

Anna BARTNIK 

Jagiellonian University

[anna.bartnik@uj.edu.pl](mailto:anna.bartnik@uj.edu.pl)

# DONALD TRUMP, THE ROLE OF THE LATINO ELECTORATE AND LATINO REPUBLICANS IN THE 2020 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

## LESSONS FOR THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Latino political participation is attracting growing attention due to the size of the population of Hispanic origin. Once portrayed as a sleeping giant, today they dispute such and other mistaken narratives. The article argues the popular belief that Hispanics are unlikely to support Republicans and seeks for determinants that shape Latino political support. The analysis offers an in-depth query into Donald Trump's anti-immigration policy that affected the Hispanic population living in the US, and explores the issue of Latino support for a Republican candidate in the 2020 and 2024 presidential elections. It also argues that Trump's hard stance on immigrants was not significant enough to convert Hispanic Republican voters to Democrats.

**Keywords:** presidential elections, Trump, Hispanics, Republicans, Latinos

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## INTRODUCTION

More than twenty years ago the 2000 Census confirmed Hispanics as the largest minority group in American society. Although their share in the overall population has been constantly increasing for the last half a century (mainly due to births, not immigration), it noticeably slowed down in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> In many public debates the opinion prevailed that President Trump's anti-immigration policy was the main reason for this decline. Under his administration, the face of American immigration law did change, and new rules made life in America harder than ever before for most of its foreign-born residents. Moreover, changes introduced by Trump's numerous executive orders impacted both temporary immigrants and legal residents of immigrant origin. Studies conducted among legal permanent residents reflected how deeply these changes influenced Latino attitudes on most of the important immigration issues.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence of growing fears of deportation, the Hispanic population prioritized finding a path to lawful residency for unauthorized immigrants already present in the US. According to a study published by the Pew Research Center in 2014, Hispanics ranked education (57%), jobs and economy (54%), and health care (50%) higher than immigration, which was thought the most significant issue by 34% of the respondents.<sup>4</sup> Their priorities changed noticeably during the last presidential campaign when 59% of Latino voters believed that immigration was a 'very important' issue in the 2020 election.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, additional research also confirmed that 83% of respondents of Hispanic origin thought that finding a way to let unauthorized immigrants stay in the country should be a 'very or somewhat important' goal of American immigration policy.<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Latino expectations, immigration was not even mentioned during the first presidential debate on 22 October 2020. At that time, the presidential race signaled two different scenarios that could be expected after the election. If Trump won reelection, he would keep introducing restrictive rules targeting

<sup>2</sup> E. Kamarck, Ch. Stenglein, "How Many Undocumented Immigrants Are in the United States and Who Are They?," *Brookings*, 12 November 2019, at <https://brook.gs/2GuST1k>, 2 October 2022.

<sup>3</sup> D.S. Meyer, S. Tarrow (eds), *The Resistance: The Dawn of the Anti-Trump Opposition Movement*, Oxford 2018, pp. 100-103; A.H. Callister, Q. Galbraith, S. Galbraith, "Immigration, Deportation, and Discrimination: Hispanic Political Opinion Since the Election of Donald Trump," *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2019), pp. 166-184; H.L. Walker, K.T. McCabe, Y. Matos, "Proximal Contact with Latino Immigrants and Immigration Attitudes," *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, vol. 10, no. 4 (2022), pp. 653-673.

<sup>4</sup> J.M. Krogstad, "Top Issue for Hispanics? Hint: It's Not Immigration," *Pew Research Center*, 2 June 2014, at <https://pewrsr.ch/3lfqawX>, 2 October 2022.

<sup>5</sup> J.M. Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, "Hispanic Voters Say Economy, Health Care and COVID-19 Are Top Issues in 2020 Presidential Election," *Pew Research Center*, 11 September 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/2M5kf1a>, 2 October 2022.

<sup>6</sup> A. Gonzalez-Barrera, J.M. Krogstad, L. Noe-Bustamante, "Path to Legal Status for the Unauthorized Is Top Immigration Policy Goal for Hispanics in U.S.," *Pew Research Center*, 11 February 2021, at <https://pewrsr.ch/3cKFnD3>, 2 October 2022.

immigrants and aggravating enforcement. If Joe Biden won, he would be challenged by Hispanic's expectations to withdraw his predecessor's decisions. This assumption was based on Biden's declaration during an NBC News interview that he (...) *will send an immigration bill to Congress on day one of his presidency to provide a roadmap to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants (...)*.<sup>7</sup> Today, we already know he has not succeeded in keeping his promise.

Even leaving aside polls and numbers, it is impossible to deny the Latino impact on American culture and lifestyle. However, every four years when the presidential campaign comes closer to election day, special attention is paid predominantly to Hispanics' voting power. For years, activists in public debates have tended to emphasize the group's hidden political potential.<sup>8</sup> On the one hand, the US Census data shows that the Latino population residing in the USA is steadily increasing. On the other hand, despite the growth in the number of Latinos eligible to cast their ballots, the group's voting power is not as significant as it potentially could be.<sup>9</sup>

The article discusses the role of Hispanics in the presidential election of 2020 and whether Hispanic voters should be considered a significant voting power, if decreasing support for Trump's re-election should be obvious, especially after a series of presidential insults toward Latin Americans, and finally, if Trump's stance on immigration became an important determinant shaping political support among Hispanics, and to what extent can Republicans be sure of Hispanic political support. The study is expected to contribute to the understanding of partisan support and the level of political engagement among Hispanic voters in the 2020 presidential election. For this reason, the article provides an analysis of data with special attention paid to factors that are believed to significantly influence Latino electoral power. US Census data was cross-compared with the findings of the Pew Research Center or Brookings Institution and contrasted with Hispanic/Latino activists' opinions. The argument that the findings presented in many reports may undercount the Latino population due to respondents' language barrier, poverty, or immigration status which could stop them from cooperating with the Census Bureau, has also been taken into account. Understanding Latino voting behavior may be a key issue before the 2024 presidential election as some advocacy groups predict that the Latino vote could prove more crucial than in 2020.<sup>10</sup> They also signal that Latino voters represent swing votes and both parties need to engage strongly to win their votes.

<sup>7</sup> "Joe Biden Outlines Immigration Plan for First 100 Days in Office," *YouTube*, 27 June 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3iFOWFG>, 2 October 2022.

<sup>8</sup> M. Rodríguez-Muñiz, *Figures of the Future: Latino Civil Rights and the Politics of Demographic Change*, Princeton 2021, p. 308; B. Francis-Fallon, *The Rise of the Latino Vote: A History*, Cambridge 2019, p. 505.

<sup>9</sup> L.J. Walker, F.E. Brooks, R.B. Goings, *How the Obama Presidency Changed the Political Landscape*, London 2017, p. 317.

<sup>10</sup> The article was sent to the editor in summer of 2024 and therefore does not refer fully to presidential election of 2024. However, it was updated in the first week after Donald Trump's election despite very limited available data at that time.

What particularly stands out in public discourse is a prevalent assumption connecting the Hispanic population living in the USA with a liberal wing of the American political system.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Latino support for Trump in presidential elections, which was more widespread than expected (28% in 2016 and 32% in 2020), surprised public opinion.<sup>12</sup> The article challenges this popular but misleading narrative. For years, studies on the political preferences of Spanish-speaking people have assumed that Latin Americans are a monolithic group – large, united, and difficult to change. The long-debated metaphor of a ‘sleeping giant’ portraying the group as politically disengaged and not paying attention to politics collapsed. Hispanics do not vote *en block* as believed but still do not feel that their voice matters. The group is diverse and represents various interests that significantly influence its members’ political choices.

In addition, the analysis of the group’s voting behavior shows that there has been stable support for Republicans since the late 1970s. It is argued that Latinos’ positive attitudes toward Republicans are based more on the political agenda and election promises than identity or religion.<sup>13</sup> Despite Latino activists’ expectations, Hispanic constituents still do not represent a significant electoral power for politicians, they did not become Trump’s ‘Holy Grail’, but they should not be categorized in the rigid frames of partisanship. Many determinants shape Latino political support. Simply labeling the group as Democrats neglects one-third of that population. Geraldo L. Cadava noticed the two strains of conservatism that have been present in American politics – *represented by Trump and Rubio, with Cruz somewhere in the middle* and predicted it may *threaten to tear the Republican Party apart*.<sup>14</sup> Increasing support for Trump was a sign of the growing influence of the xenophobic and radical wing of the Republican Party and the marginalization of a conservative one. The narrative of the article goes beyond the strict analysis of data on the level of conservatism among Hispanic Republicans. It focuses on answering the question (paraphrasing the Democratic Senate majority leader Harry Reid): How could anyone of Hispanic heritage be a Republican, especially in the time of Trump?<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> S.J. Zentner, M.C. LeMay, *Party and Nation: Immigration and Regime Politics in American History*, Lanham 2019, p. 331; J. Sides, M. Tesler, L. Vavreck, *Identity Crisis: The 2016 Presidential Campaign and the Battle for the Meaning of America*, Princeton 2019, p. 360.

