THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HISPANIC ELECTORATE AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY

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The Latino electorate is becoming an increasingly powerful force in American politics. In the last two Presidential elections the Latino electorate voted in much greater numbers for the Democratic candidate but that does not mean that the Republican Party should ignore the growing power of the Latino vote. In the past the Republican Party has made inroads within the Latino electorate and it may be able to do so in future. In this research project I examine past voting history and trends within the Hispanic electorate, how religion effects voting within it, and how the hotly debated issue of comprehensive immigration reform has an effect on the vote of the Latino electorate. Though immigration reform is an issue that pulls Latino votes away from the Republican Party, there are significant commonalities of interest and values between the Republican Party and Latino voters.  This research project discusses how and why the Republican Party has been faced with struggles in gaining votes from Hispanics and proposes several solutions to the problem, including courting Hispanics on social issues and taking a stance on immigration reform.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

**Research Question:** How has the GOP been affected by and adapted to the rapidly changing Hispanic population in the American electorate? What, if any, steps can the Republican Party take to appeal to this growing group of voters that has lacked in past election cycles?

The American population and demographics within it are constantly changing more than ever before. One of these demographic groups that is simply too hard to ignore is the Hispanic and Latino population. The Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project reported, “the nation’s 53 million Hispanics comprise 17% of the total U.S. population.”[[1]](#footnote-2) When it comes to politics in the United States, this rising demographic in the American electorate has presented an obstacle to the Republican Party that has affected the outcomes of many different elections on all levels. The clearest example of this comes from the 2012 presidential election, in which Latino voters voted overwhelmingly to reelect President Barack Obama. According to the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project, seventy-one percent of the Hispanic vote went to Obama, while only twenty-nine percent went to his Republican challenger, Mitt Romney. This data reveals that “Obama’s national vote share among Hispanic voters is the highest seen by a Democratic candidate since 1996, when President Bill Clinton won 72% of the Hispanic vote.” This research also indicates that the Latino population in the American electorate is on the rise that they made up 10% of the total American electorate in 2012, up from 9% in 2008 and 8% in 2004.[[2]](#footnote-3) This data is just the beginning of a large group of studies that come to the same conclusion, that Republicans are having an ever-increasing hard time in swaying Latino voters to cast their ballots for them.

There are several factors that have played into the always changing Hispanic-American

Electorate. According to another study by The Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project, “Hispanics will account for 40% of the growth of the eligible electorate in the U.S. between now and 2030, at which time 40 million Hispanics will be eligible to vote, up from 23.7 million now.”[[3]](#footnote-4) This is crucial to examine because the Latino population will help to shape the results of elections for present and future generations.

Another factor concerns changes in religion within the Latino population. According to Henry Olsen, “People who are genuinely concerned about the Republican Party’s future often think of how to appeal to the nation’s Hispanics. And they properly note that one Latino group stands out as potentially open to conservative Republicanism: Evangelicals.” According to another study by the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project and the Public Religion Research Institute, confirm that evangelicals comprise 16% of the Latino-American population, however, Republicans have still have an increasingly difficult time attracting this growing group of voters[[4]](#footnote-5). Hispanic Evangelicals, as well as other religious groups, such as Catholics, will be further examined in the upcoming chapters to explain this trend and how this rising problem can be solved.

Perhaps the most important issue that is currently causing the divide between Republicans and the Hispanic population is the hotly debated issue of immigration reform. This has branded the Republican Party in recent years, with many members opposing any type of comprehensive reform. Although there are some moderate Republicans that do support creating and passing such legislation, this clearly does not sit well with Latino voters and is an issue that will have to be addressed and most likely resolved in order for Republicans to be able to persuade more of the Hispanic population to vote for them.

The third aspect that has to be investigated when it comes to Hispanic voters is arguments and strategy regarding social issues. Social issues in the United States are not only controversial, they are a key factor in why the Democratic and Republican parties are currently so divided in our nation. Social issues such as abortion and gay rights have become important factors in the way Americans shape their political views today.

There are several arguments and proposed solutions that can be explained and tested for this issue. The first is that the Republican Party should court Hispanic voters on non-immigration issues, such as social and economic issues. The second argument is that the Republican Party’s base is too skeptical of immigration for the party to change its views. The third, and perhaps most drastic argument, is that Hispanics are unlikely to vote Republican under any circumstances, so the party shouldn’t even bother.

