

SIX MYTHS ABOUT TEXAS LATINX REPUBLICANS

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The Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) at the University of Houston was established in 1972 as an interdisciplinary academic program encompassing the liberal arts, education and social sciences focusing on the Mexican American and broader Latino experience in the U.S. Its mission is to advance knowledge, promote critical thinking and foster the value of service to the community. This involves designing a broad spectrum of public and scholarly programs. Located within the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, CMAS has evolved into an academic unit with several major components: teaching, research and publications, recruitment and retention, leadership training, academic advising and community service.

SIX MYTHS ABOUT TEXAS LATINX REPUBLICANS

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Executive Summary

Texas is home to one of the largest Latinx populations in the nation, but population size does not directly translate to political power for either party. The “sleeping giant” is real: Latinos are predicted to become the largest population group in Texas by 2022¹. Both parties continuously battle to win over the Latinx voting bloc – Democrats to increase their majority hold and fend off Republican acquisition, and Republicans to increase their higher than average base. Latinos becoming the largest population group does not directly translate to new votes for either party. This is especially true since Latinx turnout is significantly low compared to non-Hispanic whites, at times reaching only 27% turnout of eligible voters.²

Although Latinos tend to support the Democratic Party nationwide, Texas Latinos support the Republican Party in larger numbers than their co-ethnics in other states. Why are Texas Latinos different, what are their political views as distinct from other Latinos, and how do Latinx Republicans compare to other partisans? Using survey data and interviews with Latinx Republican leaders, we explore six myths about who Latinx Republicans are politically and ideologically, what policies they support, and what issues separate them from other Republicans.

Introduction

Texas is home to one of the largest Latinx population in the nation, but population size does not directly translate to political power for either party. Democrats in Texas hope that “demographics are destiny” and an awakening of the Latinx vote will mean more Democratic voters.³ Although Latinos tend to support the Democratic Party nationwide and in Texas, Texas Latinos support the Republican Party in larger numbers than their co-ethnics in other states. Why are Texas Latinos different and what are their political views as distinct from other partisans?

In this report⁴, we take a close look at Latinx Republicans in Texas. We identify **six myths** about Latinx Republicans that describes the political trends in Republican Party support among Latinos, explores the predictors of Latinx support for the Republican Party in Texas and the nation, explains the distinct political views of Latinx Republicans, and describes the views Latinos hold towards each political party.

Myth #1: Latinos are Natural Democrats...but it Ain't Happening in Texas

Latinos favor the Republican Party in larger percentages in Texas than about any other state. Surveys in 2014 showed that 27% of Hispanics in Texas identify with the Republican Party, 6% higher than any other state in the nation at the time.⁵ The Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, a nationwide poll, from 2016 finds of respondents in Texas, 4% identify as both Latinx and Republican, compared to California and Arizona at 2%. Of all Hispanic identifiers in Texas for the same survey, 18% back the Republicans (compared to 24% backing Independents), while that number as 14% for California, 19% in Arizona, and 9% in New York, and 24% in Florida.

Why is Texas different?

Republican candidates in Texas have received between 25 to 45 percent of the Latinx vote in elections between 1998 and 2014.⁶ Those numbers were estimated to be lower – 18% -- in 2016 in part because of the candidacy of Donald Trump which may have turned many Latinos away from the Republican Party.⁷ Polling from the month prior to Election Day in Texas for top of the ticket candidates shows how Texas Republicans have netted roughly one third of the Latinx vote since 2008. Figure 1 shows Republican candidates get nearly uniform support from strong Republican identifiers. Latinx support for Republican candidates at the top of the ticket ranges from high (49% for John Cornyn in 2014) to low (30% for Ted Cruz in 2018).

