

17/2019

octubre de 2019

*María Luisa Pastor Gómez**

The Weight of the Hispanic Vote in the
U.S.

[Visit website](#)

[Receive Newsletter](#)

The Weight of the Hispanic Vote in the U.S.

Abstract:

The weight of the Hispanic vote in the U.S.

Abstract:

In the run up to the 2020 U.S. presidential elections, both the Democratic Party and especially the Republican Party are developing various initiatives aimed at attracting the vote of the Hispanic population, the country's largest minority. This renewed interest can be attributed to the increased participation of this group in the 2018 legislative elections with respect to previous votes and to the particular concentration of Hispanic voters in the states that contribute most delegates to the Electoral College, a factor that may have a decisive impact on the results.

Keywords:

2020 elections, USA, Hispanic vote.

***NOTA:** Las ideas contenidas en los **Documentos Informativos** son responsabilidad de sus autores, sin que reflejen, necesariamente, el pensamiento del IEEE o del Ministerio de Defensa.

"Mexican immigration is leading toward the demographic *reconquista* (re-conquest) of areas Americans took from Mexico by force in the 1830s and 1840s... This "mexicanization" is introducing a very different culture, capable of doing away with the dominance of the "English-speaking and white" culture characteristic of the United States."

Samuel P. Huntington

Introduction

As the year 2020 approaches and, with it, the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, the Republican candidate for re-election, Donald Trump, mindful of the potential of the Hispanic electorate, has launched a number of initiatives designed to reach out to this community in order to partially mitigate the negative impact of several of his policies, as well as the derogatory comments he has made about this minority since his arrival in the U.S. political arena.

According to the latest data provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, out of the country's total population of 327,167,434 million, the number of those of Hispanic origin has reached 59.9 million in 2018, with 62% of Mexican origin, representing 18% of the total U.S. population. Although its average growth has declined since 2010, from an annual rate of 3.4% to the present-day 2% – only surpassed by the Asian-American group at 2.8% – the Hispanic population constitutes the country's first minority, which may complicate Trump's re-election, especially considering the results of the midterms last year. In November 2018, 7 out of 10 Hispanics voted in favour of the Democratic Party and in clear rejection of Trump's policies, which was key to the Democrats regaining control of the House of Representatives.

Until now, one of the characteristics of the Latino community was its low voter participation. However, according to a study by the Pew Research Center, the national turnout of Hispanics at the polls was 40 percent, a number that nearly doubled that of the 2014 legislative elections, a trend that pollsters estimate will continue in the 2020 elections.

Some experts, such as Fernand Amandi, president of the polling firm Bendixen and Amandi and a political advisor to the Democratic Party, attribute that change to the continued growth of the Hispanic population and the growing resentment expressed by Latinos against Trump's anti-immigration campaign. In this sense, it is estimated that "the next elections will not be about the Democratic candidate, but about Trump, the

most anti-Latino president in U.S. history," Amandi said¹.

According to a study published by Telemundo, approximately 60% of Hispanic voters intend to vote for the Democratic candidate emerging from the primaries compared with 20% of Hispanic voters who would vote for Trump, with 20% undecided.

Characteristics of the Hispanic Population

A characteristic feature of the Hispanic population living in the U.S. is its demographic dynamism, although this has been slowing down in recent years - due to the decline in the birth rate and the reduction in arrivals of immigrants - as well as the young age of its members. With an average age of twenty-seven, Latinos are ten years below the average for other minorities and far from the age of forty-two for non-Hispanic whites and the average age of thirty-six for Asians, with all the associated political, economic and cultural influences², especially related to changes in mentality.

According to the 2018 census, the Hispanic vote grew by four points with respect to the 2014 elections, with 29.1 million Hispanics entitled to vote, approximately 10% of the electorate, a fact which could affect the results, due to three fundamental reasons³:

1. The volatility of the Hispanic vote is in contrast to the stability of the U.S. vote in general. Except for atypical circumstances such as major economic depressions, Americans do not switch parties between elections. In fact, so-called party realignments occur only in exceptional situations and have taken place approximately every 36 years⁴.