<sup>12</sup> M.P. Fiorina, *Unstable Majorities: Polarization, Party Sorting, and Political Stalemate*, Stanford 2017, p. 190; G.S. Mahler, *Foreign Perceptions of the United States under Donald Trump*, Lanham 2021, p. 321; G. Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, from Nixon to Trump*, London 2020, p. 466.

<sup>13</sup> D. Garza, “Policies, Not Personality: The Defining Characteristic of the 2020 Latino Vote,” *Harvard Journal of Hispanic Policy*, vol. 33 (2021), pp. 16-26; A.C. d’Appollonia, *Migrant Mobilization and Securitization in the US and Europe: How Does It Feel to Be a Threat?*, New York 2015, p. 205.

<sup>14</sup> G. Cadava, “Hispanic Conservatism: Its Rise—and Fall?: Latinxs Have Played a Central Role in Modern U.S. Conservative Politics: But Does Donald Trump’s Racist Vitriol Spell an End to Hispanic Conservatism?,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. 48, no. 4 (2016), pp. 385-393.

<sup>15</sup> S. D’Aprile, “Reid: I Don’t Know How Any Hispanic Voter Could Be a Republican,” *The Hill*, 11 August 2010, at <https://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/senate-races/168716-reid-i-dont-know-how-any-hispanic-voter-could-be-a-republican/>, 11 January 2024.

Given these points, the article analyzes whether Latino voters are more likely to support Democrats and what the role of Hispanic Republicans in the electoral process is. It is worth noting that during the 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, special attention has been paid to Latinos supporting Trump. Despite popular beliefs, Hispanic Republicans have been a part of the Hispanic community for a long time. The history of Latino political choices shows that support for the Republican party diminished after 1930 but increased in the early 1970s. Although their number was neither impressive nor significant at that time, Geraldo Cadava argues that *ever since Nixon's reelection in 1972, Hispanic Republicans have helped Republican presidential candidates win about a third of the Hispanic vote*.<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, the Hispanic support for Trump should not be surprising. The paradox was that Trump's presidential campaign was full of disdain and false accusations against Latino (predominantly Mexican) immigrants. His outspoken character challenged public opinion and made it seem that it is unlikely that any Latino voter would ever support him. The article seeks an explanation for Trump's Latino support. Through an analysis of Hispanic attitudes toward immigration, economy, education, or religion, it is possible to distinguish priority issues that shape their political choices. Since many dual-identity Latinos who are eligible to vote are more interested in their well-being (having a good job, education for their children or safe neighborhoods) than immigration, it is argued that Trump's hard stance on immigrants is not significant enough to convert Hispanic Republican voters to Democrats.

Lastly, the work argues that Latinos' political support for Trump was not based on his immigration policy, but mostly on economic or security issues. The constituencies of Hispanic origin did not forget about their immigrant heritage but favored financial stabilization, education, and security. Although many Latino Trump supporters did not like Trump as a candidate, they supported him as the representative of the party they identify with. Their fear that Biden would raise taxes and favor the so-called elite played a significant role in making the final decision on the ballot. An analysis of Hispanics' voting behavior presented in the article concludes that Latino political choices are based on multiple factors, and not only is the hospitality of the party significant, but also a notion of belonging or the lack of trust in government built on experiences in the country of origin. These assumptions led to the final thesis that Hispanics would not become Trump's 'Holy Grail' but also would not leave the Republican Party in large numbers. As Geraldo Cadava notes *We are talking about a partisan identity that has been developed over a long period of time*.<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly, Trump seems to try his best to win even more Latino voters' support in the elections of 2024 than he received in his re-election bid. In July 2023, he decided to give some interviews and visited a local restaurant in Miami. Although he has not won the Republican party nomination yet, choosing Florida was not an accidental decision but rather a planned strategy. In this state he won half the Hispanic vote in 2020.

<sup>16</sup> G. Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican...*

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Additionally, the 2022 midterm election showed that Democrats did not win back the Latino support they had lost before. The most recent polls show that Hispanics share similar views to Republicans in many areas. However, despite the lack of enthusiasm for the left-wing values of the Democratic Party they continue to more likely identify with Democrats rather than Republicans.<sup>18</sup> The article discusses current changes in Latino voters' attitudes and analyzes if it is plausible that a Republican candidate could win the Latino vote in 2024.

The introductory comments require also an explanation of the method of use of ethnic labels. Finding politically correct names for the people of Latin American origin living in the USA today is an issue again, due to the emergence of the word 'Latinx'<sup>19</sup>. Because the issue of Hispanic identity has already been debated both in public and academic discourses it is not widely commented on in the article.<sup>20</sup> The media, academics, or think tanks favor accepting both terms ('Hispanics' and 'Latinos') and using them interchangeably. The Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan think tank known worldwide for its polling, social science research, and investigating attitudes on many issues, uses the most common approach, defining Hispanics as *Anyone who says they are. And nobody who says they aren't*.<sup>21</sup> However, even among Pew researchers who use 'Hispanic' and 'Latino' as synonyms, there are voices that criticize the approach that equates these two words.<sup>22</sup> They argue that neither of these terms fully describes the people we are attempting to define. Although the Census Bureau introduced and popularized the combined form 'Hispanic / Latino', it has not solved the problem of pan-ethnic labels, especially when the self-identification of particular groups tends to lean toward using labels that recall their ethnic origin. According to Pew Research Center data, even Hispanics/Latinos themselves do not share the same opinion on these terms. 61% said they preferred 'Hispanic', followed by 29% who chose the term 'Latino'.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, a critical analysis of the literature shows that among the different names used to describe Latin Americans, 'Hispanics' and 'Latinos' are the most common terms. Furthermore, both in public debates and among researchers, there have been no strict rules to follow on

<sup>18</sup> R. Teixeira, "The Evidence Mounts: Hispanic Voters Are Drifting Toward the GOP," *Washington Post*, 5 July 2023, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/05/hispanic-voters-gop-biden/>, 17 July 2023.

<sup>19</sup> "Latinx" has emerged as a potential pan-ethnic, non-stigmatizing and non-discriminating, generic label encompassing this diverse population living in the USA.

<sup>20</sup> D. Arreola, *Hispanic Spaces, Latino Places: Community and Cultural Diversity in Contemporary America*, Austin 2004; L. García Bedolla, *Latino Politics*, Hoboken 2015; S. Oboler, *Ethnic Labels, Latino Lives: Identity and the Politics of (Re)Presentation in the United States*, Minneapolis–London 1995; R.A. Gutiérrez, T. Almaguer, *The New Latino Studies Reader: A Twenty-First-Century Perspective*, Oakland 2016; I. Stavans (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Latino Studies*, Oxford 2020.

<sup>21</sup> M.H. Lopez, J.M. Krogstad, J.S. Passel, "Who Is Hispanic?," *Pew Research Center*, 15 September 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/2GGkY6B>, 12 June 2023.

<sup>22</sup> D. Cohn, "Hispanic? Latino? Or...?," *Pew Research Center*, 4 April 2012, at <https://pewrsr.ch/2FciegV>, 12 June 2023.

<sup>23</sup> L. Noe-Bustamante, L. Mora, M.H. Lopez, "Views on Latinx as a Pan-Ethnic Term for U.S. Hispanics," *Pew Research Center*, 11 August 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/2SSLZ9e>, 12 June 2023.

whether to use 'Hispanics' or 'Latinos'. Considering these facts, the author of the article decided to follow the US Census, which lists them both and uses them interchangeably.

