

The Rise of the Hispanic Voters in Florida and the 2016 Election

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Background

In 1940, as Florida struggled to emerge from the Great Depression and as the dark clouds of war appeared on the horizon, it remained little more than an intriguing footnote in the history of the United States. While it was the place of the oldest European settlement in St. Augustine in 1565 and the oldest free black community at Ft. Mose, just north of the Ancient City, in 1738, few Americans were aware of either. Most looked on Florida as a backward place and as a Deep South state in which race defined relations between the white and black populations. The Hispanic population in the state, which was negligible prior to 1940, represented only 6.6% of the state's population as recently as 1970.¹

World War II brought dramatic change to the state, as more than 2 million people – a number larger than the entire population of 1.9 million – located at training bases throughout the state to prepare for war. The war introduced Americans to Florida, most for the first time, and it awakened them to the state's possibilities. Soldiers, especially those in training on the southeast coast and in the Panhandle, wrote to family and friends that Florida was the most beautiful place they had ever seen, and they hoped to have the opportunity to settle there after the war.²

Many did have that opportunity, and they migrated in significant numbers in the late 1940s and throughout the 1950s, pushing the state past all its Deep South neighbors in total population by 1960. At the same time, a socialist revolution in Cuba in the 1950s that turned communist, ignited a dramatic influx of Cuban immigrants into Florida in 1959. Fidel Castro accelerated the out-migration by starting Freedom Flights and a children's exodus (Pedro Pan) to the United States in order to rid Cuba of those opposed to his revolution. While many Cubans who fled their homeland were welcomed by churches throughout the United States, most relocated to Miami over time to be with family, friends and neighbors from Cuba, and they transformed the city from a community of northerners to a multi-ethnic, multi-racial one.

In the process, what had been a biracial state for much of the twentieth century became by 1980 the most diverse state in the South and one of the most diverse in the nation. Hispanics throughout the Caribbean and South America, attracted by Miami's diverse culture and economic opportunities, flooded into Florida, following the Cuban migration. By 2010, according to the most recent decennial U.S. Census, Hispanics constituted 22.5% of the state's population and more than 4.2 million residents,

¹ See David R. Colburn and Lance deHaven Smith, *Florida's Megatrends* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2nd edition, 2010), 60-61. The first decennial U.S. Census to report Hispanics as a separate ethnic category was 1970. An estimated 450,000 Hispanics lived in Florida based on that census. See Stanley K. Smith, "Florida Population Growth: Past, Present and Future," June 2005, https://www.bebr.ufl.edu/sites/default/files/FloridaPop2005_0.pdf.

² David R. Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans: Florida and Its Politics Since 1940* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2nd edition, 2013), 22.

over three times their proportion of the total population in 1970 and 6% more than in 2000.³ These numbers from the 2000 and 2010 Census only hinted at the ethnic complexity of Florida. As one Hispanic woman observed about the dramatic growth of the Hispanic population: “They’re from all over Central and South America.”⁴ Sandra Cortes, who moved to Miami from Colombia in 2000, said most of her friends are from that South American country. “I don’t seek them out,” she stated, “but we gravitate to each other because we share similar cultures.”⁵

Unlike Cubans, who resided in Florida as exiles, most other Hispanics were “birds of passage,” who moved back and forth between south Florida and their countries of origin. Even those Hispanics who moved farther north from Miami to Ft. Lauderdale and Orlando located near airports so that they can travel to their homelands frequently and inexpensively. The experience of these Hispanics, including Puerto Ricans, differed markedly not only from that of Cubans, but also from that of previous immigrant groups because of the proximity to their homelands and the pervasiveness of the Hispanic language and culture in south Florida. These Hispanics retained much of their cultural identity far longer than those who emigrated from Europe and Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even among many second and third generation residents, the appeal of their homeland has remained strong. The political result has been that surprisingly few take part in the political process in Florida and have voted much less frequently than Cubans have.⁶

Given the marked change in Florida’s Hispanic population, both in terms of growth and diversity, what might we expect from the state’s Hispanic voters in the 2016 presidential election? This paper examines the increasing importance of Florida’s Hispanic voters and their impact on state and, consequently, on national politics.

