



**Department of Political Science**

**Major in Global Studies**

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**Latino vote in the United States presidential elections: the  
Cuban American minority in Florida**

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*With regard to human affairs – not to laugh, not to cry,  
not to become indignant, but to understand.*

Benedict De Spinoza

*Tutto si trasforma a Miami. Gli anglos diventano latinos.  
I latinos si tingono di nero. I neri si sbiancano.  
Le abitudini e le razze si incastrano.  
L'uomo e la donna del Beach, anche se non sono nati lì,  
piano piano diventano un prodotto nuovo, un miracolo moderno.  
Che cancella il razzismo, un tempo così radicato  
nel sud degli Stati Uniti e in Florida.  
È il miracolo della fusion, il nuovo cosmopolitismo.  
A New York la fusion ha una predominante giudaico-europea.  
A Los Angeles e a San Francisco una forte componente asiatica.  
A Miami l'ingrediente principale è l'ispanicità,  
con un fortissimo, piccante aroma cubano.*

Carlo Rossella

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## ACRONYMS

**ACS** American Community Survey

**ARA** Bureau of American Republics Affairs

**BRICS** Brasile Russia India Cina Sudafrica

**CACR** Cuban Assets Control Regulations

**CANF** Cuban American National Foundation

**CBSA** Core Based Statistical Area

**CDA** Cuban Democracy Act

**CEO** Chief Executive Officer

**CIA** Central Intelligence Agency

**CLC** Cuban Liberty Council

**COINTELPRO** Counter-Intelligence Program

**DACA** Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals

**DEFCON** Defense readiness Condition

**FAA** Foreign Assistance Act

**FL** Florida

**FRAA** Foreign Relations Authorization Act

**FY** Fiscal Year

**GATT** General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

**GOP** Grand Old Party

**ICBMs** Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles

**ICE** Immigration and Customs Enforcement

**ISIS** Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

**JFK** John Fitzgerald Kennedy

**LPR** Lawful Permanent Resident

**LULAC** League of United Latin American Citizens

**MEChA** Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán

**NAACP** National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples

**NAFTA** North American Free Trade Agreement

**NED** National Endowment for Democracy

**NFWA** National Farm Workers Association  
**NSPM** National Security Presidential Memorandum  
**OAS** Organization of American States  
**OCU** Organizaciones Cubanas Unidos  
**PAC** Political Action Committee  
**PCC** *Partido Comunista de Cuba*  
**PRC** *Partido Revolucionario Cubano*  
**PRRI** Public Religion Research Institute  
**RUP** *Raza Unida Party*  
**SAC** Strategic Air Command  
**SOFA** Status of Forces Agreement  
**SVREP** Southwest Voter Registration Education Project  
**TCA** Tariff Classification Act  
**TWEA** Trading With Enemy Act  
**UFW** United Farm Workers  
**USAID** U.S. Agency for International Development  
**USSR** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics  
**VRA** *Voting Rights Act*  
**WHA** Western Hemisphere Affairs  
**WTO** World Trade Organisation

## SPANISH TERMS

Adiós: goodbye/farewell

Balseros: rafters

Batistianos: Batista's supporters

Bloqueo: embargo

Don Feliciano: Santa Claus

El movimiento: The movement

Hermanos al Rescate: Brothers to the Rescue

Marielitos: Mariel Cubans

Peninsulares: peninsular

Pequeña Habana: Little Havana

Plaza de la Revolución: Revolution Square (in Cuba)

## INTRODUCTION

«The air you breathe here is Republican. It’s hard for Democrats to show up here and try to create a different atmosphere»<sup>1</sup>. With these words Guillermo J. Grenier – a professor of sociology and the chair of the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University, born in Havana – describes the situation of Cuban American voters in his state, Florida, and, more particularly, in Miami. The city is in fact a stronghold of Cuban exiles and Cuban Americans living in the United States, with a neighbourhood called *Little Havana (Pequeña Habana)*, which is considered the centre of the Cuban exile population. Latino voters, who represent the fastest-growing share of the electorate, do not act as a monolithic bloc. Latinos in the U.S. have different regional, racial, and political orientations that change based on their country of origin and of the experiences lived before their migration to North America.

It goes without saying that Latinos are crucial to the result of the presidential elections in the U.S., having represented 16.6 million votes in 2020, with an increase of 30.9% over the 2016 presidential election. By comparison, turnout was 15.9% greater among voters of all races.

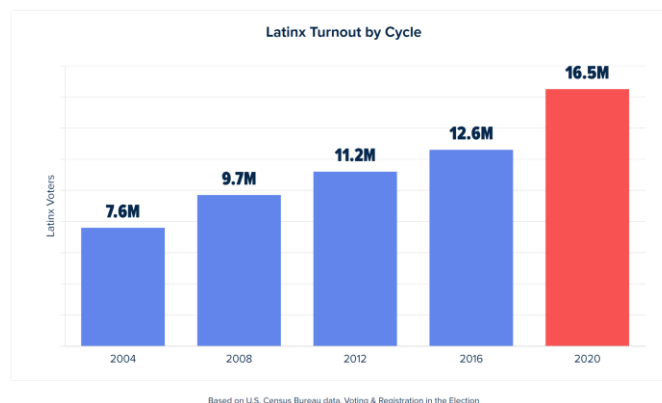


Figure 0.1 – Latino turnout by cycle, 2004-2020 | Voto Latino<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, according to data projections, there will be over 111.22 million people of Hispanic descent in the United States in 2060. Latino population is much younger than average U.S. population: median age of U.S. born Latinos is 30, versus the median age of 44 for U.S. white population. At this rhythm, by 2032, the overall Latino electorate in the South will have grown by two thirds. Twelve million Latinos are, at present, eligible to vote but not yet registered.

<sup>1</sup> Rodriguez, S. (2020, November 5). *How Miami Cubans disrupted Biden’s path to a Florida win*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/04/biden-miami-cubans-election-2020-433999>

<sup>2</sup> *Understand the Latino Vote*. (2022, January 31). Voto Latino. Available at: <https://votolatino.org/understand-the-vote/>

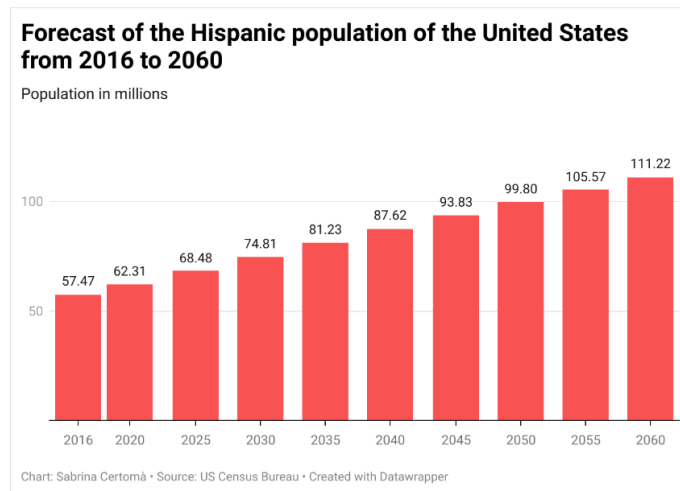


Figure 0.2 – Forecast of the Hispanic population of the U.S., 2016-2060 | U.S. Census Bureau<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, it is essential to consider who will most Latinos vote for, and how large that majority is; a majority that could constitute a significant force in winning or losing a *swing state*, such as Florida. Here, in 2020, 20.5% of the eligible voter population was Latino (3,143,000 out of a total 15,342,000), on a total Latino population of 5,697,240 (35% increase since 2010). Unregistered eligible Latinos counted for 1,605,377 (37.05% of the population), while 2020 Latino turnout was of 2,034,824, compared to the 2016 Latino turnout of 1,605,277<sup>4</sup>.

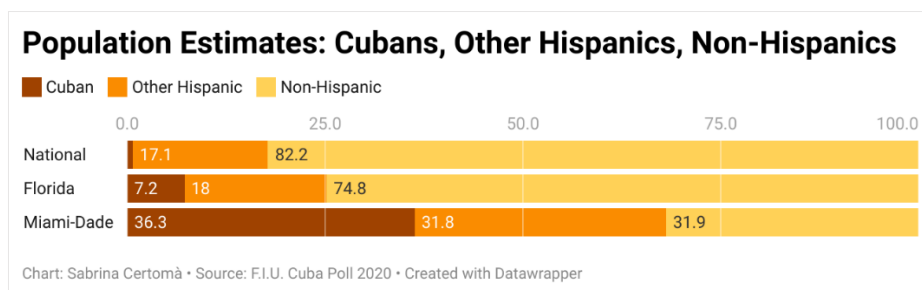


Figure 0.3 – Population estimates in Florida | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>5</sup>

Most of the Cuban American Florida residents live in the South Florida region, dominating the demographic landscape of Miami-Dade County. Their overwhelming presence in the state makes their political involvement critically important, particularly in presidential election years. The table and charts that follow shows the current number of registered Cuban Americans by party affiliation in Florida and Miami-Dade County, visually highlighting the dominance of the Republican Party in

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (September 6, 2018). Forecast of the Hispanic population of the United States from 2016 to 2060 (in millions) [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved February 12, 2022, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/251238/hispanic-population-of-the-us/>

<sup>4</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2021, April 28). *Most Cuban American voters identify as Republican in 2020*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/02/most-cuban-american-voters-identify-as-republican-in-2020/>

<sup>5</sup> Grenier, Guillermo and Qing Lai. (2020). *2020 FIU Cuba Poll: How Cuban Americans in Miami View U.S. Policies Toward Cuba*. Miami, FL: Florida International University.

the Cuban American political life at the state and the county levels. Nationwide, 58% of Cuban registered voters affiliate with or lean toward the Republican Party, while 38% identify with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic. By comparison, around two-thirds of Hispanic voters who are not Cuban (65%) identify as or lean Democratic, while 32% affiliate with the Republican Party<sup>6</sup>.

	FLORIDA			MIAMI-DADE		
	All	Hispanic	Cuban	All	Hispanic	Cuban
Republican	4,927,507	587,552	367,233	398,542	294,020	253,830
Democrat	5,167,930	920,324	180,227	622,818	272,397	124,572
Other	3,795,933	866,043	150,325	478,734	305,050	103,904
Total registered	13,891,370	2,373,919	697,785	1,500,094	871,467	482,306

Figure 0.4 – Current number of registered Cuban Americans by party affiliation in Florida and Miami-Dade County | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>7</sup>

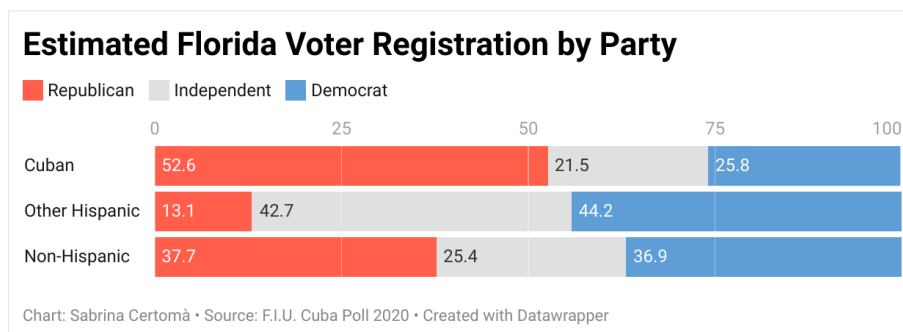


Figure 0.5 – Percentage of registered Cuban Americans by party affiliation in Florida | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>8</sup>

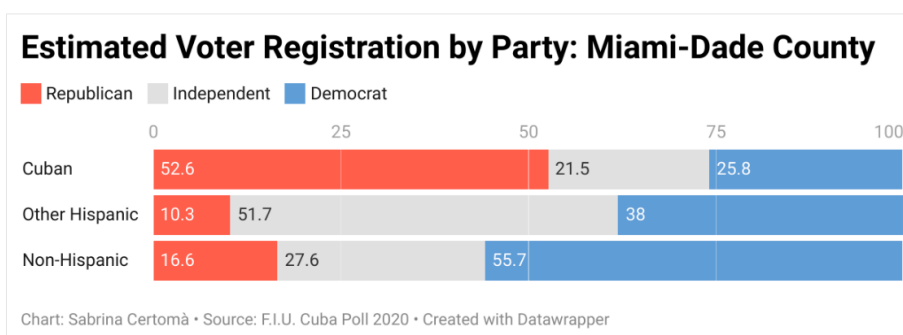


Figure 0.6 – Percentage of registered Cuban Americans by party affiliation in Miami-Dade County | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2021, April 28). *Most Cuban American voters identify as Republican in 2020*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/02/most-cuban-american-voters-identify-as-republican-in-2020/>

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*

Historically, Cuban Americans have backed the Republican Party in large numbers, but that support has at times softened as a new generation of U.S.-born, Democratic-leaning Cubans has come of age. As a result, the Cuban American community is by no means a monolith, but polling data shows that around 53% of Cubans in Miami-Dade County are registered Republicans, compared to 26% registered Democrats. The 21% of Cubans not affiliated with a party tend to skew right. It is important to investigate the nature and causes of this difference and to examine the political implications of this vote in the U.S. national scenario. The present work aims precisely at analyse how the Cuban American vote have evolved – by taking into account historical, political, economic and social aspects – in the U.S and, particularly, in Florida. The time frame covered by the study ranges from the 1800s to the present day. The purpose is to change the common stereotype of Latinos in general and Cuban Americans in particular as a monolith.

The focus of the research is on the history of Cuban American immigrants and their generational divide. The reasons for choosing Florida and Cuban Americans as a case study are essentially two. First, the dissertation author's fascination with the United States and the Latin American continent and interest in minority voices in the 2020 national elections, which were both the confirmation and the starting point of her passion for the history, political and sociological process in the Americas. Second, compared to other Latino communities, Cuban Americans have made significant political and economic efforts to influence national policy and national foreign policy decisions in recent decades. Therefore, it was deemed interesting to explore the background of the current situation and to assess whether the changing demographic structure of Cuban Americans in Florida is reflected in the day-to-day political life of the state's electorate.

The research question guiding the analysis is: *What is the significance of Latino votes in presidential elections? What sociological and historical factors have led to Cuban Americans voting Republican in Florida? Does anything change in the long run due to generational and demographic factors?* To answer the above question and provide a more comprehensive understanding, this study pursued certain tasks. First, to what extent have historical relations between the United States and Cuba influenced the perceptions of Cuban migrants in the United States? Second, how has the Cuban American community responded to and influenced the foreign policy decisions of recent presidents regarding Cuba? Finally, what are the factors that led to Trump's victory in Florida in 2020 and which party is supported by the majority of Cuban Americans today?

The goal of this work is to deepen the understanding of an under-researched topic and to examine the cause-effect relationship that led to nowadays relationship of Florida Cuban American electorate with the U.S. presidential candidates and political parties. The answers to the research questions are provided using a historical, legal, social and political perspective, thus taking into

account historic and sociological factors when looking at any social phenomenon or process. The historical, legal and analytical frameworks, presented in the first three chapters, result functional to understand and contextualize the in-depth study on Florida of the fourth and fifth chapters.

As far as the methodology is concerned, the dissertation is developed combining the document and data analysis of the past few elections and the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data through different interviews. The research is conducted on the basis of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of information gathered through brief interviews with Cuban American voters and Italian and Cuban American experts on the subject, as well as through participation in the *LULAC Voting Rights Townhall* conference<sup>10</sup>. The decision to enrich the study by directly asking Cuban American voters about the reasons for their political choice aims to give voice to those who are the direct subject of this research. The experts and Cuban American voters who participated in the interviews were contacted through different channels. First, through the networks of Latino non-governmental organisations – *LULAC*. Secondly, through the online platform *LinkedIn*, which made it possible to get in touch with some professors who expressed their opinions on the subject. Secondary sources include books, academic papers, official documents and reports from national governments, international and non-governmental organisations specialising in voter rights and the Latino community in the U.S, letters from presidents and diplomats, transcripts of speeches, election polls and election data. The sources were selected on the basis of their suitability to answer the research questions and to provide further input on the elaborated themes.

This research could be academically and socially relevant as it draws attention to the voting behaviour of a minority – Cuban Americans – who have not been the subject of study and research (only local election polls) for almost 15 years, but who are crucial to turnout in U.S. presidential elections. It also sheds light on the influence of the Cuban American community on the U.S. national government since 1959. As mentioned above, it also gathers the direct testimonies of a category of people – the Cuban American voters – whose feelings and opinions are interesting to hear.

The present work is structured as follows. The first chapter provides a historical and legal framework for understanding Latino voting rights in the U.S. It presents the evolution of voting rights for minorities – Blacks, Latinos – and the factors that have hindered the realisation of voting rights since the end of the World War II. The legal framework in the United States to promote the rights of minorities – such as the *Civil Rights Act* and the *Voting Rights Act*, the two most important laws – are

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<sup>10</sup> Conversation about voting rights during a national town hall meeting. (November 8, 2021). Sonja Diaz, Founding Executive Director of the UCLA Latino Policy & Politics Initiative, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs; Arturo Vargas, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials; Dr. Luis Fraga, Joseph & Elizabeth Robbie Professor of Political Science, and Director of the Institute for Latino Research, University of Notre Dame; Julian Castro, Former U.S. Presidential Democratic Party Candidate; Maria Cardona, Principal, Dewey Square Group, Latinovations Founder, and CNN & CNN En Español Political Commentator.



the subject of the following section. A focus is then placed on the new protagonists of the civil rights struggle: young people who organised themselves into groups such as the Black Panthers, the Brown Berets and the Young Lords. The third section of the chapter analyses the expansion of the *Voting Rights Act* of 1975, including some of the legal cases in which it was applied. This was indeed an absolutely crucial contribution to all the successes and growth of Latino political empowerment. The final part of the chapter provides an overview of the current debate on Latino voting rights in the U.S., with a focus on the still growing restrictions on voting rights. A 2018 voter engagement survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and *The Atlantic* showed how the loss of protections leads to voter suppression, with Latino and Black voters more likely to face barriers at the polls.

The second chapter provides a historical background on relations between Cuba and the United States in order to better understand the relationship between Cuban migrants and their country of asylum. The first section begins by outlining the history of the development of relations between the two countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries by analysing the private correspondence of politicians and presidents. This is followed by a discussion of U.S. interventions on the island. The second section examines the causes of the breakdown in relations. In order to assess the impact of the revolution on U.S.-Cuba relations, the Castroist regime origin is analysed first. The Castro brothers succeeded in overthrowing Batista in 1959 and Cuba became a central issue in the incipient Cold War. Here, Havana's geostrategic role in the Cold War is highlighted by analysing the events at the Bay of Pigs from John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Castro's perspectives and the missile crisis. This analysis of the Cold War period allows for a fuller understanding of the later imposition of the embargo, which is the subject of the final section of this chapter. The embargo, which came about in response to the seizure of U.S. property on the island by the new revolutionary government, was difficult to justify in the long run against the background of international law, as it led to considerable suffering for the Cuban people, especially when Soviet economic relations with Cuba ended with the end of USSR in 1991. This section sheds particular light on the legal framework of the embargo. It began in October 1960 under President Eisenhower and continues today under President Biden. Various legal instruments were used to justify it: the *Foreign Assistance Act* (FAA) of 1961, the *Tariff Classification Act* (TCA) of 1962, the *Cuban Assets Control Regulations* (CACR) of 1963, the *Cuban Democracy Act* (CDA) of 1992, the *Foreign Relations Authorisation Act* (FRAA) of 1994, the *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act* (*Helms-Burton Act*) of 1996, the *Omnibus Appropriations Act* of 1998 and the *Trade Sections Reform and Export Enhancement Act* of 2000. It became law: only Congress can repeal it.