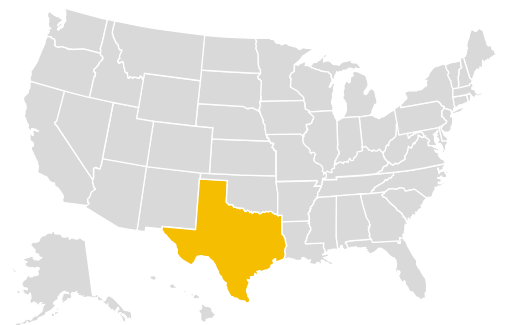
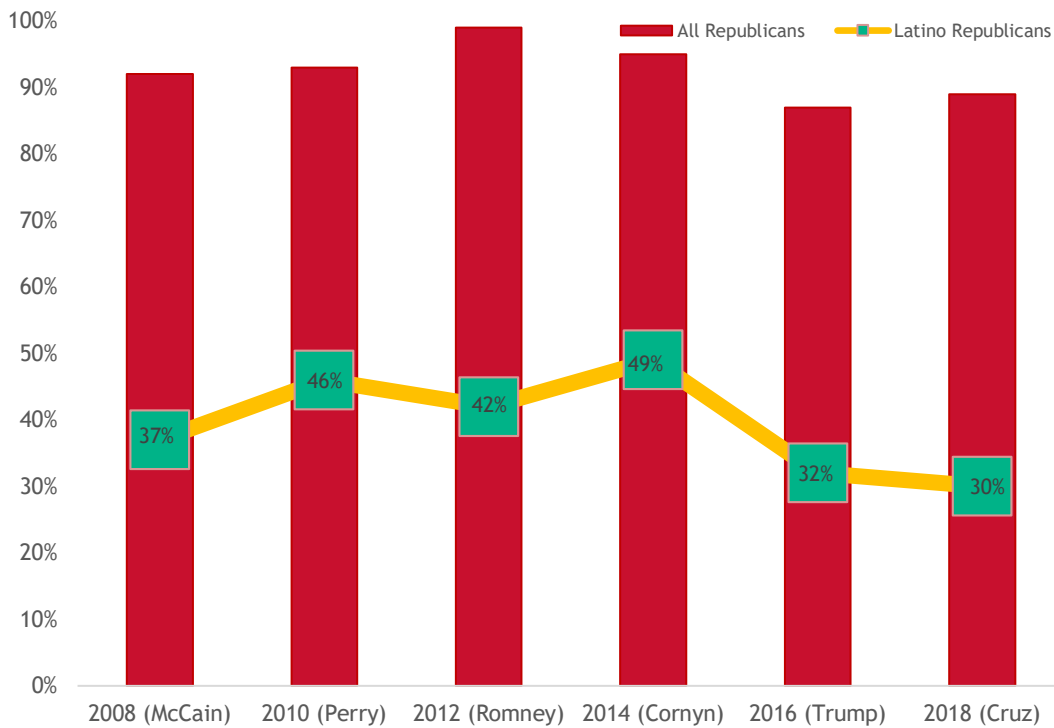


Figure 1: Latinx Support for Top of the Ticket Republican



NOTE: Support for top of the ticket candidate, October of each year, Texas Tribune polling.

The 2018 election was a groundswell of turnout for Democrats with Congressman Beto O’Rourke at the top of the ticket driving turnout levels not seen in twenty years in the Lone Star State. O’Rourke, who speaks fluent Spanish and is from a border city of El Paso, struggled to connect early to Latinos but ended up winning a significant percentage. Support among Latinos for incumbent Republican Senator Ted Cruz fell to a low of 30% in polling just before the election.

Republicans have traditionally counted on getting between 30% and 35% of the Latinx vote – this trend may be ending as support for Republican top-of-the-ticket candidates erodes over time.