Some political pundits have questioned the extent to which Florida’s Hispanic voters are critical in determining the outcome of state and national elections, arguing that they frequently don’t vote. But the results from the 2012 election point out quite clearly that Hispanics in Florida and other swing states contributed significantly to President Obama’s success in Florida in 2012, in a place that had otherwise gone Republican. President Obama won the White House by attracting a large percentage of minority votes, including 71% of the U.S. Hispanic vote and 60% of Florida’s Hispanic vote. Of additional significance, the number of registered Hispanic voters in Florida grew by almost 200,000 from the 2008 and to 2012 presidential elections and is likely to grow by more than that number in 2016.⁷

³ In 2000 there were almost 2.7 million Hispanics in Florida or 16.8% of the state’s total population of almost 16 million. See Betsy Guzman, “the Hispanic Population Census 2000 Brief,” Table 2, May 2001, <https://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/c2kbr01-3.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid. Based on the 2000 Census, approximately 37% of Hispanics in Florida were not identified as Cuban, Mexican, or Puerto Rican. Computation was authors’.

⁵ “The Changing Face of Florida,” *Gainesville Sun*, March 28, 2001.

⁶ Colburn, *From Yellow Dog Democrats to Red State Republicans*, 194-195.

⁷ It is difficult to project registered voters with any certainty. In terms of eligible voters, one estimate projects the addition of over 400,000 Hispanic eligible voters in Florida from 2012 to 2016. See Partnership for a New Economy, “The Changing Face of the Nation, How Hispanic and Asian Voters Could Reshape the Electorate in Key States,” Table 2, October 2014, http://www.renewoureconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/PNAE_Voting_Brief.pdf. According to the Pew Research Center, over 1.6 million of the 2.1 million Hispanic eligible voters were registered in Florida in 2012. This number computes to approximately 79% of Florida’s Hispanic eligible voters in 2012. If the same percentage is applied to 2016, there would be more

A writer for the *New York Times* observed that Republicans may not necessarily need to achieve a great gain in Hispanic votes to win back the White House in 2016, but they ignore Hispanics at their own peril in the swing state of Florida.⁸ Moreover, the proportion of non-Hispanic white voters in Florida who supported a Republican presidential candidate has been declining relative to the proportionate growth of Hispanic voters who have been leaning increasingly toward the Democratic Party.⁹ An op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* argued: “Groups that lean Democrat – minorities, young people, and single women – are growing. The challenge is obvious: Republicans can’t win a presidential election by trying to grab a larger piece of a shrinking pie.”¹⁰

Not all Hispanics will count equally in the grand calculus of projected voter turnout in 2016. For example, most Hispanics live in California (a state that will predictably turn out the vote for a Democratic president) and in Texas (a state that tends to vote Republican). That leaves Florida, with the largest population of Hispanics in the crucial swing state, with its 29 electoral votes. In the 2012 election Florida also had a larger Hispanic voter turnout (62%) than was the case in California (49%) or Texas (39%).¹¹ Another interesting feature of Florida’s Hispanic voters is the large percentage of voters who are not affiliated with a party, Democrat or Republican. Of the 11.9 million voters in the state who registered for the 2012 election, approximately 1.7 million, or 14%, were Hispanics, over 500,000 of whom did not register as either Republicans or Democrats.¹²

The major question facing the Republican Party is how should it position itself for the 2016 election? Assuming the Party wants to attract Florida’s Hispanic voters, what does it need to do to be successful?

In conjunction with these questions is the overarching set of tactical questions for Republican strategists. Should the GOP do the following: 1. change the message to Hispanic voters; 2. change the substance or policies that underpin the message; or 3. both? The frequently cited quip by Ronald Reagan, “Latinos are Republicans. They just don’t know it yet”¹³ suggests that the way the message is delivered may be more of the problem than the Party’s position on public policy issues.

