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# Fact check US: Has Donald Trump really made a breakthrough in the Latino electorate?

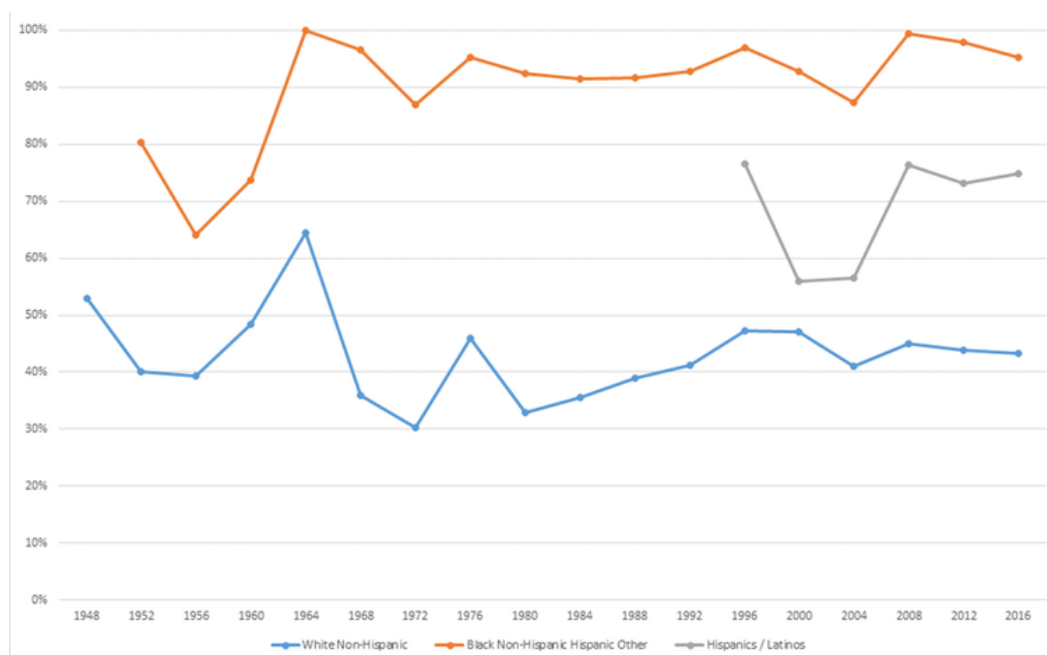
Vincent Tiberj

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The US elections delivered plenty of surprises on 3 November. While the results eventually showed that Trump had well and truly lost, we also saw him make inroads on several fronts. More than [74 million people](#) cast their ballot for him, compared to 63 million in 2016. That margin of progress came from multiple categories of voters, including rural, lower-middle-class and Latino voters. That last group, in particular, has shocked many observers, especially given the president's attacks against Latino immigrants. A month and a half later, it's time to take a closer look at the data and try to analyze the voting behavior of that population.

First of all, let's look at the numbers. To date, all we have access to are the [exit polls](#) conducted for American media outlets, which are interesting tools at the local and national level. They indicate that Trump made no real inroads with Latino voters since 2016. In both 2016 and 2020, two thirds of this group voted Democrat – 63% for Hilary Clinton, then 65% for Joe Biden. Furthermore, according to the [American National Election Studies \(ANES\)](#), this has been a trend since the late 1980s, with 76% going for Al Gore in 2000, 76% for Barack Obama in 2008 and 73% for Obama (again) in 2012. The Republican candidate who received the most votes was George W. Bush (around 40%), probably because he had a strong base of support in Texas, where 23% of the population is Latino American.

## Share of the vote for the Democratic Party by ethnicity



Democratic share of the vote. American National Election Studies, Author provided

## Why Latino and Black minority votes differ (to a certain extent)?

The fact that Trump received 32% of the Latino vote was surprising, partly because he has [railed against Latinos on numerous occasions](#), calling Mexicans “rapists” and “criminals” back in 2015. But the other reason this result was so shocking is that people tend to assume that the Latino voting bloc will vote in the same way as the other big minority in the US, that is, African-Americans. However, the two groups have different reasons for their voting behaviors.

The Latino population is far more diverse than the Black population. It includes both recently-arrived and second-generation immigrants, economic migrants and refugees, those that are “visible” and those that are not. Taking a moment to study the Black vote is therefore useful for understanding the Latino vote.

