

Why Latino Voters Haven't Completely Abandoned the GOP

According to Perry Bacon of 538, there are four possible theories (T1-T4) as to why Latino voters haven't completely abandoned the GOP, despite some journalists/academics predicting Trump would irreparably damage the GOP standing within the Latino community due to his seemingly racially insensitive rhetoric/policies. T1) Partisanship is strong T2) Immigration isn't a deal breaker T3) Republican appeal T4) Maybe we're wrong (aka Latinos have left the GOP in droves). While it remains true that Latino's overwhelmingly supported national Democrats in both 2016 and 2018, there has yet to be a Latino voter backlash to Trump that would essentially crush the GOP's hopes of maintaining power in the federal government.

Out of the four plausible explanations about why Latino voters haven't abandoned the GOP in a political mass exodus, I contend that T3 has proven to be the primary reason why the GOP has done exceptionally well within the Latino community. This effectively discredits T4, the author's pre-election claim that maybe Trump has wrecked the GOP's chances with Hispanics, as the 2020 election proved that the Latino vote is still solidly in play for national Republicans. The widespread perception that Trump has alienated this community with his policies and rhetoric while Democrats have adopted increasingly liberal stances on immigration issues, while fair and justified, simply did not manifest itself in the election results.

I contend that Congressional Republicans deserve more credit than the author gives them for devoting the time and energy into tightly contested Hispanic battleground areas, such as Florida and Texas, whereas Democrats may have relied too heavily on anti-Trump Latino sentiment to carry them to victory in these national and state elections. The author points out that Democrats, and not Republicans, are known as the party of immigration and inclusivity; couple

this with the opportunity that Trump's anti-Latino rhetoric and stricter immigration policies presents, and Democrats should command well over 20-25% of the Latinos vote in national and state elections (Bacon 5). However, Republicans haven't cowered in the face of adversity; they have battled to overcome Trump's supposed shortcomings in the Latino community when the money is on the table: election day. Polls might paint a picture, but they don't tell the full story the way that voting data does. Republicans such as Florida Senator Rick Scott and Texas Governor Greg Abbott have been overall better than their Democratic opponents at investing campaign time and money to appeal to their Latino constituents. How do I know? They won the elections! Even some Democratic strategists have lambasted Democrats like Senator Bill Nelson and gubernatorial candidate Andrew Gillum for failing to effectively connect with a larger chunk of Latinos in order to win their races. Ultimately, these critics are saying: we've been gifted Trump and all the racially charged things he's said in regards to Hispanics/immigrants, therefore we *should not* and *cannot* blow this! In my opinion, this is a totally valid critique of Democratic strategizing in races that depend on the Latino vote. 2020 has proven that Democrats must get back to the drawing board if they want to receive a larger percentage of the Hispanic vote, and Congressional Republicans are not backing down from the challenge.

While the author says he is skeptical that Republicans are doing this well given the inherent disadvantage that Trump presents, I disagree with him. The GOP weaponized Socialism by branding Joe Biden and Kamala Harris supporters of this widely condemned system of government. This was especially impactful in Latino (and Cuban) areas because Socialism has ties to Castro. Regardless of whether or not Republican claims that Democrats wish to implement Socialism are true, this is the way the GOP portrayed Democrats in nationally televised attack ads (I watched them during football, basketball games). I assert that the GOP's

politically tactful move to link Joe Biden to AOC and the Progressive Wing of the Congressional Democrats – and not moderate Democrats – greatly improved their results in the 2020 Presidential election, as Florida went for Trump. Additionally, it did not help Democrats when the CEO of Goya foods publicly backed Trump at the White House and simultaneously denounced Democrats such as The Squad as Socialists who would destroy the foundation of our country. In my view, this is again proven by the 2020 election, where Trump did lose the White House, but Republicans made gains in the House and in all likelihood will retain control of the Senate. Per NBC News, “55 percent of Florida’s Cuban-American vote went to Trump, according to NBC News exit polls, while 30 percent of Puerto Ricans and 48 percent of ‘other Latinos’ backed Trump. Additionally, Trump increased his percentage of the Hispanic vote from 28 to 32%” (Del Guidice). I understand that Florida has a large population of Cubans, who are traditionally more conservative, in comparison to other states, but these numbers are still staggering! I think the media sold us this narrative that minorities hated Trump, and while that may be true for the African American community, it simply is not the case for Latinos, who voted Republican twice as much as African Americans did in 2016 and 2018 (Bacon 2). This article was written prior to the election; if the author analyzed the 2020 election results I think he would agree with my thesis that Republican Appeal – whether or not it is tied to Trump – is primarily responsible for the GOP making such shocking gains on Democratic support among Hispanics that Nicole Chavez of CNN points out “some Hispanic vote experts are declaring ‘there’s no such thing as a Latino vote’ after 2020” (Chavez). So, when the author posits his fourth theory – maybe his fundamental premise is wrong and Latinos *are* in fact abandoning the GOP due to Trump – he was wrong. Since I’m writing this in December, I can look back at the voting data/exit polls to definitively say that Latinos have not deserted the GOP because of

Trump. In fact, just the opposite has seemed to unfold: the GOP is gaining more votes in the Hispanic community based off the 2020 election results. Whether or not this is attributable to Trump is debatable, but it is unmistakable that Theory 3 – Republican appeal – more accurately predicts Latino voter trends than Theory 4.