The third chapter deals with the attempts at normalisation made under the Obama presidency and partially reversed by Trump. In the process of normalising relations between the United States and Cuba, the succession of political leaders in the two countries has played a very important – if not indispensable – role. Barack Obama on the one hand and Raúl Castro on the other initiated this process, which culminated on 17 December 2014. However, the death of Fidel Castro and Trump's victory in 2016 reignited discussions about U.S.-Cuba relations. During his presidency, Trump implemented his campaign promise to reverse much of the Obama administration's policy of détente towards Cuba. He decided to reimpose sanctions on the island, restrict travel between the two countries and ban trade with companies owned by or working for the Cuban military, intelligence and security services. It also banned Americans from travelling to Cuba on their own for academic or cultural purposes. While the White House increased economic pressure on Cuba, Raúl Castro's successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, became president. The last part of the chapter analyses the evolution of the migration problem – one of the variables that distinguishes today's Cuban voters in the United States. The different waves of emigrants came with different histories and had different views on life in general and on their country in particular, which remained relevant to them even after years in the U.S. The treatment of Cubans arriving in the United States since 1959 was marked by different migration policies. From the *Cuban Adjustment Act* to the so-called *Wet foot/dry foot* policy, Cubans have received preferential treatment under U.S. immigration policy from 1959 to the present, a consequence of the U.S.'s harsh stance against the communist dictatorship on the island.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the case study: the weight of the Cuban diaspora in Florida. The evolution of Cuban American generations and their status in the country is analysed in a conceptual order: the socio-economic framework, the adaptation of immigrants in the U.S., the cultural and political aspects. First, an introductory overview of Cuban immigrants in Florida is given, with some basic information and data. Each paragraph is accompanied by one or more graphs and tables to contextualise what is subsequently analysed using concrete data. The first paragraph first looks at the socio-economic framework of the Cuban diaspora in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and describes the relationship of the diaspora to its country of origin. The following section provides an overview of the comparison between the three different migrant groups – *Exiles*, *New Cubans* and *Marielitos*. The second paragraph is devoted to the adaptation of Cuban immigrants in the United States and looks at how Cubans from the different waves of migration have adapted to life in the United States and how their differences can be explained. It begins with geographical adaptation, pointing out that Cuban immigrants have always congregated in their new country, and this trend has accelerated in recent years with the emergence of a large Cuban American community in Miami. It then looks at social and cultural adaptation, focusing on the English-Only campaign of the 1980s, a cultural struggle

against the use of Spanish in Florida. The third and final section deals with political adjustment, focusing on Cuban voting patterns and the dominance of exiles in elections and appointments. This dominance became evident with the establishment of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), a fundamental lobbying tool of the *Exiles*. Cuban Americans demanded (and received) ethnic concessions up to the highest levels of national politics. Their success was based on a dense web of mutually reinforcing social, cultural, economic and political relations. The section continues with an in-depth examination of the presidential elections between 1992 and 2004, highlighting the influence of the Cuban American community on presidential candidates at the turn of the century. The final section describes the end of *Exile* control and the disruption of the ethnic political cycle, focusing on the growing generational divide.

The concluding chapter examines Florida as a swing state from 2008 to 2020 in a comparative manner. It begins with Obama's victory in the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections and shows an initial shift in the political party affiliation of Cuban Americans that gained momentum in 2012 when Obama unexpectedly received 48% of the Cuban American vote. However, with the subsequent 2016 and 2020 elections and the presidency of Donald Trump, the *Latinos por Trump* phenomenon began to spread in Florida and especially in Miami, which seemed to reverse the trend.

The conclusions, after a digression on the work done, provide an answer to the research questions. Further, it presents a picture of the current situation of the Cuban American electorate in Florida, thanks to the data collected by the FIU Cuba Poll 2020 and an interview with Guillermo J. Grenier<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Professor of sociology and the chair of the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University, born in Havana.

# CHAPTER ONE - Historical Latino Struggles for Justice and Inclusion in U.S. Civil Society

## *Introduction*

Latinos are the largest minority ethnic group in the U.S. and represent a powerful force. In the 2020 election, the first time in history that Latinos were the largest minority racial group also in the electorate with 32 million eligible voters, there was a dramatic rise in registration and voting by some 18.7 million Latinos, so that about 1 in 10 voters was Latino<sup>12</sup>. What is more, Hispanic millennials accounted for nearly half of the 27.3 million Hispanic eligible voters in 2016 (44% - a share greater than any other racial or ethnic group of voters, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data)<sup>13</sup>. This means that their force is young and wide enough to transform the political balance of the U.S. local, state, and federal governments. This potential depends, however, on one factor: the number of people who are legally able to vote using their right to go to the polls on election day. Suffrage has not been an easy right to obtain or maintain for people of colour, including Latinos, and their enfranchisement remains under perpetual threat as voting restrictions hit minority populations harder.

### **1.1 The World War II legacy**

The political events leading up to the Second World War can be seen as the basis for the wave of change that eventually became the civil rights movement. The United States entered the conflict to fight against what it saw as the greatest threat to the Western world: fascism and Nazi Germany's drive to conquer the European continent<sup>14</sup>. The aim of the Allies was to defend democracy against totalitarian fascist dictatorships. In the United States, young people of all different ethnicities and social classes were drafted or volunteered to fight in Europe in the name of democracy – there were over a million blacks in the armed forces<sup>15</sup> – even though many of these young people (African

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<sup>12</sup> Gamboa, S. (2021, May 12). *Over half of eligible Latinos voted in 2020 — A historic first*. NBC News. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/half-eligible-latinos-voted-2020-historic-first-rcna899>

<sup>13</sup> Krogstad, J. M., Lopez, M. H., López, G., Passel, J. S., & Patten, E. (2016, January 19). *Millennials make up almost half of Latino eligible voters in 2016*. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2016/01/19/millennials-make-up-almost-half-of-latino-eligible-voters-in-2016/>

<sup>14</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *The Limits of Liberty: American History, 1607–1992 (Short Oxford History of the Modern World)* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press, pp. 504 - 505. "The United States fused their efforts with those of the allies, entering into an especially close relationship with Great Britain and taking the lead in forging the coalition Churchill later named 'the Grand Alliance'. [...] On New Year's Day, 1942, Roosevelt, Churchill, the Soviet Ambassador Litvinov, and the representatives of twenty-three other nations at war with the Axis signed a Declaration of the United Nations."

<sup>15</sup> Ivi, p. 503. "Blacks were admitted to the marines and the army air corps; for the first time in decades the Navy accepted them in capacities other than that of mess-waiter; several thousand were commissioned in the army, 600 in the army force, and 50 in the navy."

Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans and Latinos) did not have access to the same democracy in their home state. In fact, even if some long-established rules fell, they continued to be discriminated against in the army and in Red Cross blood banks where segregation prevailed<sup>16</sup>; high-ranking army officers refused to employ coloured-skin soldiers in combat roles. This gave rise to a strong contradiction between democratic ideals and the actual experiences of minority U.S. citizens that emerged more strongly after the conflict, in particular, when the war was finally over, and black or Latino soldiers were supposed to return to ‘their place’ as subordinate groups within their communities. From this moment on, many of the non-white veterans began to claim their rightful place as equal members of their society, organising themselves to fight for their civil rights. For instance, membership of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples (NAACP) rose from 50,000 to 450,000 only during the conflict<sup>17</sup>, with minorities starting to claim for a legalistic approach.

One of the first Latinos organizations created to fight for civil rights was the G.I. Forum. Founded in Texas in 1948 by Hector P. Garcia, the G.I. Forum grew from an organization of Mexican American veterans in the Southwest to have branches throughout the United States<sup>18</sup>. The main goal was to ensure that Hispanic-American veterans received the services and benefits of the G.I. Bill of 1944, a law that guaranteed government support for education and provided aid for veterans to buy homes. Mexican Americans and other non-white veterans were still systematically discriminated against and denied the benefits of the law. Initially, the G.I. Forum took on a national role following the fight to allow soldier Felix Longoria, killed in World War II, to be buried in his hometown of Three Rivers (Texas); until then he had been denied a funeral because of his Mexican origin. The G.I. Forum mobilized: as an American citizen who had fought and given his life for his country, Longoria deserved due recognition. The Forum succeeded in convincing the then U.S. representative for Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson, to request that the soldier be buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Longoria was then buried with all the honours of an American hero fallen in battle. After achieving this initial success, the forum addressed other veterans’ issues, such as hospital care and Mexican American representation on draft boards. The Three Rivers incident elevated the forum to an effective advocate of civil rights for Hispanics and broadened the scope and nature of its activities (in some areas, auxiliary – female – and junior G.I. Forums developed). In 1954, lawyers from the forum, together with lawyers from the League of United Latin American Citizens, successfully intervened before the Supreme Court in *Hernandez v. State of Texas*<sup>19</sup> (the first and only Mexican American civil-rights

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<sup>16</sup> *Ivi*, p. 504

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> Carl Allsup, (1982). *The American G.I. Forum: Origins and Evolution*. University of Texas, Center for Mexican American Studies Monograph 6, Austin.

<sup>19</sup> *Hernandez v. Texas*. (n.d.). Oyez. Retrieved July 8, 2021, from <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us475>

case heard and decided by the U.S. Supreme Court during the post-World War II period). Mexican Americans, although technically classified as Caucasians, suffered discrimination as a class and were entitled to the protection of the Fourteenth Amendment. As for this particular case, in 1950 Pete Hernandez, a migrant cotton picker in Texas was convicted of the murder of Joe Espinosa in Edna, Texas, a small town in Jackson County, where no person of Mexican descent had served on a jury there for at least twenty-five years (he was convicted by an all-white jury). His lawyers appealed because Mexican Americans had been systematically excluded from juries in Texas for years and wanted to make the Hernández case a precedent against the exclusion of people of Mexican descent from all types of juries in the state. However, because Mexican Americans were classified as white, the state court argued that a white jury constituted a “jury of peers” for Hernández. The case was then taken to the U.S. Supreme Court (the Warren Court), and Hernandez’s defence lawyers were the first Mexican American lawyers to appear before it. They again argued that Texas discriminated against Mexican Americans as a class and that Hernandez’s rights were violated by the exclusion of Mexican Americans from all juries, while the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed protection not only based on race, Caucasian and Negro, but also class. The state of Texas acknowledged the lack of Spanish-speaking personnel on any kind of state jury for the past twenty-five years but argued that it was merely a coincidence, not a pattern of behaviour. In its unanimous decision, the court ruled that Mexican Americans were a separate class (in this case “Hispanic” as opposed to “White”) since discrimination against them was proven, and that they and all other racial or national groups in the United States had equal protection under the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. The court held that Hernández had “the right to be indicted and tried by juries from which all members of his class are not systematically excluded”. This decision was a great triumph of the “other white” concept, the legal strategy of Mexican American *Civil Rights Activists* from 1930 to 1970. The case set a valuable precedent until it was superseded in 1971 by *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi ISD*, which recognized Hispanics as an identifiable minority group and used the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*<sup>20</sup> decision to prohibit segregation<sup>21</sup>.

In 1957, the G.I. Forum ended another decade-long struggle when a federal court ruled that school segregation of Mexican American children in Texas schools<sup>22</sup> was unjustified<sup>23</sup>. In the same decade, the forum helped thousands of Mexican Americans in the Rio Grande Valley to register to

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<sup>20</sup> *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. (n.d.). Oyez. Retrieved July 8, 2021, from <https://www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/347us483>

<sup>21</sup> Carlos M. Alcala and Jorge C. Rangel. (March 1972). *Project Report: De Jure Segregation of Chicanos in Texas Schools*, Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review 7.

<sup>22</sup> San Miguel, G. (1983). The Struggle against Separate and Unequal Schools: Middle Class Mexican Americans and the Desegregation Campaign in Texas, 1929-1957. *History of Education Quarterly*, 23(3), 343-359. doi:10.2307/367762

<sup>23</sup> Hermino Hernandez, et al v. Driscoll Consolidated Independent School District (DCISD), et. al. Retrieved July 21, 2021 from <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/26174936>. A group of eight elementary school students went to court in 1957 and sued Driscoll Consolidated Independent School District. The suit was filed on their behalf by the American G.I. Forum, a group founded to battle discrimination against Hispanic veterans.

vote and to fight police brutality. Health care and the needs of veterans remained important concerns, as did scholarships, campaigns against school dropouts, and the problems of migrant workers.

In 1958, the American G.I. Forum became a national organisation, and its members introduced Mexican Americans into national politics. In the 1960 presidential campaign, the Viva Kennedy-Viva Johnson clubs, run by leaders of the forum and LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens), helped John F. Kennedy win Texas and New Mexico. Although the Kennedy administration did not reciprocate with ad hoc federal aid, the Johnson administration did. The G.I. Forum played a significant role in implementing the Great Society's programmes<sup>24</sup> in the barrios, and for the first time Latinos were appointed to influential positions and agencies. When Johnson established the first cabinet-level office for Hispanic affairs, he chose a former national president of the G.I. Forum, Vicente Ximenes, for the position.

The Forum continued its work in the 1970s, becoming a civil rights organisation, advocating for voting rights for Hispanic Americans in the Southwest. In fact, poor Latinos were unable to vote because of the Poll Tax in states like Texas: there was a requirement to pay a poll tax if you wanted to vote in the state. The G.I. Forum first of all organised to raise funds to help people pay their poll tax, but also to challenge its constitutionality in the courts. However, other global conflicts soon emerged after the Second World War. Conflicts that would shape the struggle for civil rights in the United States: the Cold War and national liberation struggles in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

## 1.2 The Sixties, the *Civil Rights Act* and the *Voting Rights Act*



*Figure 1.1 – Martin Luther King lead a black voting rights march from Selma, Alabama, to the state capital in Montgomery. Among those pictured is the late Civil Rights Activist and Congressman John Lewis, died in 2020 | William Lovelace/Express/Getty Images*

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<sup>24</sup> Reifman, A. (2014). Great Society social programs. In M. J. Coleman & L. H. Ganong (Eds.), *The social history of the American family: An encyclopedia*, pp.647-650. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. “The term ‘Great Society’ refers to the enactment of civil rights laws and many federal government social programs in the mid-1960s by President Lyndon B. Johnson at a time his party, the Democrats, had large majorities in the U.S. House and Senate”.

The civil rights era was characterized by a series of events that took place during the 1960s, most notably the struggles in the southern states of the U.S., where African Americans and other minorities rose against Jim Crow segregation. Jim Crow laws expanded beyond the South to the Southwestern region of the United States, where in addition to African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans and other non-white populations lived segregated lives. Hispanic Americans, for example, were prohibited from being in the same space as whites in restaurants, parks, cinemas, and swimming pools, among others.

At this early stage, therefore, the civil rights struggle focused on ending Jim Crow segregation in the South and Southwest. Some of the most important national figures were Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez, but other groups representing different ethnic minorities also came to the fore: the aforementioned G.I. Forum and other Latino organizations such as LULAC. Although a coalition between African Americans and Hispanic Americans was never created, solidarity and the common goal of ending racial discrimination brought the ethnic groups closer together as they overcame their initial differences and adopted common strategies. Initially, nonviolence was chosen to carry on the struggle without risking legal retaliation; it had become widespread in the United States after Gandhi struggled for Indian independence against British colonialism and because of the strong ties of minorities with religion<sup>25</sup>. Nonviolence was mainly used as a technique to denounce the inherent violence of the government in situations of oppression during peaceful protests, civil disobedience, strikes, sit-ins, economic boycotts, political non-cooperation. These acts would be constitutionally protected, but the segregationists attacked them violently, so there began to be a strong national backlash against segregation, which also spread internationally. The federal government realised that domestic racial inequality would exacerbate U.S. contradictions in the eyes of other powers: the U.S. claimed to be the defender of democracy in the world while denying it to its own citizens at home. The U.S. government was aware that it had to promote a major internal transformation if it was to continue to represent the “free and democratic world” against the “totalitarian and undemocratic” communist world. The national and international pressure that characterised the first five years of 1960 culminated in the passage of the two most important pieces of legislation: the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965.

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<sup>25</sup> Calhoun-Brown, A. (2000). Upon This Rock: The Black Church, Nonviolence, and the Civil Rights Movement. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 33(02), 169–174. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1049096500060911>. “The manner in which culture – particularly the subcultures of minority groups – affects political action is not well understood. In the case of the Civil Rights Movement, the receptivity of African-American religious culture to the message of nonviolence is what really linked the black church to the movement”.



### 1.2.1 The pattern towards the *Civil Rights Act* and the *Voting Rights Act*

On June 11, 1963, President John F. Kennedy called on Congress “to enact legislation giving all Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public, hotels, restaurants, theatres, retail stores, and similar establishments.”<sup>26</sup> Kennedy’s speech and the introduction of ambitious civil rights legislation were fundamental to the movement. In addition to the desegregation of shops, the president sought to extend measures to the still segregated schools and in the field of voter protection. It was this speech and JFK’s approach to the protests that led to the subsequent passage of the *Civil Rights Act* to be signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson on July 2, 1964. “In fact, from 1960 to 1962, the Kennedy administration took a reactive or crisis management response to emerging protests focusing on peak events. In 1963, as protest was escalating throughout the South, a more comprehensive approach emerged that involved administration efforts to coordinate ‘voluntary’ desegregation by working with executives of national companies and other leaders. The Kennedy administration also began laying the foundation for a more ambitious legislative response as administration officials came to see that voluntary desegregation was insufficient.”<sup>27</sup> It was this new outcry that broke out in the spring and summer of 1963, first in Birmingham, Alabama, and then throughout the United States, that convinced the Kennedy administration of the need for a dedicated law. The Justice Department began tracking *Civil Rights Activity* and desegregation: between 20 May and 8 August, 978 protests had been identified as occurring in 29 cities and 36 states<sup>28</sup>.

The *Civil Rights Act* of 1964<sup>29</sup> prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, national origin, religion, sex in employment, education, and improved access to public facilities and accommodations, such as restaurants and hotels, to voting and employment<sup>30</sup>. In particular, Title I relates to voting rights: it bans the use of literacy tests, the inconsistent application of voting requirements, and the use of immaterial errors and omissions to disenfranchise eligible voters. Although it appeared to be an encouraging step in the protection of voting rights, Title I “failed to create long-term change; barring certain types of discriminatory voting practices simply led to a modification of methods – Southern voting officials would do everything from ignore court orders to freeze voting rolls by closing registration offices”<sup>31</sup>. The failure of Title I to bring about meaningful change in Southern voting

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<sup>26</sup> Andrews, K. T., & Gaby, S. (2015). Local Protest and Federal Policy: The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement on the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*. *Sociological Forum*, 30, pp. 509–527. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12175>

<sup>27</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi*, p. 14

<sup>29</sup> U. S. Congress (1964, July 2). *Civil Rights Act Of 1964*. The United States Department of Justice. Available at: [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/civil\\_rights\\_1964.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/civil_rights_1964.asp)

<sup>30</sup> Hersch, J., & Shinall, J. B. (2015). Fifty years later: the legacy of the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 34(2), pp. 424–456. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.21824>

<sup>31</sup> Sudeep, P. (2013). The Voting Rights Act’s fight to stay rational: *Shelby County v. Holder*. *Duke Journal of Constitutional Law & Public Policy Sidebar*, 8, 2, 271.

practices led Congress to pass the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965<sup>32</sup>. The bill was passed in the U.S. Senate by a 77-19 vote on May 26, 1965, and in the U.S. House of Representatives by a vote of 333-85 on July 9. It was finally signed into law by Johnson on August 6, 1965. The law enforced the voting rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth Amendments (1870), which granted citizenship to anyone “born or naturalized in the United States” and prohibited states from disenfranchising voters “on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude,” respectively. The act vetoed racial discrimination in voting practices by the federal, state and local governments laws by banning practices used in the South and in the Southwest to keep non-white populations from voting (such as literacy tests or poll taxes<sup>33</sup>). Since its passage, the *Voting Rights Act* has been amended to include such features as the protection of voting rights for non-English speaking American citizens. While the act aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote, the law was far-reaching, securing this right for most racial and ethnic minorities, including English-speaking Latinos in the southwest, northeast, and southeast.



*Figure 1.2 – President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act of 1965 in a ceremony in the President’s Room near the Senate Chambers on August 6 | AP Photo*

These two laws represent the greatest achievement of the civil rights era. They became the legal foundation for the creation of the post-Civil Rights United States. However, white supremacist violence soon exposed the limits of non-violent tactics. As a result, in the second half of the 1960s, the civil rights movement underwent major transformations.