The Changing Demographics of Hispanics in Florida

than 300,000 new Hispanic registered voters in Florida in 2016. For data on Florida’s Hispanic registered voters from 2006 through 2012, see Seth Motel and Eileen Patten, “Latinos in the 2012 Election: Florida,” Pew Research Center, Released January 23, 2012; updated November 5, 2012, http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/11/Florida_Election_Factsheet_2012_updated_11-5.pdf. Last accessed April 17, 2015.

⁸ Nate Cohn, “Hispanic Voters Are Important for Republicans, but Not Indispensable,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/21/upshot/hispanic-voters-are-important-for-republicans-but-not-indispensable.html?_r=2&abt=0002&abg=1. Last accessed March 27, 2015.

⁹ Ibid. Based on exit polls, President Obama lost the non-Hispanic white vote by 24% in the 2012 presidential election.

¹⁰ Whit Ayers, “A Daunting Demographic Challenge for the GOP in 2016,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 5, 2015, A. 5.

¹¹ CBS Miami, “Florida Hispanics Voted At A High Rate In 2012 Election,” May 8, 2013, <http://miami.cbslocal.com/2013/05/08/hispanics-in-florida-voted-at-a-high-rate/>.

¹² Motel and Patten, “Latinos in the 2012 Election: Florida,”. For the 2012 election, the number of Hispanics registered as Republicans (476,000) in Florida was lower than that of Hispanics who registered as unaffiliated (513,000).

¹³ See http://www.ontheissues.org/celeb/Ronald_Reagan_Immigration.htm. Last accessed March 27, 2015.

Hispanics accounted for 17% of eligible voters in Florida in 2012 and 23.6% of the population. They are projected to constitute 19% in 2016 and over 25% of the population by 2020. Voting trends among Florida’s Hispanics have increasingly shifted to the Democratic Party in the past decade as the more conservative Cuban population became a less dominant segment of the Hispanic vote and as Cuban attitudes relative to their homeland moderated over time.

The following table reveals the shift in the Hispanic vote from one party to the other between 2004 and 2012:¹⁴

Table 1
Presidential Preference in Florida by Hispanic Voters, 2004-2012

2012	Obama	60%	Romney	39%
2008	Obama	57%	McCain	42%
2004	Kerry	44%	Bush	56%

Pew Research Center analysis of 2012, 2008, and 2004 National Election Pool Florida exit poll results

The percentages of Hispanic votes for each presidential nominee highlights the voting trends of various sub-groups within the Hispanic population. For example, Florida’s Cuban American voters split their votes between President Obama in 2012 (49%) and challenger Mitt Romney (47%), whereas 66% of Florida’s non-Cuban voters supported President Obama’s re-election compared to just 34% who voted for Romney.¹⁵

Cubans in Florida:

Cuban Americans have long defined the Hispanic population in Florida, particularly in the southern part of the state, where they constitute approximately 1.3 million, most of whom are concentrated in Miami-Dade County (almost 900,000). One historian quipped that Miami was the only city in the United States with its own foreign policy.¹⁶ While their political influence has diminished with the growth of other Hispanics, Cuban Americans still constitute 32% of Florida’s Hispanic eligible voters. As noted previously, the Cuban population tends to be more conservative than the Florida Hispanic population in general because of their focus on Cuba and the overthrow of Fidel Castro. And older Cuban Americans are typically even more conservative than younger Cubans, consistently voting Republican because of the party’s support of the embargo against Cuba and its resistance to normalizing relations with Cuba.¹⁷

¹⁴ Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor, “Latino Voters in the 2012 Election,” Figure A-5, 12, November 7, 2012, http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2012/11/2012_Latino_vote_exit_poll_analysis_final_11-09.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5. Note that analysis of exit poll results is the only reliable way to discern the proportion of Hispanic voters favoring one candidate over another.

¹⁶ Gary Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 285.

