

Key Factors Influencing the Hispanic Vote in the 2020 United States Election

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Abstract: The Hispanic vote in America has traditionally leaned more Democrat in the United States. Appealing to the Hispanic vote as a political tactic has been popular ever since Kennedy's "Viva Kennedy" campaign to reach out to Mexican Americans, which formed a large part of his victory. This trend will only continue as Hispanic-Americans are the fastest-growing demographic in America. This paper analyzes the influence of four factors on Hispanic voting in the United States to try and create hypotheses to predict on what considerations must be made when predicting the Hispanic vote.

1. Introduction

Considering Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's relative underperformance among Hispanics in the 2020 election, this paper also analyzes the conclusions made to predict policy decisions that may help regain favor for Biden in the upcoming 2024 election. Therefore, multiple factors must be considered with regards to the Hispanic vote that take into account the fact that the Hispanic population is not a monolith, with many diverse beliefs and values on a religious, social, and demographic front.

2. Literature Review

The Hispanic American vote is a complex one, with a variety of factors at play.

One of the most important factors for the Hispanic vote is the identification of domestic issues like immigration. The Democratic Party has traditionally been the defender of minority rights and a supporter of immigration, a major factor for many Hispanics since they themselves have had relatively close personal or family contact with such issues. Related topics include affirmative action, bilingual education, and the DREAM/DACA program. As well, Hispanic-Americans on average make less income per capita than the general US population, and so Democrat policies targeted towards poverty alleviation and more government involvement in the economy would play well towards Hispanic voters, although this is a trend that affects the population in general and not just specifically Hispanics. In fact, for some groups like Mexican-Americans, increased socioeconomic status correlates to Democratic, not Republican identity (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera, Krogstad, J.M., 2018).

That said, it is also important to consider that most Hispanic voters come from a Catholic background, which would make them socially conservative and therefore identify more with the

Republican platform. As well, many Hispanics either work in or have a family member who works in law enforcement or the military, two issues on which Republicans appear stronger than Democrats. One example of this was in 2004, when George Bush targeted the Republican platform more towards social issues and national security after 9/11 to draw more of the Hispanic vote. For Puerto Ricans, religion is a particularly important issue, though this is not important enough to draw their vote to a Republican-leaning point (Abrajano, Michael Alvarez, Nagler 2008).

A further influence on the Hispanic vote depends on what region Hispanic voters originate from. Voters from Mexico or Puerto Rico are more likely to be Democrats, while Cubans are more likely to be Republicans. Before the 1960s, Cuban-Americans also leaned Democrat much like their Hispanic-American peers, but after Castro came to power and brought communism to Cuba, many Cuban-Americans (especially new immigrants or political refugees) took a strong stance against communism and identified with the Republicans, who were seen as being “tougher” on communism in the world. For Cubans, this factor is actually the defining factor for the vote much of the time, being far more important than other variables (Uhlener, Garcia, 1998).

Finally, it is important to note that across all Hispanic groups, a longer length of time in which the family has been in the United States correlates to greater Democratic identity. This could be because they essentially experience the two most Democratic-defining factors for Hispanics - as they increasingly Anglicize into American culture, they gain increasing exposure to non-conservative and non-Catholic social and cultural ideas, but on the Hispanic aspect they still retain a great level of self-identification and even personal experience with immigration issues (Naumann, Benet-Martinez, Espinoza, 2017).

The current and prevailing literature suggests that we should expect Hispanics as a group to be, in general, socially conservative due to their Catholic background. However, Hispanics are also typically more economically liberal due to their average socioeconomic status being lower than the United States average.

3. Hypotheses

In terms of the 2020 election, several hypotheses could be formed to determine important voting factors among Hispanic-Americans. One factor could be with relation to Donald Trump’s hardline stance on immigration - a major part of his 2016 campaign centered around the need to “build a wall” on the US-Mexican border to stamp out illegal immigration and crime, which was a message that did not particularly resonate well with Hispanic Americans who saw it not only as a racist attack on Hispanics, but also as being generally anti-immigration. Trump maintained more or less the same policy platform on immigration in between 2016 and 2020 and delivered more or less on this plan, so voters knew what to expect with regards to Donald Trump’s immigration platform and the policy maintained its important status in determining vote share.