The Hispanic vote, on the other hand, does not identify itself so much with the political parties as with the policies proposed. Bush, for example, won the 2000 election against Al Gore because he campaigned for the Hispanic minority, presented proposals and appeared in the most prominent Hispanic media

¹ DIAZ REBOLLEDO, Jerónimo, "El peso electoral de los votantes latinos en Estados Unidos, Reforma, México DF, August 24, 2004, available at <https://reforma.vlex.com.mx/vid/jeronimo-rebolledo-votantes-latinos-82076425>

² UREÑA, Daniel, et al, "El auge de la comunidad hispana en Estados Unidos, una oportunidad Estratégica para España", The Hispanic Council Policy Paper, nº1, February 2014, available at <https://www.hispaniccouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/PolicyPaper1THC.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

outlets such as Univision's Saturday-evening TV variety show *Sábado Gigante*, which has one of the highest Latino audiences⁵.

2. The voting system. As we know, in the United States the popular vote in each state determines from which political party the delegates to the Electoral College will be, and it is the latter that actually elects the future president. In other words, the party that gets the most votes in a state takes all the delegates from that state to the Electoral College. The number of delegates in each state is proportional to the population and "here is the second key to understanding why 10% of Latinos can determine a nation's future. The U.S. Hispanic population is concentrated in 5 of the 6 states with the most delegates: California (55), Texas (38), New York (29), Florida (29) and Illinois (20): in total, 171 of the 538 delegates that make up the Electoral College". Thus, the candidate who wins these states has a strong chance of winning the presidency, assuming that the rest of the country behaves according to traditional trends and that voters do not switch parties.
3. The factors the Hispanic community considers when exercising its right to vote. Hispanics do not attach as much importance as the rest of the electorate to employment, taxes or foreign policy in times of war. Instead, they want to hear proposals on immigration or temporary work permits, as proposed by Bush during his campaign, on social security, education and, in general, on any issue related to expanding their rights⁶.

In other words, a substantial number of Latinos vote for their ethnic identity, so that the parties, in their quest to form majorities, are forced to incorporate the Hispanic agenda into their electoral platforms or face the risk of ceding those votes to the adversary⁷. Nevertheless, the Latino vote is not unanimous. There is a large Hispanic segment, located mainly in Florida, that is essentially of Cuban and Venezuelan origin and whose ideology is more in line with Republican views than

⁵ UREÑA, op.cit.

⁶ DIAZ-REBOLLEDO, op.cit.

⁷ Ibid.

those of the Democrats, as evidenced in 2016 by Trump's victory with 49.1% of the vote compared to 47.8% obtained by Hillary Clinton.

Aside from this unique feature of the population of Florida, broadly speaking, 48 percent of registered voters in the 2018 election indicated in a poll that the Democratic Party cared more about Latinos than the Republicans; 32 percent said there were no differences between the two parties; and only 14 percent thought that there was more concern shown by Republicans.

Table 1. Presidential election data 2016.

The 5 States with the largest Hispanic presence	Hispanic voters out of the total electorate	Number of Electoral College Delegates	Results Republican Party	Results Democratic Party
1. CALIFORNIA	30.0%	55	32.9%	61.6%
2. TEXAS	29.8%	38	52.6%	43.4%
3. FLORIDA	19.8%	29	49.1%	47.8%
4. NUEVA YORK	29.4%	29	37.4%	58.9%
5. ILLINOIS	14%	20	39.4%	55.4%

For these reasons, the Hispanic minority has become an important protagonist in election campaigns. According to an analysis of the results of the 2018 elections in Arizona, California, Florida, Nevada and Texas, the Latino vote was key to the victory of the Democrats⁸, as this segment of the electorate, partially spurred on by the incendiary rhetoric of President Donald Trump, voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Democrats and in clear rejection of White House policies, which proved decisive in the Democratic party regaining control of the House of Representatives in an election in which 435 seats in the House of Representatives, 35 in the Senate, plus 36 governorships and hundreds of local and state offices were at stake. Currently, there are already 37 Latinos in the Lower House and 4 in the Senate.