## HISPANICS' VOTE BACKGROUND

Data on public opinion on Hispanics living in the USA reveal a stereotypical image of the group. Popular beliefs, most often misleadingly, describe them as favoring Democrats (Cuban Americans are very often perceived as a group with a strong commitment to the Republican Party. However, according to Luis DeSipio, on domestic issues, they tend to be moderate and ready to cooperate with Democrats to ensure, for example, funding for social service programs) and consider immigration issues the most important in public policy.<sup>24</sup> Even though Hispanics continue to choose the Democratic Party most often, their voting preferences show a wide margin of support for Republican candidates. Cornell University's Roper Center for Public Opinion Research compared and summarized data from 2000 to the 2016 presidential elections. According to its findings, in the 2000 presidential election, 35% of Latinos voted for a Republican candidate. In 2004, almost half the voters (44%) who declared themselves Hispanic supported Republicans, while in each subsequent presidential election until 2016, the level of their support froze to what was believed typical for Latinos: 31% in 2008, 27% in 2012, and 28% in 2016.<sup>25</sup> Because for more than 30 years their support for Democratic candidates had never dropped below 60%, the 2004 increase in favor of Bush was widely commented on.<sup>26</sup> Many theories attributed this fact to the issues raised by the candidates during the campaign. Concerns such as same-sex marriages or abortion became pivotal in the support of Hispanics, who were traditionally religious. Similarly, the national security issue played an important role, mainly because the 9/11 tragedy was still a vivid memory in American minds. In these areas, Bush was able to attract Hispanic voters by drawing more attention and emphasizing issues important for Latinos at that time. However, it should be noted that matters like abortion alone would probably not convert a Hispanic Democrat into a Republican. Especially since 61% of Hispanics today say that abortion should be legal, and this is up from about 55% 10 years ago.<sup>27</sup> An accurate evaluation of Hispanic voting power can only be made if their attitudes toward basic social and political issues are considered during actual elections. In between elections, analysts tend to focus their efforts on predicting voter turnout or partisan preferences, and, as Abrajano et al. have pointed out, *rather surprisingly*,

<sup>24</sup> L. DeSipio, "Latino Civic and Political Participation", in M. Tienda, M. Faith (eds), *Hispanics and the Future of America*, Washington, D.C. 2006, p. 447.

<sup>25</sup> A. Khalid, "Latinos Will Never Vote for a Republican, and Other Myths about Hispanics from 2016," *NPR*, 22 December 2016, at <https://n.pr/2F6YAST>, 12 June 2023.

<sup>26</sup> J.P. Schmal, "Electing the President: The Latino Electorate (1960-2000)," *La Prensa*, 30 April 2004, at <https://bit.ly/3mp0azG>, 12 June 2023.

<sup>27</sup> "U.S. 2022 Midterm Elections: Latino Voters," *U.S. Department of State*, 15 July 2022, at <https://www.state.gov/briefings-foreign-press-centers/midterm-elections-latino-voters/>, 24 July 2023.

little research has examined another critical factor: what influences the way Hispanics cast their ballots in Presidential elections.<sup>28</sup> Barreto et al. argue that Latino political influence should be measured as a function of three factors: group size, electoral patterns, and mobilization.<sup>29</sup> The 2008 presidential election results showed that despite media speculation predicting the ‘awakening of the sleeping giant’, the general turnout of Hispanic voters was not as significant as predicted, although it did influence the outcome of the election in key states.<sup>30</sup> Obama’s biggest breakthrough came in Florida, where he won 57% of the Latino vote in a state where Latinos have historically supported Republican presidential candidates.<sup>31</sup> Barack Obama did not make immigration a core issue of his campaign, but he stressed it strongly enough to be criticized after leaving the office for not keeping his promise of comprehensive immigration reform and deporting a record number of immigrants. It is believed that, despite Obama’s deportation policy, his solid political support among Hispanic voters (67% in 2008 and 71% in 2012) enabled his reelection.<sup>32</sup> The Latino attitude toward the Democratic president was partially based on his immigration policy. Although he was unable to achieve a comprehensive immigration reform, Obama announced Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in 2012 and established legal grounds for temporary conditional residency for about 800,000 young foreigners, commonly called Dreamers<sup>33</sup>. They are immigrants who were brought illegally to the USA as minors, were raised and educated in mainstream American society but cannot fully participate in it due to their unauthorized stay.

Analyzing Hispanic political and social attitudes revealed by polls leads one to a basic question: if immigration in general did not play a pivotal role in shaping political support among Hispanic voters, what did? According to polls, among the issues that mattered most and made Latinos favor Barack Obama in the presidential race of 2008, 57% reported the economy/jobs as their top priority, 8.9% chose the Iraq War and abortion was important for 6.9%. Only 1.6% of the respondents declared immigration as their most significant choice.<sup>34</sup> Hispanics’ priorities were comparable to those of the mainstream American society and reflected fears related to the growing nationwide

<sup>28</sup> M.A. Abrajano, R.M. Alvarez, J. Nagler, “The Hispanic Vote in the 2004 Presidential Election: Insecurity and Moral Concerns,” *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 70, no. 2 (2008), pp. 368-382.

<sup>29</sup> M.A. Barreto, L. Collingwood, S. Manzano, “A New Measure of Group Influence in Presidential Elections: Assessing Latino Influence in 2008,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 63, no. 4 (2010), pp. 908-921.

<sup>30</sup> M. Rodríguez-Muñiz, *Figures of the Future...*, p. 308; B. Francis-Fallon, *The Rise of the Latino Vote...*, p. 505; J. Sides, M. Tesler, L. Vavreck, *Identity Crisis...*, p. 360.

<sup>31</sup> “The Hispanic Vote in the 2008 Election,” *Pew Research Center*, 5 November 2008, at <https://pewrsr.ch/31P0Vdc>, 16 June 2023.

<sup>32</sup> L.J. Walker, F.E. Brooks, R.B. Goings, *How the Obama...*, p. 371.

<sup>33</sup> The name „dreamers” comes from the DREAM act = The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, a legislative proposal that was first (unsuccessfully) introduced in Congress in 2001.

<sup>34</sup> A. Gonzalez, S. Ochoa, “The Latino Vote in 2008: Trends and Characteristics,” *William C. Velasquez Institute*, October 2008, at <https://bit.ly/3jvzGdO>, 16 June 2023; Ch. Garcia, G. Sanchez, *Hispanics and the U.S. Political System: Moving into the Mainstream*, New York 2015, p. 372.



economic crisis, as well as the deteriorating financial status of Latinos in the USA. Such polls are sensitive barometers of social attitudes and show the impact of everyday events on groups' political choices. Furthermore, they reflect the changes that accompany its development and transformation. Today, the profile of the Hispanic minority group differs significantly from that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For a growing share of the second and third immigrant generation in the overall Hispanic-American population, immigration is no longer a top priority issue, despite the fact that immigration has traditionally heated emotions in campaign debates. Therefore, an analysis of Hispanic influence on elections and candidate performance in presidential races should distinguish attitudes presented by the overall population of Hispanics living in the United States and those eligible to vote. Becoming a permanent legal resident of the USA appeared to be a watershed in changing immigrants' priorities. Gallup and Pew Research Center polls have confirmed that the main issues for registered Latino voters were similar to those of other American citizens.<sup>35</sup> Despite a widely-held belief that Democrats tend to be more attentive to immigration issues, in the 2016 presidential election, immigration played a significant role mostly among Republican voters. 68% of those who believed that immigration was the most important issue for the country chose Trump. His hardline policy toward foreigners attracted voters mainly in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maryland, and Pennsylvania.<sup>36</sup> In contrast, data shows that Hispanic voters' evaluation of Trump's immigration policy agenda made them more likely to support Hilary Clinton. Only 22% of them believed that the Republican candidate would do a better job of dealing with immigration. Trump gained Hispanic votes mainly by proposing to improve economic conditions, defend the country from future terrorist attacks, and reduce the influence of interest groups.<sup>37</sup>

According to most surveys, even during the turbulent period in immigration policy introduced by Trump after 2017, the economy, health care, Supreme Court appointments, coronavirus outbreak and crime issues still ranked higher in importance for American voters than immigration.<sup>38</sup> However, in the midterm elections of 2018, 78% of eligible voters considered the immigration problem a significant factor in shaping their decisions.<sup>39</sup> President Trump's decision to rescind DACA and separate migrant children from their relatives at the border triggered political (e.g., government

<sup>35</sup> L. Saad, "Hispanic Voters Put Other Issues before Immigration," *Gallup*, 25 June 2012, at <https://bit.ly/35G0gvP>, 20 June 2023; J.M., Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, "Latino Voters Have Growing Confidence in Biden on Key Issues, While Confidence in Trump Remains Low," *Pew Research Center*, 16 October 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/2N8Sjd2>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>36</sup> "2016 Election Results: Exit Polls," *CNN Politics*, 23 November 2016, at <https://cnn.it/3mp4gYJ>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>37</sup> "Hispanic Voters and the 2016 Election," *Pew Research Center*, 7 July 2016, at <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2016/07/07/6-hispanic-voters-and-the-2016-election/>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>38</sup> "Important Issues in the 2020 Election," *Pew Research Center*, 13 August 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/34vwxGE>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>39</sup> F. Newport, "Top Issues for Voters: Healthcare, Economy, Immigration," *Gallup*, 2 November 2018, at <https://bit.ly/2TqzTEA>, 20 June 2023.

