



To: Interested Parties
From: Equis Research
Re: Latino Voters in Limbo - A Midterm Update
Date: September 19th, 2022

1. **Where the Latino Vote is Today:** The Latino vote remains stuck in the 2020 moment. Many Latino voters who in past elections have voted with Democrats are today persuadable — but Republicans have so far failed to win them over.
 - While Latinos shifted toward Republicans between 2016 and 2020, an 8-point swing toward Trump, we do not see evidence of a further decrease in Democratic support since Biden's win. **In most states, things do not look worse for Dems with Latinos than they did in the last election, nor do they look better.**
 - Even if we are not yet seeing a decrease in our polling, **the political environment has the potential to lead to further erosion of Democratic support among Latinos.**
 - Stated simply, conditions are unstable. **There is great uncertainty in the vote (and in the polling)!** A meaningful share of Latino voters remain on the fence, having not firmly chosen a side in the election. These late breakers could move toward either party, or toward the couch, before the midterms are over. For both Democrats and Republicans, it is a reminder yet again that a large segment of the Latino vote is a swing vote that must be persuaded.

2. **For Democrats, Disaster Prevention:** For Democrats and their allies, there is a strategic need to contend with the ways in which things might still get worse for their candidates if they do not get ahead of the trend.
 - We might be seeing inklings, today, of an environment slightly more favorable to Dems now than at any other point in the last year. **But small glimmers of hope should not obscure the warning signs.**



- Moreover, even if there is no further decline, that is no cause of celebration for Democrats: we estimate Dems need levels of Latino support in Arizona and Nevada beyond those they are getting today.
 - Florida is an exception to the general trend and, perhaps, a cautionary tale: signs there point to a possible Democratic decline, due in great part to the neglect from national Democrats after 2020. Numbers have improved of late, but Republican candidates have received consistent support throughout the cycle, and are still pulling over more Hispanic Biden voters than Democrats are winning over Latino Trump defectors. There is no reasonable scenario where Democrats win Florida without a healthy majority of the Hispanic vote.
3. **For Republicans, a Poor Sales Job:** Republicans haven't fully convinced persuadable Latino voters that they are a viable alternative to Democrats, even in the midst of an economic crisis.
- It is premature to say that Latinos are further shifting to the GOP without showing gains beyond South TX and South FL (we wrote about the unique circumstances in both those places in [our 2020 post-mortem](#)). If Republicans want to claim that a realignment is underway, they are going to need to demonstrate it in the high-stakes environments of Nevada and Arizona, where all sides are competing for Latino voters.
4. **It's the Economy (But the Economy is Never Just the Economy):** For Democrats, the task is to alleviate the concerns of Latinos who are worried that the party doesn't share their perspective on the economy.
- Concerns about the Democrats' approach to the economy rattled some Latinos and allowed them to put aside other fears about Trump and Republicans in 2020. Today what keeps many Latinos on the fence is again concerns about the economy and fears that Democrats don't consistently prioritize the economy, handle it as decisively as business-obsessed Republicans, or value hard work.
 - Now, **the path forward for Democrats is to remind voters that they care, fight and deliver:** that they are more in tune with the challenges and values of



hardworking people and are delivering tools for them to not just survive, but thrive.

- For Democrats, holding on and expanding their coalition means, first, placing hardworking, middle class Latino families at the center of their story, with politicians and the government in a supporting role. Second, honoring Latinos and other hard-working people as the engine of the economy. And, third, demonstrating that they are fighting to ensure that hardworking Latinos have the tools they need to thrive — thinking not in terms of *spending* or *assistance* but instead of *opportunities* that allow Latinos to continue to provide for their families and work to keep our country strong.
- Recent legislative action gives Democrats some proof points. Communicating about the action they've taken on drug pricing, for example, bolsters the case that they "care, fight and deliver." It provides an opportunity to message on the opportunity it presents working people, rather than on the price tag of the legislation. And it focuses on an issue that lives at the intersection of the economy and health care, an area on which Latino voters greatly trust Democrats.

5. **Where Other Issues Come into the Picture:** The economy is top of mind for Latino voters, as for all voters. Two other issues that are coloring the political environment — gun safety and abortion rights — are potential weaknesses for Republicans among Latino voters. Democrats have opportunities here, but run the risk of seeming out-of-touch themselves if they hyper-fixate on these issues ahead of economic concerns.

- **Don't Forget About Uvalde:** Gun violence rose to be a top-three issue for Latinos in many battleground states after the shooting in Uvalde. **For Latino voters, a key question of this election is: who will protect me and my family?** This is true on the economy, and it is also true on an issue like responsible gun ownership. A strong majority of Latino voters — and an overwhelming majority of Latina women — are aligned with the progressive stance on gun safety, and reject the conservative position as a matter of values as much as of policy. Our polling suggests that if there is a social issue for Democrats to campaign on alongside the economy, it's this.