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<sup>32</sup> U. S. Congress (2015, August 6). *Voting Rights Act Of 1965*. The United States Department of Justice. Available at: <https://www.justice.gov/crt/voting-rights-act-1965>

<sup>33</sup> In 1964, the 24th Amendment made poll taxes illegal in federal elections; poll taxes in state elections were banned in 1966 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

### 1.2.2 The late Sixties: Black Panthers, Brown Berets and Young Lords

At the end of the 1960s (since 1966), the struggle for civil rights took a new direction. The new protagonists became the young people who were growing up in this era. Inspired by the national liberation struggles against colonialism in Asia and Africa, the socialist revolutions in China and Cuba, and the voices of people like Malcolm X, who believed that people who continued to endure white supremacist violence had a constitutional right to “armed self-defence”, they changed their perspective on armed confrontations for social and political change in the United States. Young people of different racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds created new organisations such as the Black Panthers, Brown Berets and Young Lords.

The Black Panthers symbolized a new phase of the struggle for social, economic, and political justice for urban African Americans. They sought to defend their community from police brutality and harassment in their neighbourhood through a political-military structure, following the Marxist-Leninist model of revolutionary organization. The Panthers also promoted social programs to improve the lives of their communities: breakfasts for school children, campaigns against lead poisoning and tuberculosis, denunciations of the terrible housing conditions of community residents, etc. This model was taken up by young Latinos: in California, Chicano youths created the Brown Berets, in the Midwest and East Coast, Puerto Ricans youths created the Young Lords.

The Brown Berets and the Young Lords emerged to address their communities’ particular concerns and issues. Modelling themselves after the Panthers, they promoted community self-defence, breakfast programs, anti-lead poisoning campaigns, among other programs in the barrios. Yet each group had its particular political and identity concerns. Puerto Ricans in the United States demanded the independence of Puerto Rico. Chicanos (Mexicans) tried to define their multi-racial identities. Chicanos in the Southwest called for Chicano power, self-determination and self-liberation. The militancy of these groups led the United States government to take action against them. The FBI program known as COINTELPRO<sup>34</sup> (Counter-Intelligence Program) aimed to destroy these groups seen as subversive and a threat to the national security of the United States. The Program was created to infiltrate, monitor and disrupt the activities of groups such as the Young Lords and the Brown Berets, by trying to incarcerate as many members as possible. Government agents tried also to exploit internal struggles of the groups by making them divide over issues of leadership or tactics. This strategy was positively used against the Young Lords in New York: the group split over the question of Puerto Rico’s independence, turning against each other. Thus, the civil rights era began to wane. Due to the infiltration of federal government agencies, the internal contradictions within the ethnic

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<sup>34</sup> COINTELPRO. (n.d.). FBI. Available at: <https://vault.fbi.gov/cointel-pro>

guerrilla groups and the gender issues that were developing within these groups, they began to disappear.

### **1.3 The Seventies. 1975 extension of the *Voting Rights Act*. ¡Su voto es su voz!**

In 1974, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP)<sup>35</sup> was founded. It was the first and largest non-partisan Latino voter participation organization in the United States, firstly committed in eliminating barriers that prevented Latinos to vote. Despite the accomplishments of the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, there remained obstacles – such as language – for Latino voters inhibiting them from exercising their right. Established by Willie Velasquez in San Antonio, SVREP tried to register to the polls as many Latinos as possible. Moreover, registration materials were finally translated into Spanish, launching larger Latino voter registration efforts; Latinos began to build a political influence, to bring court challenges against discriminatory redistricting and election systems that kept Latinos from electing other Latinos to public office<sup>36</sup>. According to SVREP’s data, the organization has registered 2.7 million Latinos until today, trained 150,000 Latino leaders, won 210 voting rights lawsuits<sup>37</sup>. Under Velazquez presidency, the Latino vote grew from 2.1 to 3.7 million nationwide; it was just the beginning: since 2018 the mobilization of Latinos has grown to 15.5 million, with a projected number of registrations for the 2020 General Presidential Elections of 17.5 million Latinos<sup>38</sup> (the final turnout was even larger, with 18.7 million Latinos registered to vote, 1 in 10 voters<sup>39</sup>).

The *Voting Rights Act* of 1965 included a section ensuring that people educated in U.S. schools predominately taught in a language other than English – for instance, island Puerto Ricans – could not be denied the right to vote because of their inability to read, write, understand, or interpret material in English. As is often the case, the provision was ignored, and Spanish-speakers in the U.S. were discriminated against at the polls. In the 1970 case *Garza v. Smith*<sup>40</sup>, three illiterate Mexican American voters of Texas, representing all illiterate voters of the State, challenged the constitutional validity of Articles 5.05(15) and 8.13 of the Texas Election Code. Their illiteracy prevented them to

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<sup>35</sup> *SVREP Register To Vote*. (n.d.). Southwest Voter Registration Education Project National Office 320 El Paso St. San Antonio, TX. Available at: <https://www.svrep.org/>

<sup>36</sup> Gamboa, S. (2015, August 6). *For Latinos, 1965 Voting Rights Act Impact Came A Decade Later*. NBC News. Available at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/latinos-1965-voting-rights-act-impact-came-decade-later-n404936>

<sup>37</sup> *History and Legacy of Southwest Voter Registration Education Project*. (n.d.). Svrep.Org. Available at: <https://www.svrep.org/history>

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>39</sup> Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies, City University of New York, Bergad, L. W., & Miranda, Jr, L. A. (2021, May). *Latino Voter Registration and Participation Rates in the 2020 Presidential Election* (Latino Data Project Report 94). City University of New York. Available at: <https://bit.ly/37kHHPn>

<sup>40</sup> *Garza v. Smith*, 320 F.Supp. 131 (W.D. Tex. 1970). Available at: <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/320/131/1467789/>

vote for the candidates of their choice without assistance at the polls, but these Articles prohibited them from receiving assistance in casting their ballots, because only people with physical disabilities were entitled to that assistance. In particular, according to Article 5.05(15) “no voter shall be entitled to any assistance in the marking of his ballot on the ground of illiteracy.”<sup>41</sup> The plaintiffs argued that “these provisions offended the Fourteenth Amendment by discriminating between illiterate voters and physically handicapped voters in violation of the Equal Protection Clause and by totally or partially depriving functionally illiterate Texas voters of their fundamental right to vote in violation of the Due Process Clause”<sup>42</sup>. The court finally ruled in favour of all illiterate voters in Texas. Another important case is considered a milestone in overcoming English only election structures: *Torres v. Sachs*<sup>43</sup>. Limited-English proficient Puerto Rican citizens living in New York City brought a class action pursuant to Section 4(e) challenging the defendants’ English-only elections. The class action started on September 12, 1973 “to redress alleged violations of the plaintiffs’ right to vote in the November 6, 1973, general election and in all future federal, state and local elections in New York City”<sup>44</sup>. Plaintiffs based their claim on the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, the Voting Rights Amendment of 1970. The court declared: “In order that the phrase ‘the right to vote’ be more than an empty platitude, a voter must be able effectively to register his or her political choice. This involves more than physically being able to pull a lever or marking a ballot. It is simply fundamental that voting instructions and ballots, in addition to any other material which forms part of the official communication to registered voters prior to an election, must be in Spanish as well as English, if the vote of Spanish-speaking citizens is not to be seriously impaired. Simple logic also requires that the assistance given to the plaintiff class of voters at the polls on election day by trained representatives of the Board of Elections be in a language they understand, in order that their vote will be more than a mere physical act void of any meaningful choice. Plaintiffs cannot cast an effective vote without being able to comprehend fully the registration and election forms and the ballot itself”<sup>45</sup>; and ordered that in the future elections conducted by the Board of Elections in New York City (the defendant) it had to provide all written materials for voters and ballots in Spanish and English, to hire a sufficient number of election officials who can write, read, speak and understand both languages and to publicize elections in the media proportionately in a way that reflects the Spanish language characteristics.

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<sup>41</sup> Texas Election Code, Art. 5.05, Subdivision 15. *Assistance to voter; use of English language*. If a voter is unable to sign his name because of illiteracy, any signature of the voter required by this section shall be made by the voter’s affixing his mark, attested by two witnesses, but no voter shall be entitled to any assistance in the marking of his ballot on the ground of illiteracy.

<sup>42</sup> *Garza v. Smith*, (1970). *Op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> *Torres v. Sachs*, 381 F. Supp. 309, 312-313 (S.D.N.Y. 1974). Available at: <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/381/309/2005481/>

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*

At last, on August 6, 1975, exactly one decade after the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965, following several court battles on behalf of Latino-Americans, President Gerald Ford (a Republican) amended it<sup>46</sup> to end discrimination against “language minorities” (Bilingual Amendments). Protecting the voting rights of Latinos, as well as non-English-speaking Asian Americans, Native Americans, Hawaiians and Alaskans made it possible to translate registration materials into other languages and strengthened the political power of communities of colour. Moreover, it brought court challenges against discriminatory redistricting and election systems that kept Latinos from electing other Latinos to public office. According to experts and analysts such as Luis Fraga, University of Notre Dame professor and expert in Latinos’ history, interviewed by NBC News: «This law in 1975 was an absolutely critical contributor to all the success and growth we have seen in Latino political empowerment»<sup>47</sup>.

The significance of this act is particularly tangible today as the Latino vote has become a “must have” for any candidate wanting to get elected to the White House.

#### **1.4 From Reagan “colour-blindness” to the contemporary debate on voting rights**

The voting triumphs of the 1960s and 1970s suffered a setback when President Ronald Reagan took office in 1981<sup>48</sup>. The Reagan administration ruled according to the idea of “colour-blindness”, by promoting racial equality through race-neutral governmental policies that ignore the ways in which race, ethnicity, language, and immigration status limit individuals’ opportunities. William Bradford Reynolds – Reagan’s head of the Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, which enforced the Voting Rights Amendment – thought that previous answers to discrimination, such as busing quotas, or drawing districts so that candidates of colour could be elected, favoured Black and brown communities against white Americans and thus were a part of the racial problem, not a solution to them. Despite this new perspective in the White House, in 1982, when the special provisions made by Johnson and Ford neared expiration, Congress voted to extend most of the conditions by 25 years, except for the bilingual election requirement, which was expanded to just seven more years.

In 1992, it was close to expiring. Representative José E. Serrano, a Democrat from New York, introduced the *Voting Rights Language Assistance Act*<sup>49</sup>, that amended the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965

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<sup>46</sup> U.S. Congress, (2017, July 28). *Text - H.R.6219 - 94th Congress (1975–1976): An Act to amend the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to extend certain provisions for an additional seven years, to make permanent the ban against certain prerequisites to voting, and for other purposes*. Congress.Gov | Library of Congress. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/94th-congress/house-bill/6219/text>

<sup>47</sup> Gamboa, S. (2015, August 6). *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup> Reichard, R. (2018, October 22). *A Brief History of Latino Voting Rights Since the 1960s*. Remezcla. Available at: <https://remezcla.com/features/culture/latino-voting-rights-1960s/>

<sup>49</sup> H.R.4312 - Voting Rights Language Assistance Act of 1992. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/102nd-congress/house-bill/4312/text>

to extend for 15 years the prohibition of providing voting materials only in English (the date of expiring was set as 2007 like the other special provisions). With mostly Democratic support, the legislation passed and was signed by President George H. W. Bush on August 26, 1992.

In 2006, Congress reconsidered the act by passing the “Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Coretta Scott King, Cesar E. Chavez, Barbara Jordan, William Velazquez and Dr. Hector Garcia *Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act*”<sup>50</sup>. On the one hand, Republicans at the time controlled both chambers as well as the presidency and thought the legislation would override the rights of individual states. On the other, the provisions allowed language-minority voters – such as Latinos in South Florida and Asian Americans – in their districts to vote for them, and finally decided to help renew the act. The *Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act* of 2006 reaffirmed the importance of the enforcement of the right to vote for all Americans, by extending the VRA for 25 years. In particular: “the prohibition against the use of tests or devices to deny the right to vote in any Federal, State, or local election; the requirement for certain States and local governments to provide voting materials in multiple languages”<sup>51</sup>. The Amendments regarded also: “the use of election examiners and observers; voting qualifications or standards intended to diminish, or with the effect of diminishing, the ability of U.S. citizens on account of race or colour to elect preferred candidates; award of attorney fees in enforcement proceedings to include expert fees and other reasonable costs of litigation”<sup>52</sup>. However, by eliminating voting examiners – who had to oversee registration in their jurisdictions – made it easier for voting discrimination to occur unnoticed.

#### **1.4.1 “Today we act, tomorrow we vote”**

2006 was a pivotal year also for immigration regulation in the United States. The House of Representatives immigration reform bill HR 4437 of 2005<sup>53</sup> (*Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act*) passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 239 to 182. The act was sponsored by Judiciary Chairman James Sensenbrenner (Republican of Wisconsin) and Homeland Security Chairman Peter King (Republican of New York) and addressed illegal immigration by strengthening immigration laws and adding border security measures. In April 2006,

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<sup>50</sup> In signing this bill, President Bush honoured the memory of three women who devoted their lives to the struggle for civil rights: Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Coretta Scott King.

<sup>51</sup> H.R.9 - 109th Congress (2005-2006). Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/9>

<sup>52</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>53</sup> H.R.4437 - 109th Congress (2005-2006). Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/house-bill/4437>. Title I: Securing United States Borders (Sec. 101) Directs the Secretary of Homeland Security (Secretary) to take all appropriate actions to maintain operational control over the U.S. international land and maritime borders, including: (1) systematic surveillance using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), ground-based sensors, satellites, radar coverage, and cameras; (2) physical infrastructure enhancements to prevent unlawful U.S. entry and facilitate United States Customs and Border Protection border access; (3) hiring and training additional Border Patrol agents; and (4) increasing deployment of United States Customs and Border Protection personnel to border areas with high levels of unlawful entry.

a coalition of very different social strata –religious, secular, faith-based organizations – marched together across Los Angeles in opposition to the reform bill, because it criminalized undocumented immigrants and churches or organizations that assisted them, subjecting them to detainment and deportation<sup>54</sup>. The protestors supported President George W. Bush’ moderate immigration reform but wanted the Senate to reject the bill already passed in the House of Representatives. Many ethnic minorities and nationalities took the street that day – the outcome was a march of 2 million people in Los Angeles and a total of 102 marches across the U.S. – but the largest racial group was indeed composed by Mexican, Caribbean and Latin American people. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Latino Community had already captured national attention because of the demographic explosion (from 22.4 million in 1990 to 44 million in 2007<sup>55</sup>), an explosion that was projected not to stop: 103 million by 2050 (25% of the total U.S. population). Due to their demographic importance, politicians from both parties seeking election began to cautiously consider them a huge pool of votes, and to pay attention to the immigration reform debate, especially after their role in the 2004 election (when 40 to 44% of them voted for Bush<sup>56</sup>).

Eventually, the bill did not pass the Senate, and neither did comprehensive reform. However, activists used to claim a specific motto during the protests: “Today we march, tomorrow we vote!”. The Latino community from that moment on managed to become a critical factor for Republicans at the polls, starting with the 2006 midterms<sup>57</sup>. According to the Los Angeles Time of March 4, 2016, “Conservative Miami Herald columnist Andres Oppenheimer wrote [in this regard]: “Hispanics said ‘*adiós*’ to President Bush’s Republican Party... voting in much greater numbers than expected for Democratic candidates in an apparent rejection of the ruling party’s efforts to blame much of the nation’s problems on undocumented migrants. Savvy Republicans scrambled to contain the damage. Presidential advisor Karl Rove showed up at a national meeting of La Raza, the country’s largest Latino civil rights organization, and attempted to distance the White House from anti-immigrant sentiment. Rove would later warn his party, ‘An anti-Hispanic attitude is suicidal’”<sup>58</sup>.

Although the popular uprisings of 2006 did not achieve much in legal terms, they had lasting significance on the long run, changing the climate of the national political debate: Latinos could no longer be ignored.

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<sup>54</sup> Espinosa, G. (2007). “*Today We Act, Tomorrow We Vote*”: *Latino Religions, Politics, and Activism in Contemporary U.S. Civil Society*. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 612(1), pp. 152–171. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207301099>

<sup>55</sup> *Ivi*, p. 153

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Census Bureau 2006

<sup>57</sup> Engler, M. E. A. P. (2016, March 7). *Op-Ed: The massive immigrant-rights protests of 2006 are still changing politics*. Los Angeles Times. Available at: <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-0306-engler-immigration-protests-2006-20160306-story.html>

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*



### 1.4.2 Voting restrictions still increasing

Since 2010, voting restrictions for Hispanics and Blacks have been increasing again: from strict photo ID requirements, like in Texas, Wisconsin, and North Carolina, to early voting reduction, as in Florida, to other registration restrictions<sup>59</sup>. The 2013 case of *Shelby v. Holder*<sup>60</sup> is emblematic in this respect. The U.S. Supreme Court decided to weaken voting rights protections by removing the requirement that some jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination get pre-approval for voting changes (nullification of Section 4 and 5 requirement that 15 states must submit changes to their electoral policies to the federal government for oversight and they must be approved in advance from the Department of Justice). States (mostly Southern, and mostly with Republican legislatures and governors) like Texas, Mississippi, North Carolina, Florida, Virginia, South Dakota, Iowa, and Indiana started enacting possibly discriminatory laws. The decision was taken by a majority of 5 to 4, partially dismantling the *Voting Rights Act*. According to Chief Justice John Roberts's reasoning in the Court's decision: "Section 4 of the *Voting Rights Act* imposes current burdens that are no longer responsive to the current conditions in the voting districts in question. Although the constraints this section places on specific states made sense in the 1960s and 1970s, they do not any longer and now represent an unconstitutional violation of the power to regulate elections that the Constitution reserves for the states. The Court also held that the formula for determining whether changes to a state's voting procedure should be federally reviewed is now outdated and does not reflect the changes that have occurred in the last 50 years in narrowing the voting turnout gap in the states in question"<sup>61</sup>. On the contrary, deep racial disparities still exist in voting, particularly in the phases that were protected by the *Voting Rights Act* and preclearance have been very effective in diminishing disparities. It was Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg that highlighted the paradox of Robert's reasoning in her dissent: "throwing out preclearance when it has worked and is continuing to work to stop discriminatory changes is like throwing away your umbrella in a rainstorm because you are not getting wet."<sup>62</sup>

Recently, another case has been brought before the Supreme Court by right-wing conservatives in Texas<sup>63</sup>. According to the plaintiffs, political districts should not be created based on total population, but on total voter population. Latinos would suffer a major setback in their voting rights, because of their very young average age, their trend to have more components of non-voting age (children) than other ethnicities and, moreover, their very high number of not-yet-naturalised

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<sup>59</sup> Newkirk, V. R., II. (2021, April 27). *The Barriers That Keep Blacks and Latinos From Voting*. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/07/poll-prri-voter-suppression/565355/>

<sup>60</sup> *Shelby County v. Holder*. (n.d.). Oyez. Retrieved July 30, 2021. Available at: <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2012/12-96>

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>63</sup> Gamboa, S. (2015, August 6). *Op. cit.*

immigrants. Non-voting population would be excluded from population totals used to draw political district borders.

Finally, a 2018 Voter Engagement Survey<sup>64</sup> conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and *The Atlantic* showed how the loss of mechanisms of protection is leading to voter suppression, with Latino and Black voters more likely to face barriers at the polls. According to the survey, few Americans reported experiencing problems the last election, but those who do report such issues were far more likely to be Black and Hispanic than white. For instance, only 5% of Americans signalled that they or someone in their household were told to lack the correct identification the last time they tried to vote. However, Hispanic Americans (9%) and Black Americans (9%) are three times more likely than white Americans (3%) to say this happened. Likewise, 11% of Latino respondents, compared to 5% of whites, reported that they were incorrectly told they weren't listed on voter rolls. 6% percent of Americans notified that they or someone in their household missed the registration deadline when they tried to vote most recently, but more than one in ten Hispanic Americans (11%) or Black Americans (11%) reported having this experience, compared to only 3% of white Americans. A more common problem experienced by U.S. citizens trying to vote was the inability to take time off work to do so. More than one in ten (11%) Americans said they or a member of their household experienced this problem the last time they attempted to vote. Hispanic (16%) and Black (16%) Americans are much more likely to report this experience than white Americans (8%). In conclusion, the PRRI survey highlighted that Latino and Black respondents were twice as likely, or more, to have experienced barriers in voting as their white respondents<sup>65</sup>.