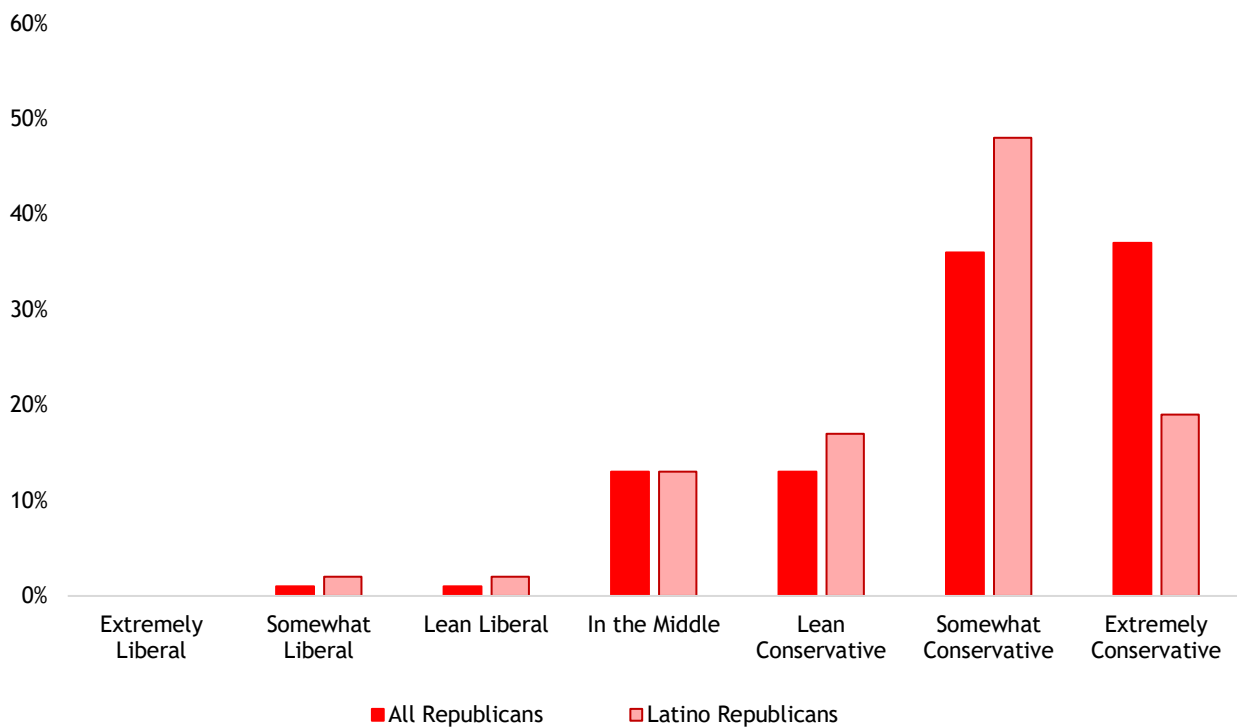
Concerns among Hispanic Republicans about divisive rhetoric and harsh immigration policies has led many to hit the alarm. According to one observer, “the old notion that the fiscal and social conservatives among them will stick with the Republican Party is up for debate.”⁸

Pre-election polls of Texas in September of 2019 conducted by the University of Houston and Univision shows President Trump with a 24% approval rating among Latinos

Myth #2: Latinx Republicans Must Be Less Conservative than Other Republicans

Polls in Texas suggest Latinx Republicans tend to be somewhat less conservative than Republicans in general – but this does not mean they are in the middle of the ideological spectrum. Rolando Garcia, a Harris County Republican Party Precinct Chair noted he grew up in a family that was “always been culturally conservative and economically populist,” noting his parents voted for Ross Perot in 1992. Still, Latinx Republicans are more likely to self-identify as “somewhat conservative” than all Republicans grouped together (about a 10% gap) but less likely to identify as “extremely conservative” – 37% of all Republicans describe themselves this way compared to 19% of Latinx Republicans. If the Republican Party continues to shift to more conservative directions, this may alienate some more moderate Latinx voters.