A second potential hypothesis relates to the major Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and events in the months leading up to the election. This movement simultaneously advocated for liberal views on race as well as policing, something which could have divided Hispanic opinion. As a racial minority, Hispanics tend to hold more liberal views on race, but since many Hispanics have relatives who work in the police and military forces, a message about defunding the police and/or that the military and police are inherently corrupt would not have been well-received. As well, Hispanic-Americans typically place higher value on institutions such as the police due to generally living in higher-crime areas. Therefore, Hispanics might have moved more Democrat on race issues, but Republican on policing issues.

A third hypothesis, albeit with less data, is that the crisis in Venezuela regarding socialistic policies with Nicolas Maduro (which escalated during Trump’s presidency) has had a quasi-Cuban effect on Venezuelan-American Hispanics which has propelled their vote towards the Republican party much

in the way that Castro turned Cubans towards Republicans. This hypothesis could explain the extreme disparity in the South Florida region, as it has an extensive Cuban and Venezuelan-American population, influencing an outsized Republican voting preference, which could help explain Biden’s underperformance in Florida as a whole.

4. Data/Methods/Measures

To collect the data for this literature review, the YouGov/Harvard CCES codebook database, 2020 version by the Cooperative Congressional Election Study of 2020 was used. To evaluate overall views of participants on cumulative issues such as immigration, policing, or race, multiple related question responses were combined to get a factor score for each category. Questions were isolated to only Hispanic respondents. After combining the scores for these questions, the scores were then allocated to the individual groups identified in the Results section to collect the processed data. The questions taken from the database for the data analysis can be found in the appendix.

5. Results

The following tables represent data collected from the 2020 CCES. All figures are given for Hispanic voters only. Qualitatively, the patterns shown here also hold in multivariate analyses.

Table 1: Immigration Policy Stance and Propensity to Vote for Trump in 2020

	Vote in 2016		
Immigration Stance	Clinton	Other/nonvoter	Trump
Conservative	0.136 (486)	0.545 (497)	0.921 (1022)
Liberal	0.019 (1625)	0.108 (640)	0.557 (88)

Cell entries give the probability of voting for Trump in 2020, with the number of observations in parentheses.

Of the individuals with conservative immigration views who voted for Trump in 2016, 92.0% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 54.5% of those who did not vote for either of the two major parties in 2016, and 13.6% of Clinton voters in 2016 with similar immigration views. For the individuals who had liberal views on immigration and who voted for Trump in 2016, 55.7% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 10.8% of those who did not vote for the Democrats or Republicans in 2016, and only 1.9% of those who voted for Clinton in 2016.

Table 2: Policing Policy Stance and Propensity to Vote for Trump in 2020

	Vote in 2016		
Policing Stance	Clinton	Other/nonvoter	Trump
Conservative	0.115 (563)	0.524 (489)	0.927 (915)
Liberal	0.021 (1548)	0.130 (648)	0.728 (195)

Cell entries give the probability of voting for Trump in 2020, with the number of observations in parentheses.

Of the individuals with conservative policing views who voted for Trump in 2016, 92.7% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 52.4% of those who did not vote for either of the two major parties in 2016, and 11.5% of Clinton voters in 2016 with similar policing views. For the individuals who had liberal views on policing and who voted for Trump in 2016, 72.8% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 13.0% of those who did not vote for the Democrats or Republicans in 2016, and only 2.1% of those who voted for Clinton in 2016.

Table 3: Views on Race Issues and Propensity to Vote for Trump in 2020

Views on Race Issues	Vote in 2016		
	Clinton	Other/nonvoter	Trump
Conservative	0.089 (921)	0.445 (703)	0.910 (1051)
Liberal	0.013 (1190)	0.062 (434)	0.576 (59)

Cell entries give the probability of voting for Trump in 2020, with the number of observations in parentheses.