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<sup>64</sup> Public Religion Research Institute, Jones, R. P., Cox, D., Griffin, R., Fisch-Friedman, M., & Vandermaas-Peeler, A. (2018). *American Democracy in Crisis: The Challenges of Voter Knowledge, Participation, and Polarization*. PRRI.

<sup>65</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 15-16

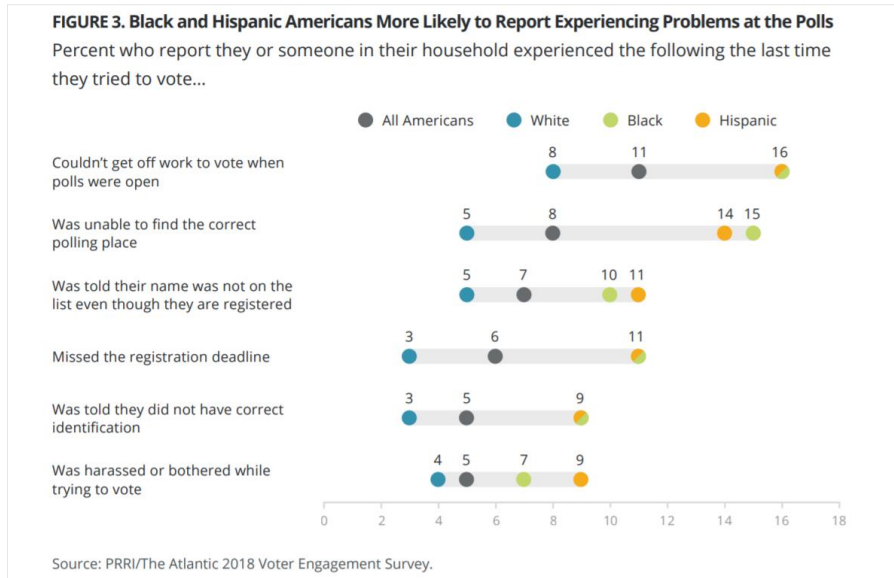


Figure 1.3 – Black and Hispanic Americans more likely to report experiencing problems at the polls | PRRI/The Atlantic Voter Engagement Survey<sup>66</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Newkirk, V. R., II. (2021, April 27). *Op. cit.*

## CHAPTER TWO - Historical background to relations between Cuba and the United States

### *Introduction. The era of “inevitable gravitation”: the United States and colonial Cuba*

Ninety miles. That is the distance which separates the southernmost part of Florida – Key West – from the Cuban coast. It is obvious that geography itself determines the mutual importance and influence of the United States and Cuba, as well as the interaction between Cuban emigrants in Florida and their families who remained on the island. This connection originated and developed before the independence of the two countries when one was a British colony and the other a Spanish colony: “United States interest in Cuba is almost as old as the North American nation itself”<sup>67</sup>. Indeed, “one of the fundamental causes of the revolt of the British colonies in North America, in 1770 and later, was their desire to have commercial relations with Cuba and the French West Indies”<sup>68</sup>.

As Loris Zanatta – an expert on Latin America and a profound connoisseur of the figure of Fidel Castro, about whom he has written a long biography – pointed out in an interview for the present research, Cuba’s importance to the United States was not only political and strategic but also historical and almost symbolic, long before 1959.

In the 19th century, when the United States was founded, one of the greatest problems for its security, and its self-expression, was the fact that the Caribbean Sea, the gateway to its territory, was a European sea because of the presence of English, Dutch, and French colonies. Cuba and Puerto Rico were once the most important, especially Cuba, the Queen of the Antilles, the largest, richest, and most influential. Cuba was still Spanish, however, and in the mid-1800s the United States proposed to the Spanish crown to buy it, as it had done with Florida or Louisiana. An independence movement and an annexationist party emerged in those years: there was always a desire on the island to become part of the American Union as a state (this was partially obscured by Cuban historiography after the Revolution). This past must be taken into account<sup>69</sup>.

To understand the Cuban Revolution, it is necessary to look past the long-established frictions in relations between the United States and Cuba. Since the early nineteenth century, the U.S. exerted a strong “Americanising” influence on the island<sup>70</sup>, convinced of favouring Cuba. Until 1898, the

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<sup>67</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution*. Princeton University Press, Chapter 1, par. 1. Available at: <https://www.perlego.com/book/1440236/the-united-states-and-the-origins-of-the-cuban-revolution-pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Thomas, H. (1971). *Cuba: The Pursuit of Freedom* (1st US ed.). Harper & Row. In the Italian edition *Storia di Cuba*, Londra: Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., p. 54.

<sup>69</sup> Author’s interview with Prof. Loris Zanatta, Full Professor of Latin American History in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna, October 22, 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *Op. cit.*

United States attempted to transform this ideological (and economic) domination in an actual annexation, after the turn of the century in the modernization of the country. What remained constant was Washington's willingness to change Cuban society while keeping it stable – two contradictory desires that were never quite fulfilled. At the same time, the emergence of a Cuban national conscience and desire for independence clashed with the North American expectations and plans, until aversion to U.S. power became one of the central characteristics of Cuban political life. Before 1959, Cubans were unable to build a political and economic system that effectively incorporated or rejected U.S. influence, but they persistently resisted this fact. For its side, the United States could only interpret Cuba's resistance to American influence as immaturity or, ultimately, foreign subversion. Washington never really considered the possibility that its control might become an intolerable "political and economic burden"<sup>71</sup>.

As a concluding remark to the introduction, an important part of American history is the oral addresses and speeches that presidents have given. Since the 18th and 19th centuries, a veritable oratory tradition has developed (just think of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address), and the speeches of the political class are crucial to understanding the rationale behind a particular decision in domestic and foreign policy. In America, so much attention has always been paid to this aspect of the political career that it is difficult to separate the history of American politics from the speeches that shaped it. Moreover, the president of the United States addresses not only American citizens, but often the world, the international community. For this reason, American institutional language has adopted certain leitmotifs that define it and distinguish it from any other oratorical tradition. Thus, in any American political discourse, the contrast between an *Us* and a *Them*, between the Westernised free world and the world of oppressed peoples, is quite common, reinforcing the sense of community while emphasising the image of the enemy. Consider, for example, the role that the USSR played for decades in presidential speeches as the principal adversary of the United States. Equally common are references to national identity, the promotion of human rights, and the notion of good and evil. In addition, American speeches contain numerous references to God and the Scriptures, as well as the use of mystical expressions such as "manifest destiny", "design", and "mission". For this reason, this research has been enriched in its historical part with analyses of some of the most important speeches that have marked the history of relations between the United States and Cuba.

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*

## 2.1 The 19<sup>th</sup> century

The United States has repeatedly called for the annexation of Cuba. The best political minds of the new nation explained the strategic, economic, and ideological imperatives that linked the island's fate to the “empire of liberty”<sup>72</sup> being built in North America.

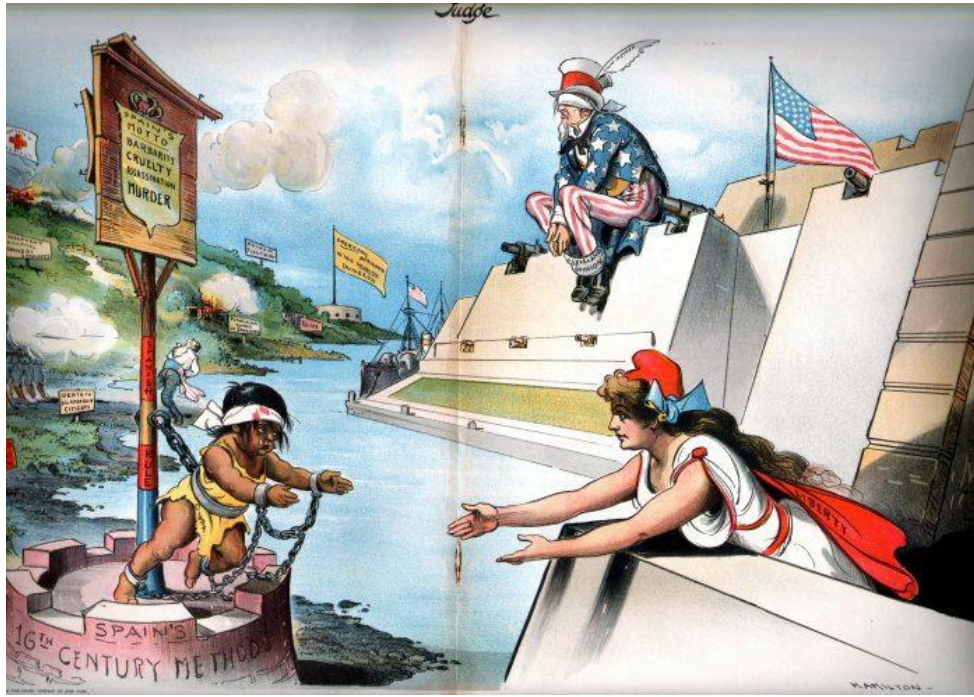


Figure 2.1 – Columbia (the American people) reaches out to help oppressed Cuba in 1897 while Uncle Sam (the U.S. government) is blind and does not use its great firepower | Judge magazine, February 6, 1897.

“Hopes and fears concerning Cuba’s future abound in the writings of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John C. Calhoun, and John Quincy Adams. Each of them expected Cuba to become either a part of the Union or an appendage to it”<sup>73</sup>. Jefferson<sup>74</sup> even admitted toward the end of his life to “have ever looked on Cuba as the most interesting addition which could ever be made to our [the U.S.] system of states”<sup>75</sup>. James Madison<sup>76</sup> wrote to Jefferson to “have

<sup>72</sup> This phrase was used by Thomas Jefferson on several occasions to emphasize the responsibility of the United States to promote freedom throughout the world and to set an example on the North American continent.

<sup>73</sup> *Ivi*, Chapter 1, par 1.

<sup>74</sup> Thomas Jefferson was the first Secretary of State, Vice President, leader of the first political opposition party (the Democratic-Republican Party), and the third President of the United States from 1801 to 1809. He was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence and one of the nation’s Founding Fathers. In his inaugural address in 1801, he explained his ideology: “Though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will, to be rightful, must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal laws must protect, and to violate would be oppression”.

<sup>75</sup> Robert F. Smith (1963), *What Happened in Cuba?*, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc. p. 30

<sup>76</sup> James Madison created the basic framework for the U.S. Constitution and made a major contribution to the ratification of the document by writing the Federalist Papers with Alexander Hamilton and John Jay. He is therefore known as the Father of the Constitution. He served as Jefferson's Secretary of State and then as the fourth President of the United States (1809-1817), and signed a declaration of war against Great Britain that began the War of 1812.

always concurred [...] in the sentiment that too much importance could not be attached to that Island and that we ought, if possible, to incorporate it into our union”<sup>77</sup>. In 1822, after the Spanish prohibition of the slave trade<sup>78</sup>, the Cuban landed aristocracy offered to annex the island as a state to the White House in hopes of maintaining the status quo – Florida, which had been annexed the year before, was used as an example. The U.S. Cabinet met but failed to reach a decision, derailing the project. Despite the negative reaction, some members of the government wanted Cuba annexed to prevent the country from coming under British influence. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams<sup>79</sup> explained the political and economic importance of Cuba in a letter dated April 28, 1823, to the U.S. ambassador in Madrid, Hugh Nelson, citing the impending war between Spain and France:

The islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico [...] are natural appendages of the North American continent, and one of them [Cuba] almost in sight of our shores, from a multitude of considerations has become an object of transcendent importance to the commercial and political interest of our Union. Its commanding position with reference to the Gulf of Mexico and the West Indian Sea, its situation midway between our southern coast and the island of San Domingo, its safe and capacious harbour of Havana, fronting a long line of our shore, destitute of the same advantages, the nature of its production and of its wants, furnishing the supplies and needing the returns of a commerce immensely profitable and mutually beneficial give it an importance in the sum of our national interests with which that no other foreign territory can be compared, and little inferior to that which binds the different members of our Union together [...] in looking forward to the probable course of events for the short period of half a century, it is scarcely possible to resist the conviction that the annexation of Cuba to our Federal Republic will be indispensable to the continuance and the integrity of the Union itself [...] there are laws of political as well as of physical gravitation. And if an apple, severed by the tempest from its native tree, cannot choose but to fall to the ground, Cuba, forcibly disjoined from its own unnatural connection with Spain, and incapable of self-support, can gravitate only towards the North American Union, which, by the same law of nature cannot cast her from her bosom<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> Thomas, H. (1971). *Op. cit.*, p. 101

<sup>78</sup> From the 18th century onwards, huge sugar plantations flourished throughout the island and the presence of African slaves became increasingly important. When the Spanish government banned the slave trade in 1820, many dissenting voices were raised on the Caribbean island. The entire economy was based on sugar plantations run by a growing number of slaves. Cutting off their influx from Africa meant curbing the industry and, according to the basic laws of economics, substantially increasing the value (and thus the price) of the slaves already on the island. The prohibition was scarcely observed: The authorities took bribes to turn a blind eye to the illegal trade in human beings. The Spanish government was too weak to enforce the ban because a revolution broke out among the troops in the port of Cadiz who were about to sail for America in 1820, leading to the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. The repercussions internationally were far-reaching, prompting many colonies to take advantage of the situation, with Peru declaring independence in 1821 and Mexico following suit in 1822 (both were promptly recognized by the United States). Clearly, in such a situation, it was not in Madrid's interest to be intransigent towards the Cuban planters. But the prohibition of the slave trade was still officially in force.

<sup>79</sup> John Quincy Adams was the sixth President of the United States from 1825 to 1829. Over the years he was a member of several political parties and also served as a diplomat, senator, and member of the House of Representatives.

<sup>80</sup> Robinson, A. G. (1905). *Cuba and the Intervention*. Longmans, Green and Company.

The island was important to the United States not only for political and commercial reasons but also for geopolitical ones: its strategic geographical location and the presence of the port of Havana for both military and economic purposes. Only a few years later, the principle of *Manifest Destiny*<sup>81</sup> (1845) was promulgated, which would form the basis for American expansionism westward and overseas. Adams' speech can be seen as a precursor to this thinking on the Cuba issue: It was inevitable that the island would be placed under the influence of the United States; the island was indispensable to the Federation.

In 1823, the *Monroe Doctrine*<sup>82</sup> was proclaimed. This set forth some basic principles, namely that the United States would no longer permit interference by European powers on the continent and that American neutrality in conflicts on the old continent was enshrined. This nationalist doctrine was prompted by the uprising of the Spanish colonies in South America seeking independence and the possibility of European intervention to restore the status quo. The Monroe administration was reluctant to antagonize Spain in its conflict with the colonies until the Florida question<sup>83</sup> was resolved. Moreover, in 1822 Russia, Prussia, Austria, and France had formed an alliance "to suppress liberalism and uphold monarchy"<sup>84</sup>, which the administration feared would help Spain regain its South American empire. Finally, a Russian edict in 1821 extended the boundaries of Alaska south to Oregon and claimed the west coast of North America as possible territory for Russian colonization. Thus, Monroe and Adams became convinced that they had to oppose European intervention in the Western Hemisphere. During the annual address of the President of the United States to Congress in 1823, Monroe explained the principles of the doctrine with the concept of the two separate hemispheres: the Americas should not be considered as territory for future colonization by European powers, and at the same time, European interference in the affairs of North and South America would be considered an expression of unfriendliness toward the United States. Many U.S. politicians feared that the independence movement in South America would spread to Cuba. Secretary of State Clay announced that "the United States are satisfied with the present condition of the Islands [Cuba and Puerto Rico], in the hands of Spain, and with their ports open to our commerce, as they are now open.

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<sup>81</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *The Limits of Liberty: American History, 1607–1992 (Short Oxford History of the Modern World)* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press, p. 177. A term coined in 1845 by John O'Sullivan, a New York editor. It summed up the idea that Providence had intended the United States to control the entire North American continent and justified the conquest of other populations such as Indians and Mexicans by pioneers. Manifest Destiny combined idealism and romanticism, advocating the belief that the enlargement of American territory was the best means to promote the spread of democratic ideals and institutions. This mindset became the driving force of public policy and led to the annexation of Texas, the settlement of the Oregon dispute, and the acquisition of California, New Mexico, and Utah.

<sup>82</sup> *Ivi*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>83</sup>In 1819, under Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, the Florida Purchase Treaty was signed, officially turning Florida over to the United States. Formal U.S. occupation began in 1821, and General Andrew Jackson, hero of the War of 1812, was appointed military governor. Florida was established as a U.S. territory in 1822 and admitted to the Union as a slave state in 1845.

<sup>84</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *op. cit.*, p.110.



[..] This Government desires no political change in that condition”<sup>85</sup>. Clay’s statement reflected the *Monroe Doctrine*: the possibility of Cuban independence could have challenged the *law of gravitation*.

In this context, the United States’ influence over Cuba was already more than mature and would continue to develop in the future. The two countries were linked mainly by trade. Economic relations were improving: it is estimated that in 1826, of the 946 ships that called at the port of Havana, 783 were American<sup>86</sup>. Spain did not oppose this strengthening of relations between the two countries: the expansion of trade was seen as a way to make money. Cuba’s economy developed in a manner typical of the countries of tropical America, becoming a monocultural, slave-based, export-oriented agrarian society<sup>87</sup>. Thanks to the sugar boom in the late 18th and 19th centuries, a new Creole elite emerged based on the ownership of land, sugar mills, and slaves<sup>88</sup>. Compared to the other Latin American and Caribbean states, however, Cuba was still a colony. An annexationist movement toward the United States began to spread across the island after planter elites (the main social class at the time) challenged slavery. In 1833, Britain formally abolished slavery in its colonies, such as Jamaica. Cuban elites feared that abolitionist ideals would spread from these nearby countries and lead to a slave revolt that, as in Haiti, would produce another black republic – on the island, the black population had risen rapidly in the 1820s, surpassing that of whites<sup>89</sup>. They were partly right, as there were numerous slave revolts, all of which were put down violently. The new sugar aristocracy had at first relied on the Spaniards for protection against slave revolts, but soon had to recognise that European power was in decline. Furthermore, Madrid seemed unwilling to encourage the growth of Cuban industry and ensure its access to African slaves and North American and European markets<sup>90</sup>. Therefore, Cuban planters began to consider annexing the island to the United States, a powerful state that would have ensured the continuation of the Cuban slave system and strengthened free trade. This principle was supported on the one hand by the cultural links between the two countries – Creoles had begun sending their children to study at American universities, and there was also a partnership between American and Cuban Freemasonry – and on the other by many supporters in the United States itself. These included Secretary of State Calhoun, a staunch slaveholder, and Vice President George Dallas, who publicly toasted Cuban annexation on July 4, 1845.

The annexation effort found expression in the actions of General Narciso Lopez, who organized an expedition from New Orleans in 1849, with the aid of numerous American adventurers, stimulated by the prospects of profit that would have opened up on the island. The project failed,

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<sup>85</sup> Langley, L. D. (1976). *Struggle for the American Mediterranean: United States-European Rivalry in the Gulf-Caribbean, 1776–1904* (1st ed.). University of Georgia Press. p. 44.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas, H. (1971). *Op. cit.*, p. 144.

<sup>87</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Modern Latin America* (9th ed.). Oxford University Press, p. 296

<sup>88</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *Op. cit.*, Chapter 1

<sup>89</sup> Knight, F. W. (1970). *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century*. University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 43 - 45.

<sup>90</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *Op. cit.*, Ch. 1

however, because of the direct intervention of the U.S. government, which did not want to engage in a war operation but continued to hope to acquire the island legally from the Spanish crown. Lopez landed in Cuba with six hundred men, but after initial successes, he failed to engage the Cubans in what was seen as an American operation. He retreated to Florida and set out later that year at the head of another expedition but was captured and shot by the Spanish. The fact that the Spanish consulate in New Orleans was vandalized when news of Lopez's execution arrived is indicative of the sentiment among the American people toward annexation. The American government, however, stuck to its official policy of "non-intervention". Nevertheless, three distinct circles formed to advocate annexation. The most important was the *Club de La Habana*, whose goal was to protect slavery from the threats of the English abolitionists. This group was composed of the owners of the large plantations who advocated a peaceful purchase of the island and only when this was not possible military intervention. Another core group was led by the aforementioned Narciso Lopez. The third component was represented mainly in the eastern provinces and consisted of landowners who opposed Spanish rule but had little confidence in the ability of the Cuban people to achieve autonomy on their own. Along the same lines was the prevailing North American view: while annexation was seen as a natural destiny for Cuba, independence was not; geographical, racial, and cultural factors all militated against freedom, and the island would not have been able to govern itself<sup>91</sup>.

