point advantage among urban voters, while Republicans won over suburban and rural voters, if not with the same margins: they only had a lead of 2 points among suburban residents but beat Democrats by 25 points in rural areas. These proportions went under considerable alteration in 2020: Democrats’ strong advantage in urban centers melted away to only 33 points, in turn, Biden flipped suburbs and won them over by a difference of 11 points. Republicans, nonetheless, managed to increase their support among rural citizens by 7 points to 32 percentage points (Igielnik et al.).

Regarding the question of how Latino Biden and Trump supporters were distributed in the country precisely, it is quite a complex picture. As Thomson-DeVeaux et al. write, where Trump seemingly broadened his coalition was in rural areas or among more conservative Latino voters like Cuban Americans. In contrast, in suburban and urban areas it was mostly a bittersweet picture for Democrats: according to Equis Research’s analysis, in the majority Latino precincts of Maricopa County, Arizona, 79% of Hispanics voted for Clinton in 2016, while solely 76% of them opted for Biden in 2020. Moreover, Trump managed to increase the number of his votes by 64% in these Latino precincts, in contrast, the number of Hispanics voting for Biden only rose by 38% (“2020 Post-Mortem. Part One”). Despite Trump making headway among Arizona Latinos, it was still the narrowest shift nationwide. The reason might be that Arizona Latinos reported the highest level of contact by Democrats of all states, which is related to the fact that Latino activism had already been vigorous in the state before the election (“2020 Post-Mortem. Part Two”). Thus, Biden managed to flip the state in the end by an extremely narrow margin: 49.4% vs 49% (“2020 Presidential Election Results”).

In primarily rural areas, such as the Rio Grande Valley in Texas, which is almost homogenously Hispanic, Trump’s success was unquestionable. In those counties, 70% percent of people voted for Democrats in 2016, and only 58% in 2020 (“2020 Post-Mortem. Part One”). Voters in Starr County just by the border, for instance, shifted toward Republicans by a staggering 55 percentage points. Nevertheless, Democrats made up for losing rural areas in the densely populated urban centers of Texas, such as Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston, by improving “their margin by more than 5 percentage points between 2016 and 2020, carrying these areas 52 percent to 47 percent in November” (Samuels and Skelley).

In Florida, Trump held onto his previous support and also widened it. Compared to 2016, Democrats lost many voters independently of national origin: in the majority Cuban American precincts of Miami-Dade County, their support decreased by 14 points from 49% to 35%, in heavily non-Cuban precincts it dropped from 70% to 50%, and in Osceola County's mainly Puerto Rican precincts support declined by 11 points (76% vs 65%) ("2020 Post-Mortem. Part One").

All aspects considered, it is safe to claim that more Hispanics voted for Donald Trump's reelection bid in 2020 than in 2016, a growth of 10 points from 28% to 38% in the share of Latino voters. Thus, it seems apparent that a growth can be observed with certainty, since President Trump successfully harnessed the regional and sociopolitical diversity of Latinos as well as built on his preexisting support among Latinos in 2020. Nevertheless, certain data firms quarreled over how large President Trump's actual voter pool was in the Latino community.

5. COMPARATIVE DATABASE ANALYSIS

Over the course of this paper, despite the fact that mainly figures by the non-partisan, centrist Pew Research Center were presented, a number of other sources were also cited in order to gain an insight into the voting patterns and partisanship of Latinos from 2016 or sooner to 2020. Most of these sources tend to skew toward liberals, since so far mostly Democrats have been interested in the in-depth analysis of the Latino electorate. As already alluded to, there were cases when data turned out to be disputed, especially regarding Latinos' support of Donald Trump (Wheaton and Shepard). It was the liberal-leaning Latino Decisions that most ardently lambasted the exit polls released on election day in 2016, the findings of the exit poll, however, were more or less in alignment with what Pew Research Center and the progressive polling firm Catalist later reported.

According to Pew Research Center, 28% of Hispanics voted for Trump in 2016, which grew to 38% in 2020. The methodology of their poll is based on the answers of validated voters "weighted to be representative of the U.S. adult population by gender, race, ethnicity, partisan affiliation, education, and many other characteristics". To this end, their online survey included English or Spanish-language interviews "with 11,818 U.S. adults in November 2020, 10,640 adults in November 2018 and 4,183 adults in November and December 2016. Everyone who took part is a member of Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel (ATP)", the members of which have been recruited by their address since 2018, before that, invitation entailed randomly selecting landline and cellphone numbers. As the fact tank also points out, "[t]he 2020 report does not include a small number of estimates from the

2016 report (principally, for subgroups among Hispanic voters) because of a change in the Center’s standards for the minimum acceptable sample size for reporting”, that is why those are left blank in the data sheet at Appendix 9 as well (Igielnik et al.).

