

Date: December 18, 2016
 To: Interested Parties
 From: Giancarlo Sopo & Guillermo Grenier, Ph.D.
 Re: **Analysis of the 2016 Cuban-American Vote**

Key Points

- Cuban-American voters supported Hillary Clinton at historically high levels.
- Despite claims that Obama’s Cuba policy hurt Clinton, the data shows no evidence that this issue played a pivotal role in the election results. In fact, according to results from the Miami-Dade Department of Elections, Democrats saw double-digit improvements in heavily Cuban-American areas.
- President-elect Trump’s reversal on U.S.-Cuba policy did not help him with Cuban-Americans. Polls taken before and after he changed his position showed that his standing among this demographic did not change.

Actual Election Results in Cuban Neighborhoods: Clinton 48%, Trump 50%

Hillary Clinton surpassed President Obama’s 2012 margins in the country’s most heavily Cuban-American neighborhoods by double-digits and earned over 82,000 more votes than Obama in Miami-Dade County. To be clear, these are actual election results, not polling data.

- In **Miami-Dade County**, where one out of three residents is Cuban-American, Clinton won by 30 points, 64% to 34%, an 81,688-vote improvement for Democrats from 2012.¹

Obama / Romney	541,440	62%	332,981	38%	+ 208,459	+ 24 pts.
Clinton / Trump	624,146	64%	333,999	34%	+ 290,147	+ 30 pts.
Difference	+82,706	+ 2 pts.	+ 1,018	- 4 pts.	+ 81,688	+ 6 pts.

- Democrats also made inroads in the predominantly Cuban² and traditionally Republican³ city of **Hialeah**⁷ where the GOP saw its 9.1-point 2012 victory margin vanish.

Obama / Romney	27,675	45%	33,267	54 %	+ 5,592	+ 9 pts.
Clinton / Trump	33,625	49%	33,718	49%	+ 93	—
Difference	+ 5,950	+ 4 pts.	+ 451	- 5 pts.	- 5,499	- 9 pts.

- In addition, Democrats saw a 14-point improvement from 2012 in the suburb of **Westchester**⁴, the U.S. community with the highest percentage of residents born in Cuba.

Obama / Romney	4,463	36%	7,856	63%	+ 3,393	+ 27 pts.
Clinton / Trump	5,480	42%	7,219	55%	+ 1,739	+ 13 pts.
Difference	+ 1,107	+ 6 pts.	- 637	- 8 pts.	- 1,654	- 14 pts.

- In **West Miami**, home to U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, Clinton’s six-point loss to Trump, 51% to 45%, was a 13-point improvement for Democrats from their 2012 performance.

Obama / Romney	948	40%	1,413	59%	+ 465	+ 19 pts.
Clinton / Trump	1,198	45%	1,344	51%	+ 146	+ 6 pts.
Difference	+ 250	+ 5 pts.	- 69	- 8 pts.	- 319	- 13 pts.

¹ Source: Miami-Dade County Elections. Retrieved: 12/1/16 at 3:25 PM. (<http://results.enr.clarityelections.com/FL/Dade/64620/182932/en/summary.html>)

² Source: 2015 American Community Survey, United States Census Bureau. Retrieved: 11/13/16 at 10:47 AM. (<http://factfinder.census.gov>)

³ Source: Miami Dade-County Elections. Retrieved: 11/13/16 at 12:22 PM (<http://www.miamidade.gov/elections/voter-registration-statistics.asp>)

⁴ Westchester is defined as the area south of SW 8th Street to SW 40th Street & West of SW 77th Avenue to SW 97th Avenue

- Combine the results from Hialeah, Westchester, and West Miami (where approximately three out of four voters are Cuban-American): **Clinton 48% vs. Trump 50%**.

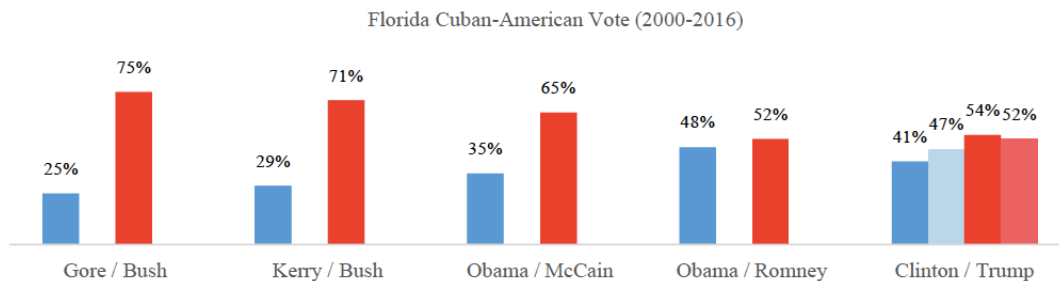
	Clinton	Trump	Total ⁵	Obama	Romney	Total
Hialeah	33,625	33,718	69,007	27,675	33,267	61,232
Westchester	5,480	7,219	13,128	4,463	7,856	12,382
West Miami	1,198	1,344	2,637	948	1,413	2,377
Totals	40,303	42,281	84,772	33,086	42,536	75,991