shutdown) and social consequences. Therefore, among other immigration-related issues, the protection of Dreamers and keeping families together mobilized Americans at the ballot box. Analysts noted that voter turnout in the 2018 midterm elections was more similar to a typical presidential election than the standard midterm, accounting for 49% of the overall population and 27% of Hispanics.<sup>40</sup> In addition, approximately a quarter of Hispanics who cast their ballots in 2018 reported that it was their first time voting in midterm elections, with a majority of them under 30 years of age. By observing the political engagement of many DACA recipients during the campaign, such as organizing marches, knocking on doors to agitate against Trump's decision and making hundreds of phone calls convincing American constituents to support the Democratic candidate, one concludes that they were partly responsible for this particular success. However, analysis of data of political engagement among young American voters shows that despite their growing share of the voting age population, young citizens usually don't vote. In the 2016 presidential election, 45% of eligible voters aged 18-24 did not even register as voters.<sup>41</sup>

## HISPANIC VOTERS' PARTICIPATION

When Donald Trump entered the 2016 presidential race, it seemed impossible to many that he could ever win. Furthermore, as a result of his anti-immigration rhetoric and publicly shared negative opinions on Latinos, it was assumed that Hispanics would not vote for him. The president of the Puerto Rican Bar Association, Anthony Suarez, commented after Trump's victory: *I thought that the rhetoric coming out of Donald Trump was so toxic, that it would eventually turn off the Hispanic community as Barry Goldwater turned off the African-American community.*<sup>42</sup>

Historical data for the American presidential elections of the 21<sup>st</sup> century showed that both the number of Hispanics registered to vote nationally and the turnout of Latino voters has steadily increased, although this growth was less than expected by Hispanic activists. Between 2000 and 2004, the Hispanic share in the overall population changed from 12.8% to 14.3%, with the number of Latino eligible voters increasing from 13.2 million to 16.1 million. However, at the beginning of the new century only 5.9 million voted, accounting for 44.1%, while four years later the number had increased to 7.6 million, equal to 47.2%. Data collected during the next two presidential campaigns showed that there were 19.5 million Hispanic eligible voters in 2008

<sup>40</sup> W.A. Galston, C. Hendrickson, "The Democrats' Choice: The Midterm Elections and the Road to 2020," *Brookings*, 30 January 2019, at <https://brook.gs/37oLvOR>, 20 June 2023; J.M. Krogstad, A. Flores, M.H. Lopez, "Key Takeaways about Latino Voters in the 2018 Midterm Elections," *Pew Research Center*, 9 November 2018, at <https://pewrsr.ch/33x7thG>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>41</sup> J.C. Chavez, "Hispanic 'Dreamers' Are Leading the Campaign to Get Young People to the Polls," *Tampa Bay Times*, 19 March 2019, at <https://www.tampabay.com/news/hillsborough/2020/03/19/hispanic-dreamers-are-leading-the-campaign-to-get-young-people-to-the-polls/>, 20 June 2023.

<sup>42</sup> A. Khalid, "Latinos Will Never Vote..."

and 23.3 million in 2012, though only about half of them decided to cast their ballots, 9.7 million (49.9%) and 11.2 million (48%) respectively.<sup>43</sup> The share in the American population reached 16.7% in 2012 and was still growing while voting rates decreased to 47.6% in 2016.<sup>44</sup> Latino USA reported that *despite the decrease, the voter share of Latinos increased to 9.2% in 2016, compared to 8.4% in 2012. In other words, of the 137.5 million people who voted in the 2016 election, about 12.65 million who went to the polls were Latinos (compared to 11.2 million Latinos who voted in 2012). According to Pew Research, the total number of Latinos who voted in 2016 was still a record number.*<sup>45</sup> These numbers corresponded to the opinions of Hispanic activists about the growing power of the Latino electorate. Though numbers suggesting millions of eligible Latino voters may seem impressive (almost 10% of all eligible American voters were of Hispanic origin), their (relatively) low electoral turnout was a significant problem that diminished their potential political influence. Hispanics as a group traditionally did not appear on the ballots in heavy numbers. What is more, their voting rates were even higher in the 1980s and 1990s than today. In presidential elections of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, only once, in 2008, did the Hispanic voting rate almost reach 50%.<sup>46</sup>

In 2016, when Donald Trump intensified his negative rhetoric about immigrants and made offensive comments about Mexicans, calling them *criminals and rapists*<sup>47</sup>, there were 57 million Hispanics living in the U.S., representing 17.6% of American society.<sup>48</sup> About 27 million of them were eligible to vote. However, analyses provided by the US Census Bureau and Pew Research Center show that the power of Latino vote has not yet been fully exploited. In 2016, the number of Latino absentee votes in the electorate was larger than those who decided to vote – 14 million and 12.7 million respectively. It should be noted that this trend has existed in Hispanic voting behavior in presidential elections since 1996.<sup>49</sup>

Though a long-anticipated historic surge in Latino voter turnout has yet to come, its voting awareness has increased among the younger generation. The turnout rate of millennials (those aged 18 to 35 years) in 2016 was almost 3 percentage points higher

<sup>43</sup> J.M. Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, G. López, J.S. Passel, E. Patten, "Looking Forward to 2016: The Changing Latino Electorate," *Pew Research Center*, 19 January 2016, at <https://pewrsr.ch/33ZGj3n>, 20 June 2023; L.W. Bergad, L.A. Miranda Jr, "Latino Voter Registration and Participation Rates in the 2020 Presidential Election," *Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies*, New York 2021, at [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clacsl\\_pubs/98](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clacsl_pubs/98), 20 June 2023.

<sup>44</sup> "Facts for Features: Hispanic Heritage Month 2012, Sept. 15-Oct. 15," *United States Census Bureau*, 6 August 2012, at <https://bit.ly/2W6efGR>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>45</sup> J.R. Varela, "New Census Data Says 2016 National Latino Voter Turnout Rate Did Not Increase," *Latino USA*, 15 May 2017, at <https://bit.ly/37NA3gc>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Th. File, "Voting in America: A Look at the 2016 Presidential Election," *United States Census Bureau*, 10 May 2017, at <https://bit.ly/2LsNxX5>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>47</sup> "Drug Dealers, Criminals, Rapists': What Trump Thinks of Mexicans," *BBC*, 31 August 2016, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-37230916>, 15 January 2024.

<sup>48</sup> E. Duffin, "U.S. Hispanic Population 2019," *Statista*, 20 July 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3lZGWQL>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>49</sup> J.R. Varela, "New Census Data Says..."

than four years earlier.<sup>50</sup> But, however optimistic this growth appears, it is misleading to believe that the 'sleeping giant' has just woken up. Both Democrats and Republicans have not yet found a way to attract the untapped power of Hispanic millennials. Demographers claim that every 30 seconds a young Latino turns 18 and becomes eligible to vote – a huge number that amounts to about 800,000 a year.<sup>51</sup> However, despite this constant growth, an analysis by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) states that the young Hispanic population is more likely to be *civically alienated* than *civically engaged*.<sup>52</sup> The increased number of those who decided to cast their vote in the 2016 election showed dissatisfaction with the vision of America presented by Trump. Eric Walker from the Democratic National Committee commented: *Donald Trump is the best recruiter we have in terms of getting Latino voters registered and out to the polls*.<sup>53</sup> However, it should be pointed out that any fear of a future xenophobic and antiimmigrant administration if Trump won the election did not mobilize young voters enough to cast their ballots in numbers that exceeded their support for Obama in 2012.

## LATINOS OF THE DONALD TRUMP'S RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The presidential election of 2020 became a battle between two competing visions of America: Joe Biden's, who was expected to bring back immigration policy from the Obama administration, and Donald Trump, continuing the policy of his first term. On entering the re-election race, Trump had to face a severe assessment of his administration's actions, inevitably appearing in public disputes as a president headed towards his final days. An in-depth analysis of the changes he introduced in American immigration policy showed what was to be done concerning his 2016 campaign promises. The main item on his immigration agenda – to bring down the number of immigrants in the USA – was only partially successful. Despite presidential executive orders introducing restrictions on travel, family unity, immigrant workers, and refugee admissions, the number of foreigners living in the U.S. has continued to rise. The process was slowed, but not stopped. Among the trends in immigration of the Hispanic population, interestingly, only Mexican immigration decreased, while the number of immigrants from the rest of the Latin American region increased. The US Census Bureau has highlighted one factor that exemplified changes in immigration patterns in the United States and showed a partial success of Trump's immigration policy. During his administration, net

<sup>50</sup> J.M. Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, "The Latino Voter Turnout Rate Held Steady in 2016," *The California-Mexico Studies Center*, 28 May 2017, at <https://bit.ly/37kieGv>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>51</sup> P. Ramos, *Finding Latinx: In Search of the Voices Redefining Latino Identity*, New York 2020, p. 274.