As per the data mentioned in this paper and provided by Equis Research, it is based on the analysis of densely populated (more than 50% Cuban or other Hispanic; in the case of Osceola County, more than 30% Puerto Rican) Latino precincts in Arizona, Florida, Nevada, and Wisconsin; in South Texas, county results are displayed as they are overwhelmingly Latino to begin with. Equis Research does not conduct nationally representative surveys, therefore they tend to rely on figures imparted by Catalist, which—as they declare—is “a progressive data utility that works with public interest organizations and Democratic campaigns”. Catalist estimates that in 2016 around 29% of Hispanics voted for Trump, while 37% did so four years later. These numbers only slightly differ from those by Pew Research Center, 28% and 38% respectively (Ghitza and Robinson). The Catalist database “includes 15 years of voter registration records, supplemented by large-scale polling, modeling and precinct-level geographic analysis”, meaning that they deconstruct the voter files and utilize large-scale machine learning models to identify demographics that are unknown, such as race, ethnicity, or education level. Catalist underlines that their datasets are neither surveys nor polls, instead, they “build the models in such a way that even if we can’t precisely identify all demographics at the individual level, our estimates are accurate at the aggregate population level” (Ghitza).

Another data firm whose figures are mentioned in previous chapters is Latino Decisions. “The American Election Eve Poll”, published by them, was the least generous to former President Trump: Latino Decisions estimated that in 2016 a mere 18%, and in 2020 27% of Hispanics opted for the Republican presidential candidate, around 10% less than other sources claim. In the 2016 Election Eve Poll, entailing live phone interviews and self-completed surveys online, 5,600 Latino voters participated “with state-specific results in 12 states, in addition to a 50-state weighted national result. Interviews were conducted in English or Spanish, from a random sample of Latino voters in the final days before the election. [...] Florida has 800 completed interviews [...]. The remaining individual states sampled—Arizona, California, Colorado, Illinois, New York, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Wisconsin, and Virginia—have 400 complete interviews” (“2016 Election Eve Poll”).

The 2020 exit poll, in which minority voters are overrepresented in the sampling and were given the choice to complete it in a variety of languages,¹ is the result of the partnership

¹ The optional languages were English, Spanish, Chinese Mandarin, Chinese Cantonese, Korean, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Hmong.

of Latino Decisions, Asian American Decisions, and the African American Research Collaborative, all of which have ties to Democratic campaigns. They carried out 15,200 interviews with Latino, Black, Asian American and Pacific Islander, American Indian, and White registered voters who already cast a ballot or were sure to do so. In total, they interviewed 5,300 Hispanic Americans, and followed almost the same distribution of state samples as four years earlier: Florida with 800 respondents, and the other 11 states with 400. This time around, however, they were present in Georgia, Michigan, and Pennsylvania instead of Illinois, New York, and Virginia (“The American Election Eve Poll”).

Another way to grasp Latinos’ partisanship in presidential elections is through exit polls. The most circulated one in 2016 was commissioned by a consortium of ABC News, The Associated Press, CBS News, CNN, Fox News, and NBC News, while data were collected by Edison Research. This “voter survey is based on questionnaires completed by 24,537 voters leaving 350 voting places throughout the United States on Election Day including 4,398 telephone interviews with early and absentee voters.” According to this poll, 29% of Latinos voted for Trump in 2016 (“Election 2016: Exit Polls”). Four years later, according to the exit poll once again ordered by the aforementioned media outlets and provided by Edison Research, Trump won around 32% of Hispanics, which only indicates a 3% increase, a more insignificant change than other datasets may suggest. In terms of the methodology of the 2020 exit poll, they are based on interviews with 15,590 voters, which was adjusted to match the actual vote count (“National Exit Polls”). For a comparison of all the datasets mentioned above, see Appendix 10.

In response to the difference between Latino Decisions’ figures and the National Exit Poll results, Latino Decisions’ affiliates argued that “[t]he exit poll reports of the Latino vote are profoundly and demonstrably incorrect,” claiming that due to its methodology, “this poll systematically misrepresents all voters of color and this can be demonstrated with actual precinct-level results and with their practices decade in the last.” They also underline that “the precise details of this year’s exit polls are not available to the public or press”, unlike those of the poll that they conducted. Their specific criticism includes the self-admitted failure of national exit polls to represent smaller fractions of society, such as Black or Asian Americans; their sample’s concentration in precincts with a scarce minority population as they tend to be uncontested; and their overrepresentation of minorities with higher income and education. As they remark: “[i]n the [2016] Exit Poll results, 44 percent of their non-white respondents have college degrees. The actual college graduate percent for all non-whites in the voting electorate is around 30 percent” (Segura and Barreto).