- **Dobbs in Contrast:** While some Latino voters balk at strong progressive messaging on *expanding* abortion access, knowing that Republicans actively plan to *take away their abortion rights* tends to remind persuadable Latino voters why they have previously shied away from supporting conservative candidates: the sense that Republicans are more concerned with pushing an extreme agenda than helping people like them. The GOP's position, out of touch with Latinos' priorities, provides an opening for Democrats to bolster their central *economic* argument by communicating how they will fight for what matters most to Latino voters.
 - **The trick for Democrats is not to engage with Latinos on issues such as abortion or gun safety *in place of* economic concerns.** For all of their grave importance, or the amount of coverage they may get, it remains likely that abortion and guns will be overshadowed by economic anxieties in the minds of persuadable Latino voters as they enter the ballot box. Relatedly, the heavy focus of media and Dem ad spending on the GOP's efforts to take away abortion rights suggests there remains ample room for increased engagement of Latino voters on the core pocketbook contrasts between Democrats and Republicans. **In any case, the top priority for Democrats remains to prove themselves on the economy, as a way to reassure Latino voters who need reassurance.**
6. **What to Watch in Senate Races:** The question of the Latino vote looms large over elections up and down the ballot, and especially over the battle for the US Senate — and not just in Las Vegas. As much as we talk in terms of national trends, midterm results will likely lend themselves to a diversity of narratives about Hispanic voters.
- In **Nevada and Arizona**, Democrats likely need to win at least 2/3 of the Latino vote to fend off GOP challenges (and Republicans likewise need to crack 1/3 to pull off either state).
 - Meanwhile, there is no reasonable scenario where Democrats win statewide in **Florida** without winning the Hispanic vote.
 - **Wisconsin** is a state where the Latino vote is small but mighty. Support levels among Latinos are critical in a narrow range of scenarios — but it just so



happens that the state has found itself in that very range in 2 of the last 3 major elections.

- **Georgia, Pennsylvania and North Carolina** are states where Latinos can play a supporting but critical role in a winning coalition led by Black voters. For that, Democrats need to earn at least 60% support among Latino voters.

7. **Who are the Persuadable Latinos?** For all the stories about different segments of Latino voters, the uncertainty — and potential — cuts broadly across the electorate right now. However, we do see certain demographics jump out as we try different ways to identify voters who aren't stuck to their current voting preferences: **young Latinos, Latino men of all ages, and ideological hold-outs.**

- Declines in Biden approval have not been isolated to any one Latino demographic — a reminder that the crises of recent times have impacted Americans broadly.
- However, young Latinos (18-34), Latino men, and self-identified conservatives are overrepresented among the set of 2020 Biden voters who today disapprove of the president's job performance.
- Among the most likely to be undecided today are **ideological hold-outs: conservative and moderate Latinos who have held back from Republicans**, despite seeming to share some characteristics with their GOP-supporting white counterparts. Notably Republicans have not increased support among these Latinos in the last year in almost any state — likely because a large majority of conservative or moderate Latinos who don't yet vote Republican believe Democrats "care more about people like [them]."
- There is little evidence to suggest that uncommitted voters are on the fence because they align more with Republicans than with Democrats on "social" issues. A healthy majority of the persuadable voters in our analysis opposed the Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade. A majority found an attack on Democrats related to "Defund the Police" to be unconvincing. On the question of which party better represents their religious values, a plurality of persuadables didn't see a difference between the parties. Meanwhile, persuadable Latinos are



even more likely to prioritize the economy and cost of living than strong partisans. **The economy remains at the heart of the election for Latino voters.**

- No two elections, or electorates, are the same. A wildcard on the margins of this election is new voters. **Young** Dem-supporting Latinos are fast-growing and moving into the electorate, while **Latino men** of all ages are leading the contingent of less-regular Latino voters who are joining Republicans.
8. **Especially Worth Watching, the Spanish-Dominant:** Some of the highest undecided rates are among those Latinos who prefer to communicate in Spanish. For all the talk of a Republican push for Latinos, Democrats are outspending the GOP in Spanish-language ads, and it has had an effect in polling. But the investment is still not where it could be, and there are lots of uncommitted Spanish-speakers left to compete for.
 9. **Don't Blame Disinformation:** It is factually inaccurate and strategically misguided to presume that lies found online are solely or even mostly to blame for the shifts in the Latino vote. **Disinformation is best thought of and addressed as a problem for democracy, not for Democrats.** In the political arena, Democrats — and Republicans — should instead worry about voters receiving one-sided communication, whether those narratives are truthful or not, and focus on meeting voters where they consume information.

Equis is a set of organizations working to create a better understanding of Latinos, innovate new approaches to reach and engage them, and invest in the leadership and infrastructure for long-term change and increased engagement.

The analysis on this memo relies on Equis polling, digital testing, and focus groups over the last year, starting with our Key States Series: state-level polls in 10 states between December 2021 and August 2022, totaling more than 16,000 interviews.

The research used in this memo was conducted in partnership with EMC Research, GBAO, Normington Petts, Searchlight Research, TargetSmart, and Castillo & Associates. Additional data provided by Catalist. Economic messaging recommendations based on an Equis poll conducted by Avalanche Insights, and on work from the Winning Jobs Narrative and Somos Votantes.



###