<sup>52</sup> J.A. McCann, M. Jones-Correa, *Holding Fast: Resilience and Civic Engagement Among Latino Immigrants*, New York 2020.

<sup>53</sup> J. Adamy, "Young Latino Voters Surge in Number, and Parties Pursue," *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 January 2016, at <https://on.wsj.com/2K8S2Wv>, 23 June 2023; C. Zepeda-Millán, *Latino Mass Mobilization: Immigration, Racialization, and Activism*, Berkeley 2017, p. 309.

migration fell to its lowest level in a decade.<sup>54</sup> Trump's politics, built on prejudice and rising threats of deportation, worsened foreigners' quality of life and forced many of those already living in the USA to leave. The smaller number of immigrants trying to enter the US, together with a greater number leaving the country than before, resulted in total net gains and represented Trump's policy success in that area. It was also represented by changes in visa and refugee admission policies.

The Hispanic population has been affected by most of Trump's anti-immigrant regulations.<sup>55</sup> Latino culture places the family as one of their main values and emphasizes the importance of family unity. The reduction in the number of permanent residency visas available to them limited the possibility to join relatives already living in the USA and left many families separated. An even more significant impact on Latinos and their families was observed when a new refugee and asylum policy was introduced. The effect of Trump's refugee policy became evident and was illustrated by the record low numbers of refugees and asylum seekers in 2018.<sup>56</sup> At first, it aimed to curtail Muslim immigration, but later greatly impacted Latin American immigrants fleeing insecurity, crime, violence, and poverty. The new rules of the asylum process moved the procedure to so-called safe third countries, and then immigrants arriving at the Mexican-American border to claim asylum could be deported to Guatemala to await the American government's decision. The paradox of the situation was that Guatemala is known as extremely dangerous – the murder rate is five times higher than in the US – which puts immigrants' lives at high risk. The lack of sufficient infrastructure to process asylum cases did not improve their situation.<sup>57</sup> In addition, the life of Latin Americans temporarily admitted to the USA to wait for their asylum claims to be processed by immigration courts was also complicated. Regulations at the border imposed by the Trump administration led to the widely condemned practice of family separations. Detention centers soon became overloaded with detainees and the media reported on child and sexual abuse, missing children, and the tragedy of separated families.<sup>58</sup>

At the beginning of his reelection campaign, Trump had to face accusations of failing to keep his pledge to remove 11 million unauthorized immigrants. Under his

<sup>54</sup> E. Lowther, "US Election 2020: Trump's Impact on Immigration – in Seven Charts," *BBC*, 22 October 2020, at <https://bbc.in/3oY8l7i>, 23 June 2023.

<sup>55</sup> A. Huerta, *Defending Latina/o Immigrant Communities: The Xenophobic Era of Trump and Beyond*, Lanham 2019, p. 223.

<sup>56</sup> "Trump Administration Sets Record Low Limit for New U.S. Refugees," *Reuters*, 28 October 2020, at <https://reut.rs/3auG04p>, 25 June 2023.

<sup>57</sup> "US Immigration: Mexican Asylum Seekers Could Be Deported to Guatemala," *BBC*, 7 January 2020, at <https://bbc.in/3pbNCwL>, 25 June 2023.

<sup>58</sup> M. Haag, "Thousands of Immigrant Children Said They Were Sexually Abused in U.S. Detention Centers, Report Says," *The New York Times*, 27 February 2019, at <https://nyti.ms/3pc0RxI>, 25 June 2023; L. Bassett, H. Yoshikawa, "Our Immigration Policy Has Done Terrible Damage to Kids," *Scientific American*, 1 December 2020, at <https://bit.ly/37AulWc>, 25 June 2023; "In the Freezer: Abusive Conditions for Women and Children in US Immigration Holding Cells," *Human Rights Watch*, 28 February 2018, at <https://bit.ly/2WFv6k5>, 25 June 2023.

administration, deportations became more visible, with people being arrested in residential neighborhoods, courthouses, and during worksite enforcement operations. However, their numbers lagged far behind Obama's removals. A Migration Policy Institute analysis stated that *the Trump administration deported less than half as many unauthorized immigrants during its first three fiscal years than did the Obama administration during the same timeframe*.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, Latinos believed that their lives had become harder since Trump's election, and although the total number of removals was not as high as predicted, the rhetoric of the president's speeches and tweets significantly influenced their attitudes.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the hardships brought to Hispanic immigrants by Trump's policies, both on and within the United States' borders, many Latinos still supported him. Even more unexpectedly, perhaps, many of them engaged in different campaigns to convince other Latinos to vote for a Republican candidate. A critical analysis of the reasons why Hispanics voted for Trump has revealed several major grounds for their decisions. First, he was believed to be the embodiment of the American dream: a successful businessman with immigrant roots. Second, his promises of low taxes, free enterprise, and bringing manufacturing jobs back to America attracted many. And third, as a conservative candidate, he guaranteed the preservation of Latinos' most important values. Commentators believed that the decrease in Hispanic support for Obama's re-election was caused by what was perceived as the Democrats' too progressive position on same-sex marriages, gender and race. *Latinos/Hispanics are conservative in nature. The majority of us believe in the family unit, fear God [and are] pro-life, pro-2nd Amendment, freedom, and less government control over the people*.<sup>61</sup> Finally, many Latinos living legally in the USA felt unfairly lumped together with their fellow countrymen residing illegally, who had been stereotyped as common criminals. They also condemned illegal immigration for apparently tarnishing the image of the Hispanic-American community.

The 2020 presidential election and its aftermath will be remembered for a long time. Trump's accusations of vote fraud led to a widely condemned attack on the Capitol Building in Washington on 6 January 2021, organized by his supporters. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly influenced not only the presidential campaign but also remodeled voters' top priority issues. In addition to the economy and health care, the coronavirus outbreak became the single most important concern during the election for about three-quarters of Hispanic registered voters, according to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center. The Trump administration's attempts to deal with Covid-19 were widely criticized and only one-third of Latinos believed that the president did

<sup>59</sup> M. Chishti, S. Pierce, "Trump's Promise of Millions of Deportations Is Yet to Be Fulfilled," *Migration Policy Institute*, 29 October 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3nHkKLW>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>60</sup> A. Gutierrez, A.X. Ocampo, M.A. Barreto, G. Segura, "Somos Más: How Racial Threat and Anger Mobilized Latino Voters in the Trump Era," *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 4 (2019), pp. 960-975.

<sup>61</sup> C. Carcamo, "These Latino Voters Are on a Mission to Persuade Other Latinos to Vote for Trump," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 October 2020, at <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2020-10-31/latinos-democratic-party-gop-trump-election>, 27 June 2023.

a good job.<sup>62</sup> Hispanics paid special attention to the issue because they were disproportionately affected. The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that Hispanics suffered higher rates of infection compared to other racial groups, mostly due to the types of jobs that the group typically performs, where it was impossible to avoid exposure to the virus on the workplace and take safety precautions such as social distancing. Hispanics were also more likely than others to be uninsured.<sup>63</sup> These circumstances threatened to change traditional political support amongst voters in the all-important swing states of Arizona, Nevada, Florida, and Texas, where Latinos made up over 20% of potential voters. Significantly, all nine battleground states (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin) together had over 6.3 million eligible Hispanic voters. Among them, Florida and Arizona accounted for more than half of the total, 4.3 million. The number of potential votes who did not believe that Trump was properly handling the Covid-19 problem increased. From June to October 2020, the percentage of Hispanic registered voters who believed that Biden would do better on the issue increased by 8% while Trump's percentage fell by 4%. A higher share (44%) were confident that Trump could make good decisions on economic policy.<sup>64</sup>

A study released at the beginning of January 2021 by the UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Initiative (UCLA LPPI) revealed that, according to estimates, a record number of US Latinos voted in the 2020 elections – 16.6 million, meaning a 30.9% increase from 2016.<sup>65</sup> This fact contradicts the common perception of Hispanic voters as a stagnant electorate whose number of voters never changes. Sonja Francine Marie Diaz (UCLA LPPI's founding director) explained that *Latinos are youthful and diverse, and projected to make up 27.5% of the American population by 2060. This translates into immense political power as more of that population grows into the electorate*. The point is, however, that despite the growing share of Hispanic Americans in the American electorate, their voting preferences have not changed in decades. They constitute a stable division – about 70% voting for the Democrats and 30% for the Republicans – despite the remarkable result achieved by George W. Bush in 2004 when he managed to garner 40% of the Latino vote.<sup>66</sup>

The 2020 presidential race did not bring any breakthrough results – it was more a case of repeating well-known patterns. Nationwide, Democrats gained about 66% of Latino support according to exit polls.<sup>67</sup> Though Joe Biden won Hispanic votes,

<sup>62</sup> J.M. Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, "Hispanic Voters Say..."