However, in spite of referring to other exit polls that also show a lower support for Trump among Hispanics, Gary Segura and Matt Barreto’s commentary turned out to be undermined by the numbers released by Pew Research Center as well as Catalist. In addition, their argument about Latino voters with no college education or less also stands on faltering ground since Igielnik et al. have shown that the education divide between Trump and non-Trump voters nationwide and among Latinos as well only became wider between 2016 and 2020. On the whole, despite the advantage of Latino Decisions’ poll in terms of sample size and language variety, it seems to be an outlier. What is more, their results also clearly show a spike in Trump’s share of the Hispanic vote.

All things considered, the one aggregate model as well as every poll, including the one by Latino Decisions, shows a confident rise in Donald Trump’s support among Latinos from 2016 to 2020, from an average of 26% to 33.5%, which amounts to a rise of 7.5 percentage points based on the average of the four sources under scrutiny (see Appendix 10). A figure that is accepted by all parties, researchers, and academics may never be produced, nevertheless, the numbers can most easily be translated with the words of Cadava: “[b]etween a quarter and a third of Latinos have voted Republican in almost every presidential election for the past half century” (“There’s No Such Thing”). In 2016, it was closer to a quarter of Latinos voting for the Republican candidate, which in 2020 moved in the direction of the third of the Latino vote. Even if the actual percentages are up for debate, the substantial growth in Trump’s Hispanic support from 2016 to 2020 is not. What remains to be unanswered is what messages by former President Trump managed to persuade so many Latinos.

6. BEHIND THE SWING TOWARD THE GOP

In the mainstream media, there has been a wide range of explanations as to why Latinos shifted so visibly to the right in 2020 – according to all pollsters, which was demonstrated in the previous chapter. In actuality, as already mentioned, a portion of Latinos’ support for Republican presidential candidates is not a novel phenomenon, as Republicans have won from a quarter to a third of the Latino vote in almost every election since Nixon in 1972, “even as the GOP tacked right on immigration and border enforcement” (Cadava, “How Trump Grew His Support”).

Cadava also discards arguments that describe Hispanics as “self-loathing” if they vote for Republicans. He opines that “Trump understood what motivated his Latino supporters—economic individualism, religious liberty, and law and order—and he made sure they knew he did” (“How Trump Grew His Support”). These issues turned out to be decisive in terms of

why many Latinos turned out to vote or changed their minds about Trump. During the campaign, he focused on his staunch opposition to defunding the police, which resonated well with the great number of Latinos working in law enforcement or those who emigrated from Latin American countries struggling with organized crime. He made clear his support for pro-life policies and appointed three conservative-leaning justices to the Supreme Court, which galvanized religious voters, including Latinos, especially Protestants.

He also opposed lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to protect small businesses. What is more, “the most common industry for Hispanic women is restaurants and other food services, followed by elementary and secondary schools, while the most common for Hispanic men is construction, followed by restaurants and other food services”, therefore it is no surprise that Latino workers were exceptionally affected by the uncertainty and lockdowns amid the pandemic (U.S. Senate Joint Economic Committee). Trump also boasted about the continuing trends that commenced during the Obama administration: the rising rates of homeownership, growing family incomes for Latinos, and the significantly low unemployment rates among Hispanics (Cadava, “How Trump Grew His Support”).

With Trump turning away his focus from immigration and anti-immigrant rhetoric, Equis Research argues that the reason behind Trump’s success might have been that a “barrier keeping some Latinos from voting for Trump” disappeared during the pandemic. “The debate over whether to prioritize the economy or public health in the middle of COVID—a debate that became, for some, about the value of hard work and the American Dream—created a permission structure for formerly hesitant Latinos to embrace Trump’s candidacy”, they hypothesize (“2020 Post-Mortem. Part Two”).

In addition to his targeted messaging, Trump might have attacked Democrats quite successfully. As Cadava explains, the scaremongering campaign painting all Democrats as socialists might have caused significant unease among Latino communities who fled socialist dictatorships across Latin America, in addition, socialism was a “shorthand for a range of ideas related to government overreach in healthcare, the economy, and education” (“How Trump Grew His Support”). Referring back to election results from precincts across Florida, this strategy seems to have functioned particularly well among Cuban, Venezuelan, and Nicaraguan Americans, as they might have personal experiences of their countries of origin or have family members there.