Polls Showed Clinton’s Performance was Consistent with Obama’s 2012 Figures

Two election surveys measured Florida’s Cuban-American vote in the 2016 election:

- The Edison Research exit poll by television networks showed Clinton at 41% and Trump at 54%.
- Latino Decisions’ election eve study showed the Democratic candidate at 47% and the Republican at 52%.⁶

While there is a debate among researchers as to the accuracy of national exit polls in measuring small ethnic clusters, these results are statistically consistent with one another and closely mirror how both parties fared in 2012 when pollsters pegged Obama’s share of Cuban-Americans between 35% and 49%. Regardless of one’s preferred election poll, Clinton and Trump’s results were on the high and low end, respectively, of their parties’ historical performances among voters of Cuban descent.⁷



Latino Decisions also found that **Clinton won a majority (50%)⁸ of the country’s Cuban-American voters**, the highest share ever recorded for a Democratic presidential candidates. Approximately three out of 10 Cuban-Americans live outside of Florida.

Clinton Outperformed Obama by 11 Points in Cuban-American Precincts

Distrustful of opinion surveys, embargo supporters pointed to 30 “Cuban-American precincts” in Miami-Dade and concluded that Trump’s share of the Cuban-American vote was 58%⁹ as evidence that the election was a referendum on President Obama’s Cuba policy. There are methodological issues with precinct analyses to induce how an ethnic group voted. There are no homogenously Cuban-American precincts and voters in western Miami suburbs may not be representative of younger ones in areas like Wynwood and Miami Beach.

Nonetheless, we tabulated the results in those precincts, compared them with how they fared in 2012, and found that **Clinton’s margins against Trump were 11 points better than Obama’s versus Romney**. This discredits the hardliners’ argument. Since, clearly, had there been a repudiation of Obama’s Cuba policy, Democrats would have suffered losses in these areas, instead of the gains they enjoyed.

⁵ Totals include votes for third party candidates

⁶ The Florida Latino Decisions survey has a sample size of 250 Cuban-American voters, a margin of error of +/- 6.2%. The Edison Research survey had a sample of approximately 240 Cuban-American voters with a margin of error of +/- 6.3%. The two findings are statistically consistent given their margins of error.

⁷ Campos-Flores, A. (2012, November 8). Cuban-Americans Move Left. *The Wall Street Journal*.

⁸ N = 300 with a margin of error of +/- 5.7%

⁹ This figure for Trump overstates his performance by one percentage point. It appears as though their calculation mistakenly used the sum of Clinton and Trump votes as the divisor without including votes for third party candidates.

It's Unclear if U.S.-Cuba Policy Influenced Cuban-American Voters

It is unclear what, if any, role U.S.-Cuba policy plays in determining how Cuban-Americans vote. The data shows that voters' stances on the issue are not the best indicator of how they will vote.

- According to an August 2016 study by Florida International University (FIU) with a sample of 743 Cuban-American voters, 72% of embargo supporters are Republicans, the vast majority of which would have voted for Trump regardless of Clinton's position on the issue.
- Four out of 10 (41.6%) Cuban-Americans electors who said they support the new U.S. policy identified themselves as Trump supporters. In addition, 55% of Cuban-American voters support the new Cuba policy. The study also found that 58% favor ending the U.S. embargo (including 75% of Independent voters), and 61% support diplomatic relations with Cuba. Support for the new Cuba policy goes beyond the Cuban-American community. An October Bloomberg poll showed 67% of likely Florida voters favor engagement with Cuba.

However, embargo advocates point to a pair of *New York Times/Sienna College* polls from September and October as proof that Trump enjoyed a + 20-point surge among Cubans after changing his position on Cuba policy to a more hardline stance. The problem with this conclusion is that given that the poll only interviewed approximately four dozen Cuban voters, the results are statistically unreliable. In fact, the *Times* itself warned its readers the "survey did not sample a large number of Cuban voters, so the findings should be interpreted with caution."

Meanwhile, surveys with significant Cuban-American samples by pollsters from different political parties found that Donald Trump's margins among Cuban-American voters did not change after his Cuba policy reversal.