The outcome of the American Civil War (1861-65) changed the perspective of Creole annexationism. The victory of the abolitionist Union of the North against the Confederacy of the South removed the possibility that the Cuban slave system could be protected by North America. As a result, some of the most modern Creoles began to replace slavery with indentured labour in order to adapt to the new principles of the Union and maintain trade relations with the growing U.S. market. Elites began to demand economic and political rights, such as freer trade, lower taxes, more political representation<sup>92</sup>, and sought autonomy from Madrid. Understanding that the Spanish would not accept their demands, liberal Creoles began to consider independence.

The first attempt at independence, the Ten Years' War (1868-78), was unsuccessful: the Cuban nationalists failed to include various social classes in their movement and were defeated by Spanish troops. During the war, a new debate on annexation took place in Washington. The purchase of the island seemed at least inappropriate, so the Secretary of State Hamilton Fish made a proposal: "Cuba would buy its independence from Spain with bonds guaranteed by the United States that would use Cuban customs duties as security"<sup>93</sup>. Fish comprised a provision that imposed "discriminating

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *Op. cit.*, Ch. 1. "John Adams was among the most pessimistic. Reflecting a widely held view in Protestant North America that Roman Catholicism was hopelessly reactionary, Adams considered the establishment of democracy in Latin America as likely as its appearance in the animal kingdom".

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*

duties, prejudicial to American productions [are] to be abolished. All other duties (export and import) to remain unchanged unless with the consent of the United States”<sup>94</sup>. The belief in U.S. domination of the island was updated with a new conception of annexation, for the original one had by this time been hampered by growing Cuban nationalism and North American racial isolationism<sup>95</sup>. Fish was already leaning toward a U.S.-island relationship as it would have been between 1898 and 1902, distinguishing himself from President Ulysses S. Grant, who advocated arbitrary expansionism (he tried to annex Santo Domingo, for example, without success). The Spanish government considered Fish’s offer but did not accept it.

Madrid retained political control of the island, but trade and investment were completely monopolized by the United States in the 1880s. As the economy changed, so did the structure of Cuban society: the Creole elite was joined by a rural proletariat composed of peasants and former slaves, and the working class grew. This differentiation led to a distinction in the goals and interests pursued by Creoles and the masses in the 1890s. However, when the independence revolt broke out in 1895, the opposing local groups cooperated in a constituency-based political party – the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (PRC) – thanks to the work of José Martí, a revolutionary lawyer who became the central figure of the Cuban independence struggle and added a social justice agenda to autonomy. Most nationalists were anti-annexationist. According to Benjamin (2020):

Martí had long opposed annexation, not simply as a poor alternative to independence but as a denial of all he wished the movement to stand for. He lived in New York City from 1881 to 1895 and left in his voluminous writings his astute critiques of U.S. politics and culture. At first, he was ambivalent about North American society, attracted to its republicanism and its freedoms but repelled by the materialism of the Gilded Age and the concentration of wealth and power. By the late 1880s, Martí had become an uncompromising anti-expansionist. He concluded in 1889 that “the republic was becoming plutocratic and imperialistic”. To those who argued that U.S. power was necessary to remove that of Spain he replied: “And once the United States is in Cuba, who will drive it out?”<sup>96</sup>

In the last thirty years of the century, the political instability of Spain, the increasing intransigence of the Cuban *peninsulares*<sup>97</sup>, and the categorical attitude of growing Cuban nationalism led to war. The McKinley government had to choose between independence and annexation, and how to exert U.S. influence in Cuba. The new insurrection broke out in 1895 – in the middle of Democratic

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*. After visiting Cuba in 1855, Fish concluded that “with its present population, the island of Cuba will be anything else than a desirable acquisition to the United States”.

<sup>96</sup> *Ivi*, Ch. 2, par. 2.

<sup>97</sup> A distinction was made between *Criollos*, those born in America, and *Peninsulares*, those born in Spain. *Criollos* were considered inferior to those who came from the mother country.

President Cleveland's term – and it did not end until 1898, after three years of outright war<sup>98</sup>. At first, Washington did not see the new rebellion as an opportunity to expand its control over Cuba. Only as the rebellion grew in range and intensity and the rebels attacked Spanish garrisons and manufacturing plants everywhere, including the prosperous western provinces, did U.S. policymakers take a more decisive stance. In response, Spain sent a huge army to maintain control of the colony, led by General Valeriano Weyler, a veteran of the Ten Years' War.

The Spanish government used cruel methods, such as the practice of imprisoning the nationalists in concentration camps, which was reported by the American tabloids and caused great outrage among U.S. citizens. In addition, rural populations were relocated to cities under Spanish control, which led to the spread of infection and starvation due to poor sanitation and terrible living conditions. By 1896, the U.S. Congress passed several resolutions urging the president to recognize the insurgents' belligerency<sup>99</sup>, but both Cleveland and later McKinley rejected them all. They feared that the guerrillas would be encouraged to continue fighting rather than compromise with Spain, as the U.S. executive preferred<sup>100</sup>. Besides, Washington was anxious to ensure the protection of American property on the island: recognition of a state of war would have relieved Madrid of its legal obligation to compensate the United States for its losses due to the war<sup>101</sup>.

North American investors who owned commercial interests in Cuba echoed this view: they believed that only Spain could protect them, despite its fragility. Another outcome of the war would have been a dissident military victory, a conclusion that North American politicians did not believe possible and rejected: according to Cleveland – and this was common knowledge – the rebels were “the most inhuman and barbarous cutthroats in the world”, as he called them in his private correspondence<sup>102</sup>. In the end, Cleveland's presidency terminated without action. His anti-imperialism prevailed, although the hesitation became unpopular and even damaging in U.S. public opinion because the end of the war seemed distant without Washington's involvement. Furthermore, both U.S. trade with the island and North American assets there were threatened.

Republican President William McKinley, elected in 1896, tried not to intervene, but he was aware that Cuba was one of the most important export markets for the U.S., and his administration together with his wing of the GOP (allies of big business) were deeply committed to export growth. McKinley was an expansionist: he was willing to go to war with Spain rather than lose major U.S. interests in Cuba and did not rule out annexation. However, he rejected internal calls for intervention while urging Spain to make changes that would end the insurgency. In July 1897, the State

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<sup>98</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *Op. cit.*, pp. 400-404.

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin, J. R. (2020). *Op. cit.*, Ch. 2, par. 4

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>102</sup> *Ivi*, Chapter 2, par. 5

Department sent a note to Spain for the first time, suggesting that the conflict should end, since its continued existence “injuriously affects the normal functions of business and tends to delay the condition of prosperity to which this country is entitled”<sup>103</sup>. In early 1896, as the Spanish army grew weaker, McKinley had to shape the now foreseeable U.S. commitment to ending the fighting. Devising a plan was not easy, for Washington’s programme had to distinguish itself from the imperialists who wanted annexation of Cuba (unpopular because considered immoral and unconstitutional) and, at the same time, from the supporters of the insurgency who demanded U.S. recognition of an independent Cuban republic (popular but considered unsafe by most North American investors)<sup>104</sup>. The explosion of a U.S. battleship in Havana harbour relieved the president of the task of deciding whether to intervene. The USS Maine was docked at the island to show Washington’s concern over the deteriorating situation. In April 1898, the battleship was sunk by a submarine mine, killing more than 250 American sailors. To appease American demands for war, the Spanish government agreed to an immediate armistice<sup>105</sup> on April 9 and abandoned the concentration camp policy but refused to grant independence to Cuba. On April 11, President McKinley addressed Congress and asked to enter the war:

[..] The present revolution is but the successor of other similar insurrections which have occurred in Cuba against the dominion of Spain, extending over a period of nearly half a century, each of which, during its progress, has subjected the United States to great effort and expense in enforcing its neutrality laws, caused enormous losses to American trade and commerce, caused irritation, annoyance, and disturbance among our citizens, and, by the exercise of cruel, barbarous, and uncivilized practices of warfare, shocked the sensibilities and offended the humane sympathies of our people [..]. [In the revolution] a dependent people striving to be free have been opposed by the power of the sovereign state. [..] a once prosperous community [was] reduced to comparative want, its lucrative commerce virtually paralyzed, its exceptional productiveness diminished, its fields laid waste, its mills in ruins, and its people perishing by tens of thousands from hunger and destitution. [..] Our trade has suffered; the capital invested by our citizens in Cuba has been largely lost [..]<sup>106</sup>.

In this first part of his speech, McKinley emphasised the economic losses that the three-year war had inflicted on the United States, but also the struggle of a colonised people fighting for their freedom. He continued, however:

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<sup>103</sup> *Ivi*, Chapter 2, par. 7

<sup>104</sup> *Ivi*, Chapter 2, par. 8

<sup>105</sup> *Ibidem*. “To arrange and facilitate peace on the island”.

<sup>106</sup> McKinley, W. (1898, April 11). *Message to Congress Requesting a Declaration of War With Spain | The American Presidency Project*. Available at: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/message-congress-requesting-declaration-war-with-spain>

[..] Nor from the standpoint of expediency do I think it would be wise or prudent for this government to recognize at the present time the independence of the so-called Cuban Republic. Such recognition is not necessary in order to enable the United States to intervene and pacify the island. To commit this country now to the recognition of any particular government in Cuba might subject us to embarrassing conditions of international obligation toward the organization so recognized. In case of intervention our conduct would be subject to the approval or disapproval of such government. We would be required to submit to its direction and to assume to it the mere relation of a friendly ally [..]<sup>107</sup>.

In this passage, it is particularly evident that, according to the President, the recognition of a “so-called Cuban Republic” and an independent government is never contemplated. Only once does he allude to a longer-term goal:

[..] When it shall appear hereafter that there is within the island a government capable of performing the duties and discharging the functions of a separate nation, and having, as a matter of fact, the proper forms and attributes of nationality, such government can be promptly and readily recognized and the relations and interests of the United States with such nation adjusted [..]<sup>108</sup>.

Considering these factors, the only solution was:

[..] The forcible intervention of the United States as a neutral to stop the war, [..] justifiable on rational grounds [..]: First, in the cause of humanity and to put an end to the barbarities, bloodshed, starvation, and horrible miseries now existing there, and which the parties to the conflict are either unable or unwilling to stop or mitigate. It is no answer to say this is all in another country, belonging to another nation, and is therefore none of our business. It is specially our duty, for it is right at our door. Second, we owe it to our citizens in Cuba to afford them that protection and indemnity for life and property which no government there can or will afford, and to that end to terminate the conditions that deprive them of legal protection. Third, the right to intervene may be justified by the very serious injury to the commerce, trade, and business of our people, and by the wanton destruction of property and devastation of the island.

Fourth, and which is of the utmost importance, the present condition of affairs in Cuba is a constant menace to our peace, and entails upon this government an enormous expense. With such a conflict waged for years in an island so near us and with which our people have such trade and business relations; when the lives and liberty of our citizens are in constant danger and their property destroyed and themselves ruined; where our trading vessels are liable to seizure and are seized at our very door by warships of a foreign nation, the expeditions of filibustering that we are powerless to prevent altogether, and the irritating questions and entanglements thus arising -- all these and others that I need

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<sup>107</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibidem*

not mention, with the resulting strained relations, are a constant menace to our peace, and compel us to keep on a semi war footing with a nation with which we are at peace [...] <sup>109</sup>.

McKinley's speech proves the connection of the Cuban question with the internal affairs of the United States and its external economic prosperity. On April 20, 1898, Congress declared war and passed the *Teller Amendment*<sup>110</sup>. Cuban independence was finally granted in December 1898, after the surrender of Spain, but it soon became clear that the island's autonomy was still a long way off due to U.S. military occupation. In 1901, a constitutional convention drew up a new charter that included another amendment (the *Platt Amendment*<sup>111</sup>) that gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuban domestic politics by making the island a protectorate. This amendment remained in effect until 1934.

### **2.1.1 The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the time of U.S. interventions**

Tomás Estrada Palma, the first president of Cuba (1902-6), hoped for annexation by the United States. He won a second term through electoral fraud and sparked an insurrection led by defeated liberals that led to a second U.S. military occupation (1906-9). An interim president was appointed by the United States: Charles Magoon had to oversee a new election but could not prevent the fraud. Another U.S. intervention followed in 1917. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Cuban government was led by President Gerardo Machado (elected 1925), a corrupt and repressive politician. Because of its export orientation, the Cuban economy was hit hard by the Great Depression of 1929 and suffered from high unemployment. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt became president of the United States and changed Washington's attitude toward Machado. Meanwhile, a general strike of bus drivers began in Havana and spread to other sectors of the population in the following days. When the military decided to switch sides and support the strikers, the president resigned and left the country. Fulgencio Batista, a sergeant, became the dominant figure in the army and the most powerful man in Cuba, while the provisional government formed after Machado's escape included a new civilian leader, Ramón Grau San Martín, who belonged to the student left. Soon the government swung to the left and proclaimed a socialist revolution, which caused great concern in Washington and triggered a new military intervention. But at a time when intervention seemed inevitable, Batista managed to

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>110</sup> In April 1898, Senator Henry M. Teller (Colorado) proposed an amendment to the U.S. declaration of war on Spain, proclaiming that the United States would not exercise permanent control over Cuba. It stated that the United States "hereby disclaims any disposition of intention to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction, or control over said island except for pacification thereof, and asserts its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and control of the island to its people". Available at: <https://investigatinghistory.ashp.cuny.edu/files/1898TellerAmendment.pdf>

<sup>111</sup> Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/ip/86557.htm>

consolidate his position in the coalition government and prevail over the radicals. The United States accepted his leadership – which would have lasted 25 years – and the *Platt Amendment* was repealed in 1934. Until 1940, Batista did not rule directly, but through a series of puppet presidents. In that year, the new Cuban constitution was adopted, and he officially became president until 1944. Except for a bracket of eight years (1944-1952) with Grau San Martín, who returned to the presidency until 1948, followed by Carlos Prío Socorrás until 1952. Finally, Batista was president again from 1952 to 1959, more a dictator than a democrat. In 25 years, the electoral system showed its weakness, as all the power was in the hands of a single strong man who led the government.

## 2.2 The causes of the rupture: the revolution of Fidel Castro

In 1953, a group of revolutionaries stormed the Moncada barracks. Their leader was Fidel Castro. It was July 26, 1953<sup>112</sup>, the attack aimed to capture the barracks in the city of Santiago with 165 men, but it ended as a failure. Fidel and his brother Raúl remained alive but were sentenced to fifteen years in prison<sup>113</sup>. At the Moncada trial, he advocated the formation of a new government based on popular elections and announced what would become known as his revolutionary program<sup>114</sup>: all legislative, judicial, and executive powers to be assumed; land for the landless by extinguishing fallow lands and transferring legal ownership from large landowners (who will be compensated by the state); the introduction of a profit-sharing scheme whereby employees of large industrial, commercial and mining companies receive 30% of their profits; the introduction of minimum sugar cane production quotas for small sugar cane planters supplying a designated sugar mill, and the allocation of 55% of crop yields to the planter instead of 45% to the mill; any property obtained by political misconduct or other illegal means under all previous regimes confiscated.

After only eleven months, the brothers were amnestied thanks to an attempt by Batista to regain the support of the public opinion. Castro fled to Mexico to plan a new insurrection in the Sierra Madre: in 1956 he travelled on the yacht *Granma*, supported by Raúl and a group of revolutionaries that included Ernesto Guevara, a young Argentine physician who had decided to participate in the insurrection after experiencing the intervention of CIA in Guatemala in 1954<sup>115</sup>. The success of the operation depended on the islanders' uprising against Batista, but once again, out of 82 men, 70 were

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<sup>112</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Op.cit.*, p. 306

<sup>113</sup> During the trial, Fidel Castro delivered a four-hour speech in court in his own defence, which is widely considered the beginning of the Cuban Revolution and later became a “sacred text” for revolutionaries. It is commonly known as “History will absolve me”. Accessible at: <https://www.marxists.org/history/cuba/archive/castro/1953/10/16.htm>

<sup>114</sup> P. J. Gallo (1974) *Castro and the Cuban revolution*, Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali, Gennaio-Marzo 1974, Vol. 41, No. 1 (161), pp. 81-98. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42733799>

<sup>115</sup> The CIA overthrew anti-American Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, citing the containment of communism in Latin America.



lost to the treachery of local peasants who decided to alert the army. Fidel, his brother, and Guevara survived and hid in the mountains of the Sierra Maestra (in the eastern part of Cuba). There the Castro brothers were able to organise another insurrection undisturbed until they came into contact with Herbert Matthews, a famous American journalist and foreign correspondent for the New York Times, in early 1957. Knowing the importance of international (in this case, American) support for their cause, the conspirators contacted the journalist, who published a series of stories on the front page of the NY Times, giving them international recognition. More members joined the rebels, all with middle-class backgrounds and origins like Fidel, and the guerrilla tactics began to be perfected. By the end of 1957, the rebels were still waiting for the urban uprisings. The situation began to change when a new ambassador to Cuba was appointed in 1957, Earl T. Smith. His task was to “implement the declared United States policy of non-intervention, impartiality, and to re-establish diplomatic relations with the Batista regime on this basis”<sup>116</sup>. On September 5, the revolutionaries, together with the Cuban naval officers, organised an uprising against Batista in Cienfuegos. It ended in another failure, but it also showed that the military did not blindly support the government. Moreover, in the first months of 1958, Washington (President Eisenhower) decided to impose an embargo on arms shipments to the island because of public opposition to the sale of weapons to Batista’s repressive regime. With this gesture, Washington began to distance itself from the established government and gave Castro hope. Although the official U.S. policy was non-intervention, the ties between the two countries were too strong to let things go without interference. As the administration decided to stop openly supporting the government, not only the armed forces but other civilian leaders defected to Batista. Demoralised by the constant military victories of the rebels and abandoned by the White House, Batista had no choice but to resign on New Year’s Eve 1959. On January 8, 1960, Fidel Castro made his triumphant entry into Havana.

To better understand the events of the Revolution, it is useful to look at the economic situation of the country. Before Castro, Cuba was not an underdeveloped country<sup>117</sup>: in 1950, 56% of the labour force was employed in industry and manufacturing; 57% of the inhabitants lived in the cities, and the standard of living there was one of the highest in Latin America. Moreover, consumer goods were widely available<sup>118</sup>: thanks to the budget brought in by the sugar crop trade, purchasing power was among the highest in the region. Economic well-being facilitated Batista, and this is the reason why shaking citizens’ confidence in his government and destroying the Cuban economy was an important aspect of Castro’s strategy. When he took power, one of his greatest assets was indeed the Cuban people’s desire for change. Up until that point, the underprivileged, such as the rural poor, did not

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<sup>116</sup> P. J. Gallo (1974). *Op. cit.* pag. 85

<sup>117</sup> *Ivi*, p. 87

<sup>118</sup> U.S. Dept. of Commerce (1957), *Report, Cuba*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, p. 3

have access to the electoral system, nor did the working class in the cities. The middle class, disappointed with the old government, now sought social justice and a more independent island (from U.S. influence)<sup>119</sup>. Aware of the influence and importance that Americans had always had in Cuba, Castro avoided messing with Washington in the early part of his presidency. In April 1959, he also visited the United States to address the Association of Newspaper Editors, promising on that occasion that the Cuban press would always be free. During the same trip, he met with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and assured them that he would not expropriate any American property on the island. Castro knew full well that nothing could solidify powerful neighbours against him faster than suspicions that he wanted to establish a communist government. When he met with Vice President Nixon, therefore, he told him that he would keep the Cuban Marxists at bay, even though significant figures in his government had been declared Communists, such as Che Guevara or his brother Raul. He even went so far as to declare that he was not a communist and that they had no influence in his government, and also claimed that his heart belonged to the West in the Cold War<sup>120</sup>. Moreover, Castro visited the UN headquarters in New York and tried to show the attitude of a nationalist reformer by claiming to be against foreign intervention and yet not to be a communist<sup>121</sup>. The attitude of the United States toward the new Cuban leader was as ambiguous as ever since they could not yet assess whether he was an ally or not. This uncertainty is evidenced by the fact that Castro attended all the meetings listed during his trip, but could not be received by President Eisenhower, who left the capital for a few days with an apology.