In contrast, Democrats lacked a consistent message toward Latinos, and their Latino outreach was regarded insufficient as well, even former New Mexico governor Bill Richardson said in May 2022 that the “Trump Hispanic effort is much more active” (Barrón-López and Schneider). Cadava also points out that Democrats did not start campaigning for

the Latino vote until before the convention and focused on Latinos during Hispanic Heritage Month. “Latino political strategists have long argued that a candidate can’t expect our support if he shows up only in the final months or weeks of a campaign” (“How Trump Grew His Support”).

Democratic efforts were especially scarce in South Florida as well as in the Rio Grande Valley. As per Equis Research evaluation, they basically let Republicans conduct one-sided communication in Spanish-language media on the salient issues: socialism concerns in Florida and border security in the Rio Grande Valley. They underscore that “while Trump didn’t directly campaign in the Rio Grande Valley or the border—he and his surrogates frequented it often as part of his ‘law and order’ pitch”. Additionally, Miami and the Rio Grande Valley served as frequent venues for pro-Trump demonstrations among Hispanics with the so-called “Trump caravans”, which rendered the “Latinos for Trump” campaign extremely visible (“2020 Post-Mortem. Part Two”).

Identity might have played a role as well. In the rural Rio Grande Valley region of Texas, 94 percent of Zapata County residents profess to be Hispanic/Latino, simultaneously 98 percent of the same population identifies as white. As Jack Herrera writes, “Hispanicness is almost beside the point to their daily lives” and most of them simply refer to themselves as Americans, which is in line with how more acculturated generations of Latinos tend to increasingly identify as Americans. In addition, lacking any immigration experience, Tejanos often say that “they did not cross the border, the border crossed them”. Chuck Rocha, a former aide to Bernie Sanders, who won most of the counties in South Texas in the Democratic presidential primary, argues that the votes of Tejanos are winnable if Democrats talk “about their issues, not just their identities. And Tejanos proved far more receptive to a pitch about a rigged economic system and health care than to generic appeals to their Hispanic heritage”, that is why Democrats need to realize the diversity of Latinos and not appeal to them as a monolithic bloc based on their heritage (Herrera).

Alfonso Aguilar, a former official in the Bush administration, considers that Democrats do not understand the motivations of Latino immigrants, who emigrate to the US “to find economic and religious freedom, and because they believe in America’s promise of equal opportunity and inclusion. They see themselves (...) not as members of a minority group but as individuals and families who left Latin America to look for something better in the United States” (qtd. in Cadava, “The Deep Origins”). In other words, they came to the US to achieve the American Dream through social mobility, hard work, and individual liberty; the opposite of which, according to Republicans’ framing, is socialism, something a number of

Latinos have personal experience with. Therefore, when Democrats focus on issues that paint the US in negative light, they indirectly undermine the attainability of the American Dream.

As Cadava suggests as well, Democrats “should engage Latinos across the country, beginning today, to understand how to better represent their preferences on issues including healthcare, education, the economy, and immigration. If Democrats hope to reverse the gains Republicans made this year, they should also pay attention to what about Trump drew Latinos in” (“How Trump Grew His Support”). Steve Phillips warns Democrats that “[d]emography is not destiny, and it’s clear that Republicans are actively trying to turn the tide in their favor” (170).

To reiterate, Trump’s elaborate and specific campaign strategy to engage Latinos seems to have borne fruit in the 2020 elections, even if he did not succeed in his reelection bid. The main factors contributing to his surge in votes was economic policy, appealing to traditional Hispanic values and the American Dream, which was complemented by attacks on Democrats’ allegedly socialist agenda and the unwillingness of Democrats to appreciate the concerns of the diverse and distinct subgroups of the Hispanic electorate. The Latino vote thus remains a ‘sleeping giant’, young in age, growing in size, and not yet awake, as only half of eligible Latinos voted in 2020.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper covered recent trends in the Latino vote in the United States in light of the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections. First, the Hispanic population of the US was under scrutiny, which has recently surpassed 60 million, amounting to around 20% of the US population. In contrast, approximately a mere 30 million Hispanics were eligible to vote in 2020 owing to their lack of citizenship or youth—as Latinos are the ethno-racial group with the youngest median age. With growing numbers comes an increasing political impact, however, Latinos’ political participation falls short of all the other ethno-racial groups, since about the half of eligible Latinos, 16.5 million voted in 2020. This underrepresentation might be due to their ‘guest complex’ and consequent alienation from the political process, their concentration in non-battleground states, their youth, and in some cases, Spanish dominance.