Figure 2: Latinx Republicans Less Conservative Than Other Republicans



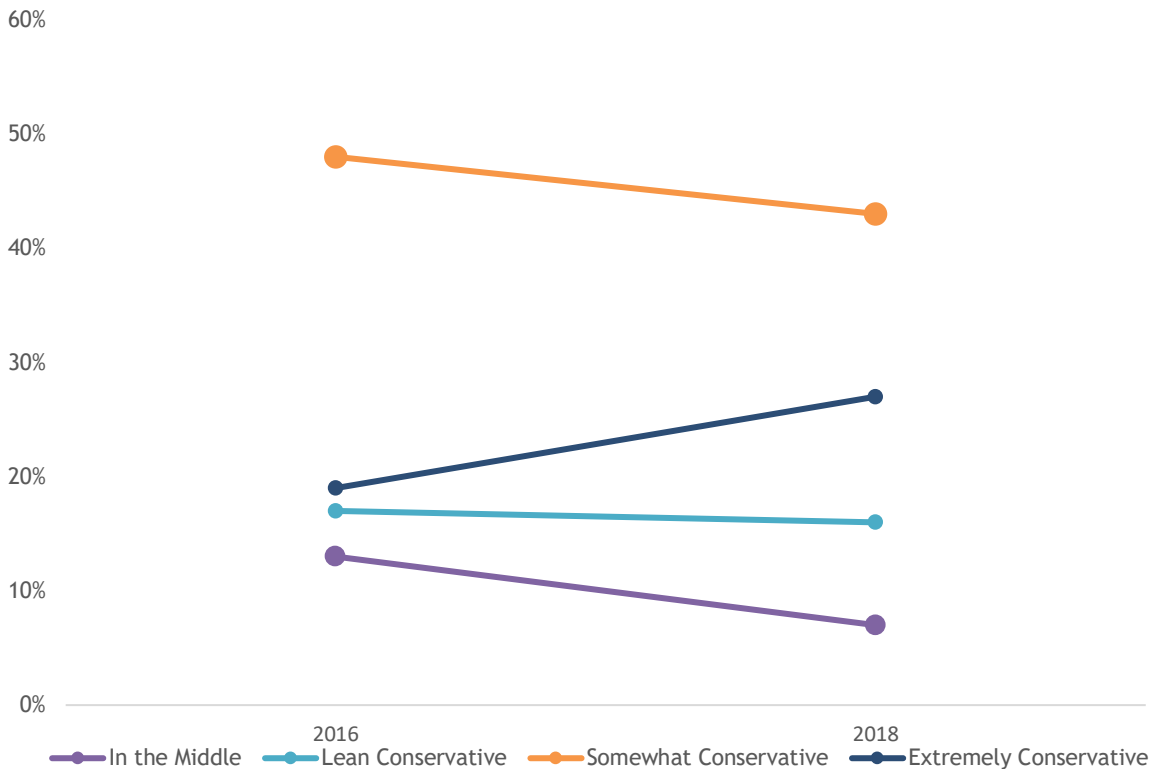
NOTE: Ideology by Ethnicity. Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016.

Interestingly, Latinx Republicans are not significantly more likely to self-identify as “in the middle” or “lean conservative” than all Republicans – 13% of both groups hug the middle category and there is only a 4% difference in the “lean conservative” between all Republicans and Latinx Republicans. In short, Latinx Republicans are conservative but don’t necessarily identify as (or want to label themselves) “extremely” conservative.

Myth #3: Latinx Republicans Are Moderating Recently As Republican Party Rhetoric Grows more Conservative

The inflammatory rhetoric from Donald Trump and other Republicans directed at immigrants as well as divisive policies concerning migrants and asylum seekers at the US-Mexico border could have moderated the conservative views of some Latinx Republicans given ethnic solidarity. Not totally, according to the data. Figure 3 tracks the percentage of Latinx Republicans in each self-selected ideological category from October 2016 to October 2018. Latinx Republicans actually grew **more conservative** from 2016 to 2018 – more Latinx Republicans self-identified as “extremely conservative” in 2018 compared to 2016 and fewer self-identified as being “in the middle” ideologically.

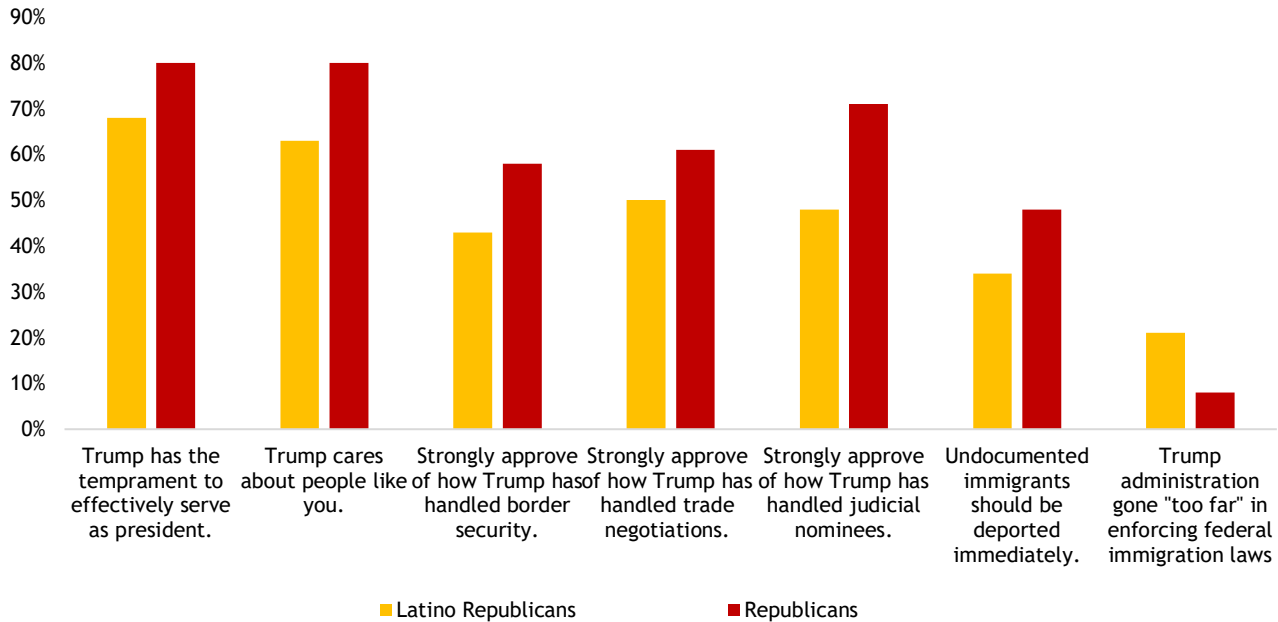
Figure 3: Latinx Republicans Growing More Conservative than Other