The demographic power of the Hispanic community in the U.S. is evident, but it must be transferred to the political arena to be of any real value. As already indicated, the main

⁸ PEÑA, María, La Opinión, Los Angeles, November 2018, available at: <https://search-proquest-com.bucm.idm.oclc.org/docview/2130618834>

problem facing the U.S. Hispanic community is that it does not get actively involved, which translates into high levels of abstention among voters: citizens do not register or will not vote even after they have registered. In California, for example, there are potentially 8.1 million Latino voters, but only 4.1 million of them are registered to vote. Two million have not yet registered and 1.1 million are permanent residents, but do not yet have citizenship.

The Trump campaign for 2020

The fact that in 2016 Trump maintained the level of support obtained by the Republicans in 2012 was something that surprised more than one analyst. The anti-immigrant rhetoric displayed by the then Republican candidate throughout his campaign foreshadowed a severe loss for the Republican Party from the Hispanic community. As president, Trump has maintained that rhetoric and developed an agenda for the region that is strongly focused on illegal immigration and immigration measures that directly affect the Latino population, as well as cutting foreign aid and developing policies that have generated animosity towards the U.S. in Latin America⁹. From the beginning of his presidential campaign, the president stated that the majority of undocumented Mexican immigrants were criminals and rapists and pledged to build a wall on the southern border to stop the immigration of these “bad people”¹⁰.

More recently, Trump threatened to impose draconian tariffs on Mexico unless it made a greater effort to prevent Central American migrants from reaching the U.S. border¹¹ and announced cuts of \$400 million in U.S. aid to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador as punishment for increased illegal migration¹² (although some of that aid was reinstated by Congress), without taking into account that many of Central America's problems are regional in nature, including U.S. drug consumption and U.S. arms trafficking that fuel drug cartels and therefore require regional solutions.

However, the U.S. president has undertaken a number of initiatives clearly aimed at attracting the Hispanic vote, beginning with a rally in Orlando, Florida to launch his re-election campaign on June 18. Trump and his family have a holiday home there but Florida is also the state with the third largest number of Hispanics and one of the perennial

⁹ OPPENHEIMER, Andrés, “La agenda negativa de Trump en América Latina”, *El Nuevo Herald*, July 12, 2019, available at <https://www.elnuevoherald.com/opinion-es/opin-col-blogs/andres-oppenheimer-es/article232596037.html>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

“swing states” that play a key role in defining the presidential elections.

Furthermore, Trump agreed to grant an exclusive interview on 20 June¹³ to a Spanish-language television network, Telemundo, the first of its kind since his arrival at the White House, with a view to reaching out to this minority and launch a campaign on the benefits that his government has delivered to this segment of the population. These achievements include the fall in the unemployment rate and the resulting increase in purchasing power, as well as a reduction in tax levels figures endorsed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics which indicate that under the Trump administration the unemployment rate for Hispanics dropped to an all-time-low of 4.7%. Although this rate rose again to 4.9%, it is still lower than the previous record lows of 5.3% recorded by the Obama administration and 5.1% under George W. Bush.

On the issue of immigration, Trump's real bone of contention, he claimed that the controversial policy of separating immigrant families who crossed the border illegally, the so-called "zero tolerance" policy, had been an initiative brought in by Obama and that he was the one who had revoked it, deliberately omitting that he had implemented it back in 2018 and had to backtrack on growing national and international pressure just days before a federal judge ordered its immediate cessation.

Another gesture towards the Hispanic community has been the launch of the "Vamos to Victory" initiative, coinciding with the beginning of the "Hispanic Heritage Month" between September 15 and October 15¹⁴, in a bid to counteract the negativity displayed by some sectors of the Hispanic community and engage their support.

The struggle for Texas

In the state of Texas, another enclave that may prove key to determining the winner of the 2020 presidential election, no Democratic Party candidate has won since Jimmy Carter's triumph¹⁵ (1977-1981), thus making it a Republican Party stronghold for nearly four decades. However, this situation could be reversed if certain media forecasts are

¹³ Available at : <https://www.telemundo.com/shows/2019/06/20/donald-trump-contesta-sobre-temas-de-inmigracion-jose-diaz-balart>

¹⁴ In 1968, the U.S. Congress agreed to a proposal by President Lyndon Johnson to create the so-called Hispanic Heritage Week. In 1988, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, it was agreed to extend this period to a full month.