As detailed earlier, Hispanics’ political affiliation has consistently tilted toward Democrats recently; nevertheless, Republicans have been able to count on at least the quarter of Latinos’ support for decades. In 2016, in spite of his anti-immigration rhetoric, President Trump did not underperform among Hispanics due to the enduring support of mainly working class, Cuban American, native-born, and Protestant Latinos. He widened this coalition in

2020, during a presidential election that entailed record-high turnout nationally and among Latinos as well.

Despite rows about certain research methods, based on the average of liberal-leaning and centrist data firms, the Republican candidate grew his share of the Latino vote by 7.5 percentage points from 2016 to 2020. Trump gained support by abandoning his staunch anti-immigration rhetoric and prioritizing a neatly tailored campaign message for Hispanics—conveyed in Spanish as well—, which focused on the economy, law and order, social values, such as religiosity and opposition to abortion, as well as firm anti-socialism.

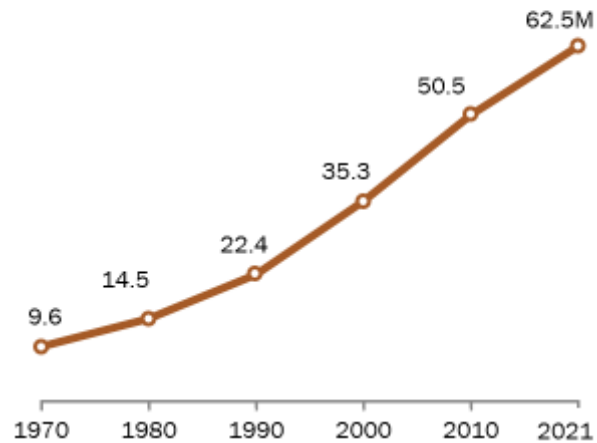
In the future, apart from monitoring further developments concerning Latinos' political attitude in presidential as well as congressional elections, another possible field of study might be whether incumbency affects Hispanics to a greater degree than the general population, as suggested by Abramowitz and Equis Research, since Latinos were more supportive of any incumbent president's reelection bid since Bill Clinton ("2020 Post-Mortem. Part Two").

APPENDIX

Appendix 1

U.S. Hispanic population reached more than 62 million in 2021

U.S. Hispanic population, in millions



Note: Population totals are as of April 1 for 1970-2010 and July 1 for 2021. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1970-1980 estimates based on decennial censuses (see 2008 report, "U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050"); additional analysis of 1990-2010 PL94-171 census data and the 2021 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Krogstad et al., "Key Facts")

Appendix 2

Hispanics made up more than half of total U.S. population growth from 2010 to 2021

U.S. population change by race and ethnicity, 2010-21

	2021 population	Change, 2010-21	Share of total increase
Hispanic	62,530,000	12,050,000	52%
Asian	18,890,000	4,420,000	19%
Black	39,270,000	1,580,000	7%
White	192,750,000	-4,060,000	<0%
Two or more races	14,300,000	8,330,000	36%
Total	331,890,000	23,150,000	

Note: White, Black and Asian individuals include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; individuals of two or more races include only those who are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Total includes all racial and ethnic groups; some not shown separately. Population figures rounded to nearest 10,000. Change and percent change computed from unrounded figures.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of PL94-171 census data for 2010 and additional data from the 2021 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau).

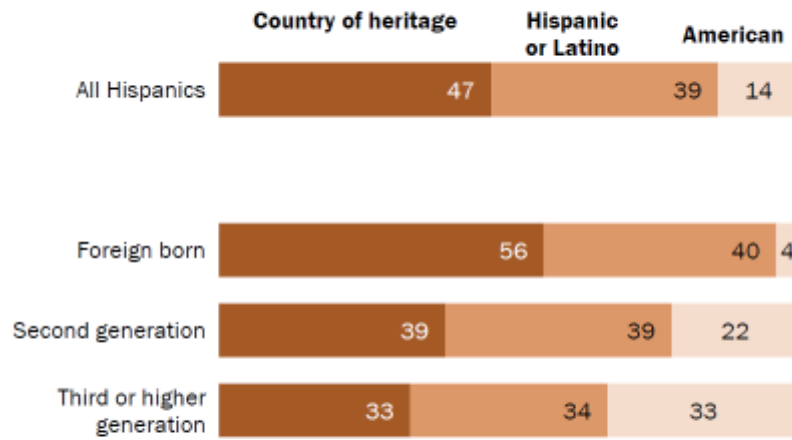
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Krogstad et al., “Key Facts”)

Appendix 3

The terms Latinos use to describe their identity differ across immigrant generations

% saying they most often use ___ to identify themselves



Note: Foreign born includes those born in Puerto Rico. Second generation refers to those born in the 50 states or District of Columbia to at least one foreign-born parent. Third generation refers to those born in the 50 states or D.C. to parents who are also U.S. born. No answer responses not shown.