NOTE: Ideology by Ethnicity. Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016 and October 2018.

Party cueing is at least partially at work. Like other Republicans, Latinos have seen the rhetorical effect of the Democratic “blue wave” at work in Texas and are reacting by becoming more conservative like other Republicans. Republican fears that Democrats are coming to “take Texas” from the Republicans – including other campaign slogans like “Keep Texas Red” from the John Cornyn campaign – incite Republicans to close ranks. Trends in polarization in Texas also mirror national trends: Latinx Republicans are affected by Democratic efforts similar to other Republicans. In interviews with Latinx Republicans, a similar chord was struck. Austin Rosas, a Republican activist from Houston stated “I am scared of the left and how their progressive ideas” will harm the country.⁹

Figure 4: Issue Support on Trump and Immigration Policies



NOTE: Texas Tribune Poll, October 2018.

It is true, however, that Latinx Republicans are more moderate on several issues than other Republicans in Texas. Figure 4 shows that Latinx Republicans give more tepid responses to supporting President Trump’s handling of border security, trade negotiations, judicial nominees, and deportation practices. The President also gets lower marks on temperament and “caring about people like you” than he gets from other Republicans. For many Latinx Republicans, Trump is changing their political calculation – Artemio “Temo” Muniz, Chairman of the Federation of Hispanics Republicans in Texas said recent events have begun “to chip away at the established relationship between Hispanic Republicans in Texas and the Republican Party.”¹⁰

Myth #4: Latinos are Culturally Conservative, And This is the Only Reason They Support the Republican Party

True, Latinos tend to be more culturally conservative, but the support for the Republican Party is also caused by other factors. Table 1 reports estimates of individual-level factors predicting support for the Republican Party among Latinx identifiers. For the national sample, religion play a major role – those Latinos identifying as Catholic and “born again” Christians are more likely to support the Republican Party. Issues matter as well; Latinos who are pro-life and who oppose gay marriage are more likely to identify as supporters of the Republican Party.

The conservative culture in Texas may explain why Latinos are more likely to identify as Republican in Texas than other states. Michelle Gamboa, a staff member for the Governor Greg Abbott campaign, grew up hunting and fishing in conservative Longview in East Texas, called herself a “Mexican hillbilly.”¹¹ She also pointed to religion and faith in capitalism and entrepreneurship, pointing to four businesses her father runs to make a living.

For Texas, in both individual poll and merged polls, those born in the U.S. and those who are Texas natives (as opposed to having moved to Texas at any point in their lives) are more likely to support the Republican Party. Issues matter as well: pro-life supporters are more likely to identify with the Republican Party. Religion is a factor but not as large a factor – those responding that the Bible is not literally the word of God but should be respected are more likely to identify as Republican.

Table 1: Factors Predicting Latinx Republican Support

Texas (2016)	Texas (Merged 2016, 2017)	National (2016)
Texas natives	Older	Catholic
Pro Life	Pro Life	Pro Life
Born in USA	Born in USA	Oppose Gay Marriage
Higher income	Higher income	Higher income
Male	Male	More conservative
Bible is not literally the word of God but should be respected		Second or third generation immigrant
		Home owners
		“Born again” Christian

NOTE: Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016; Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016, February 2017; Cooperative Congressional Campaign Survey, October 2016. Estimates are logistic regression models. Individual factors are those that reached statistical significance at p<.05 or lower.