Ever since the 1960s, more than 90% of Black Americans have been voting Democrat. Such stability is striking considering that this group has been socially divergent since the 1980s, as established by the work of political scientist [Michael Dawson](#), who explains this behavior through the prism of “linked fate” that unite Black Americans despite socioeconomic diversity.

Other immigrant groups are not connected by that notion of linked fates. Their shared socio-political characteristics generally fade over time, as members of the population are integrated into American society. This is mainly due to the fact that new arrivals only experience temporary discrimination (*see the work of [Robert Dahl](#) for more on this topic*). In the case of African-Americans, however, this feeling of connection still exists because American society continues to discriminate against them. And prejudices remain, particularly because “visibilization” due to skin color plays a major role. [Reuel Rogers](#) showed that recently-arrived Afro-Caribbeans also experience discrimination in the US, even though they do not have the same history as Black Americans.

Latino voting behavior can be explained through the “two-tiered pluralism” theory developed by political scientist [Rodney Hero](#), which shows how part of the Latino population feels connected to their Latino identity, experiences race-based discrimination and will therefore have similar voting behavior to African-American voters. This is the case in New York or California, for example, two states that are strongly structured by the fight against racism. According to [David L. Lean, Matt A. Barreto et al](#), this helps to explain why a Latino identity is stronger factor than other social voting factors, such as income, age, education or religion.

**Table 3**  
**Latino Partisanship by Demographic Characteristics**

	Democrats	Republicans	Independent
Total	66.2%	23.7%	10.1%
Likely voters	67.1%	24.2%	8.8%
Less HS	72.4%	17.9%	9.7%
HS Grad	66.3%	24.7%	9.0%
College	63.0%	28.4%	8.6%
Less 25K	67.4%	22.9%	9.7%
25–49K	67.0%	23.3%	9.8%
More 50K	66.0%	28.9%	5.1%
Immigrant	64.0%	25.9%	10.1%
Native–2nd	67.9%	21.3%	10.8%
Native–3rd	70.0%	21.4%	8.6%
18–39	61.5%	24.8%	13.7%
40–59	68.0%	23.3%	8.7%
60 and over	69.8%	23.9%	6.3%
Catholic	71.6%	19.5%	8.9%
Non-Catholic	56.0%	34.4%	9.6%
Born Again	58.9%	31.6%	9.5%

Source: *Washington Post/Univision/TRPI National Survey of Latino Voters, October 15, 2004.*

Source: The Latino vote in the 2004 election, David Leal, Matt Barreto et al.

## The case of Cuban Americans

However, some Latinos easily integrate into American society. This is because they do not stand out because of their skin color, meaning that they are not reduced to their race in daily interactions. Bit by bit, their solidarity with other Latinos decreases, and their sense of linked fates disappears. Other voting factors take precedence: depending on their personal situation, voters begin to consider various things – their position toward the welfare state (which they may not necessarily support) or religious beliefs, for instance. Another factor is Cuban-American exceptionalism, which researchers identified in the 1990s. This group votes overwhelmingly Republican (80% in 2004), whereas Mexican Americans, for example, mostly vote Democrat (66% in 2004).

The influence of Cuban voters has become particularly important in US presidential elections because of Florida, which has been a swing state for more than twenty years. In 2020, 56% of Cubans voted for Trump, versus 31% of Puerto Rican voters, continuing the well-known trend. Several studies dating back to 2004 have explored this phenomenon, and explain it through the difficult relationship that Cubans have with the Castro regime (and related beliefs in terms of socialism, private property, oppression, etc.).

It should also be noted that this kind of voting behavior has also been observed in Vietnamese “boat people,” who came to the US and France after the Vietnam War. In France, the [“Trajectories and Origins”](#) survey by INED and INSEE provides insight into the right-wing positioning of immigrants from Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia (a position that their children and grandchildren do not hold). The common denominator being that these immigrants fled a Communist regime.

In conclusion, these dynamics do not support the Republican party. Trump may have succeeded in mobilizing some Latino Americans who feel “less Latino” and less discriminated, by using highly divisive, anti-immigrant rhetoric. But the Latino population’s increasing strength nationwide is shifting Republican states to the Democrat camp. Such was the case of New Mexico under Obama. This year, Arizona flipped, whose population is 19% Latino. Texas, at 23%, looks to be next.

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*Translated from the French by Rosie Marsland for [Fast ForWord](#)*