¹⁷ Marc Caputo and Joey Flechas, “Poll: Cuban-Americans Split on Obama’s Cuba Policy,” *Miami Herald*, December 19, 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article4701411.html>. Last accessed March 27, 2015. This finding also corresponds to a response to a poll conducted by the Bureau of Economic and Business Research, the University of Florida, showing greater support for than opposition to ending the Cuban Adjustment Act. The poll added four Cuba-related questions to its consumer confidence survey in March 2015. The poll surveyed 521 Florida adult residents, including one fifth of respondents who identified themselves as Hispanic. There is a margin of error of 4.3%. See Megan O’Matz, Sally Kestin, John Maines, and Rachel

A recent poll of registered Cuban American voters in Miami-Dade, however, revealed a decline in support for Republican candidates based on when the respondents came to the United States. Those who left Cuba in 1965-1973 supported Mr. Romney in the 2012 election by 67%, compared to 33% of those who left Cuba in 1995-2014.¹⁸ The dates are significant because those who left before 1980, the year of the Mariel boatlift, were considered political exiles, while those who left after 1980, economic exiles.

Even though decades have elapsed since Castro's rise to power, many first and second generation Cuban Americans continue to be wary of American diplomatic overtures toward Cuba, especially those that would end the trade embargo and normalize diplomatic relations. The age of Cuban voters matters greatly as to whether a candidate's position on the embargo would affect that person's vote. When asked how likely they would be to vote for a candidate for political office who supported the re-establishment of diplomatic relations, 67% of those 65 years old and older responded that they were unlikely or not very likely to do so, compared to only 25% in the 18-29 year old age group.¹⁹

Puerto Ricans:

After Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans account for the second largest group of Hispanic voters in Florida. The Puerto Rican migration into Florida has exploded since 1990, largely as a result of difficult economic problems on the island. As the migration escalated, builders in Osceola County constructed large subdivisions for Puerto Ricans and advertised heavily on the island. The Orlando airport made it relatively easy for Puerto Ricans to move back and forth between their homeland and Florida and the area highly desirable as a consequence. And the fact that they enjoyed U.S. citizenship made the transition almost seamless.

There are approximately one million Puerto Ricans in Florida, representing 28% of eligible Hispanic voters in the state, with most residing along the I-4 corridor. Most Puerto Ricans were registered as Democrats in their homeland and they registered as Democrats again when they relocated to Florida. In the 2012 presidential election, they voted overwhelmingly for President Obama over Mr. Romney.²⁰ A September 2014 poll of Puerto Rican residents in Florida's I-4 Corridor showed that 55% of respondents were registered Democrats and only 17% registered Republicans. Despite their overwhelming affiliation with the Democratic Party, almost half of the respondents (48%) indicated they were conservative on

Schallom, "Interactive: Poll Shows Views on Cuban Immigration," *SunSentinel*, <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/interactive/sfl-cuban-adjustment-act-poll-interactive-2015-htmlstory.html>.

¹⁸ Jorge Duany, "2014 FIU Cuba Poll: How Cuban Americans in Miami View U.S. Policies Toward Cuba," Cuban Research Institute, Florida International University, 23, <https://cri.fiu.edu/research/cuba-poll/2014-fiu-cuba-poll.pdf>. Last accessed March 27, 2015. "The 2014 FIU Cuba Poll was conducted between February and May 2014. It was administered to a random sample of 1,000 Cuban-American residents of Miami-Dade County, age 18 and over." The poll had a margin of error of 3.1%.

¹⁹ Ibid, 18.

²⁰ Based on an exit poll by Bendixen & Amandi of 4,866 Hispanic voters (approximately 1,300 from Puerto Rico) in Miami-Dade, Broward, Osceola, Orange, Hillsborough counties, 87% Puerto Ricans voted for President Obama and 13% for Mr. Romney. See Bendixen & Amandi International, "Exit Poll of Hispanic Voters in Florida," November 8, 2012, 15, <http://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/ElectionResults-ExitPoll.pdf>. Last accessed April 20, 2015. The poll had a 1.4% margin of error.

several issues. For example, they supported pro-life legislation, parental notification, and prayer in public schools. But Puerto Ricans also strongly favored comprehensive immigration reform.²¹