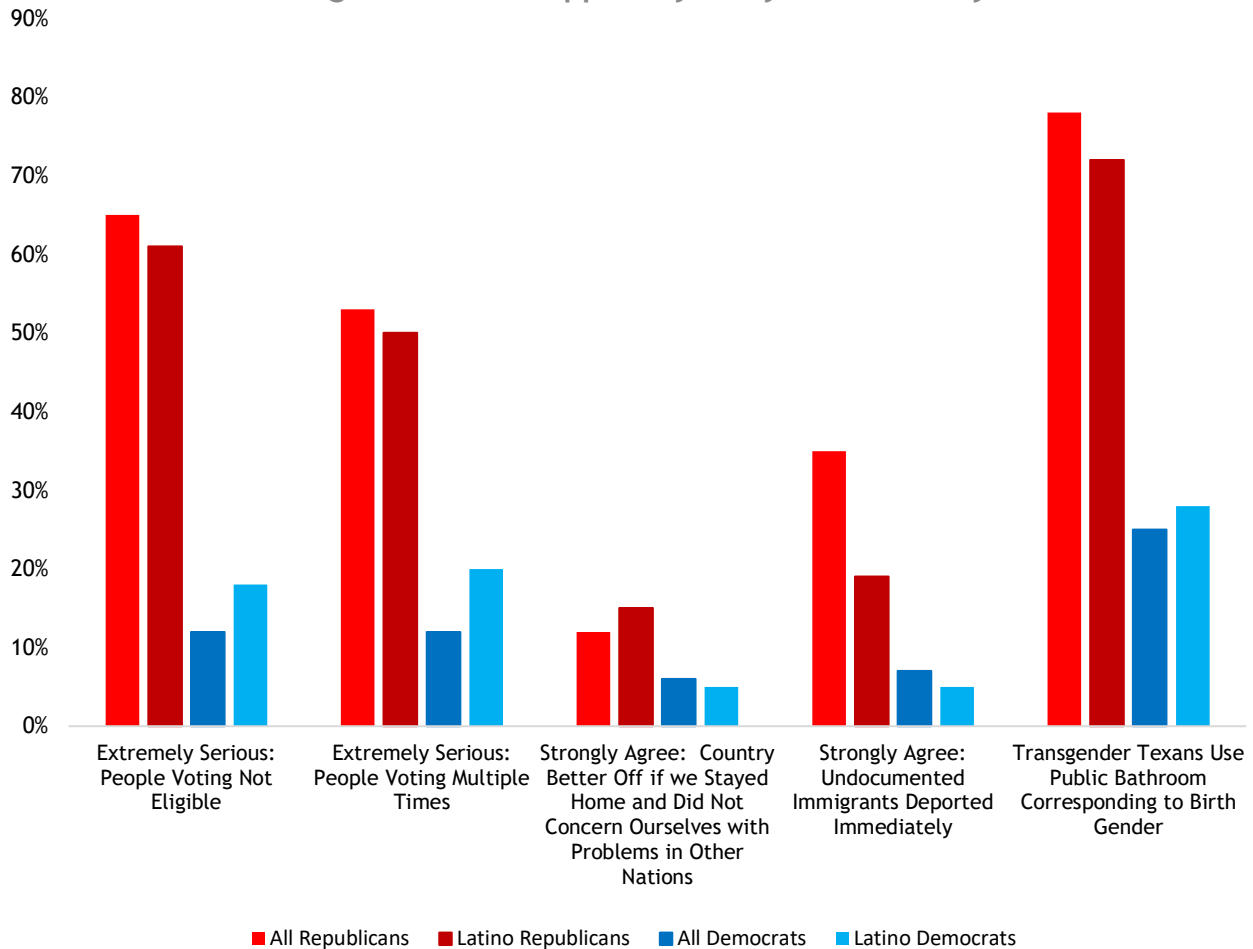
Other factors are at work too. Homeowners and Latinos who have been in the United States for multiple generations are also more likely to support the Republican Party. Males and those with higher incomes are more likely to identify as Republican, similar to national trends for all Republican-leaning identifiers. In the merged poll models age is also a factor – older Texans are more likely to support the Republican Party. Other polling bears out these trends: in a survey of Latinx millennials in Texas (18-26 years old) in 2016, only 23% identified as Republican, followed by 33% who chose “independent” and 44% who chose Democrat.¹²

Myth #5: Latinx Republicans are “Softer” On Illegal Voting and Immigration Than Other Republicans

Unique factors predict Latinx support for Republican candidates, and Latinx Republicans are ideologically different from other Republicans, so support of various issues should be different as well. Figure 4 reports a cross tabulation of opinions on various issues grouped by categories: All Republicans, Latinx Republicans, All Democrats, and Latinx Democrats.