In the following chapters, several aspects of the rising problem between the Republican Party and the Hispanic electorate will be addressed. These aspects will help to explain the intellectual problem of what the GOP can do to attract this group of voters, and how the Republican Party can overcome this demographic challenge. These chapters will focus on using several key issues, including the rise in the American Hispanic electorate, the changes in religion within it, stances on social issues within the Latino population, and how the hotly debated issue of immigration reform has and will continue to shape how Hispanics make the decision on who to pick on the ballot in elections to come.

**II. BACKGROUND**

There are several factors that help to explain the current relationship between the Republican Party and the Hispanic electorate in the United States. Before that happens, it is important to give a background on the development of the current problems within the GOP. An article written by Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner, titled “How to Save The Republican Party” does an excellent job at highlighting and explaining the variety of struggles the Republican Party faces, with both the Hispanic population and the rest of the American electorate. This article begins by explaining that four out of the last six presidential elections have gone to the Democratic nominee, “at an average yield of 327 electoral votes to 210 to the Republican.” The article then goes to point out that during the two decades prior to that, 1968 to 1988, Republicans won the White House five out of six times, “averaging 417 electoral votes to the Democrats’ 113. In three of those contests the Democrats failed to muster even 50 electoral votes.” [[5]](#footnote-6)

Gerson and Wehner go on by explaining that the first factor of the “stunning reversal of electoral fortunes” is rapidly changing demographics in the United States. When it comes to the White voters, the number who favored the GOP in 1976 was 89%, and as of 2012, has dropped to 72%. A main reason for this change is in the way the United States Census Bureau identifies Hispanics, who “used to be counted among Whites before being placed in a separate category. An example to illustrate this change comes from the 2012 election. Mitt Romney, the Republican Presidential candidate, carried the White vote by 20 points, but only pulled 27% of the Hispanic vote. If the nation’s demographics were composed in a similar way as they were in 2000, he would have easily won the presidency. This is a clear sign of the changing times in the United States and it is also clear that the Republican Party faces an issue that can no longer be ignored.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The authors then explain the development of the problem. During the 1970s and 1980s, “Republicans were widely considered the stronger and more trustworthy party when it came to national defense and to keeping America safe.” When the Cold War ended, this issue did not seem to pull at the heartstrings of Americans again until after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The negative attitude of how Republicans handled wars in Afghanistan and Iraq has since tarnished the previous positive reputation of the GOP when it comes to foreign policy. Another struggle comes from Republican presidential candidates and their attempts to “connect with the concerns of working and middle-class voters.”[[7]](#footnote-8) The last major battle that the Republican Party faces according to Gerson and Wehner is that Republican policies appear to be “nearly identical to those offered up by the party more than 30 years ago.” [[8]](#footnote-9)The authors also mention that in order to become once again successful, the Republican Party needs to get rid of its “judgmental and retrograde” reputation.[[9]](#footnote-10)

One of the best ways to examine these rapid changes in the two parties in the American political system is to look at the changes that have taken place within the Democratic Party in the last few decades. Gerson and Wehner begin this explanation by talking about the struggles of the Democratic Party during the mid to late 20th century. “By the early 1990s, the Democratic Party had endured a miserable, two-decades long losing streak in presidential elections. (The one exception to was the election of Jimmy Carter in the wake of the Nixon-era Watergate Scandal).”[[10]](#footnote-11) After the Republican presidencies of Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, a “reform-minded Southern governor who knew instinctively what had to be done,” entered the national political spotlight. Clinton became the chairman of the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), an organization formed by Democrats after Ronald Reagan became elected president in 1984. In order to get away from the stigma of the McGovern/Carter/Mondale/Dukakis years, “the DLC stressed the core themes of opportunity, responsibility, community, and entrepreneurial governance.”[[11]](#footnote-12)

Clinton then went on to proclaim himself as a “New Democrat” and solidified his message by “promoting national service; making our streets and neighborhoods safer; strengthening the traditional family and creating a more family-friendly workplace; promoting educational accountability and advocating public-school choice; and, especially, “ending welfare as we know it.”[[12]](#footnote-13) These new ideas presented by Clinton paved the way for changes in the way the Democratic Party was viewed; indirectly implying it was everything the Republican Party was not. Overall, Clinton was presenting himself to the American public in a way that had not been seen much previously, in a way that he was willing to “confront ideological excesses within his own coalition, as emblems of a Democratic shift toward mainstream values.”[[13]](#footnote-14) According the Gerson and Wehner, Clinton’s two terms in the White House proved that it worked.