Of the individuals with conservative racial views who voted for Trump in 2016, 91.0% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 57.6% of those who did not vote for either of the two major parties in 2016, and 8.9% of Clinton voters in 2016 with similar racial views. For the individuals who had liberal views on race and who voted for Trump in 2016, 57.6% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 6.2% of those who did not vote for the Democrats or Republicans in 2016, and only 1.3% of those who voted for Clinton in 2016.

Taken together, these three tables suggest, therefore, that immigration, policing, and racial views played important roles in the 2020 election, particularly for those who did not vote in 2016 (or third-party voters). In all three cases, the impact of the three variables on propensity to vote for a particular candidate was greater for Trump voters in 2016 than Clinton voters in 2016. Taken with the fact that a much larger number of Clinton supporters had conservative stances as compared to Trump supporters with corresponding liberal views, indicating that Clinton had a broader support base, the data suggest that these three issues are more relevant for Trump voters as compared to Clinton voters and impact Trump-intending voters to a greater extent.

Table 4: Cuban Origin and Propensity to Vote for Trump in 2020

Hispanic Origin	Vote in 2016		
	Clinton	Other/nonvoter	Trump
Cuban	0.090 (133)	0.403 (62)	0.920 (112)
Non-Cuban	0.043 (1959)	0.291 (1062)	0.888 (975)

Cell entries give the probability of voting for Trump in 2020, with the number of observations in parentheses.

Of the Cuban Hispanics who voted for Trump in 2016, 92.0% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 40.3% of those who did not vote for either of the two major parties in 2016, and 9.0% of Clinton voters in 2016 who were also of Cuban origin. For the non-Cuban Hispanics who voted for Trump in 2016, 88.8% voted for Trump again in 2020, compared to 29.1% of those who did not

vote for the Democrats or Republicans in 2016, and only 4.3% of those who voted for Clinton in 2016. Therefore, the data show that Cuban Hispanics were more pro-Trump in 2020 than in 2016 as compared to non-Cuban Hispanics.

6. Conclusion

We see that overall, with the Hispanic-American community in the United States, there are still long-term partisan forces at work such as continued trends of the importance of immigration, family ties to law and order, and Anglicization that impact the ways in which Hispanic-Americans vote. These forces have more or less remained constant over the years, with rare exceptions found in factors such as Cuban-Americans' sudden propensity to tilt Republican after Castro took power in Cuba in 1959, but no such shift change occurred in the years between 2016 to 2020.

Riding atop these long-term trends are temporary events that impact the vote with relation to these long-term forces. For example, between 2016 and 2020, a notable event was the increase in race and policing as factor issues for voters, and especially Hispanics, due to the escalation in the Black Lives Matter movement after the killing of George Floyd. Voters react to these temporary events in their relation to the aforementioned long-term factors; for example, Hispanics typically reacted in a pro-police manner in reaction to movements such as "Defund the Police" due to Hispanic's strong community ties to law enforcement. On the other hand, Hispanics also typically supported movements such as Black Lives Matter due to their own personal experiences as a racialized minority in the United States.

Overall, some factors are more impactful than others to different individuals. In other words, the overall salience of an issue depends on the person - different issues affect different people to different extents, relate to different people in different ways, and are related to their values in different ways. Similarly to how Hispanics are more reactive to policing issues due to heavy community involvement with law and order, Cuban and Venezuelan-Americans likely paid more attention to the goings-on of Nicolas Maduro's socialist government in Venezuelan more than the average Hispanic-American, and certainly more than the average American in general.

Undoubtedly, the 2020 presidential election was a highly influential and significant election, being compared to a sort of "referendum on Trump" by news agencies such as *The Washington Post*, *US News*, and *AP News*, citing factors such as record voter turnouts. This increased voter turnout meaning that those who neither voted for the Republicans nor the Democrats in 2016, either due to third-party voting, not voting or due to not being of voting age had an outsized impact on voting results. Typically, this would take the form of conservative people deciding that they like Trump's policies and that is the deciding factor for them to vote for Trump in 2020, and conversely that liberal people decide they do not like Trump's policies and therefore vote against Trump in 2020. While the impact of younger voters who were not eligible to vote in 2016 can be considered, the relatively small number of such voters precludes it from being a major impact on the election, although it is definitely a contributing factor.