Latinx Republicans are somewhat less likely than all Republicans to believe “ineligible voters are voting” in Texas or that people are voting multiple times is “extremely serious.” Latinx Republicans believe it to be serious, just not as important as their Republican counterparts. But Latinx Republicans look a lot more like standard Republicans than Democrats on these issues – small percentages of Democrats believe the issue to be “extremely serious.” Issues such as positions on abortion and border security are important to Latinx Republicans – as one survey showed: “some issues (such as pro-life and border security) are more important than others.”¹³

Figure 4: Issue Support by Party and Ethnicity



NOTE: Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016. Figures are crosstabulations of issue preferences by race and party.

Latinx Republicans feel similarly to other Republicans when asked if transgender Texans should use the public bathroom of their birth gender (instead of chosen gender) – 78% of Republicans and 72% of Latinx Republicans agreed. Compared to Democrats, only a quarter of which agreed with the statement, Latinx Republicans present a very conservative opinion on this issue. On international issues, strong support for the isolationist statement that “the country would be better off if we stayed at home and did not concern ourselves with problems in other nations” was low across the partisan board but Latinx Republicans were closer to their Republican associates than to the Democrats.

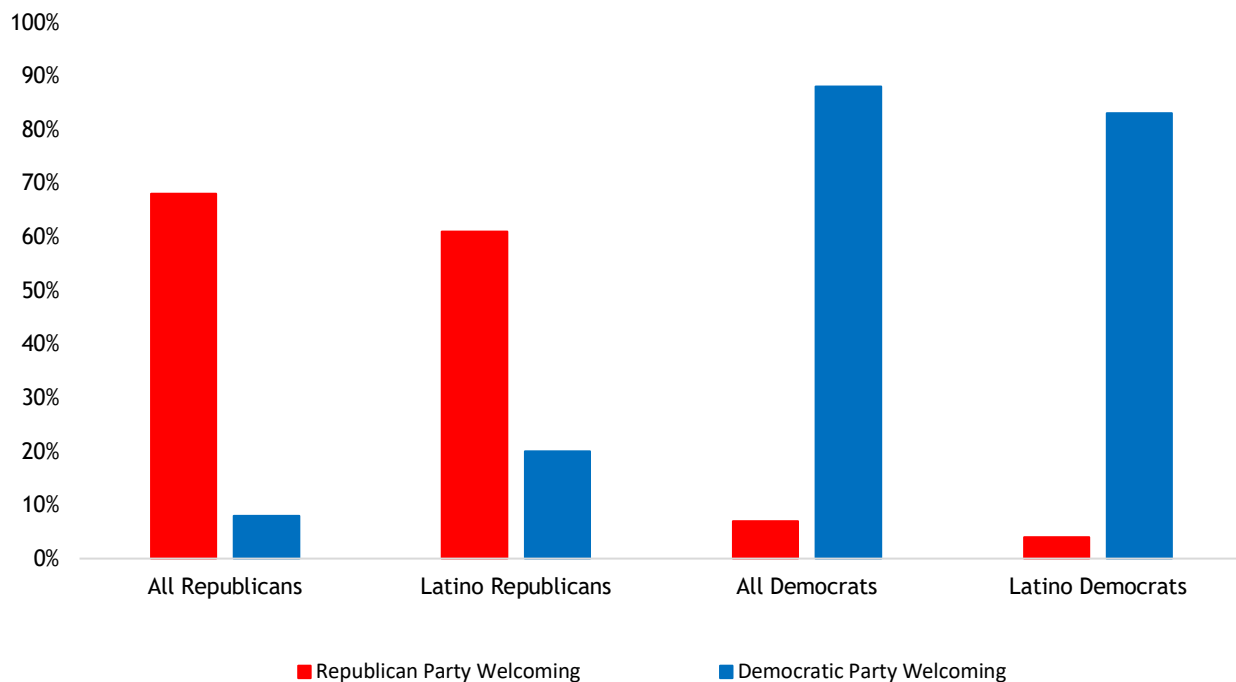
In fact, the support for this was higher than any other group in Figure 4.