Finally, Gerson and Wehner present a five-step plan for the GOP to “revivify” itself and to once again appeal to more of the American public. The authors believe the Republican Party can execute this plan while still remaining in the perimeters of their principles. The first, and most important step “is focusing on the economic concerns of working and middle-class Americans.” The second is “a new Republican agenda requires the party to welcome rising immigrant groups,” which will be especially important to focus on throughout the rest of this paper. Third, “Republicans need to express and demonstrate a commitment to the common good.” Fourth, “the GOP can engage vital social issues forthrightly but in a manner that is aspirational rather than alienating.” Lastly, “where appropriate, Republicans need to harness their policy views to the findings of science.”[[14]](#footnote-15) More specifically, several of these steps can tremendously help the Republican Party to attract votes from a more diverse population, with Hispanics being the focus of the rest of this paper.

**III. PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE VOTING TRENDS OF THE HISPANIC POPULATION**

As previously mentioned, a sound way to analyze the rapid changes in the Hispanic-American electorate is to take a look at past voting history and trends of the population. A recent example of this is the 2012 presidential election. After the election, the Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project analyzed the return data and found many interesting results. One of these findings was that 11.2 million Latino voters cast ballots in the election. Although this was the most votes ever cast by the Hispanic population in a presidential election, the result greatly lagged other groups.[[15]](#footnote-16) Overall, “48% of Hispanic eligible voters turned out to vote in 2012, down from 49.9% in 2008.”[[16]](#footnote-17) To compare this to other major demographic groups in the United States, 66.6% of eligible black voters and 64.1% of eligible white voters came to the polls in 2012.[[17]](#footnote-18) Despite the decrease of Hispanic voter turnout, “between 2008 and 2012, the number of Latino eligible voters grew from 19.5 million to 23.3 million – an increase of 19%.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

To give a bit more background, there were three subgroups within the Hispanic population that did not see a decline in turnout in the 2012 election. These three groups include: naturalized Hispanic immigrants who arrived in the 1990s, Hispanic voters ages 65 and older, and Puerto Rican voters. [[19]](#footnote-20) When it comes to naturalized Hispanic immigrants who came to the United States in the 1990s, their voter turnout rate “increased from 41.2% in 2008 to 47.2% in 2012.”[[20]](#footnote-21) Among Hispanics who were age 65 and older, their voter turnout rate went from 56% in 2008 to 59.9% in 2012.[[21]](#footnote-22) This number also reflects to overall increase in voter turnout for those eligible voters age 65 and older. Among Puerto Rican voters, turnout “increased from 49.7% in 2008 to 52.8% in 2012.”[[22]](#footnote-23) This analysis also found that voter turnout among Hispanic demographic subgroups varied greatly. In 2012 “ the highest turnout rates were among those with a college degree (70.8%) and among Cuban-origin Latinos (67.2%).”[[23]](#footnote-24) In contrast, those within the Hispanic electorate who showed the lowest turnout rates were those ages “ages 18 to 29 (36.9%) and those with less than a high school diploma (35.5%).

Overall, the research shows that Hispanic voters made up a larger share of the electorate in 2012, counting for 8.4% of all voters, a new record, which is up from 7.4% in 2008. While 11.2 million Latinos chose to cast ballots in the 2012 election, an even bigger number, 12.1 million, chose not to participate. Ultimately, “among the nation’s 82.1 million nonvoters in 2012, 15% were Latinos.[[24]](#footnote-25)

A large contributing factor to the rate of growth in the participation of Latino voters was the increase of young Hispanic voter taking part. “Among the 3.8 million Latinos who became eligible to vote between 2008 and 2012, 3.7 million were U.S.-born young Hispanics who entered adulthood.”[[25]](#footnote-26) To put this into perspective, about 800,000 young Latinos come of voting age each year.[[26]](#footnote-27) The number of Latinos who reported that they were registered to vote in 2012 hit 13.7 million, which is up 18% percent from 2008. Although was the case, the turnout percentage amidst registered Latino voters was “lower in 2012 than in 2008 – 81.7% versus 84%.”[[27]](#footnote-28)

Looking at the overall picture, Latinos made up for 17.2% of the nation’s entire population in 2012, in which 10.8% were eligible voters, but only 8.4% of all voters. This difference is attributed to the overall young Hispanic population and the increasing number of “non-citizen adults among its population.”[[28]](#footnote-29) Comparing this to other minority populations in the United States, only 43.9% of Latinos are qualified to vote, while “more than half (51.7%) of Asians, 69.1% of blacks and 78.6% of whites are eligible to vote.”[[29]](#footnote-30)