Source: National Survey of Latinos conducted Dec. 3-23, 2019.

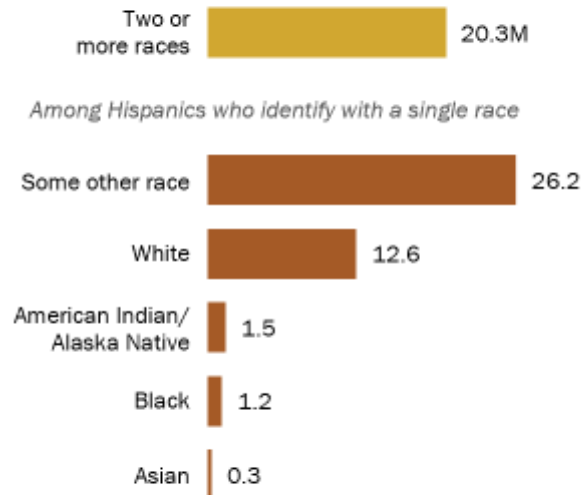
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Gonzalez-Barrera)

Appendix 4

Most Hispanics do not identify their race only as White, Black or Asian

Number of U.S. Hispanics who identify with a racial group in 2020 (in millions)



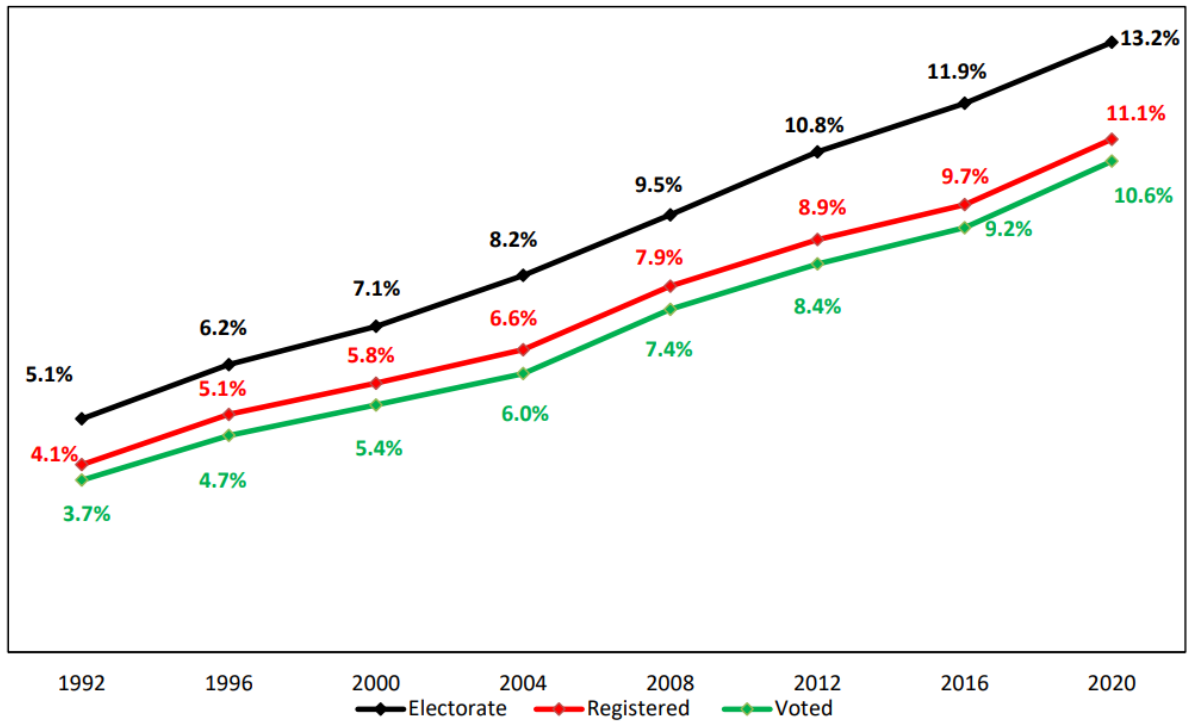
Note: "Some other race" refers to people who wrote in a response that did not fit within the race categories listed on the census. The group "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" is not shown.
Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of PL94-171 census data for 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Lopez et al.)