Because Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans account for roughly 60% of eligible Hispanic voters in Florida, they receive most of the media coverage and political attention. The remaining Hispanic groups remain substantial, however, and continue to immigrate into the state in substantial numbers. Based on 2010 Census data, the other 40% include, 9% Mexican, 5% Dominican, 1% Salvadoran, and 25% other. Dominicans may be a population of particular interest to Democrat strategists in the 2016 election. They represent the most enthusiastic bloc of Hispanics voters, having cast most of their votes for President Obama and having supported his positions on civil rights, affirmative action, and health care.²²

Issues of Potential Interest for Florida's Hispanic Voters:

As the data above reveal, Florida's Hispanic voters are not monolithic in their political attitudes and in their responses to federal policies. The federal government's policies in the areas of immigration reform, health care access, and education have been strongly embraced by many, but not all, Hispanic voters.

Of the issues of importance to Hispanic voters, the economy appears to be the most vital. In response to a Pew Research Center national exit poll for the 2012 presidential election, Hispanic voters (60%) mirrored the general electorate (59%) in identifying the economy as the most important issue facing the nation.²³ In other polls conducted in 2012 and for the mid-term election of 2014, Hispanics again mirrored the population as a whole in the importance they attached to the economy. Yet, in the 2012 election, while Romney enjoyed a slight advantage over Obama in terms of aggregate poll responses on the economy, Hispanic voters thought Obama's stance on many other campaign issues vastly outweighed Romney's stance on the economy.²⁴

An article analyzing the outcome of the 2012 presidential election (Jacobson, 2013) found that extreme partisanship and a lack of cross-over votes from one party to the other trumped concerns about the economy in explaining why President Obama defeated Mr. Romney. Specifically, Democrats voted in greater numbers than Republicans, and there were few defections of Democrats to the Republican Party and vice versa. The same nationwide finding of partisanship and a lack of defections from the major parties appeared to apply to Hispanic voters in Florida as well. An exit poll of Hispanic voters in Florida conducted by Bendixen & Amandi after the 2012 presidential election revealed that only 8% of Democrats and 12% of Republicans crossed over to the other party in the general election. Of particular significance to the outcome, Independents voted almost 3 to 1 for President Obama over Mr. Romney.²⁵

²¹ Voter/Consumer Research, I-4 Puerto Rican Residents, September 2014, <http://www.pr51st.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/SurveyReport.pdf>. Last accessed April 20, 2015. This poll was of 400 respondents conducted by telephone or cell phone between August 20 and September 4, 2014, with a margin of error of 4.9%.

²² Elizabeth Llorente, "Dominicans are Obama's Most Enthusiastic Latino Voters," Fox News Latino, November 2, 2012, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/11/02/dominicans-are-obama-most-enthusiastic-latino-voters/>. Last accessed April 20, 2015.

²³ Mark Hugo Lopez and Paul Taylor, "Latino Voters in the 2012 Election."

²⁴ Gary C. Jacobson, "How the Economy and Partisanship Shaped the 2012 Presidential and Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly*, Spring 2013; 1-38.

²⁵ Bendixen & Amandi International, "Exit Poll of Hispanic Voters in Florida."

So how did Hispanics respond to other prominent issues in this campaign? In the section that follows, we examine immigration reform, health care reform, and education to assess the impact of the Hispanic vote on the election outcome.

Immigration Reform

Immigration reform resonates differently among Hispanics depending on their place of origin and the criteria they face in becoming citizens. Those individuals who came initially from Cuba and Puerto Rico have different residency status under federal law than do residents from other Latin American countries. Under the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1996, Cubans are eligible for U.S. citizenship after only one year of residency. Puerto Ricans are automatically U.S. citizens, but they cannot vote in presidential elections unless they have established residency in the United States. For other Hispanics registering to vote and becoming a citizen is much more challenging. The process can take years.

According to national exit polls of Hispanics following the 2014 mid-term elections, immigration ranked as the most important issue for only 16% of respondents.²⁶ However, many of the polls that assessed Hispanic attitudes toward immigration reform occurred prior to President Obama's executive actions and the ensuing action by the Republican-dominated Congressional responses to block the President's proposals.