In the election, Latino voters comprised an increasing number of voters in three of the key battleground states, including Florida, Nevada, and Colorado. This is where one of the most significant changes within Hispanic voting history took place. President Obama overwhelmingly won the Latino vote in Florida, carrying it 60% compared to Mitt Romney’s 39%. In comparison, Obama won the Hispanic vote in Florida in 2008 over challenger John McCain 57% to 42%. Hispanics also counted for 17% of the Florida electorate in 2012, compared to 14% in 2008.[[30]](#footnote-31) A large contributing factor to the rise in support for Democrat candidate is the rise is the state’s non-Cuban population, with notable growth in central Florida’s Puerto Rican population.[[31]](#footnote-32) According to exit polls, 34% of the Hispanic voters in the state of Florida were Cuban, while 57% of non-Cuban descent. Among Cuban voters, “the vote was split – 49% supported Obama while 47% supported Romney. Among the state’s non-Cuban voters, Obama won 66% versus 34% for Romney.”[[32]](#footnote-33)

In comparison to Florida, Obama toted the Hispanic vote by a very large margin. Obama won 75% of the Latino vote, while Romney received only 23%. President Obama’s performance in Colorado was also significantly better in 2012 than in 2008, when Obama courted 61% of the Hispanic vote compared to McCain’s 38%. In Nevada, Obama won 70% of the Latino vote, but was down from the 76% he won in 2008. In both states, Latino voter participation rose in the overall number of voters compared to 2008.[[33]](#footnote-34) Lastly, there were several other states that showed a massive amount of support for President Obama in 2012. Among other battlegrounds, “Obama won 68% of the Hispanic vote in North Carolina, 65% in Wisconsin, 64% in Virginia, and 53% in Ohio.”[[34]](#footnote-35)

All of the data is important for several different reasons. Another study done by the Pew Hispanic Center predicts that Latinos “will account for 40% of the growth in the eligible electorate in the U.S. between now and 2030, at which time 40 million Hispanics will be eligible to vote, up from 23.7 million now.”[[35]](#footnote-36) This means that if Latinos’ considerably low voter turnout and naturalization rates were to rise to those other minority groups, the amount of votes cast by Hispanics could double in elections within the next two decades.[[36]](#footnote-37)

To examine this further, it is crucial to break down current Hispanic electorate in the United States. National exit polling after the 2012 election estimate that 10% of all voters were Hispanic, which means as many as 12.5 million Latinos cast ballots. However, there is a more concise way to look at this data. In the 2012 election, it is estimated that as many as 40 million Hispanics in the United States did not participate. These 40 million people make up the part of the Hispanic population that either chose not to or were not eligible to vote.[[37]](#footnote-38) 11.2 million Hispanic adults chose not to vote in the election, 5.4 million “are adult legal permanent residents (LPRs) who could not vote because they have not yet become naturalized U.S. citizens”, 7.1 million are undocumented immigrants who would only be able to gain the right to vote if Congress would pass a law to grant them citizenship, and 17.6 million are under age 18, which in turn makes them to young to vote. However, 93% of these youths were born in the United States and will become voting-eligible once they turn 18.[[38]](#footnote-39) This number alone shows that almost one million Latinos become eligible to vote every year, projecting that the Hispanic-American electorate could increase by 16 million by the year 2030, and could raise the number of Latino voters to up to 40 million.[[39]](#footnote-40) This also means that by the year 2030, “twice as many Latino voters could be casting ballots in 2032 as did in 2012.”[[40]](#footnote-41) According to the same study, the turnout of Hispanic voters could rise “even more if naturalization rates among the 5.4 million adult Hispanic legal permanent residents were to increase over time.”[[41]](#footnote-42)

It has also been found that more than nine out of every ten Latino immigrants who have not yet become citizens say they would if it were possible. There have been many roadblocks presented to this group of more than 93% of immigrants who are in the United States today. These roadblocks include many “administrative costs and barriers, a lack of English proficiency and a lack of initiative.”[[42]](#footnote-43) In addition, there is a lack of knowledge about the future impact of immigration in the United States. It is estimated that roughly 24 million immigrants have come to the United States in the last 40 years, which is the largest eave of immigration by one ethnic or racial group the nation has ever seen. However, only about 45% of these 24 million immigrants arrived in the United States legally.[[43]](#footnote-44)

In the end, there are several reasons why this data is significant in terms of the future of elections of the United States and how it will also affect the Republican Party. First, it is becoming more and more clear that the Latino electorate is becoming a part of the electoral process that campaigns on all levels simply cannot ignore. Secondly, it shows that the Republican Party will need to try to find solutions to court more of these votes if they do not want to be defeated in elections, especially on the national level. Third, the numbers show that the Hispanic population has and will continue to grow for years to come. Lastly, the data shows that the Hispanic vote has impacted states in all regions of the United States, and if Republicans want to be able to win more of these votes and elections, there may be some compromise needed on several key issues such as religion, social issues, and immigration, which will be discussed over the course of the following chapters.