Appendix 5

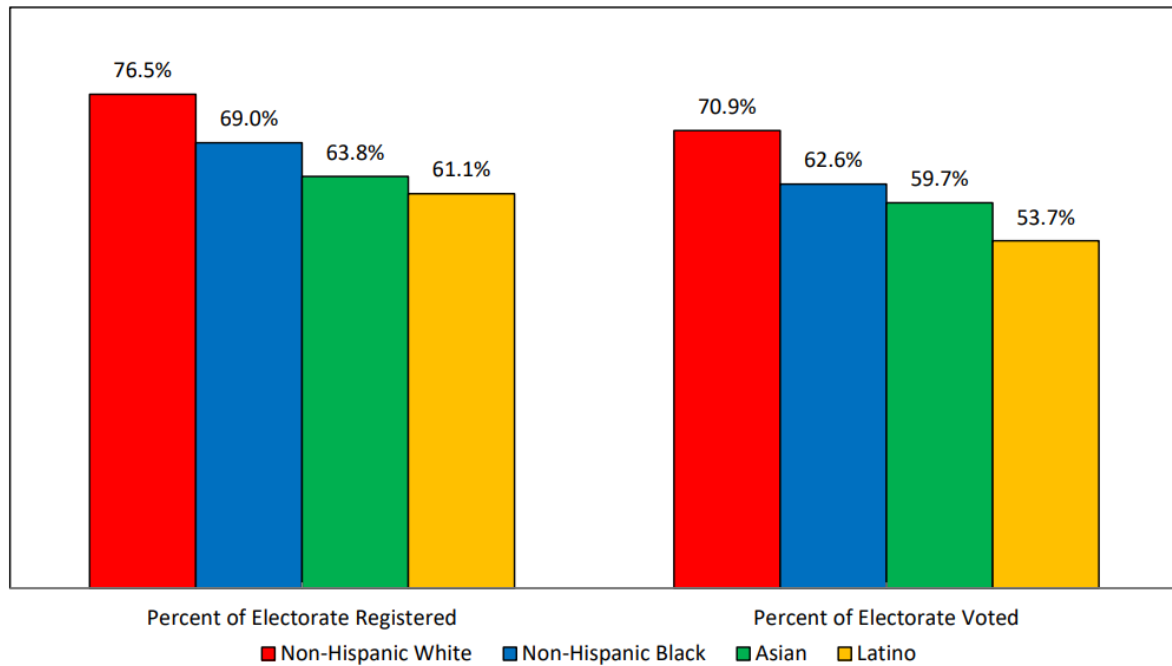
Latinos as a Percentage of the total U.S. Electorate, Registered Voters, and Voters
Presidential Elections, 1992 - 2020



(Bergad and Miranda 11)

Appendix 6

Percentage of Electorate Registered and Voted by Race/Ethnicity
Presidential Election, 2020



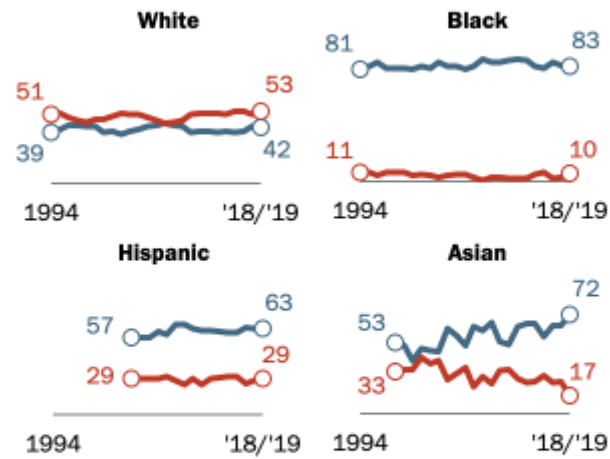
(Bergad and Miranda 15)

Appendix 7

All major racial and ethnic voter groups lean Democratic, except Whites

% of registered voters who identify as/lean toward ...

■ Rep/lean Rep. ■ Dem/lean Dem.



*Asian adults were interviewed in English only.

Note: Based on registered voters. Due to smaller sample sizes in 2018 and 2019, the data from those years has been combined. Respondents who didn't offer an answer not shown. White, Black and Asian adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race.

Source: Annual totals of Pew Research Center survey data (U.S. adults).