<sup>63</sup> R. Dominguez-Villegas, D. Tomaskovic-Devey, "Top Issues for Latino Voters in Swing States for the 2020 Election," *University of Massachusetts Amherst*, 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3bPuvFx>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>64</sup> J.M. Krogstad, M.H. Lopez, "Latino Voters Have..."

<sup>65</sup> J.R. Varela, "UCLA Study: A Record 16.6 Million US Latinos Voted in 2020 Election, Leading to Key State Victories for Biden-Harris," *Latino Rebels*, 19 January 2021, at <https://bit.ly/2M15pIS>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>66</sup> G. Cadava, "The Hispanic Republican..."

<sup>67</sup> K. de Groot, "Latino Voters and Lessons from the 2020 Election," *Penn Today*, 3 December 2020, at <https://bit.ly/3sQqRRM>, 27 June 2023; A.J. Corral, D.L. Leal, "Latinos por Trump? Latinos and the 2016 Presidential Election," *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 101, no. 3 (2020), pp. 1115-1131.

he did not surpass Hillary Clinton's results, a fact often mentioned in post-election comments. Undoubtedly, Latino support played a significant role in Biden winning Arizona, where one-quarter of registered voters were Hispanics.<sup>68</sup> They helped Biden become the first Democratic Party presidential candidate to win the state since Bill Clinton's victory in 1996. Much attention was also paid to Nevada, Texas, and Florida – states with large Hispanic populations. In Nevada and Florida 19.7% and 20.5% of eligible voters, respectively, were of Hispanic origin. In Texas, every third eligible voter was Latino.<sup>69</sup> In these states, Trump made a greater effort to attract Hispanic votes, but eventually only succeeded in Florida, gaining the support of almost half the state's Hispanic voters (according to a CNN exit poll, Biden received 52% of the vote among Latinos, compared to 47% for Trump).<sup>70</sup> Surprisingly, it was not Texas or Florida that became the significant battleground states of the 2020 presidential elections but Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.<sup>71</sup> Although the Hispanic population residing in those states was not as large as in Arizona or Texas, ethnic votes and voters of color played a pivotal role in shifting political support to the Democrats.<sup>72</sup>

Interestingly, Latino political choices in 2020 varied between subgroups. An analysis of data released by Latino Decisions shows that while Mexican Americans supported Biden (74%) over Trump (23%), Cuban Americans chose Trump. Other Hispanic groups tended to prefer Democratic candidates, although this varied in degree. The level of support was also different according to the gender and age groups. 73% of Latinas voted for Biden, compared to 67% of male Hispanic voters. Older voters were more likely than younger to support Democrats, except for Florida's Hispanic residents. 54% of those aged 40 and over preferred Biden as opposed to 64% of those aged 18-39.<sup>73</sup>

At the time of writing the article, it is impossible to predict who will win the nomination of the Republican Party for the 2024 presidential election. The decision will be made at the 2024 Republican National Convention, which will take place in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, July 15-18, 2024.<sup>74</sup> According to a poll conducted by RealClear-

<sup>68</sup> R. Dominguez-Villegas, D. Tomaskovic-Devey, "Top Issues for Latino..."; L. Chavez, "Democrats, You Can't Count On the Hispanic Vote," *The New York Times*, 23 September 2020, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/opinion/latino-voters-trump.html>, 20 April 2024.

<sup>69</sup> "Mapping the 2020 Latino electorate," *Pew Research Center*, 31 January 2020, at <https://pewrsr.ch/3sVg3lf>, 8 October 2020.

<sup>70</sup> J.C. Chavez, "Hispanic 'Dreamers' Are...".

<sup>71</sup> "US Election 2020: Results and Exit Poll in Maps and Charts," *BBC*, 13 November 2020, at <https://bbc.in/2Yc5hsG>, 25 January 2021.

<sup>72</sup> A. Morrison, K. Stafford, Ch. Fernando, "Trump Election Challenges Sound Alarm among Voters of Color," *AP News*, 22 November 2020, at <https://bit.ly/39dRt7r>, 25 January 2021; N. Narea, "Most Latinos Voted for Biden — but 2020 Revealed Fault Lines for Democrats," *Vox*, 12 November 2020, at <https://www.vox.com/21551025/latino-national-vote-biden-trump-2020-florida-texas>, 25 January 2021.

<sup>73</sup> C. Montoya, "What Conclusions Can We Draw about the Hispanic Vote in 2020?," *Fortune*, 11 November 2020, at <https://bit.ly/368Uzb5>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>74</sup> Candidates seeking Republican Party nomination are: Doug Burgum, the governor of North Dakota, announced his candidacy on June 7, 2023; Chris Christie, former governor of New Jersey, announced



Politics, Trump leads the race and Ron DeSantis is in second place but the difference between the level of support they received is significant; 53 to 14 respectively.<sup>75</sup> Today, the most important question is whether the Hispanic support for Republicans in 2020 was a one-off fluctuation or if it was the beginning of the process that will change the way Latinos perceive political parties. The analysis of the last midterm elections (2022) shows that Democrats do not have to worry but cannot celebrate as well. Hispanic support for Democratic candidates was rather stable and did not change much in battleground states, except Florida. The incumbent governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, won his re-election in 2022 in a landslide. He was the first Republican in 20 years that had won democratic leaning, and largely Hispanic Miami-Dade County. Over 60% of Latinos decided to support him despite his hardline policy toward immigrants in the state.<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, even though Florida does not share the border with Mexico and does not have a large Mexican population living there, President Andrés Manuel López Obrador commented against DeSantis' decision to run for the Republican presidential nomination. He addressed all voters but particularly Hispanics living in Florida and asked them not to support Florida's governor in the 2024 presidential race. *Hopefully Hispanics in Florida will wake up and not give him one single vote, to not vote for those who persecute migrants, those who don't respect migrants.*<sup>77</sup> This request may be unsuccessful as polls show that many Hispanics in Florida favor their governor's politics. Despite all the controversy over the so-called 'Martha's Vineyard migrant airlift'<sup>78</sup>, Latinos sided with DeSantis (with 53% in favor of his decision and 43% opposed the relocation). What is worth noting is that Hispanic support for migrant relocation was

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his candidacy on June 6, 2023, Ron DeSantis, the governor of Florida, announced his candidacy on May 24, 2023, Larry Elder, a talk radio host and 2021 California gubernatorial candidate, announced his candidacy on April 20, 2023; Nikki Haley, former U.N. Ambassador and South Carolina Governor, announced her candidacy on February 14, 2023; Will Hurd, former U.S. Representative from Texas, announced his candidacy on June 22, 2023; Asa Hutchinson, former Arkansas Governor, announced his candidacy on April 2, 2023; Mike Pence, former vice president of the United States, announced his candidacy on June 7, 2023; Vivek Ramaswamy, entrepreneur and political commentator, announced his candidacy on February 21, 2023; Tim Scott, a United States senator from South Carolina, announced his candidacy on May 22, 2023; Corey Stapleton, former Montana Secretary of State, announced his candidacy on November 11, 2022; Francis Suarez, the Mayor of Miami, announced his candidacy on June 15, 2023; Donald Trump, former U.S. President, announced his candidacy on November 15, 2022. "Republican Presidential Nomination, 2024," *Ballotpedia*, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfpc>, 17 July 2023.