**IV. RELIGION AND POLITICS IN THE HISPANIC ELECTORATE**

Religion is another important factor when it comes to determining political party affiliation in the United States. In the Hispanic electorate, many religions are present, but mostly consist of different denominations within the Christian religion. It is also important to note that religion is much more prevalent in the Hispanic community than in non-Latino ones and also has many more prominent religious traditions. The growth of the Hispanic population in the United States is driving the rise of “Latino-oriented” places of worship across America. [[44]](#footnote-45) A study conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life used public opinion surveys to establish one of the largest data collective studies on this subject. The survey covered many things, including religious principles and their connection with political philosophy in the United States among Hispanics of all faiths. This particular study focused on those of the Catholic faith, “both those who retain their identification with the church and those who covert to evangelical churches.”[[45]](#footnote-46)

It is estimated that about one-third of all Catholics who live in the United States are Hispanic, and this study found that the Latino population within the Catholic Church will continue to rise for decades to come. The reality when it comes to this demographic is that Latinos within both the Catholic and Evangelical faiths will convey changes in religion and politics in the United States. The study also reveals that many Latinos who are joining evangelical churches are converting from Catholicism. In the past, it has been known that “70% of Latinos are Catholic, whereas less than 20% are evangelical.”[[46]](#footnote-47) It has been estimated that between 1970 and 1995, approximately one in seven Hispanics left the Catholic Church behind. [[47]](#footnote-48)It is believed that the reason for this large number of conversions is due to the fact that many Latinos are seeking a more intimate, personal experience with God due to the lack of interest in an average Catholic mass, but “negative views of Catholicism do not appear to be a major reason for their conversion.”[[48]](#footnote-49)

Another important thing to note about religion in the Hispanic population is that all across their major religions, worship and congregations are particularly more ethnic compared to other demographic groups. It has been found that “two-thirds of Latino worshippers attend churches with Latino clergy, services in Spanish and heavily Latino congregations.”[[49]](#footnote-50) This is important because since the Hispanic population tends to group together when it comes to religion, they also tend to group together when it comes to political ideology. These types of worship are common with both foreign-born Spanish speakers and native-born English speaking Latinos. According to the Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project, this “strongly suggests that the phenomenon is not simply a product of immigration or language but that it involves a broader and more lasting form of ethnic identification.”[[50]](#footnote-51) The popularity of “spirit-filled religious expressions and of ethnic-oriented worship”[[51]](#footnote-52) in combination with the dramatic rise in the United States’ Latino population leaves minimal hesitation that a grasp of religion and faith among Hispanics is crucial to comprehending the future of the population as well as the development of faith in the United States.[[52]](#footnote-53)

Beyond religion, this same study suggests that religion in Latino population plays a key role in political ideology and politics in the United States. Many Hispanics think of their religious faith as a compass to guide political philosophy and require the same of their leaders. Within the Hispanic population, those who are religious most often times will see the pulpit as a place where social and political issues can be discussed. When it comes to political party affiliation, “Latinos who are evangelicals are twice as likely as those who are Catholics to identify with the Republican Party. Latino Catholics, on the other hand, are much more likely than Latino evangelicals to identify with the Democratic Party.”[[53]](#footnote-54) These differences in ideology are more prevalent in the Latino population than those found in other parts of the general American population.

The study conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed many things about religion and the Hispanic population in the United States. The first regards religion and demography within the Latino population. It has been found that more than two-thirds (68%) of Latinos in the United States identify themselves as part of the Roman Catholic Faith. The second-largest category is comprised of “born-again or evangelical Protestants”, but is only 15% of the population, which is a significantly smaller number than that of Catholicism. Only 8% of Latinos said that they don’t identify with any religious practice. Catholics are more densely populated with immigrants than evangelicals, and it can be concluded that with the direction of current Latino population trends, Hispanic Catholics are becoming more and more present in the Catholic Church in the United States.[[54]](#footnote-55)