Polls of Cuban-Americans taken before Trump changed his Cuba policy:

- May 2016: Trump +6 (Dario Moreno, GOP)
- May 2016: Trump +12 (Bendixen & Amandi, Democrat)
- August 2016: Trump +4 (Florida International University, Non-Partisan)

Polls of Cuban-Americans taken after Trump changed his Cuba policy:

- October 2016: Trump +6 (Bendixen & Amandi, Democrat)
- November 2016: Trump +13 (Edison Research, Non-Partisan)
- November 2016: Trump +5 (Latino Decisions, Democrat)

With Clinton making significant gains in Cuban-American neighborhoods; polls showing that majorities of Cuban voters support engagement policies; and no sign that Trump's Cuba 180° helped him, there is simply no evidence to backup the claim that Obama's Cuba policy hurt Democrats or that a hardline stance benefited Republicans.

The Cuban-American Vote Was Important, But Not Decisive in Florida

Some argue that Cuban-American voters cost Hillary Clinton the state of Florida. Two conditions are required for this to be true: (1) Clinton's performance among Cubans would have to be unusually low *and* (2) Clinton would have won the state had she mirrored past performances among Cuban-Americans. The election results clearly show that Clinton surpassed Obama's totals, and as *FiveThirtyEight* pointed out, "Cuban-Americans would have needed to vote for Hillary Clinton by an impossibly wide margin to swing the election her way, and Trump would have won the state if they hadn't voted at all."

Indeed, Cuban-American voters accounted for six percent (564,938) of the 9,415,638 Florida voters¹⁰ who cast a ballot for President. Even if Clinton had improved her performance among them by 10 points, it's a gain of 57,000 votes—**well short of her statewide deficit of 114,000**. It's clear that while Cuban-Americans remain an important political constituency, they were not the deciding factor in Present-elect Trump's Florida win.

¹⁰ Source: Florida Division of Elections. Retrieved: 11/13/16 at 3:47 PM. (<http://enight.elections.myflorida.com/FederalOffices/Presidential/>)

White Non-Hispanic Voters Propelled Trump to Victory in Florida

Trump's performance among white non-Hispanics was the most important factor in his victory in Florida.

- In 2016, white non-Hispanic voters were 62% of the electorate; yet they made-up 81% of Trump's statewide coalition. Republicans made gains in predominantly white non-Hispanic suburban and exurban counties in Central Florida. For example: Trump surpassed Mitt Romney's margins in Pasco and Lake counties by 14,164 and 13,447 votes, respectively.
- Sixty-four percent of Florida's white, non-Hispanic voters supported Donald Trump, while 32% backed Hillary Clinton. In 2012, President Obama and Mitt Romney received 61% and 37%, respectively, of Florida's white non-Hispanic voters. Trump's 32-point advantage was an eight-point improvement for the GOP from 2012.
- Had Clinton mirrored Obama's 2012 performance among Florida's white non-Hispanic voters and kept Trump at Romney's support levels, she would have narrowed her 2016 gap among this demographic by approximately 467,015 votes—and maintained Florida in the Democratic column.

The Bottom Line

- In 2016, Cuban-American voters supported Hillary Clinton at historically high levels. Moreover, Democrats saw double-digit gains in Cuban neighborhoods, a sign that these voters are still in play.
- Cuba policy is no longer the third rail of Florida politics for pro-engagement candidates. Based on the data (electoral and survey), neither Obama's Cuba policy or Clinton's support for ending the embargo affected the results. Moreover, Cuban-American voters did not determine the outcome in Florida.
- It's unclear if a candidate's position on U.S.-Cuba policy—regardless of whether they support or oppose the embargo—determines how Cuban-Americans vote.
- Taking a pro-embargo stance on Cuba is no longer the secret to convincing persuadable Cuban voters or winning in Florida where two thirds of all electors support ending the embargo. Six polls showed that Trump's support among Cuban-American voters did not change after he reversed his U.S.-Cuba policy position to a more hardline stance. This is largely due to the fact that three out of four embargo supporters are Republicans, and were likely going to vote for Trump regardless of his position on Cuba.

About the Authors

Giancarlo Sopo is a Democratic strategist and serves as the (pro-bono) chair of CubaOne Foundation, a non-partisan non-for-profit organization he co-founded that sponsors cultural and family reunification visits to Cuba for young Cuban-Americans. He was formerly the head of marketing and a consultant at Benenson Strategy Group, as well as a teaching fellow on Leadership and Presidential Politics at the Harvard University Extension School.

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Neither Florida International University or CubaOne Foundation contributed to this report.