Immigration is not surprisingly where Republicans and Latinx Republicans have major policy differences. Only 19% of Latinx Republicans strongly agreed that undocumented immigrants should be deported immediately compared to 35% of all Republicans. On this issue, Latinx Republicans are slightly closer to Democrats than to Republicans. Support for deportation among Latinx Republicans actually increased in 2018, likely following the lead of Donald Trump as party leader.

Myth #6: Latinos Don't Feel Welcome in the Republican Party

Latinx Republican generally **do** feel welcome in the Republican Party. As broken down in Figure 5, in 2016, 61% of self-identified Latinx Republicans felt welcome in the Republican Party compared to 68% of all Republicans. In contrast 20% of Latinx Republicans felt the Democratic Party was welcoming, compared to 8% of all Republicans. Very few Democrats (7%) and almost no Latinx Democrats (4%) feel welcome in the Republican Party. The difference of opinion and the divisive rhetoric on immigration and border security may be why Latinos feel less “welcome” in the Republican Party than other Republicans.

Figure 5: Who Feels Welcome in Each Party?



NOTE: Texas Tribune Poll, October 2016. Figures are crosstabulations of issue preferences by race and party

While specific issues are a key component to Latinos identifying as Republican, our surveys indicate that ideology is an important underlying factor for Latinx Republicans. One Latinx Republican Senate District Chair reported that the: “GOP best aligns with my views on limited government, traditional values, patriotism, and national sovereignty...” and that he judges Republican candidates by “their adherence to conservative principles and ideology.”¹⁴

Yet, positive feelings towards the Republican Party may be changing. Polls of Texas Latinos leading up to the 2020 election conducted by the University of Houston and Univision (in the field in September of 2019) reveal that 56% of Latinos agreed that Democratic candidates are “doing a good job” reaching out to Latinos. Only 22% of Latinos thought the same about the Republican Party.

Conclusion

For Texas Latinx Republicans, those born in the U.S., Texas natives, pro-life supporters, and those with religious views are more likely to support the Republican Party. Polls in Texas suggest Latinx Republicans tend to be somewhat less conservative than Republicans in general – but this does not mean they are in the middle of the ideological spectrum. The difference of opinion and the divisive rhetoric on immigration and border security may be why Latinos feel less “welcome” in the Republican Party than other Republicans. Immigration is not surprisingly where Republicans and Latinx Republicans have major differences, but Latinx Republicans believe similarly to other Republicans about transgender bathroom usage, illegal voting, and isolationism. Yet, immigration and border security issues are increasingly issues where Latinos, even Republicans, separate themselves politically from the Republican Party. As these issues are magnified in the 2020 election, the Republican Party will need to adapt to court the Latinx vote.

Endnotes

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⁶ R.G. Ratcliffe. 2017. “Latinos Won’t Turn Texas Blue Anytime Soon.” Texas Monthly, February 21. <https://www.texasmonthly.com/burka-blog/Latinos-wont-turn-texas-blue-anytime-soon/>

⁷ Francisco Pedraza and Bryan Wilcox-Archuleta. 2016. “Donald Trump Did Not Win 34% of Latinx Vote in Texas. He Won Much Less.” Washington Post, December 2. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/02/donald-trump-did-not-win-34-of-Latinx-vote-in-texas-he-won-much-less/?utm_term=.1c9670d9dfe5

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⁹ Written Survey Response from Austin Rosas, April 3 2019.

¹⁰ Lulu Garcia-Navarro. 2018. “Latinx Republican Voters in Texas.” National Public Radio, November 4. <https://www.npr.org/2018/11/04/664103241/Latinx-republican-voters-in-texas>

¹¹ In person interview with Michelle Gamboa, September 28, 2019.

¹² Center for Mexican American Studies, University of Houston, October 2016 Poll of Latinx Millennial Attitudes.

¹³ Written Survey Response from Rolando Garcia, April 21 2019.

¹⁴ Written Survey Response from Rolando Garcia, April 21 2019.

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