There is also a large number of Latinos who have admitted to converting from one religion to another or to no religion. This is important because conversion is a key factor in the expansion in evangelicalism among the Latino population. It has been found that 51% of Hispanic evangelicals have converted from their original denominations and more than four-fifths of those converts, 43% of which are currently evangelicals, were former Catholics.[[55]](#footnote-56) There are several reasons as to why so many former Catholic Hispanics have converted to evangelicalism. 82% of those surveyed said that the yearning for a more personal and direct relationship with God was the main reason for converting from Catholicism. About 90% of those converts said their reason for conversion was this particular spiritual search. A majority of these coverts (61%) said that their experiences in traditional Catholic Masses have not been exciting or fulfilling. However, only about one-third of those converts (36%), cite that as the exclusive reason for conversion.[[56]](#footnote-57)

A further way to dissect this is to look at the relationship between the Hispanic population and its effects on American politics. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project found that two-thirds of Hispanics say that their religion plays an important role in their political thinking. It was also found that more than half of churches that the Latino population attends address social and political issues of the day. Many Latinos have also expressed that today’s political leaders do not acknowledge religion as much as they should. Also, “Churchgoing Hispanics report that their clergy often address political matters, although the extent of that practice varies considerably by issue and by religious tradition.”[[57]](#footnote-58)

When it comes to ideology and policy issues, religious affiliation is also closely tied to political ideology in the Hispanic population. Even “after controlling for language ability, nationality, generation and education, for instance, Latino evangelicals are still significantly more conservative than Catholics on social issues, foreign policy issues, and even in their attitudes toward the plight of the poor.”[[58]](#footnote-59) On the other hand, Catholics tend to be more conservative than seculars when it comes to issues such as same-sex marriage, the growth of government-assured health care, and rises in government services. [[59]](#footnote-60) A noticeable correlation between religious Hispanics and political ideology is that the more frequent a person attends church, the more conservative that person may be when it comes to stances on social issues.[[60]](#footnote-61)

Another way to look at the relationship between religion and politics in the Hispanic population is to examine the one between party identification and ideology. As stated previously, Hispanic evangelicals are twice as likely to identify with the Republican Party than Catholics are. It is crucial to note that this is significant because this is a much bigger difference than exists among Caucasians. Hispanic conservatives who are Catholic tend to vote for the Democratic ticket, while White conservatives who are Catholic tend to vote for the Republican one, despite religious traditions.[[61]](#footnote-62)

The survey revealed that the Democratic Party has a nearly three-to-one lead among Latino Catholics who are qualified to vote in which 48% vote Democratic versus only 17% who vote for Republicans. [[62]](#footnote-63) Due to the fact that the Latino population is dominated by Catholics, (63%), Catholics characterize the center of Democratic backing among Latinos. In fact, it has been found that over 70% of Latinos who are eligible to vote are Catholic. Party identification “among Latino evangelicals is more narrowly divided and appears to slightly favor the Republican Party. Among Hispanic eligible voters who are evangelicals, 37% say they consider themselves Republicans and 32% say they are Democrats.”[[63]](#footnote-64)

There are several key things that can be pulled from all of this information that can tell the American people a lot about the transformation in religion among the Hispanic population. First, it shows that there is a clear split in political ideology between those who identify as Hispanic Evangelicals and those who identify as Roman Catholics. The second is that many Hispanics in the United States have converted to different religions, mostly Catholics who have converted to different protestant denominations. The overall consensus is that religion among the Hispanic population in the United States greatly affects how these people of faith live in every aspect of their lives.

**V. HISPANIC VIEWS ON IMMIGRATION, ITS REFORM, AND HOW IT AFFECTS POLITICS TODAY**

One of the most controversial issues that affects the relationship between Hispanics and politics is the one regarding comprehensive immigration reform. It is no question that Democrats and Republicans have become more and more split on the issue that is greatly affecting the nation and its people. This especially affects millions of Hispanics throughout the country because many of them that have come to the United States may know other Latinos who have not come to the United States in the proper, legal manner, or have personally not come into the country legally themselves. This is also an area where Republicans have struggled to gain support on. One of the main problems that the GOP has to solve if it wants to gain more support is how to come to some sort of compromise when it comes to comprehensive immigration reform. The Party has to be willing to work across the aisle when it comes to the issue, because it is one that is not going to disappear anytime soon.