A 2013 report by the Republican National Committee (RNC) noted how strategically important immigration reform was in gaining Hispanic support:

If Hispanic Americans hear that the GOP doesn't want them in the United States, they won't pay attention to our next sentence. It doesn't matter what we say about education, jobs, or the economy; if Hispanics think that we do not want them here, they will close their ears to our policies. In essence, Hispanic voters tell us our Party's position on immigration has become a litmus test, measuring whether we are meeting them with a welcome mat or a closed door.²⁷

Assuming the RNC is correct in its assessment, Florida's decision to join a law suit to block President Obama's immigration reforms adds a serious impediment to GOP presidential candidates' efforts to woo Hispanic voters.

Health Care Access

Historically Hispanics have had the highest uninsured rate among all racial and ethnic populations in the United States. Although the data are two years old, a Kaiser Family Foundation report noted that the uninsured rate of nonelderly Hispanics in Florida was 36%, compared to the U.S. average of 32%.²⁸ The report found that, because many uninsured Hispanics were members of low-income working families,

²⁶ Jens Manuel Krogsted and Mark Hugo Lopez, "5 Takeaways About the 2014 Latino Vote," Pew Research Center, November 10, 2014, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/10/5-takeaways-about-the-2014-latino-vote/>. Last accessed March 30, 2015.

²⁷ Matt Barreto, "Latino Views on the 2016 GOP Field: Who Can Actually Win the Latino Vote?" Huff Post Politics, February 2, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/latino-decisions/latino-views-on-the-2016_b_6592088.html. Last accessed April 20, 2015.

²⁸ Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured, "Health Coverage for the Hispanic Population Today and Under the Affordable Care Act," April 2013, Table 1, <https://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/84321.pdf>. Last accessed March 27, 2015.

nearly all had household incomes that would have qualified them for Medicaid expansion or premium tax credits.²⁹

A poll conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Robert Wood Johnson, and the Harvard School of Public Health also revealed that Hispanics were very concerned about their ability to pay for Medicare. Over half (52%) did not think they had enough money or health coverage to pay for a major illness.³⁰ A poll conducted in October 2014 of Florida Hispanic voters showed that 34% of those polled lacked health insurance and 80% supported Medicaid expansion.³¹ As of March 6, 2015, Florida was among 22 states that had blocked Medicaid expansion.³² At the time of this writing, the Florida Senate was considering SB 7044, which would create the Florida Health Insurance Affordability Exchange Program. The House, however, had yet to take any action, and Governor Scott joined forces with those opposed to Medicaid expansion. Effective October 2016 Medicaid funding is scheduled to be cut for safety net hospitals in Florida, thereby placing them under great fiscal pressure. This pressure will be exacerbated by the loss of a projected \$1.3 billion for the Low Income Pool Program which largely benefits safety net hospitals and is scheduled to expire in June 2015.³³

Education

Education is another important issue which tends to galvanize Hispanic voters. In 2012, Florida's Hispanic eligible voters (54%) lagged behind the state's white eligible voters (61%) in educational attainment.³⁴ With education often critical to individual advancement, Hispanics have been strong supporters of education funding and improved access to higher education. The Florida Legislature and Governor took at least one potentially divisive issue off the table when legislation was adopted in 2014 to allow some undocumented immigrants to qualify for post-secondary in-state tuition. Another potentially divisive issue that may surface in the 2016 election in Florida and the nation is the disposition of the Common Core standards. Former Governor Jeb Bush has been a strong supporter of Common Core in contrast to several other prominent Republicans who have spoken against it. In addition,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

³⁰ NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard School of Public Health, "Latinos' Lives and Health Today Summary Part One: Total Latinos and Heritage Groups," January 2014, http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/surveys_and_polls/2014/rwjf407545. Last accessed March 27, 2015. This survey was conducted for National Public Radio, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health via telephone from June 11 – July 14, 2013, using a nationally representative sample of 1,478 Hispanic respondents age 18 and older. The poll had a margin of error of 3.7%.