¹⁵ SARQUIS, Hernán, “¿Podría Texas darle la espalda a Trump en 2020?”, *La Política Online*, September 28, 2019, available at <https://www.lapoliticaonline.com/nota/121971-podria-texas-darle-la-espalda-a-trump-en-2020/>

confirmed pointing to the existence of “indications that if the elections were held today, the Democrats would win in Texas”¹⁶, since in the 2018 midterm elections, Democrat Beto O'Rourke fell just two points short of beating Texas Republican Senator Ted Cruz. A significant part of any victory could be attributable to the Hispanic vote.

Partly due to the current greater diversity in the population of Texas, the Democrats estimate they could regain control of the state by 2020, based on 400,000 more Latinos being eligible to vote than in 2018, while according to some polls, 88 percent of Hispanics intend to cast their vote in the next presidential election, as they now feel significantly more motivated to do so than in 2016. Added to this, the tragedy experienced in El Paso last August left an indelible mark on the Latino community. Eight out of ten respondents (80%) said they felt personally affected by the shooting that left 22 dead and dozens injured, mostly Latinos, while more than half say the massacre will influence their vote in the 2020 elections¹⁷, according to a survey released on September 27. Hispanic voters in Texas partly hold President Donald Trump responsible for the shooting, whose author allegedly warned of a "Hispanic invasion of Texas" in a manifesto similar to the rhetoric sometimes used by the American President.

This would not be the first time for Democrats to snatch a state from the Republican Party. As the renowned Democratic pollster Stanley Greenberg, and author of the book *R.I.P. G.O.P.*, pointed out in an interview, the Hispanic vote is likely to be crucial, along with that of millennial voters, single women and suburban and African-American voters:

“We could see a national phenomenon similar to what we witnessed in California in the 1990s. California had long been a Republican state, until Republicans began to push for Resolution 187, which sought to make life impossible for Mexican immigrants. That created a huge backlash which ended up turning California into a solidly Democratic state... The same could happen across the country in 2020. Voters have become more pro-immigrant as Trump has become more virulent in his attacks on immigrants¹⁸.

¹⁶ OPPENHEIMER, Andrés, ¿Impedirá el voto hispano la reelección de Trump?, el Nuevo Herald, September 12, 2019, available at <https://www.msn.com/es-us/noticias/estados-unidos/%C2%BFimpedir%C3%A1-el-voto-hispano-la-reelecci%C3%B3n-de-trump/ar-AAHdoqc>

¹⁷ EFE, “Elecciones 2020: Latinos de Texas no tienen intenciones de reelegir a Trump”, *La Opinión*, September 29, 2019, available at : <https://laopinion.com/2019/09/29/elecciones-2020-latinos-de-texas-no-tienen-intenciones-de-reelegir-a-trump/>

¹⁸ OPPENHEIMER, op.cit

Conclusion

Although it is still too early to advance forecasts for the 2020 election, with only one candidate's identity known at the moment, it is evident that the U.S. Hispanic community has been gaining significant momentum, and at some point could even be decisive in tilting the results towards one party or another.

That reality has motivated a number of gestures of rapprochement towards the Hispanic community from both President Trump and the Democratic Party, as demonstrated by one of its potential candidates for the White House, former Vice President Joe Biden, who has launched a video in Spanish in Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) in a bid to get closer to the Latino community. In it he uses the first sentence of the U.S. Constitution: "We the People", emphasising the importance of that city in the foundation of American democracy, where immigrants have an essential value, while at the same time underscoring the importance of the union of all people as opposed to the policies developed by Trump, which have generated divisions¹⁹.

The Hispanic community, however, will have to increase its electoral participation as well as its presence in the institutions if it wants to have greater impact in the political arena and not just in demographic terms. This will enable it to exert greater pressure on the implementation of a regional plan aimed at reducing violence and poverty in Latin America, the only way to combat the causes of Central American immigration, namely the high rates of homicide and widespread poverty.

*María Luisa Pastor Gómez**
IEEE analyst

¹⁹ GARCÍA, Jesús, «Joe Biden lanza video en español: "Nosotros el Pueblo"», *El Diario*, May 16, 2019, available at <https://eldiariiony.com/2019/05/16/joe-biden-lanza-video-en-espanol-nosotros-el-pueblo/>