There are several different attitudes among the Latino population in the United States when it comes to the issue of immigration and its reform. According to a survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in September of 2013, 53% of Hispanic Americans believe that immigration is the most critical issue facing the United States today.[[64]](#footnote-65) 67% of Latinos believe that “immigrants currently living in the United States should be allowed to become citizens provided they meet certain requirements.”[[65]](#footnote-66) Approximately one-fifth say they should be allowed to attain legal resident status without having to become citizens, while only one-tenth believe that they should be reprimanded with the ultimate consequence of deportation. Although there is much controversy currently surrounding the immigration issue, there is a fair amount of bipartisan and cross-religious support among Hispanics for its reform. According to the same survey, “majorities of Hispanic Democrats (72%), Independents (67%), and Republicans (53%) support a path to citizenship.”[[66]](#footnote-67)

The month of November in 2014 showed several changes regarding immigration in American politics. The first was in the state of Texas when Republican Attorney General, Greg Abbott, defeated the Democratic candidate, state senator Wendy Davis, for governor. Some believe that it is a given for a Republican to win the governorship in Texas, but 2014 was a year that made strides for the party among Hispanic voters. Although Abbott won in a landslide with 59.3% of the vote, compared to Davis’ 38.9%,[[67]](#footnote-68) the most astonishing fact was that Abbott won 44% of the Hispanic vote.[[68]](#footnote-69)

The main reason Abbott won over so many Latinos in the state of Texas was because of his stance on immigration. Since the state of Texas is one of the most heavily affected by the issue of illegals crossing the border into the state, Abbott took a bold stance that most Republicans would not otherwise agree with. According to an article published by News 4 out of San Antonio, Abbott has stood by the fact that the federal government has not done enough to help solve the immigration problem, and that Texas will not stand for it.[[69]](#footnote-70) Abbott’s proposed solutions to address the immigration crisis included the following: A $300 million dollar border security package that would include hiring 500 more Texas Department of Public Safety officials and 20 new Texas Rangers, as well as additional funding to increase resources for local law enforcement. [[70]](#footnote-71) Abbott believed that by doing this, it would allow him to provide the state of Texas with the tools, resources, and technologies it needs to better address the immigration problem.[[71]](#footnote-72) Another part of Abbott’s plan was to increase funding for border prosecution units. This would allow the state of Texas to be able to focus on catching criminals that are trying to cross the border into the United States, specifically targeting organized crime operations.[[72]](#footnote-73) The last part of Abbott’s plan to address the immigration crisis was to make sure that Texas played a role in reform human smuggling legislation. His reason for reform was to make sure that Texas law enforcement officials were able to carry out effective responses and also that the federal government should feel obligated to pay back the costs of the current border surge which is happening in the state.[[73]](#footnote-74) This would allow Texas to be able to reinstate funds that have been spent on the border surge into other programs that would benefit the state’s economy and help Texas citizens in need.

The fact that Abbott addressed that immigration reform in the state of Texas showed many Hispanics that not all in the Republican Party want to ignore and or shoot down passing comprehensive immigration reform. Another key factor in Abbott’s success among Hispanic voters is that his key platform on the immigration issue was focused on making Texas a safer state to live in and to protect Texas citizens from any harm caused by illegals crossing the border, such as drug smuggling cartels. Also, the fact that Abbott did not want to repeal the Texas Dream Act, a state version of the Federal Dream Act, was a huge help to him. Abbott stressed that he wanted to reform the bill instead of repeal it, which would allow students who came into Texas in an illegal manner to begin and or continue to pursue a quality education in the state of Texas while paying in-state tuition. [[74]](#footnote-75) Others believe that Abbott’s success among Hispanic voters was due to the fact that his wife and mother-in-law are Latinos and that he and his family were relatable to the Hispanic population in Texas.

Another action that came into being in the month of November 2014 was one on the federal level. A plan of executive action proposed by President Barack Obama is one that many undocumented Hispanics who are currently living in the United States are happy about. The President’s plan has several key steps with the goal to start helping to fix the immigration crisis that is happening in all parts of the country. The White House website states “The President is taking new steps to fix our broken immigration system to ensure nearly 5 million people are held accountable and have the opportunity to play by the rules.” [[75]](#footnote-76)

The first part of President Obama’s plan aims at cracking down on illegal immigration faced at the U.S. – Mexico border. This part of the plan includes the persistence of deploying as many resources at possible to the border in order to strengthen border patrol and other law enforcement. This aspect of the plan also emphasizes the importance of deporting illegals that have recently crossed the border into the United States.[[76]](#footnote-77)

The second piece of the plan focuses on deporting criminals instead of families who have come to the United States in order to make a better life. This aspect will teach law enforcement to concentrate their efforts and use of resources on criminals and not “hardworking parents of U.S. citizens.”[[77]](#footnote-78) The third portion increases “accountability so more than 4 million undocumented immigrants have the opportunity to play by the rules.”[[78]](#footnote-79) This would happen by demanding that undocumented parents or naturalized United States citizens who have been law-abiding residents for five or more years and can pass a background check as well as pay backed up taxes will be allowed to temporarily stay in the United States without risk of deportation.[[79]](#footnote-80)