Castro returned to Cuba and decided to implement the Agrarian Reform Law, one of his most radical measures, on May 17, 1959. The new law limited the size of lands to 1000 hectares and expropriated the lands beyond that (handing them over to small private owners and cooperatives), even if they were lands of foreign companies, in exchange for compensation in Cuban currency. In addition, the lands could not be owned by foreigners, and a National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) was created to oversee the regulations. The United States sounded the alarm, but the government had no interest in taking sides against the revolution. Since there were still several moderate ministers in the Cuban cabinet, the United States hoped that the leftist elements of the new government would be isolated and outnumbered by the members who still represented bourgeois values. Nevertheless, new laws continued to affect foreign ownership directly or indirectly. A typical example is a law that allowed the state to take ownership of companies that were in trouble or were cutting production to avoid losses. This led to several cases of nationalization, especially in the hotel industry. In late 1959, Secretary of State Herter, concerned about the steady deterioration of the

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<sup>119</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Op.cit.*, pp. 309-310

<sup>120</sup> Thomas H. (1971). *Op. cit.* p. 923.

<sup>121</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Op.cit.*, p. 310

situation, threatened severe repercussions on the sugar quota imported from the United States if Cuba did not “calm down”.

However, the “de-Americanization” of the island progressed rapidly, and although the main objective was the economy, some measures were also taken in the cultural sphere, including the curious decision to abolish Santa Claus and replace him with a Cuban *Don Feliciano*. Despite the constant verbal expressions of friendship and sympathy toward the Americans, other measures affected their interests on the island. For example, foreign sugar refiners were deprived of the possibility of borrowing from Cuban banks while being asked to turn to Wall Street, or citizens in possession of dollars were forced to exchange them for pesos. Domestically, the centralization of power continued in the hands of Castro, who began to crack down on dissenting voices such as the newspapers, which would soon lead to the introduction of censorship. By the end of 1959, Cuba was becoming more and more anti-American. Daily the Yankees were accused of planning invasions to restore the Batista government<sup>122</sup>.

In 1960, four points characterized Fidel’s government<sup>123</sup>: the nationalization of the economy, a rapprochement with the Soviet Union, a more authoritarian attitude, and the introduction of egalitarian socioeconomic policies. Friction was inevitable and relations between the two neighbours visibly deteriorated; soon the main conflict that alienated Cuba from the United States, that over oil, would erupt. The first contacts with Moscow were secret, for the Soviet Union was not yet sure whether it would break with the United States. Anastas I. Mikojan, vice-president of the Council of Ministers, visited Cuba in February 1960, resuming a relationship that had been interrupted eight years earlier. On this occasion, a trade agreement was signed: a huge loan of \$100 million was provided for the purchase of equipment, and the Soviet Union also promised to buy 4 million tons of sugar in each of the next four years<sup>124</sup>. On March 18, 1960, the last liberal minister left the Cuban government, and that same day Eisenhower gave orders to begin training Cuban exiles (preparing for an invasion of Cuba). A U-2 spy plane was captured in the Soviet Union, and Khrushchev decided to suspend diplomatic relations with the U.S. until the end of the Eisenhower administration. The Cold War climate affected the American government, which viewed the Soviet Union’s increasing interference in Cuban affairs with suspicion, even in light of the growing number of Communists in the government in Havana. The first crisis began when Castro decided to process Russian crude oil instead of Venezuelan because it was cheaper. The U.S. oil refiners on the island – Texaco, Esso, and Shell – refused and Castro seized them, prompting an immediate reaction from Washington: President Eisenhower drastically reduced the Cuban sugar quota in the U.S. Convinced of the Kremlin’s support

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<sup>122</sup> *Idem*, p. 311

<sup>123</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibidem*

for him, Castro nationalized all other American businesses and properties worth \$850 million. The American embassy in Havana advised all compatriots to leave the island as soon as possible, and the campaign for the upcoming 1960 presidential election was influenced by the developing situation.

I want to talk with you tonight about the most glaring failure of American foreign policy today – about a disaster that threatens the security of the whole Western Hemisphere – about a Communist menace that has been permitted to arise under our very noses, only 90 miles from our shores. I am talking about the one friendly island that our own short-sighted policies helped make communism's first Caribbean base: the island of Cuba<sup>125</sup>.

These were the opening words of the young Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy of Massachusetts at his rally in Ohio. A week after these words, the White House imposed an embargo on all trade with Cuba, except for medicine and food. Eisenhower justified this decision by citing the *Trading with the Enemy Act*<sup>126</sup>, a 1917 federal law that gave the president the authority to control American trade with enemies of the United States in wartime. In addition, diplomatic relations with the island were severed on January 3, 1961, inaugurating covert operations as the only means to depose Castro. The embargo policy – still in force – had begun and led to a second crisis: the Bay of Pigs<sup>127</sup>.

According to a periodization proposed by Professor Federico Romero<sup>128</sup>, who was interviewed for this work, the Cuba problem between 1960 and 1967 was still a foreign policy problem for the United States, i.e., it involved the presumed danger of an expansion of the myth of Castro's Cuban Revolution to other parts of Latin America and Africa with Guevara's mission in Congo – it is a short period between the mid-1960s and the assassination of Che Guevara in 1967. From that moment on, the problem became one of U.S. domestic politics with the formation of a Cuban lobby in Florida that conditioned any possibility of even minimal change in U.S. policy toward Cuba. The embargoes that followed one after another from then on were fundamentally linked to the impossibility of overcoming this electoral obstacle, apart from the fact that the idea of paternalistic or tougher U.S. control over Cuba remains a myth that the U.S. has perpetuated since the 1800s.

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<sup>125</sup> Kennedy J. F., "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Cincinnati, Ohio, Democratic Dinner", October 6, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25660>

<sup>126</sup> Hand, C. H. (1919). *The Trading with the Enemy Act*. Columbia Law Review, 19(2), p. 112. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1111955>

<sup>127</sup> Haney P. J. (2005), *The Cuban Embargo: The Domestic Politics of an American Foreign Policy*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, p. 16.

<sup>128</sup> Author's interview with Prof. Federico Romero, Professor of History of Post-War European Cooperation and Integration in the Department of History and Civilisation at the European University Institute, October 12, 2021.

### 2.2.1 Kennedy and the Bay of Pigs

Kennedy won the presidency and inherited the Cuba problem when he was sworn in as president on January 20, 1961. Since April, he had been pressured to support the exiles' invasion of the island, which Eisenhower had already authorised while he was still in office. Kennedy was unsure about the operation and feared the possible repercussions on world opinion<sup>129</sup>. He allowed preparations to continue but demanded that there be no discernible U.S. involvement and eventually authorised the operation but declined American air support<sup>130</sup>. On April 12, during a White House press conference, the first question a journalist asked Kennedy was whether the administration had decided to bust the counterrevolution or invade Cuba.

Mr. President, has a decision been reached on how far this country would be willing to go in helping an anti-Castro uprising or invasion in Cuba? And what could you say with respect to recent developments as far as the anti-Castro movements in Cuba are concerned?<sup>131</sup>

The determined reply was this:

First, I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, be an intervention in Cuba by US armed forces, and this government will do everything it possibly can, and I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba. Secondly, the Justice Department's recent indictment of Mr. Masferrer, of Florida, on the grounds that he was plotting an invasion of Cuba, from Florida, in order to establish a Batista-like regime, should indicate the feelings of this country towards those who wish to re-establish that kind of administration inside Cuba. Third, we do not intend to take any action with respect to the property or other economic interests which American citizens formerly held in Cuba, other than formal and normal negotiations with a free and independent Cuba. The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba, it is between the Cubans themselves. And I intend to see that we adhere to that principle. And as I understand it, this Administration's attitude is so understood and shared by the anti-Castro exiles from Cuba in this country<sup>132</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Op.cit.*, p. 314

<sup>130</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *Op.cit.*, p. 546

<sup>131</sup> Kennedy J. F. (April 12, 1961). "The President's News Conference". Online by Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHA/1961/JFKWHA-022/JFKWHA-022> ; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNuNj3F8HAw&ab\\_channel=DavidVonPein%27sJFKChannel](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNuNj3F8HAw&ab_channel=DavidVonPein%27sJFKChannel)

<sup>132</sup> *Ibidem*

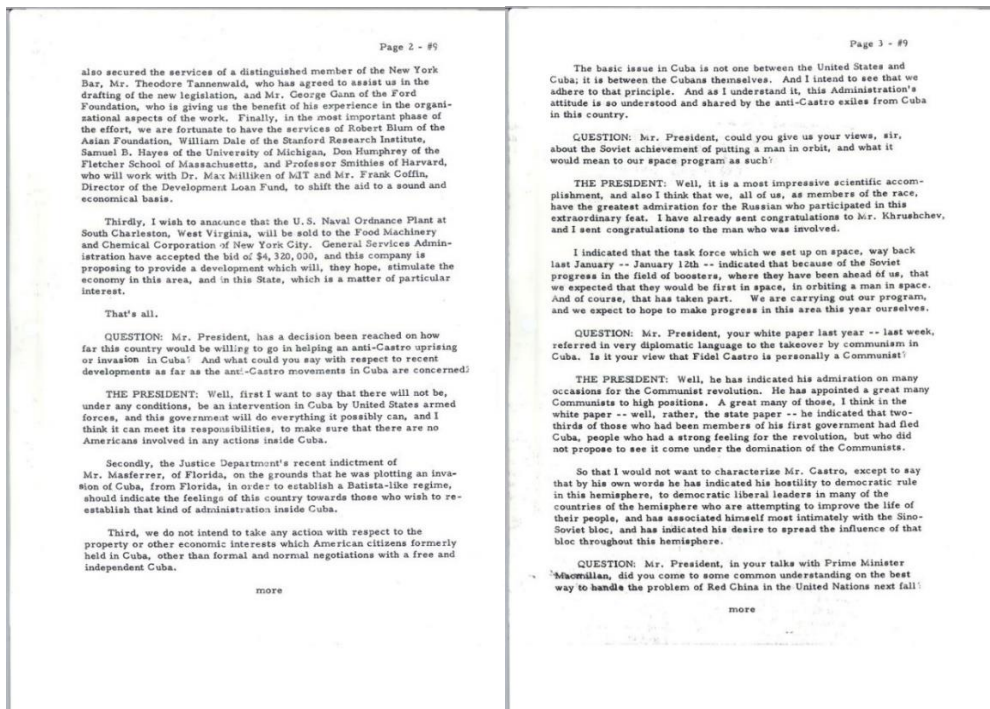


Figure 2.2 – Material collected by the office of President John F. Kennedy’s secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, concerning the President’s News Conference of April 12, 1961 | News Conference 9.

Three days later, on April 15, JFK gave the order and operations began: on the night of April 17, 1961, 1400 Cubans landed at the Bay of Pigs<sup>133</sup>. The invasion was neither properly planned nor executed, and the expected popular uprising failed to materialise. Since the invaders were overwhelmed, the CIA asked the President for permission to use the Air Force to protect them while they could still win, but Kennedy would not hear of any official American intervention. As a result, the whole operation ended in fiasco: after two days of fighting, the surviving exiles surrendered. On April 18, while operations were still underway, Khrushchev wrote a letter to Kennedy expressing his concern about the moment the world was facing so “bristling with dangers for the peace of the entire world”, since it was “no secret to anyone that the armed gangs that are invading the country have been trained, equipped and armed in the United States”, and ended by threatening that “as far as the Soviet Union is concerned, there should be no doubt about our position: we will lend the Cuban people and their government all the help necessary to repel any armed attack against Cuba”<sup>134</sup>. The danger to world peace was grave, for the greatest threat was from a Soviet retaliatory strike in Berlin, where Communist forces had the upper hand. It was probably this letter that extinguished in Kennedy the desire to support the ongoing operation: faced with the choice of risking the outbreak of a major

<sup>133</sup> Jones, M. A. (1995). *Op.cit.*, p. 546

<sup>134</sup> Blight G., Lang J. M., Whyte A., Masutani K. (2012), *The Armageddon Letters: Kennedy, Khrushchev, Castro in the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, p. 45

war with unimaginable consequences or saving one thousand four hundred men in Cuba, world peace took precedence.

On April 20, 1961, JFK made a statement on the Cuban situation before the American Society of Newspaper Editors at the Statler Hilton Hotel in Washington, DC. Here follows the most important parts:

On that unhappy island [Cuba – ed.], as in so many other arenas of the contest for freedom, the news has grown worse instead of better. I have emphasized before that this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator. While we could not be expected to hide our sympathies, we made it repeatedly clear that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way. Any unilateral American intervention, in the absence of an external attack upon ourselves or an ally, would have been contrary to our traditions and to our international obligations. But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible. Should it ever appear that the inter-American doctrine of non-interference merely conceals or excuses a policy of nonaction – if the nations of this Hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside Communist penetration – then I want it clearly understood that this Government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our Nation!<sup>135</sup>

In this first part, JFK laid out the reasons for the U.S. Army's failure to intervene in support of the exiles fighting at the Bay of Pigs, but he also asserted that his administration would not hesitate to attack if communism threatened other American nations.

This is not the first time in either ancient or recent history that a small band of freedom fighters has engaged the armour of totalitarianism. It is not the first time that Communist tanks have rolled over gallant men and women fighting to redeem the independence of their homeland. Nor is it by any means the final episode in the eternal struggle of liberty against tyranny, anywhere on the face of the globe, including Cuba itself. [...] Meanwhile we will not accept Mr. Castro's attempts to blame this nation for the hatred which his onetime supporters now regard his repression. But there are from this sobering episode useful lessons for us all to learn<sup>136</sup>.

In this second section, the President uses some typical rhetorical expressions of the political language of the United States, such as the metaphor of the struggle of freedom against tyranny and of exiles fighting for the liberation of their homeland and explains how communism is evil.

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<sup>135</sup> Kennedy, J. F. (April 20, 1961). *Address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, Washington, D.C. Available at: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/american-society-of-newspaper-editors-19610420>

<sup>136</sup> *Ibidem*

First, it is clear that the forces of communism are not to be underestimated, in Cuba or anywhere else in the world. [...] Secondly, it is clear that this Nation, in concert with all the free nations of this hemisphere, must take an ever closer and more realistic look at the menace of external Communist intervention and domination in Cuba. The American people are not complacent about Iron Curtain tanks and planes less than 90 miles from their shore. But a nation of Cuba's size is less a threat to our survival than it is a base for subverting the survival of other free nations throughout the hemisphere. It is not primarily our interest or our security but theirs which is now, today, in the greater peril. We and our Latin friends will have to face the fact that we cannot postpone any longer the real issue of survival of freedom in this hemisphere itself. [...] Together we must build a hemisphere where freedom can flourish; and where any free nation under outside attack of any kind can be assured that all of our resources stand ready to respond to any request for assistance. Third, and finally, it is clearer than ever that we face a relentless struggle in every corner of the globe that goes far beyond the clash of armies or even nuclear armaments. The armies are there, and in large number. The nuclear armaments are there. But they serve primarily as the shield behind which subversion, infiltration, and a host of other tactics steadily advance, picking off vulnerable areas one by one in situations which do not permit our own armed intervention. The legitimate discontent of yearning people is exploited. The legitimate trappings of self-determination are employed. But once in power, all talk of discontent is repressed; all self-determination disappears, and the promise of a revolution of hope is betrayed, as in Cuba, into a reign of terror. [...] We dare not fail to see the insidious nature of this new and deeper struggle. We dare not fail to grasp the new concepts, the new tools, the new sense of urgency we will need to combat it – whether in Cuba or South Viet-Nam. [...] No greater task faces this country or this administration. No other challenge is more deserving of our every effort and energy<sup>137</sup>.

The tactics of the communist forces are explained in the body of the speech: subversion, infiltration, no overt armed intervention (all features of the guerrilla tactics theorized by Castro and Guevara<sup>138</sup>). These are all negative statements that seem to underscore the incorrectness of the communist mode of struggle. Finally, there is a cross reference to *Domino Theory*<sup>139</sup> and *Containment*<sup>140</sup>.

We intend to profit from this lesson. We intend to re-examine and reorient our forces of all kinds-cur tactics and our institutions here in this community. We intend to intensify our efforts for a struggle in many ways more difficult than war, where disappointment will often accompany us. For I am convinced that we in this country and in the free world possess the necessary resource, and the skill, and the added strength that

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>138</sup> *La guerra de guerrillas* is a book written by Ernesto Guevara immediately after the Cuban Revolution and published in 1960. It became a guide for thousands of guerrilla fighters in various countries. Guevara wrote it as a manual on guerrilla tactics and especially on the theory of *foco* for other revolutionary movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia, but the book was also studied by counterrevolutionary military schools.

<sup>139</sup> The Domino Theory was a Cold War policy that predicted that the establishment of a communist administration in one nation would swiftly result in communist takeovers in neighboring countries. It was employed in Southeast Asia by the US administration to explain its participation in the Vietnam War. Although the Communists won the war in Vietnam, with the exception of Laos and Cambodia, Communism failed to expand across Southeast Asia.

<sup>140</sup> The Truman Doctrine or containment policy was theorised by President Harry Truman in 1947. This foreign policy provided political, military, and economic aid to democratic nations threatened by communist influence, to prevent the spread of communism. It was a departure from the United States' earlier isolationist principles, which prevented the country from engaging in foreign affairs.



comes from a belief in the freedom of man. [...] Let me then make clear as the President of the United States that I am determined upon our system's survival and success, regardless of the cost and regardless of the peril!<sup>141</sup>

The failed invasion marked a turning point in U.S.-Cuba relations. It was now clear that Cuba would not be the Guatemala of the Caribbean<sup>142</sup> and that the issue had international significance within the Cold War. The Castro regime was strengthened by publicly professing the socialist nature of the movement on December 2, 1961, and by establishing closer economic and political relations with the Soviet Union, which then “began to adopt a more aggressive posture”<sup>143</sup>.

### 2.2.2 The geo-strategic role of Havana in the Cold War. The missile crisis.

Khrushchev knew the strategic importance of the island in directly threatening the United States. Motivated to defend Cuba from a likely new attack, Moscow began to arm the island more and more. The first consequence of the Bay of Pigs attack for the Soviets was the strengthening of anti-American tendencies in the Presidium. Arkadij Sevchenko, a Russian Foreign Ministry official who later defected to the United States, said that it was this very occasion which “gave Khrushchev and other leaders the impression that Kennedy was undecided”<sup>144</sup>, a sentiment that would play a role in the decision to install missiles in Cuba the following summer. While the island had been economically dependent on the United States for a full century, the situation had changed completely in just three years of Castro's rule. In 1962, 82% of Cuban exports went to communist countries and 85% of imports came from them<sup>145</sup>. The Soviet camp's firm stance also had repercussions on the Latin American continent when, at Kennedy's instigation, the Organization of American States (OAS)<sup>146</sup> excluded Cuba from the forum, with only Mexico voting against. It was a response to Fidel Castro's address to a huge crowd in the *Plaza de la Revolución* in central Havana in early 1962. From the podium, the Cuban leader denounced the Organization of American States as the “Yankee Ministry of Colonies and a military bloc against the peoples of Latin America”<sup>147</sup>. For several years,

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<sup>141</sup> Kennedy, J. F. (April 20, 1961). *Op. cit.*

<sup>142</sup> Smith, P. H., Green, J. N., & Skidmore, T. E. (2018). *Op.cit.*, p. 315. It refers to the U.S. covert operation in Guatemala in 1954. Code-named Operation PBSuccess, it was a covert operation by the U.S. CIA to depose democratically elected Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz and end the Guatemalan Revolution of 1944-1954.

<sup>143</sup> *Idem*

<sup>144</sup> Beschloss M. (1991), *Guerra Fredda. Kennedy e Kruschev. Cuba, la Crisi dei Missili, il Muro di Berlino*. Milano: Mondadori, p. 154.

<sup>145</sup> Nuti L. (1994), *I Missili di ottobre. La Storiografia Americana e la Crisi Cubana dell'Ottobre 1962*. Milano: LED.

<sup>146</sup> The OAS is the oldest regional organization in the world. It was founded in 1947/1948 as the successor to the Pan-American Union and originally comprised all 20 Latin American states plus the USA.