"The Changing Racial and Ethnic Composition of the U.S. Electorate"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

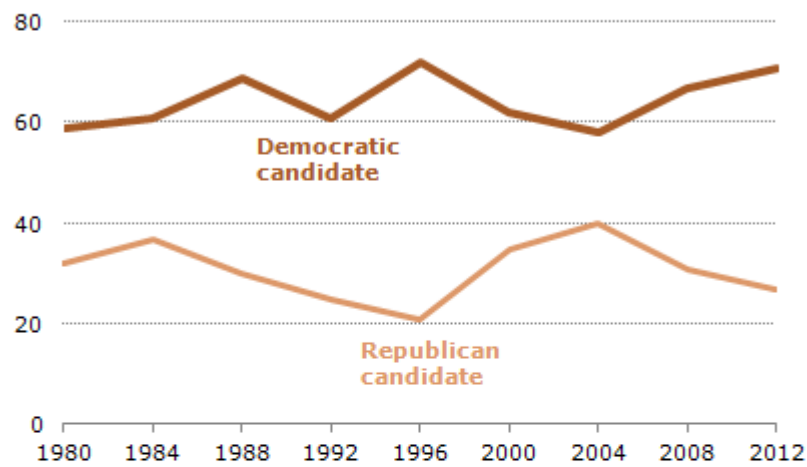
(Igielnik and Budiman)

Appendix 8

Figure 1

The Hispanic Vote in Presidential Elections, 1980-2012

(% of Hispanics who voted for the ...)



(winner is bolded)

Year	Democratic candidate	Republican candidate	Democratic advantage
1980	Jimmy Carter, 56%	Ronald Reagan, 35%	+21
1984	Walter Mondale, 61%	Ronald Reagan, 37%	+24
1988	Michael Dukakis, 69%	George H.W. Bush, 30%	+39
1992	Bill Clinton, 61%	George H.W. Bush, 25%	+36
1996	Bill Clinton, 72%	Bob Dole, 21%	+51
2000	Al Gore, 62%	George W. Bush, 35%	+27
2004	John Kerry, 58%	George W. Bush, 40%	+18
2008	Barack Obama, 67%	John McCain, 31%	+36
2012	Barack Obama, 71%	Mitt Romney, 27%	+44

Notes: Independent and other third party candidates not shown. In 1992, the independent candidate Ross Perot received 14% of the Hispanic vote. "Democratic advantage" calculated after rounding.

Source: Pew Hispanic Center analysis of national exit poll data, 1980-2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Lopez and Taylor)

Appendix 9

The gender gap narrowed among White voters

% of validated voters who reported voting for each candidate

	2016			2018			2020		
	Share voting for ... Clinton	Trump	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Share voting ... Dem.	Rep.	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)	Share voting for ... Biden	Trump	Margin (Dem.-Rep.)
Total	48%	46%	2	53%	44%	9	51%	47%	4
Men	41	52	11	50	48	2	48	50	2
Women	54	39	15	58	40	18	55	44	11
White, non-Hispanic	39	54	15	46	52	6	43	55	12
Black, non-Hispanic	91	6	85	92	6	86	92	8	84
Hispanic	66	28	38	72	25	47	59	38	21
Asian*				73	26	47	72	28	44
White men	32	62	30	43	55	12	40	57	17
White women	45	47	2	50	48	2	46	53	7
Black men				92	6	86	87	12	75
Black women				93	5	88	95	5	90
Hispanic men				69	27	42	57	40	17
Hispanic women				75	23	52	61	37	24

*Asian adults interviewed in English only.

Notes: Based on 3,014 (2016), 7,585 (2018) and 9,668 (2020) validated general election voters. Validated voters are those found to have voted in commercial voter files. Vote choice for all years is from a post-election survey. 2018 figures indicate vote for U.S. House candidate. See Methodology for details. White, Black and Asian adults include only those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic; Hispanics are of any race. Don't know responses not shown. There were insufficient sample sizes in 2016 to separately show Black and Hispanic men and women. There were insufficient sample sizes in 2016 to show responses among Asians.

Source: Surveys of U.S. adults conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 12, 2016, Nov. 7-16, 2018, and Nov. 12-17, 2020.

"Behind Biden's 2020 Victory"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

(Igielnik et al.)

Appendix 10

Percentage of Trump voters nationwide among Latinos in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections according to different sources					
	Pew Research Center	Catalist	Latino Decisions	National Exit Poll	Average
2016	28%	29%	18%	29%	26%
2020	38%	37%	27%	32%	33.5%
Change	+10	+8	+9	+3	+7.5

(Data compiled by the author)

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