The final part of President Obama’s immigration reform plan is to emphasize legal immigration in order to improve the United States’ economy and promote becoming a United States citizen. This aspect would do so by making it easier for high-skilled workers to gain work authorization permits of who are currently waiting for receive a green card. [[80]](#footnote-81)

President Obama has also stressed that Congress still has a lot of work to do in order to make this plan work successfully. He emphasizes that House Republicans “have failed to vote on a bipartisan bill that passed the Senate more than 500 days ago.”[[81]](#footnote-82) That particular bill would do the following: strengthen the border by hiring an additional 20,000 border patrol agents, focus on finding companies who are hiring or have hired undocumented persons, offer a gateway to citizenship for illegals who “pay a fine and taxes, pass a background check, learn English, and go to the back of the line.”[[82]](#footnote-83) The last part of this particular proposed legislation would make the overall legal immigration process easier to access and obtain and would boost the American economy in the long run by keeping families together.[[83]](#footnote-84)

In many ways, it is clear that the Republican Party needs to come to some sort of compromise when it comes to immigration and its comprehensive reform. As Greg Abbott showed us in Texas, it is possible to gain Hispanic vote by having a different approach to the problem rather than making the entirety of the Latino population in the United States feel as if they are being targeted or that the undocumented population constantly have to live in fear. However, there is a lot of work to be done on this issue if the Republican Party believes that this is the way to begin winning or even dominating portions of the Hispanic vote. It is definitely clear that the two parties need to work across the aisle to begin to fix the problem that affects more and more people in the United States every single day.

**VI. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION: WHAT, IF ANYTHING, CAN THE REPUBLICAN PARTY DO TO FIX THE PROBLEM?**

After looking at all three of the previous chapters, it is clear that there is question about how the Republican Party should ultimately go about persuading more Hispanic and Latino voters to check the box next to their names on the ballot. There are three proposed solutions to the problem: courting Hispanic voters on issues that do not regard immigration, such as social and economic issues, courting voters by promoting bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform, and that the Republican Party will never be able to gain the majority of Hispanic voters, so they should focus their efforts elsewhere. These three solutions will be further examined below.

An article written by Henry Olsen in the National Review about the relationship between the Republican Party and Hispanic Evangelicals suggests that the Party’s harsh stance on immigration reform is not the problem why the party fares so poorly with the Hispanic population in the United States. When it comes to these Hispanic Evangelicals, Olsen says that education, health care, jobs, and the economy are more important issues facing the country than immigration reform. [[84]](#footnote-85) Olsen notes that although immigration reform is important to many among the Latino population, “the idea that failure to pass immigration reform is the only, or even the primary, barrier to Republicans’ winning over Hispanic Evangelicals, much less the more numerous and more liberal Hispanic Catholics, is wrong.” [[85]](#footnote-86)This suggests the idea that if the Republican Party wants to court more Hispanic voters in future elections, focusing on non-immigration issues is key.

Although this may be true among voters who identify themselves as Hispanic evangelicals, this solution does not work across the board. Although many Latinos do identify other issues, such as social and economic issues to be the top ones currently facing the United States, it will be impossible for the Republican Party to gain a significant amount of votes from the Hispanic electorate if the immigration issue is put to the side.

As discussed in the previous chapter regarding the issue of comprehensive immigration reform, some believe that Republicans should be more willing to come to a compromise when it comes to this issue in order to gain more votes from the Hispanic population in the United States. This is by far the best solution to gaining votes from Hispanic voters in future elections, and Greg Abbott of Texas is a great example of that. This is the best issue to court Hispanic voters on because it affects more and more people in our nation every day. Many of those who are here legally and undocumented have a stigma of fear against the current system, and if it does not change, then the Republican Party will have a slim-to-none chance of courting the amount of Hispanic voters they need to gain in order to win future elections.

The proposal that the Republican Party should not bother to waste their time trying to court Hispanic voters on any of the issues that were discussed previously is one that will simply just not work. This is due to the fact that due the rapidly increasing Hispanic population in the United States, their presence in American politics is simply too hard to ignore when it comes to winning elections in years to come. The minority vote in the United States is on the rise every year, and if the Hispanic population

It is no question that the Republican Party has many uphill battles that it has to face and solve in order to court more Hispanic voters. Latinos are becoming a key player in the game of politics in the United States, and the Hispanic population is going to continue to grow for decades to come, and it will be interesting to see what strategies the Republicans will use in order to gain more Hispanic votes in elections to come.

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