<sup>147</sup> Langley, L. D. (2010). *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere (The United States and the Americas Ser.)* (2nd ed.). University of Georgia Press p. 205

moderate Latin American governments – including Brazil, Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico – managed to subvert the hard line of U.S. policy within the OAS. But by early 1962, the Kennedy administration had gathered enough votes to expel Cuba from the body<sup>148</sup>. Two years later, at the request of President Johnson – following the assassination of President Kennedy on October 22, 1963 – the OAS imposed sanctions on the island and called on all members (15 Latin American states) to sever relations with Havana<sup>149</sup>. Only Mexico resisted. Cuba’s isolation was complete. Meanwhile, the White House extended the embargo to imports from the island. The hemisphere was thus united in its condemnation of communism and feared possible infiltration into other countries in the region, an idea that Che Guevara had theorized and put into practice. Excluded from the OAS, economically and politically blocked by the rest of the continent, and in a state of constant mobilization against a possible invasion, Castro relied more and more on the USSR.

The Soviets then began to establish bases for intermediate-range missiles on the island, upsetting the balance of power that had existed until October 1962. The island offered unparalleled advantages over other Latin American countries: no other country had a geographic location that allowed it to control traffic between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. Exports from the Midwestern United States flowed through the Mississippi River and the city of New Orleans, located on its banks. The establishment of a Soviet military base on the island would have seriously jeopardised an artery vital to American commerce. If New Orleans was the key to the Midwest, Cuba was the key to New Orleans, and its control would have meant geopolitical “checkmate” for Moscow. In his memoirs, Khrushchev wrote that the idea first occurred to him in May 1962, when he saw a parallel between the American missiles stationed in Turkey and the idea of installing some in Cuba. As he wrote, he would teach America “just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we would be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine”<sup>150</sup>.

Moreover, the Communist leader probably wanted to preserve the Cuban Revolution and its importance, as he was being urged by some members of the Party to take a more aggressive stance toward the United States and to spread the Communist ideal abroad, while issues with the Communist Party in China were increasing. Finally, the so-called *Missile Gap*<sup>151</sup> – the disparity in the strategic

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<sup>148</sup> OEA/Ser.C.II.8, Resolution VI: “*Exclusion of the present government of Cuba from participation in the inter-american system*”. Available at: <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%208.pdf#page=14>

<sup>149</sup> OEA/Ser.F/II.9, Resolution I: “*Application of measures to the present government of Cuba*”. Available at: <http://www.oas.org/council/MEETINGS%20OF%20CONSULTATION/Actas/Acta%209.pdf#page=6>

“President Johnson persuaded OAS Foreign Ministers, acting as Organ of Consultation, to impose economic sanctions on Cuba as well as break off diplomatic relations with the Cuban government under Articles 6 and 8 of the Rio Treaty”. Quoted in: White, N. D. (2015). *The Cuban Embargo under International Law: El Bloqueo (Routledge Research in International Law)* (1st ed.). Routledge. p. 101

<sup>150</sup> Khrushchev N. (1971), *Khrushchev remembers*. New York. Quoted in *Nikita S. Khrushchev, Khrushchev remembers*, translated by Strobe Talbot (New York, 1971), pp. 546-7

<sup>151</sup> Preble, C. (2004). *John F. Kennedy and the Missile Gap* (1st ed.). Northern Illinois University Press.

“In August 1957 the Soviet Union launched the world’s first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). Then, on 4 October 1957, the Soviets launched Sputnik, the world’s first Earth-orbiting satellite. With its Cold War adversary’s technological prowess on public display, the United States seemed to be marching in place—or going backward. Journalists, politicians, and military leaders began to

nuclear arms race – in favour of the U.S. greatly worried the Soviet leader<sup>152</sup>. Indeed, the superiority of the States had become clear in 1961 after the famous speech of the Assistant Secretary of Defence (1961-1964), Roswell Gilpatric, before the Business Council in Hot Springs, Virginia, on October 21:

[..] This nation has a nuclear retaliatory force of such lethal power than an enemy move which brought it into play would be an act of self-destruction on his part. The U.S. has today hundreds of manned intercontinental bombers capable of reaching the Soviet Union, including 600 heavy bombers and many more medium bombers equally capable of inter-continental operations because of our highly developed in-flight refuelling techniques and world-wide base structure. The U S. also has 6 Polaris submarines at sea carrying a total of J-6 missiles, and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Our carrier strike forces, and land-based theatre forces could deliver additional hundreds of megatons. The total number of our nuclear delivery vehicles, tactical as well as strategic, is in the tens of thousands; and of course, we have more than one warhead for each vehicle. Our forces are so deployed and protected that a sneak attack could not effectively disarm us. The destructive power which the United States could bring to bear even after a Soviet surprise attack upon our forces would be as great as — perhaps greater than — the total undamaged force which the enemy can threaten to launch against the United States in a first strike. In short, we have a second-strike capability which is at least as extensive as what the Soviets can deliver by striking first. Therefore, we are confident that the Soviets will not provoke a major nuclear conflict.<sup>153</sup>

Finally, the first satellite images of the Soviet Union were released, revealing the communist country's lag in nuclear development<sup>154</sup>.

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speak of a "missile gap"—a perceived strategic disparity between the two superpowers brought on by the Soviet Union's gains in the production of rockets, missiles and nuclear weapons. [...] The missile gap itself, however, was a fiction. At no time did the Soviets have a qualitative or quantitative superiority in nuclear weapons technology over the United States. The U.S. nuclear arsenal, dispersed among military bases worldwide, was never in danger of being incapacitated by a surprise Soviet attack”.

<sup>152</sup> Rabe, S. G. (1991). The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 3(3), pp. 59–66 (61). Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30001786>

<sup>153</sup> Address By Roswell L. Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary Of Defense Before The Business Council At The Homestead, Hot Springs, Virginia Saturday, October 21, 1961. Available at: [https://archive.org/stream/RoswellGilpatricSpeechBeforeTheBusinessCouncil/ELS000-010\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/RoswellGilpatricSpeechBeforeTheBusinessCouncil/ELS000-010_djvu.txt)

<sup>154</sup> Cline, Ray S. “*Commentary: The Cuban Missile Crisis.*” *Foreign Affairs*. January 10, 2016.



Figure 2.3 – Graphic depicting the types and locations of the eight categories of Soviet offensive and defensive weapons systems deployed in Cuba in the fall of 1962 | United States. Department of Defense Cuban Missile Crisis Briefing Materials. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, 6 February 1963.

The Soviets were unable to close the gap quickly, they did not have the resources to build enough Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) – Kennedy increased U.S. military spending. By mid-1962, the United States had 5000 strategic warheads, the Soviets 300. In ICBMs, the United States had a lead of more than four to one and was rapidly expanding it. Under Kennedy, the number of ICBMs increased from 53 in 1961 to 424 in 1963, when the Minuteman missiles were installed. By comparison, the Soviets had about twenty ICBMs on their ground – or long-range – bombers in October 1962<sup>155</sup>. They had only SS-4 at medium range and SS-5 at intermedium range, with a scope of about 2000 and 4000 kilometres, respectively, and were therefore incapable of reaching American soil unless launched from a short distance. For this reason, the installation of nuclear missiles on the island would immediately double Soviet war-fighting capacity.

On the Cuban side, the plan was approved by Raúl Castro, Fidel’s brother, during his visit to Moscow in July 1962, and an agreement was reached in between late August and early September when Ernesto “Che” Guevara, now a Castro adviser, travelled to Moscow. Initially, the United States claimed that after the Bay of Pigs invasion, it had never again done anything to overthrow the Castro regime, apart from some control operations such as reconnaissance flights. In 1975, thanks to the revelations of the Church Committee, a different picture emerged: from 1960 to 1963, the United States persistently tried (eight times) to assassinate Fidel Castro<sup>156</sup>. The plots were part of the so-

<sup>155</sup> John Lewis Gaddis. (1990). *Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States*, New York, pp 245-8, 260

<sup>156</sup> Rabe, S. G. (1991). *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited*. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 3(3), p. 62

called *Operation Mongoose*<sup>157</sup>, authorised by Kennedy in November 1961: it allowed the CIA, to prepare Cubans to carry out acts of sabotage on the island. It had an annual budget of nearly \$50 million, using 400 CIA agents and training thousands of Cuban exiles under Colonel Edward G. Lansdale<sup>158</sup>. Although Kennedy administration officials tended not to admit the true development of the operation after 1974, the documents suggest that the plan involved a direct U.S. invasion of Cuba, justified by the explosion of a major insurgency. According to the documents, the invasion was planned for October 20, 1962<sup>159</sup>, but the Cuban Missile Crisis broke out on October 16.

It is considered the most dangerous confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in the fifty years of the Cold War. The closest point to a global nuclear war, one wrong decision on either side could have triggered a catastrophe. Nearly 10 million Americans left their homes after learning of the presence of the Soviet nuclear arsenal in Cuba<sup>160</sup>. The secret Soviet initiative was code-named *Operation Anadyr* and initially envisioned the installation of twenty-four medium-range missiles and twelve intermediate-range cruise missiles on the island<sup>161</sup>. The operation remained secret, even to the Soviet soldiers who had to practically transport the material to the island: they did not know their destination, were given boots and skis and told they were going to Chukotka<sup>162</sup>. “Even the captains of the ships knew their true destination only a week after departure. They had three secret envelopes with the routes, each opened in sequence. First, the captain was ordered to sail through the Bosphorus, then to head for Gibraltar and only when he was in the Atlantic was he told that his final destination was Cuba”, Aleksandr Feklisov, Soviet reconnaissance officer wrote in his memoirs<sup>163</sup>. The nuclear missiles were disguised as agricultural implements. The first to fly to Cuba were the military officers responsible for assembling the missile systems, while the trips that brought the rest of the military personnel (more than 50,000) to the Caribbean were much more difficult. The ships sailed from eight Soviet ports and the men had to stay below deck for weeks to avoid detection by U.S. surveillance planes. The first ship to sail to Cuba arrived on July 10, 1962, and U.S. intelligence began to notice large shipments of Soviet materials to Cuba in mid-July, but without knowing the true scope of the operation<sup>164</sup>. After 185 trips from the Soviet Union to Cuba and the deployment of

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<sup>157</sup> A campaign of covert operations and terrorist attacks carried out by CIA in Cuba against Castro. Boot, M. (2018, January 12). *Operation Mongoose: The Story of America's Efforts to Overthrow Castro*. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/01/operation-mongoose/549737/>

<sup>158</sup> Rabe, S. G. (1991). *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited*. Op. cit.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>160</sup> George, A. L. (2003). *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*. The University of North Carolina Press. p. 28

<sup>161</sup> Crandall, R. (November 23, 1961). “*This Godless Communism*”, *Treasure Chest of Fun and Fact*, p. 12

<sup>162</sup> The easternmost federal subject in Russia.

<sup>163</sup> Feklisov, A. (2001). *The Man Behind the Rosenbergs: Memoirs of the KGB Spymaster Who Also Controlled Klaus Fuchs and Helped Resolve the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Enigma Books..

<sup>164</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *Secret Cuban Missile Crisis Documents*, 269

42,000 troops to the island<sup>165</sup> (four times the CIA estimates), the missiles were dispatched in mid-September and reached the Caribbean on October 4<sup>166</sup>. Meanwhile, further friction occurred in September when, according to Soviet officials, an American U-2 flight violated Russian airspace over Sakhalin Island and China shot down another U-2 aircraft a few days later. It was then decided to limit U-2 flights to international waters: the quality of the photos decreased, and besides, the weather was always cloudy over Cuba in September, which prevented any kind of photographs from the sky<sup>167</sup>. On October 15, the secret was revealed. Two U-2 pilots (Major R. S. Heyser and Rudolph Andersen) had finally managed to capture evidence of launching pads under construction on the island. The National Photographic Interpretation Centre analysed the films, and the information was sent to the President on 16 October.

Exhausting days followed, with Kennedy trying to keep the discovery secret while his closest aides met to sort out the situation. Suggestions ranged from a direct invasion to a targeted air attack on missile sites to a blockade of the island<sup>168</sup>. When the latter option was chosen, Kennedy briefed the Allies on what was happening and won the support of De Gaulle, Macmillan and Adenauer. Eventually, the nation was informed as well. Newspapers in America and around the world printed on their front pages that the President would be speaking on all channels on the evening of October 22, speculating as to what the reason might be, but certain that it would be something extremely serious. The news apparently reached Cuba, where Castro prepared for the worst and immediately gave orders to mobilise the entire reserve. Over 270,000 Cubans were preparing for war when Kennedy told the world what had happened. The small Caribbean Island had suddenly become the geopolitical centre of the earth, the site of confrontation between the planet's two nuclear superpowers. The President of the United States denounced the Soviet Union's behaviour:

This secret, swift, and extraordinary build-up of Communist missiles – in an area well known to have a special and historical relationship to the United States and the nations of the Western Hemisphere, in violation of Soviet assurances, and in defiance of American and hemispheric policy – this sudden, clandestine decision to station strategic weapons for the first time outside of Soviet soil – is a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo which cannot be accepted by this country, if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Blight, J. G., Allyn, B. J., & Welch, D. A. (2002). *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (Revised ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. pp. 59–60

<sup>166</sup> Freedman, Kennedy's Wars, 166. Cited in George, A. L. (2003). *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis*. The University of North Carolina Press. p. 40

<sup>167</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 167

<sup>168</sup> The U.S. demanded the withdrawal of Soviet missiles and threatened a naval quarantine of all Soviet military shipments to the island.

<sup>169</sup> Kennedy J. F. (1962), transcript of “*Radio and Television Report to the American People on the Soviet Arms Buildup in Cuba*”, October 22, 1962, Available at: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/sUVMCh-sB0moLfrBcaHaSg.aspx>.

The speech then ended with the warning that any attack from the island would be considered as coming from the Soviet Union itself, with all the consequences that would entail. Once the cameras were turned off, military orders were issued. Commanders of U.S. forces around the world put their men on alert, while Strategic Air Command (SAC) was split up and dispersed to civilian airports around the country to make it less vulnerable to attack. U.S. SAC determined that from that moment on, one-eighth of all B-52 bombers would be in the air at all times with full nuclear payloads on board, ready to go to assigned targets, while as of 7:00 p.m. that same day, all U.S. conventional forces went to DEFCON 3<sup>170</sup> and nuclear forces went to DEFCON 2, the first and only time in history that they were one step away from a thermonuclear war state (DEFCON 1). To give one example, the nuclear submarines left their ports and reached their assigned attack positions, while all ICBM crews were placed on high alert<sup>171</sup>. The following evening Castro responded to Kennedy's televised address by declaring that recent events were the culmination of policies pursued by the United States since the triumph of the Revolution and calling on the Cuban people to resist American imperialism now and always. In private letters, he then suggested to Khrushchev that he bomb first, knowing full well that this would mean the destruction of his island, but willing to sacrifice himself for the greater good. Perhaps in part because of such fanaticism, the Kremlin rushed to defuse the coming conflict. The crisis dragged on for thirteen interminable days, at the end of which Khrushchev and Kennedy agreed on the immediate dismantling of all Soviet offensive weapons on Cuban soil. In return, the United States promised never to attempt to invade the island and secretly assured the dismantling of missiles stationed in Turkey. In his memoirs, Khrushchev claimed to have achieved his goal, which was solely to protect Cuba from further aggression. However, this is a very simplistic view, considering that the billion dollars the Kremlin spent on the operation was repaid with a non-invasion pledge that could very well be revoked at any time. Not to mention that the outcome of the enterprise was not conducive to Khrushchev's efforts to improve the Soviet position in the balance of nuclear powers. Much of the world, ignoring the secret condition of dismantling the missiles in Turkey, interpreted the dismantling of the missiles as evidence of weakness: the USSR had challenged the United States and lost. But Kennedy was not innocent either, although his proclaimed success against communism enabled him to defend himself against criticism at home, as his victory in the midterm elections showed.

Castro was never consulted. He himself declared that Cuba did not want to be a mere pawn on the world chessboard, but nothing could be done about the strategic importance of his country. It was

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<sup>170</sup> The defence readiness condition (DEFCON) is an alert condition used by the United States Armed Forces. The DEFCON system was developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the Unified and Specified Combatant Commands. It prescribes five graduated readiness levels (or alert states) for the U.S. military. Severity levels range from DEFCON 5 (least severe) to DEFCON 1 (most severe) to accommodate different military situations, with DEFCON 1 signalling the onset of nuclear war.

<sup>171</sup> Paterson T. G. (1994), *L'Ossessione Cubana: la Baia dei Porci, la Crisi dei Missili e la Guerra Clandestina contro Castro*, in Nuti L. *I Missili di Ottobre. La Storiografia Americana e la Crisi Cubana dell'Ottobre 1962*, Milano: LED, pp. 151-152.

precisely geography that made the island not a pawn but the playing field of the great geopolitical chess game that took place in October 1962.

In one of his last speeches during the crisis, on October 22, Kennedy recited:

[..] I want to say a few words to the captive people of Cuba [..]. I speak to you as a friend, as one who knows of your deep attachment to your fatherland, as one who shares your aspirations for liberty and justice for all. And I have watched, and the American people have watched with deep sorrow how your nationalist revolution was betrayed – and how your fatherland fell under foreign domination. Now your leaders are no longer Cuban leaders inspired by Cuban ideals. They are puppets and agents of an international conspiracy which has turned Cuba against your friends and neighbours in the Americas – and turned it into the first Latin American country to become a target for nuclear war – the first Latin American country to have these weapons on its soil. These new weapons are not in your interest. They contribute nothing to your peace and well-being. They can only undermine it. But this country has no wish to cause you to suffer or to impose any system upon you. We know that your lives and land are being used as pawns by those who deny your freedom. Many times in the past, the Cuban people have risen to throw out tyrants who destroyed their liberty. And I have no doubt that most Cubans today look forward to the time when they will be truly free – free from foreign domination, free to choose their own leaders, free to select their own system, free to own their own land, free to speak and write and worship without fear or degradation. And then shall Cuba be welcomed back to the society of free nations and to the associations of this hemisphere.<sup>172</sup>

But *de facto* the embargo had just begun to separate the island from the Western Hemisphere.

### **2.3 The causes of the rupture: the imposition of the embargo**

The United States embargo against Cuba was imposed over sixty years ago and has been maintained to this day: since then, trade and relations with the island have been restricted. Initially, it was a response to the new revolutionary government's seizure of U.S. property, which was seen as a violation of international law. But what might initially have been seen as a legitimate sanction was difficult to justify in the long run against the backdrop of international law, because it led to "considerable suffering of the Cuban people, especially when Soviet economic relations with Cuba ended with the demise of the USSR in 1991"<sup>173</sup>.

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<sup>172</sup> Kennedy J. F. (1962). *Radio and television address to the American people on the Soviet arms build-up in Cuba*, October 22, 1962. Available at: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/address-during-the-cuban-missile-crisis>

<sup>173</sup> White, N. D. (2015). *The Cuban Embargo under International Law: El Bloqueo (Routledge Research in International Law)* (1st ed.). Routledge.