<sup>75</sup> "2024 Republican Presidential Nomination," *RealClear Polling*, 17 July 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfp5>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>76</sup> "Florida Governor Election Results 2022: Live Map | Midterm Races by County," *Politico*, 2 February 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfpt>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>77</sup> R. Bernal, "Mexican President Tells Florida Hispanics: Don't Give 'One Single Vote' to DeSantis," *The Hill*, 25 May 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfjz>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>78</sup> Martha's Vineyard flights was the name given to a relocation move organized by Governor DeSantis (but also Gregg Abbott – Texas Governor) in September 2022. As a protest against President Biden's immigration policy DeSantis decided to flight two planes of Venezuelan migrants to Martha's Vineyard.

strongest among Latino immigrants (52% favored, 41% opposed) than among those already born in the U.S. (49% to 45%).<sup>79</sup> First-generation immigrants appreciate the change that happened in their life after moving to the USA. They don't want to risk the social or economic stability they achieved, by welcoming new immigrants in cities or counties where the immigrant population has already been numerous. Giancarlo Sopo, a Republican strategist of Cuban descent from Miami explained: *Those of us who remember Miami in the '80s and '90s remember the aftermath of Mariel*<sup>80</sup> *when 120,000 people showed up in the community over a span of six months. What we're now seeing at the border is two Mariels per month.*<sup>81</sup> Ron DeSantis' policy towards new immigrants is also supported by a significant number of those of the second and third generations. Many of them have been here for a long time, are 'whiter' and wealthier and don't identify with the poor darker-skinned migrants.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of the role of Hispanics in presidential elections, particularly the 2020 election, enables several observations to be made. First and foremost, Latinos residing in the USA are still perceived as a monolithic minority group. Although this assumption has been challenged by Latino activists, past election campaigns have shown that politicians still tend to treat Hispanics *en bloc*. Even though Latinos speak the same language (most of them) and share culture, they differ significantly. Determinants such as the country of origin, the nature of the problem forcing them to flee, or domestic political systems have shaped their attitudes toward social and political issues in the U.S. Attempting to draw parallels between Cubans, Puerto Ricans or Haitians<sup>82</sup> to predict their political attitudes and voting preferences becomes complicated and, ultimately, fruitless. Despite being granted US citizenship a century ago, Puerto Ricans (born on the island) cannot vote in American presidential elections. However, both Trump and Biden directed a significant amount of their attention toward the islanders. Although their votes could not be counted, those of their families and friends living on the mainland could.

When considering the case of Cubans, it is important to recognize that the group itself does not represent parallel views. The division is seen for example between age groups. The older generation constitutes a solid base of support for any candidate proposing a hardline policy toward Cuba, while younger Cuban-Americans do not share

<sup>79</sup> M. Caputo, N. Pransky, "Florida's Hispanic Voters Back DeSantis over Crist, Support Martha's Vineyard Migrant Flights," *NBC News*, 24 October 2022, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfp2>, 27 June 2023.

<sup>80</sup> The Mariel boatlift was a mass emigration of Cubans who traveled from Cuba's Mariel Harbor to the United States between April 15 and October 31, 1980.

<sup>81</sup> M. Caputo, N. Pransky, "Florida's Hispanic Voters..."

<sup>82</sup> In the article the words Latinos and Hispanics are used interchangeably to describe population coming from the region of Latin America. However, it should be remembered that Haitians are not a Spanish speaking group and in many ways differ culturally from Hispanic Americans or Ibero-Americans.

their grandparents' resentment and have their own priorities. And in the last case, Haitians, whose temporary protected status was ended by President Trump, would be unlikely to give him, or the Republicans, their support.

Donald Trump built some of his Hispanic support on the threat that the Democrats leaned too much toward the political left. During the 2020 campaign, he told Hispanics that Biden represented a form of government synonymous with socialist regimes. His spin doctors released campaign ads in Spanish where Biden was portrayed as a socialist and was compared to Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro. Such messages could not have left Venezuelan and Cuban Americans unaffected.

In 2020, Latinos constituted 13% of the American voting population, and their share in the overall voting population had been increasing for years. Data reports that every 30 seconds one young Latino reaches voting age and every year there are at least 800,000 new Latino voters. An increasing number are young people who have turned 18 and become eligible to vote. Given this fact, both parties will have to pay more attention to Hispanics in the future to attract their votes. In the first place because their turnout rates are low, and secondly because they are swing voters – even if the majority routinely vote Democrat, there is still a significant minority that consistently chooses Republicans. Even though the turnout of Latino voters has increased, both main political parties have not paid much attention to it. A significant number of Hispanic voters reside in states that are not swing states like California or Texas. However, both Florida and Arizona cases show that mobilizing Hispanic voters can play an important role in the political game. Significantly, Trump's defeat in Arizona revealed that long-term local activism can be powerful enough to shift political support. Thanks to the hardline immigration enforcement of Republican Sheriff Joe Arpaio and state immigration legislation like the 2010 act known as the Arizona SB 1070 law, the state became home to grassroots organizations mobilizing voters against anti-immigration policy.

Advocates and researchers have pointed out that among the most important reasons that motivated some Latinos to support Trump were economic and immigration policies.<sup>83</sup> Under the Trump administration, Hispanics experienced an economic boom and believed in the president's plan to bring jobs back to America. Paradoxically, Trump's harsh immigration policy also appealed to Hispanics' minds, particularly those who had problems obtaining US citizenship. Trump's vision of 'bad illegal immigrants' who are coming in to take American citizens' jobs resonated particularly with those from the southern states, where the problem of illegal immigration has been rife for years.

Are Latino votes a Holy Grail for American parties?<sup>84</sup> Although the broad Latino support for Trump's reelection remained more a desire for him than actual achievement, he undoubtedly scored better than Biden, whose gains among Hispanic voters

<sup>83</sup> H.K. Sonneland, "Chart: How U.S. Latinos Voted in the 2020 Presidential Election," *AS/COA*, 5 November 2020, at <https://www.as-coa.org/articles/chart-how-us-latinos-voted-2020-presidential-election>, 14 November 2024.

<sup>84</sup> According to the Cambridge English Dictionary, the Holy Grail is 'something a person or a particular group of people want very much to have or achieve'; "Holy Grail," *Cambridge Dictionary*, at <https://bit.ly/2YgSy0C>, 19 July 2023.

did not equal Hillary Clinton's. Support for Trump increased amongst Latinos, though the Republicans have always had a sizeable group of loyal Hispanic-Republicans. James McCann and Michael Jones-Correa concluded that *the fact that Latino immigrants are disenchanted and angry, apprehensive and yet engaged, offers both Democrats and Republicans promise and peril. The promise resides in the fact that Latino immigrants and their children now make up a key part of the American electorate. However, if these new political actors are spurned (as they have been by many Republicans) or taken for granted (as they have sometimes been by Democrats), the peril for both parties is that this part of the electorate could either rebel or sit stubbornly on the sidelines.*<sup>85</sup> Uncertainty belongs to the Democrats. Even though a significant number of Hispanics believe that the Democratic party better represents the interests of Latinos and immigrants, still a noteworthy part of the group sees no difference between the parties. It is not sure which is more representative. The assumption that Hispanics are Democrats by default is erroneous. Whether and how the parties respond to the challenging situation will influence Latino political choices. Advocates in public debates have often argued that 'a sleeping giant' has been awakened, reflected in a growing number of eligible voters. The giant is truly impressive, composed of about 32 million people eligible to cast their ballots, but its turnout rates demonstrate that it is still slumbering, no matter what the hopes and expectations are. The analysis of Latino choices during midterms and presidential elections shows that as long as Democrats will assume that the Hispanic population like open immigration policy and favor mass migration, they cannot be sure of winning their support, especially in swing areas. What is more, Republicans should also understand that their assumption that addressing inflation and the cost of living is crucial to winning Latinos' votes is wrong and Hispanics prioritize the economics at the same rates as the general US public. Both parties erroneously believe that Latino voters differ significantly from the US voting population. What is worth noting is that data collected through the years by Pew Research Center and other research and polling institutions say that Latinos mirror the US public when it comes to the list of priorities or the list of issues that matter most. Their affiliation with parties hasn't changed much over the last decade and about three-quarters of Hispanics will probably continue to identify with and lean towards the Democratic Party, while about a quarter will choose the Republican party. Surprisingly, it seems that what should be particularly observed when predicting and analyzing Latino voters' choices, are values. Hispanics are in general conservative or moderate, only 28% describe their views as liberal. It is believed that more Latinos decided to cast their votes in the 2022 midterm election due to the abortion debate started by the US Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, many Hispanic voters prioritized gun violence as the main reason for their vote.<sup>87</sup> On 1 July 2023, the US

<sup>85</sup> J.A. McCann, M. Jones-Correa, *Holding Fast...*, p. 179.

<sup>86</sup> G.R. Sanchez, "Will Latino Voters Help Lead the GOP to Victory in 2024?," *Brookings*, 18 July 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwflj>, 1 July 2023.

<sup>87</sup> A. X. Ocampo, S.I. Garcia-Rios, A.E. Gutierrez, "Háblame de tí: Latino Mobilization, Group Dynamics and Issue Prioritization in the 2020 Election," *The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2021), pp. 531-558.

Supreme Court ruled in favor of Lorie Smith a web designer in Colorado who said she had a First Amendment right to refuse to design wedding websites for same-sex couples despite a state law that forbids discrimination against gay people.<sup>88</sup> Such cases raise concerns that federal laws that protected people from discrimination can be changed by the Supreme Court. Fears that the SCOTUS conservative majority may result in a restrictive ruling that will limit or reduce the rights of people of race, religion, gender, and/or national identity can become the main driver mobilizing Latino voters to turn out at the ballots in larger than usual numbers in the forthcoming presidential election.