³¹ Camila Gallardo, "Responses Demonstrate Strong Bipartisan Latino Support for Medicaid Expansion, Minimum Wage Increase and Equal Pay Laws for Women," National Council of La Raza, October 10, 2014, http://www.nclr.org/index.php/about_us/news/news_releases/new_poll_shows_hispanic_voters_in_florida_enthusiastic_about_election_but_undecided_in_gov_race/. Last accessed March 27, 2015.

³² Kaiser Family Foundation, "Status of State Action on the Medicaid Expansion Decision," March 6, 2015, <http://kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/state-activity-around-expanding-medicaid-under-the-affordable-care-act/>.

³³ Not all Florida hospitals will be affected the same but safety net hospitals are expected to be more adversely impacted from these two reductions. See Phil Galewitz, "No Medicaid Expansion? No Problem for Many Safety-Net Hospital Profits, *Kaiser Health News*, March 4, 2015, <http://kaiserhealthnews.org/news/no-medicaid-expansion-no-problem-for-many-safety-net-hospital-profits/>.

³⁴ "Characteristics of Eligible Voters in Florida and the United States, by Race and Ethnicity, 2012," Latinos in the 2014 Election: Florida, October 15, 2015, Table 5, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/fact-sheets/2014-state-election-fact-sheets/latinos-in-the-2014-election-florida/ph-2014-10-election-fact-sheet-fl-05/>. Last accessed March 27, 2015.

national Hispanic organizations such as the National Council of La Raza and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) have worked to inform their constituencies about the standards. This year Governor Scott approved a bill to eliminate an a statewide English language arts test required in the 11th grade and to limit statewide standardized testing to 5% of a student's time in the classroom.³⁵ Last year he signed a bill removing references to "Common Core" from state law although the majority of standards remain in effect. It is perhaps too early to gauge how important Common Core will be for Florida's Hispanic voters, either in the presidential primaries or in 2016.³⁶ Moreover, opponents of the implementation of Common Core standards can be found on both sides of the political spectrum from national teachers unions to GOP presidential candidates Ted Cruz, Rand Paul, and Marco Rubio.

Conclusion:

Even though voting trends among Hispanics have favored the Democratic Party, there are no guarantees with the Hispanic vote because it is so diffuse. Florida's elderly Cuban Americans, for example, turn out in greater numbers than Hispanic voters, whose roots are elsewhere. But their historic dominance is declining as younger Cuban Americans and Hispanics in general show a greater preference for the policies of the Democratic Party. These younger Hispanics also generally favor President Obama's efforts to improve relations with Cuba. A large percentage of young voters are unaffiliated, however, and they tend to vote in much smaller numbers than do older Hispanic voters. In addition, the dramatic influx of people from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, who are largely Democrat, is further redefining Florida's political landscape.

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the GOP and the Democrat Party is motivating Hispanic voters to take part in the electoral process. According to a recent article in *the Economist*, only one-third of all Cubans who have entered the country since the 1990s have actually progressed from residency to becoming full citizens.³⁷ Moreover, more recent Puerto Rican arrivals tend to be independent and unaffiliated.³⁸ The rising tide of Hispanics moving into Florida and their political leanings suggest it is in the interest of the Democratic Party to get them registered to vote and to participate in the election process. While message refinement by Democrats will help, it may not be enough to get out the Hispanic vote unless Democrats combine it with a massive voter mobilization effort as Obama did in 2012. For its part, the Republican Party will need more than political strategies to win the support of Florida's Hispanic voters.

³⁵ Committee Substitute for H.B. No. 7069, at <http://laws.flrules.org/2015/6>.

³⁶ If Florida's Hispanic voters are surveyed in the future regarding their views of Common Core standards, the way the questions are worded will likely play a role in their response. See Dr. Michael D. Martinez, "To Join the Common Core or Not to Join the Common Core: It Depends on the Question," University of Florida, November 13, 2014, <http://www.bebr.ufl.edu/article/to-join-the-common-core-or-not>. Last accessed April 20, 2015.

³⁷ "Special Report: America's Hispanics," *The Economist*, March 14, 2015, 8.

³⁸ Luisita Lopez Torregrosa, "'How a Surge in Puerto Rican Voters is Changing Florida Politics.'"