Biden's underperformance in Florida was likely due to the influence of the sizeable Cuban and Venezuelan-American population in Florida. These communities likely tilted more Republican in 2020 due to recent events in Venezuela, which personally impacted Venezuelan Americans whereas Cuban-Americans could sympathize due to their own community's experiences with similar issues after Castro seized power in Cuba. Within the data we could see a confirmation of the hypothesis that Cuban Americans were more likely to vote Republican than other Hispanics. However, it should be noted that this may be subject to change now that the Castros are no longer in power. Further research can determine whether the Cuban American propensity to vote Republican was out of anti-Castro sentiment or if it has been generalized to anti-communist sentiment.

Overall, the 2020 United States Presidential Election revealed the continued diversity and complexity of the Hispanic vote, with immigration policy, policing policy, and racial policy standing out as critical factors in the development of their voting choice, with Hispanic views on immigration and race leaning more Democrat and Hispanic views on policing leaning more Republican. Looking forward to 2024, if the Democrats wish to increase their vote margin amongst the Hispanic-American community, they likely need to re-assert a more neutral stance on policing issues without compromising on their stances on race in order to best appeal to the Hispanic-American population who are simultaneously racialized as well as heavily linked to the policing and military establishments in the United States. As well, Biden should appear tougher on Venezuela and increase pressure to restore democracy in order to regain some degree of favour among Venezuelan and Cuban-Americans.

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Appendix

The following CCES questions were used to create the score on immigration policy views:

- **CC20_331grid:** What do you think the U.S. government should do about immigration? Do you support or oppose each of the following?
- **CC20_331a:** Grant legal status to all illegal immigrants who have held jobs and paid taxes for at least 3 years, and not been convicted of any felony crimes.
- **CC20_331b:** Increase the number of border patrols on the US-Mexican border.
- **CC20_331c:** Withhold federal funds from any local police department that does not report to the federal government anyone they identify as an illegal immigrant.

- **CC20_331d:** Reduce legal immigration by 50 percent over the next 10 years by eliminating the visa lottery and ending family-based migration.
- **CC20_331e:** Increase spending on border security by \$25 billion, including building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico.

The following CCES questions were used to create the score on policing policy views:

- **CC20_334grid:** Do you support or oppose each of the following proposals?
- **CC20_334a:** Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug offenders.
- **CC20_334b:** Require police officers to wear body cameras that record all of their activities while on duty.
- **CC20_334c:** Increase the number of police on the street by 10 percent, even if it means fewer funds for other public services.
- **CC20_334d:** Decrease the number of police on the street by 10 percent, and increase funding for other public services.
- **CC20_334e:** Ban the use of choke holds by police.
- **CC20_334f:** Create a national registry of police who have been investigated for or disciplined for misconduct.
- **CC20_334g:** End the Department of Defense program that sends surplus military weapons and equipment to police departments.
- **CC20_334h:** Allow individuals or their families to sue a police officer for damages if the officer is found to have “recklessly disregarded” the individual’s rights.

The following CCES questions were used to create the score on racial views:

- **CC20_440grid:** Do you agree or disagree on the following statements?
- **CC20_440a:** White people in the U.S. have certain advantages because of the color of their skin.
- **CC20_440b:** Racial problems in the U.S. are rare, isolated situations.
- **CC20_441grid:** How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree)
- **CC20_441a:** Irish, Italians, Jewish, and many other minorities overcame prejudice and worked their way up. Blacks should do the same without any special favors.
- **CC20_441b:** Generations of slavery and discrimination have created conditions that make it difficult for blacks to work their way out of the lower class.
- **CC20_441e¹:** I resent when Whites deny the existence of racial discrimination.
- **CC20_441f¹:** Whites get away with offenses that African Americans would never get away with.
- **CC20_441g¹:** Whites do not go to great lengths to understand the problems African Americans face.

1: Question only shown if the respondent did not answer “White” to the question, “What racial or ethnic group best describes you?”