Nowadays, the existence of a so-called 'Latino vote' so often debated in the media is still more a wish than a reality. Thus, to predict Latino voting behavior it is necessary to quit the stereotype of a monolithic group and focus on sub-groups. In public discourse, Latino activists optimistically predict the significance of the Hispanic electorate for future elections based on its growing youth population. The numbers may be impressive. According to a report by Brookings Institution the Latino electorate has the highest ratio of first-time voters. 11% of Latinos first voted in the 2022 midterm elections compared to 9% of Native Americans, 7% of Asians, 7% of Black, and 6% of White voters.<sup>89</sup> What is more important in this analysis is where these voters live as their regional distribution tells more about their possible impact. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civil Learning and Engagement, the impressive growth in the youth Latino voting population was observed in most critical battleground states in the West like Arizona or Nevada.<sup>90</sup> However, young voters do not have strong party affiliations. The biggest challenge for both Republicans and Democrats would be not only to attract these voters in the 2024 presidential elections but also to make them long-term voters. Young voters who are believed to be the future of the Latino electorate tend to have more progressive views. Their electoral choices are based on the evaluation of parties' attitudes towards ecology, abortion, gun safety, health care, permanent legal status for DACA recipients and Dreamers, etc. Young Latinos' overwhelming support for the policies<sup>91</sup> that are likely to remain in the Democratic presidential campaign agenda in 2024 suggests that they will favor Democrats. The Republican Party does not have proposals that appeal to more than 30% of Hispanic voters. Donald Trump gained more Latino votes in 2020 due to the uncertain economic situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Today, the situation has changed and it cannot be assumed that the fear

<sup>88</sup> "Gay Rights vs. Free Speech: Supreme Court Backs Web Designer Opposed to Same-Sex Marriage," *The New York Times*, 30 June 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfn9>, 5 July 2023.

<sup>89</sup> G.R. Sanchez, "How Younger Voters Will Impact Elections: Young Latino Voters Will Be Vital to the Outcome of the 2024 Election," *Brookings*, 2 May 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfnk>, 1 July 2023.

<sup>90</sup> A. Medina, "Where the Youth Vote Can Be Decisive in the 2022 Elections," *Circle*, 11 August 2022, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfkf>, 1 July 2023.

<sup>91</sup> In the 2022 midterm elections 81% of Latinos under the age of 30 support providing permanent legal status to DACA recipients and Dreamers, 76% of Latinos under the age of 30 support passing a federal law to guarantee access to abortion nationwide, 87% of Latinos under the age of 30 support the Inflation Reduction Act, which constitutes the largest investment ever in clean energy in an effort to reduce toxic air and carbon pollution, 89% of Latinos under the age of 30 support passing a new voting rights act to ensure that all eligible Americans can vote without barriers.

and uncertainty will still trigger Hispanic support for Republicans. What can influence young Latino voters' decisions are the SCOTUS' rulings in cases where student loans and affirmative action are at issue. President Biden's proposal to cancel \$10,000 for borrowers making less than \$125,000 and \$20,000 for those who also received federal Pell Grants draw heavy criticism from Republicans. They also do not approve (74%) admission procedures implemented at some universities considering race and ethnicity in admission decisions.<sup>92</sup> The Supreme Court ruled in June 2023 on the end of this policy and was immediately applauded by Donald Trump and other GOP representatives. In a poll conducted by Pew Research Center 39% of Latinos agreed that affirmative action was fair.<sup>93</sup> As a result of the Supreme Court's decision Black and Hispanic enrolment could drop 10%.<sup>94</sup> The message for many young, ambitious Latinos for the future says it can be better only if they support candidates of the Democratic Party.

It should be noted that Republicans can gain some votes from Latinos when it comes to the issue of transgender Americans, especially transgender athletes participating in team sports. American society has been deeply polarized on the issue, but Hispanics have a very stable opinion. 66% of Latinos believe that transgender athletes should be allowed to play on sports teams that match their birth gender. For Hispanic men, who tend more often to support Republicans than women voters, 74% share that opinion.<sup>95</sup>

Although there are many areas where Latino voters tend to be swing constituents it is unlikely to await a significant change in their voting behavior at least in the 2024 presidential election.

## AN UPDATE – THE ELECTION OF 2024

Data available at the time of updating the article show that Latino voters were not fully satisfied with Joe Biden's policy. In 2020 and 2024 alike, they named economy as their top priority issue in presidential elections. In a poll conducted before the election in September 2024 by NBC News/Telemundo/CNBC, 34% of Latinos ranked the cost of living as the most important issue, followed by jobs and the economy at 20%.<sup>96</sup> They accused Biden's administration of increasing inflation and decreasing daily living

<sup>92</sup> J. Gramlich, "Americans and Affirmative Action: How the Public Sees the Consideration of Race in College Admissions, Hiring," *Pew Research Center*, 16 June 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwfkz>, 1 July 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> K. Meyer, "The End of Race-Conscious Admissions," *Brookings*, 29 June 2023, at <https://tiny.pl/cwf81>, 1 July 2023.

<sup>95</sup> R. Teixeira, "The Evidence Mounts..."

<sup>96</sup> S. Gamboa, N. Acevedo, D. Silva, C. Sesin, D.J. Hampton, "Record Voter Gains among Latinos for Trump Mainly Boiled Down to Their Top Issue — The Economy," *NBC News*, 6 November 2024, at <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/trump-economy-latino-vote-2024-election-rcna178951>, 15 November 2024.

conditions (e.g. higher grocery prices and rents). 35% of Hispanic voters also believed that immigration hurts more than it helps, the highest share noted in the last 20 years of surveys. It resulted in a lower support for Kamala Harris and a shift in her votes to Trump. Surprisingly to predictions made on the basis of the 2020 presidential elections the Republican Party beat the previous record, set by George W. Bush in 2004 (44%). According to the poll cited above, Trump got 40% support among registered Latino voters. It is also worth noting that the Republican candidate change some historic trends like in Starr County in Texas that had voted Democratic for 100 years or in Miami Dade county in Florida that had not been a red county for more than 30 years.<sup>97</sup> Speaking about historic trends, although Kamala received 14 percentage points more than the ex-president, her advantage over a Republican candidate was lower than past Democratic candidates in 2012, 2016 and 2020.

It should be clearly underlined that the data released just days after the election vary in numbers. For example, a poll conducted by Unidos US<sup>98</sup> shows that Latinos voted for Kamala Harris (62%) over Donald Trump (37%) by a +25 margin.<sup>99</sup> The NBC NEWS exit poll reported that Harris captured 52% compared to 46% for Trump.<sup>100</sup> Despite these differences, the shift of Hispanic voters to the Republican candidate is clear. Although Trump is uneasy, outspoken, and has insulted Latinos many times during his campaign in 2020, they believe that first of all he is a businessman not a politician and the economy will be the most important to him. They also remember that four years ago financially they had a better time. The decreasing support for Democratic Party is also connected with the Hispanic breakup with a democratic identity that goes too left for them. Whether they are Catholic or Evangelical, conservative values are important to them. Trump's strategy to accuse the Democratic Party of heading toward socialism/communism appealed to many Hispanic groups who do not want to remember what led them to leave their home countries. The results of the 2024 presidential election also denied the opinion that young Latinos would rather support a Democratic candidate. This year, more than four years ago, they decided to support Trump. Concluding these remarks based on the preliminary data of the 2024 presidential election, the thesis of the article saying that Latino constituents are not a monolith group, are swing voters, and still underestimated participants of the electoral process has been proven.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza) is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization.

<sup>99</sup> "Hispanic Voters Back Harris over Trump by a 62%-37% Margin; Cite Economic Concerns as Top Priorities," *Unidos US*, 12 November 2024, at <https://unidosus.org/press-releases/hispanic-voters-back-harris-over-trump-by-a-62-37-margin-cite-economic-concerns-as-top-priorities/>, 15 November 2024.

<sup>100</sup> "National Exit Polls: Election 2024 Results," *NBC News*, 15 November 2024, at <https://www.nbc-news.com/politics/2024-elections/exit-polls>, 15 November 2024.

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**Anna BARTNIK** – holds a habilitation in political science (Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University, 2020) and a Ph.D. in political science (Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University, 2006). Since 2007, she has been working at the Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora (Jagiellonian University, Krakow, Poland). Her research is dedicated to American immigration law and policy, Latinx immigrants in the USA and local government in the U.S.