### 2.3.1 The legislative framework

The embargo (or *el bloqueo*) began in October 1960 under President Eisenhower with some very specific measures: he lifted Cuba's sugar quota, invoking the *Trading With Enemy Act* (TWEA) of 1917<sup>174</sup> – the first legal instrument the United States used to impose the blockade – which banned exports from the United States to Cuba except for food and medicine. Although the law was drafted at the time of U.S. entry into World War I to “prohibit, restrict or regulate commerce with hostile nations in time of war”<sup>175</sup>, an amendment to Section 5(b)<sup>176</sup> in 1933 expanded the president's authority by allowing the law to be used in peacetime during national emergencies. In 1977, another amendment eliminated the ability to use it for national emergencies, but in return allowed existing sanctions to continue, provided they were reaffirmed annually<sup>177</sup>. Since then, each president maintained the embargo against Cuba, which was gradually expanded until it encompassed virtually every commercial or financial transaction. In addition to the TWEA, various legal instruments were used to justify it: the *Foreign Assistance Act* (FAA) of 1961, the *Tariff Classification Act* (TCA) of 1962, the *Cuban Assets Control Regulations* (CACR) of 1963, the *Cuban Democracy Act* (CDA) of 1992, the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* (FRAA) of 1994, the *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act* (*Helms-Burton Act*) of 1996, the *Omnibus Appropriations Act* of 1998, and the *Trade Sections Reform and Export Enhancement Act* of 2000. The FAA of 1961 in its Section. 620 stated that “No assistance shall be furnished under this Act to the present government of Cuba. As an additional means of implementing and carrying into effect the policy of the preceding sentence, the

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<sup>174</sup> Cfr. Paragraph 2.2, pag. 18

<sup>175</sup> Travieso-Diaz M. (1997), *The Laws and Legal System of a Free-Market Cuba*, Westport: Greenwood, p. 14

<sup>176</sup> Congressional Research Service. (1996, August). *Presidential Emergency Powers: The So-Called “War Powers Act of 1933”* (No. 95–753 A). Available at:

[https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19960820\\_95-753\\_9f0fe5a5990563d678b0867f5693e5da564e1d24.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/19960820_95-753_9f0fe5a5990563d678b0867f5693e5da564e1d24.pdf). President F. D. Roosevelt came into office on March 5, 1933, during the most severe economic depression in the Nation's history. According to the Congressional Research Service report, he declared that massive withdrawals of gold and currency from the banks had created a “national emergency” and ordered that the banks be closed for 4 days, “in order to prevent the export, hoarding, or earmarking of gold or silver coin or bullion or currency”. As the legal authority for this proclamation, he cited the portion of § 5(b) of the “Trading with the Enemy Act”, which provided that “[...] the President may investigate, regulate, or prohibit, under such rules and regulations as he may prescribe, by means of licenses or otherwise, any transactions in foreign exchange, export, hoarding, melting or earmarkings of gold or silver coin or bullion or currency”. Congress enacted the President's emergency banking legislation, and, recognizing the limitations of the legal authority the President had cited for his declaration of a national bank holiday, the legislation amended § 5(b) of the Trading with the Enemy Act to allow it to be used not only in time of war but also “during any other period of national emergency declared by the President”.

<sup>177</sup> Amendments to the *Trading With the Enemy Act*, 3 Md. J. Int'l L. 413 (1978). Available at:

<http://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/mjil/vol3/iss2/11>. Both House and Senate Reports on the act note that Presidents have extensively used the authorities of 5(b) to regulate economic transactions unrelated to war or national emergency, and that 5(b) had thus become an almost unlimited grant of power to the President. The purpose of the new act is to redefine and codify the President's authority to regulate international economic transactions in future times of war or national emergency. The legislation “would separate war and non-war authorities and procedures, preserving existing presidential powers in time of war declared by Congress, and providing somewhat narrower powers subject to Congressional review in times of national emergency.” [...] Title I removes national emergency powers from section 5(b) of the TWEA. However, the wartime powers of 5(b) remain intact. The title includes a grandfather clause tied to existing regulations to prevent their termination by the amendment. The act states that the powers exercised under 5(b) before July 1, 1977, may continue only for a two-year period beginning on the date of enactment of the National Emergencies Act. The President can then extend the authorities for one-year periods if he believes it is in the national interest.

President is authorized to establish and maintain a total embargo upon all trade between the United States and Cuba”<sup>178</sup>. The law was introduced after the failure of the Bay of Pigs. In 1962, Section 602 (e) was added, barring U.S. aid to communist nations and strengthening sanctions against expropriation of American property. The *Tariff Classification Act*<sup>179</sup> of the same year excluded Cuba from reduced tariff rates and most-favoured-nation treatment. In 1963, following the missile crisis, the CACR banned all “transactions [that] involve property in which [Cuba], or any national thereof, has [...] any interest of any nature whatsoever, direct or indirect” by “any person subject to the jurisdiction of the United States”<sup>180</sup>. These regulations were issued by the U.S. Treasury Department’s Office of Assets of Foreign Control (it interprets and applies economic sanctions). All assets and property of the Cuban government and private individuals were frozen, effectively prohibiting all transfers not specifically authorised by the Treasury Department. Beginning in the 1970s, the climate of increasing détente between the United States and the Soviet Union also affected Cuba, with some measures moving for the first time toward cooperation and normalisation in certain areas, albeit on a limited scale. The 1973 *Bilateral Agreement for the Prevention of Plane Hijackings* encouraged the exchange of information between the two countries<sup>181</sup>. Following the resignation of Nixon in 1974 in the wake of the Watergate scandal, the prospect of normalising U.S.-Cuba relations opened up. In 1975, the OAS voted to lift sanctions against the island. Having difficulty finding the necessary two-thirds majority in the consultative body, the OAS amended the Rio Treaty to allow the lifting of sanctions by a simple majority<sup>182</sup>. Finally, a resolution was adopted granting each member state the “freedom to normalize or conduct their relations with the Republic of Cuba in accordance with their own national policy and interests”<sup>183</sup>. In 1975 (at the height of détente), an amendment<sup>184</sup> to the CACR relaxed restrictions on U.S. companies operating in third countries doing business in Cuba (the regulation was repealed later that year and replaced with a trade licence). Finally, in 1977, the new Carter administration launched an initiative to improve relations with Cuba. The aim was to improve contacts with the island and promote an improvement in the human rights situation. This strategy provided for the opening of an interest section in Cuba and the opportunity for the Cubans to open a similar office in Washington. Diplomatic relations had not existed since January 1961, shortly after Castro took power, nationalized major private sector investments, and turned to the

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<sup>178</sup> Public law 87-194-SEPT. 1, 1961. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3wMRObe>

<sup>179</sup> Tariff Classification Act (1962). Available at: <https://www.finance.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Rpt87-1317.pdf>

<sup>180</sup> John W. Smugula. (1995). *Redirecting Focus: Justifying the U.S. Embargo against Cuba and Resolving the Stalemate*, 21 N.C. J. Int’l L. & Com. Reg. 65. p. 76. Available at: <http://scholarship.law.unc.edu/ncilj/vol21/iss1/4>

<sup>181</sup> United States of America and Cuba. (15 February 1973). *Exchange of notes constituting an agreement relating to hijacking of aircraft and vessels and other offenses* (with memorandum of understanding). Washington and Havana. Available at: <https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%20916/volume-916-I-13067-English.pdf>

<sup>182</sup> White, N. D. (2015). *Op.cit.* p. 101

<sup>183</sup> *Idem*

<sup>184</sup> The Act was lastly amended in 2020. Available at: [https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/fr85\\_67988.pdf](https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/fr85_67988.pdf)

Soviet Union for extensive military and economic assistance. The interest sections, consisting of a small number of diplomats acting as part of a friendly embassy rather than under their own flag, were a great first step toward diplomatic relations<sup>185</sup>. An agreement that decided the lapse of travel restrictions, set maritime affairs and the bilateral opening of interest sections<sup>186</sup> was signed between the two countries. Restrictions on U.S. citizens visiting Cuba were curtailed – for example, tourists were allowed to increase the amount of goods they could purchase to \$100 – and an agreement on fishing rights and maritime boundaries was reached; Interest Sections were opened in Havana and Washington as surrogate embassies. In an interview, Terence Todman – 1977-78 Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of American Republics Affairs (ARA, now WHA or Western Hemisphere Affairs) and the first U.S. diplomat to travel to Havana for negotiations – stated:

There was a very different approach toward Cuba during the Carter Administration. We decided right at the very beginning of the administration that we would seek to reach some negotiated understanding with Cuba and that the administration was going to do this and not allow itself to be controlled by the Cuban community in the United States. Therefore, we made the arrangements for establishing the contacts without consulting with anyone. And once the contacts were established, then we let them know. [...] Cuba wanted to get the right to fish in U.S. waters. We were also faced during this time with numerous incidents at sea over presumed violations of maritime boundary. People were always being arrested and released; a lot of problems. And it seemed worthwhile to negotiate and establish a maritime boundary with Cuba and a fisheries agreement<sup>187</sup>.

According to John Bushnell – Deputy Assistant Secretary in ARA 1977-82 – the influence of the vast expatriate Cuban community was obvious:

Perhaps I haven't had enough experience to make a generalization, but I think one could make a case that, after the Jewish lobby, the next most powerful lobby of foreign origin or interest is made up of the Cubans. The Cubans have made a lot of money and beginning in the 1970's they became big contributors to political campaigns, both in Florida and nationally. Moreover, the Cuban community has focused its political interest on policies regarding Cuba. In many respects Cuban views are as diverse as any other group of Americans, but on Cuba, until recently anyway, there has been great unity in being anti-Castro, even among the generation that has spent all, or almost all, their lives here. The Cubans consider that they were kicked out of Cuba by Castro. My impression was that the Carter Administration adopted its warming policy toward Castro without realizing what a strong adverse reaction it would generate in the Cuban community. Its lack of decisive influence in the early days of

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<sup>185</sup> Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training (2014). *Re-establishing Ties with Cuba, 1977*. Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training Available at: <https://adst.org/2014/12/re-establishing-ties-with-cuba-1977/>

<sup>186</sup> U.S. Embassy Havana. Available at: <https://cu.usembassy.gov/embassy/havana/>

<sup>187</sup> Todman, T. (1995). *Interview with Michael Krenn*, in: *Re-establishing Ties with Cuba, 1977*. Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training (2014). Available at: <https://adst.org/2014/12/re-establishing-ties-with-cuba-1977/>

the Carter Administration made the Cuban American community realize it needed a major presence in Washington. It hired lobbyists, and its leaders began coming to Washington with some regularity. In Florida it organized to have greater impact on foreign policy, meaning for it Cuban policy. By the time I came into ARA at the end of 1977 the Carter Administration was already working harder at improving relations with the Cuban Americans than with Castro. There was little interest in additional warming even before the Cuba military role in Africa and the Mariel Sea invasion of Cuban immigrants ended and reversed the warming process. The experience at the beginning of the Carter Administration showed the Cubans that groups such as the Council on Foreign Relations with a broad membership can be more important during the turmoil of a presidential transition than more narrow groups such as the Cuban American Foundation, which might not have a seat at a key transition table<sup>188</sup>.

Toward the end of the decade, the geopolitical climate changed again: in the late 1970s, Cuba sent its own troops to Africa to take advantage of the wave of turmoil sweeping the continent at the height of decolonization and bring the newly independent states into the communist camp<sup>189</sup>. These interventions were clearly disapproved of by Washington and stalled the tentative attempt at normalisation that had begun in the years before. As a result, in 1982 President Reagan reimposed all restrictions on U.S. citizens wishing to travel to the island.

So, the first tranche of sanctions – motivated by the threat of communist expansion in the hemisphere – proved a success from a geopolitical point of view. In one way or another, all Latin American countries are now democratic and capitalist, even if some of them are shaken by turbulence of various kinds: even the populist countries that dot the region, from Bolivia to Argentina and Ecuador to Venezuela, are anxious not to extinguish the forms of parliamentary democracy, even if they reject its ideal conditions<sup>190</sup>. The debate over the second set of sanctions is more complex. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s was the last of the major international geopolitical factors to strain relations between the two countries. It can be seen as a turning point in the fifty-year history of the economic bloc. While all the measures taken before the fall of the Soviet Union were aimed at blocking and preventing the penetration of communist ideology into the hemisphere, according to the will of the United States, the measures taken after the fall of the Soviet regime were primarily aimed at influencing democratization and respect for human rights in the island.

In 1992, the *Cuban Democracy Act*<sup>191</sup> was passed: it codified and strengthened many of the U.S. sanctions against Cuba that remain in place today. The new regulation, also called the *Torricelli*

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<sup>188</sup> Bushnell, J. (1997). *Interview with John Harter*, in: *Re-establishing Ties with Cuba, 1977*. Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training (2014). Available at: <https://adst.org/2014/12/re-establishing-ties-with-cuba-1977/>

<sup>189</sup> Falk, P. S. (1987), “*Cuba in Africa*”, in *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1987 Issue. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/africa/1987-06-01/cuba-africa>

<sup>190</sup> Zanatta L. (2014), “*L’America Latina: un’area emergente*”, *Atlante Geopolitico Treccani*. Available at: <http://www.treccani.it/geopolitico/saggi/2014/l-america-latina-un-area-emergente.html>

<sup>191</sup> Cuban Democracy Act. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/cda.pdf>

*Act* after the congressman who introduced it, prohibited U.S. companies or subsidiaries from doing business with Cuba; restricted maritime trade by barring ships and boats carrying goods or passengers directly to or from the island from entering a U.S. port; required the inspection of medical equipment; gave the president the authority to prohibit economic and military aid or the cancelation of debt; and required the maintenance of caps on remittances from people in the United States to Cuba. The new goals of democratization and respect for human rights were clearly enumerated: “[..] to seek a peaceful transition to democracy and a resumption of economic growth in Cuba through the careful application of sanctions directed at the Castro government and support for the Cuban people... to maintain sanctions on the Castro regime so long as it continues to refuse to move toward democratization and greater respect for human rights”.

Shipping between the two countries was effectively cut off, in that any cargo leaving or arriving in Cuba was not allowed to be transported directly to the United States for the following 180 days. This was an extremely important measure for trade flows in the region. Indeed, the Caribbean region has clearly defined trade routes: most ships pass through the basin before arriving in the United States – the region’s main trading partner – or vice versa. Even for goods coming from or going to third countries, as in the case of the European Union, American ports are an almost obligatory port of call for transit. Cuban imports and exports are thus effectively excluded from this network due to the 180-day clause, forcing those who wish to trade with Cuba to use means of transport exclusively intended for this purpose, without having access to the American market on the same trip, which significantly increases transport costs.

The *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* of 1994 also provided that the President should continue the embargo against Cuba in its Section 526: “It is the sense of the Congress that the President should advocate and seek a mandatory international United Nations Security Council embargo against the dictatorship of Cuba”<sup>192</sup>. Two years later, in 1996, the *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act (Helms-Burton Act)* further expanded sanctions against Cuba and made the embargo U.S. law during President Clinton’s administration after a Cuban exiles’ plane was brought down over international waters by a Cuban military aircraft. The law’s four titles required U.S. representatives to international financial institutions and the OAS to reject Cuba’s membership and restrict U.S. payments to institutions that support Cuba; affirmed that the president must determine that a “Transition Government” (without the Castro brothers) is in place in Cuba before sanctions are lifted; allowed U.S. citizens to sue Havana government for profits made from use of confiscated property previously owned by U.S. citizens; denied visas to enter U.S. for persons

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<sup>192</sup> Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995, Pub. L. No. 10-236, § 526 108 Stat. 382, p. 475. Available at: <https://www.congress.gov/103/statute/STATUTE-108/STATUTE-108-Pg382.pdf>

involved in U.S. property in Cuba. The law was controversial because it extended U.S. sanctions originally imposed on the island to other countries (including U.S. allies) that trade with Cuba. Some countries such as Canada and Mexico passed legislation to counter the law<sup>193</sup>, and the European Union also opposed it. The U.S. government required its European allies to adopt Congressional decisions on Cuba (and Libya) as if they had actually been made by a supranational legislature<sup>194</sup>. It was the first time that much of the international community protested the extraterritorial nature of the new law, which de facto extended U.S. sanctions to countries that traded with Cuba. It was inevitable that in a world dominated by free trade, a legal instrument designed to disrupt the flow of goods and investment would be condemned. *Helms-Burton's* proponents themselves soon realized the damage it was doing to the newly formed World Trade Organization and, in the case of Canada and Mexico, to NAFTA. Subsequent amendments modified and reduced the scope and stringency of the bill's provisions. In 1998, the *Omnibus Appropriations Act*<sup>195</sup> was passed: trademarks that had been abandoned by their original owners due to seizure by the Cuban government could not be renewed or registered in the United States. Finally, in 2000, the *Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act*<sup>196</sup>, signed by President Clinton, eased unilateral sanctions on several countries – such as Cuba – to allow conditional sales of food, medicine and medical equipment. However, export financing for this trade is prohibited, which negates the law's effect due to Cuba's lack of hard currency and debt.

### 2.3.2 Some brief conclusions: the legacy of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War, the diminution of Cuba as a strategic threat to the United States, and the transition to legislation as the legal basis for the embargo have meant that U.S. policy toward Cuba has become a matter of domestic politics and law rather than international politics and law<sup>197</sup>. *Helms-Burton* 1996 had the effect that the embargo could no longer be suspended or ended without congressional approval. This could only happen if the President proposed an end to the embargo, which, according to the law, could only happen after the election of a democratic government in Cuba that did not include Raúl or Fidel Castro. The introduction of *Helms-Burton* free trade arguments, combined with falling international commodity markets, emboldened the U.S. agricultural lobby, which was looking for new markets and strongly advocated ending the embargo. However, Florida's

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<sup>193</sup> Cuba also developed its own legislation to counter *Helms-Burton* extraterritoriality: Act 80, "Reaffirmation of Cuban Dignity and Sovereignty Law", which required the government to do whatever was necessary to protect all foreign investment in Cuba.

<sup>194</sup> Fabbrini S. (2008), *America and its Critics: Virtues and Vices of the Democratic Hyperpower*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 159.

<sup>195</sup> Public law 105–277—OCT. 21, 1998. Available at: [PLAW-105publ277.pdf \(congress.gov\)](https://www.congress.gov/plaws/publ/277/PLAW-105publ277.pdf)

<sup>196</sup> Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000 (TSRA) Program Information. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/ofac-license-application-page/trade-sanctions-reform-and-export-enhancement-act-of-2000-tsra-program/trade-sanctions-reform-and-export-enhancement-act-of-2000-tsra-program-information>

<sup>197</sup> White, N. D. (2015). *Op. cit.* p. 112

prominence in U.S. presidential elections beginning in 2000 meant that the Cuban American community would continue to exert a disproportionate influence on U.S. policy toward Cuba, which at its core included the embargo. Thus, after 2001, President G.W. Bush's administration raised expectations that the embargo would be tightened as a political reward for Cuban American voter support in Florida, a tightening that would include repeal of the Title III exemption and enforcement of Title IV of *Helms-Burton*.

Protests against the embargo did not die down, however, and found a prestigious stage in the General Assembly of UN, which has passed a resolution condemning the blockade and calling for its end every year since 1992, with the sole exception of 2020 due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions<sup>198</sup>. The last<sup>199</sup> vote took place on 9 June 2021, when a total of 184 countries voted in favour of the resolution, the 29th year in a row. Only the U.S. and Israel voted against, confirming the international community's solid position against U.S. action. Three countries abstained (Colombia, Ukraine and Brazil).

In this process of normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba, the succession of political leaders in the two countries has played a very important – if not indispensable – role. Barack Obama on the one side and Raul Castro on the other, opened the dialogue, which culminated on December 17, 2014 with a joint declaration on the end of hostilities.

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<sup>198</sup> UN General Assembly calls for US to end Cuba embargo for 29th. (2021, June 26). UN News. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/06/1094612>. “While the Assembly's vote carries political weight in terms of international diplomacy, only the U.S. Congress can lift the economic, commercial, and financial embargo in place for five decades”.

<sup>199</sup> UNGA, Cuba: draft resolution. *Necessity of ending the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the United States of America against Cuba*. Available at: <https://undocs.org/en/A/75/L.97>

## CHAPTER THREE - Attempts at normalization

### *Introduction*

In the process of normalizing relations between the United States and Cuba, the succession of political leaders in the two countries has played a very important – if not indispensable – role. Barack Obama on the one hand and Raúl Castro on the other initiated this process, which culminated on December 17, 2014. The presidents announced that their two countries would resume diplomatic relations, and since that moment, a full normalization was to develop, an intention that Obama had expressed as early as 2009: «The United States seeks a new beginning with Cuba», although he acknowledged at the opening ceremony of the Summit of the Americas that «there's a longer journey to overcome decades of mistrust»<sup>200</sup>. Normalization, however, was to prove far more complicated than it first appeared. While Obama was running for the White House, a new presidency was also beginning in Cuba. In 2006, the ailing Fidel Castro retired from the exercise of power and handed it over to his brother Raúl, who succeeded him in 2008 and became official president. Both began a new policy of openness. Obama relaxed the repressive measures of the embargo and increased people-to-people exchanges and contacts in the hope of strengthening democratic freedoms and human rights; Raúl reformed and liberalized the island's economy, which had been controlled by the state since the 1960s.

Obama's foreign policy initiatives have been harshly attacked for their lack of strategic value and coherence, but his actions in Cuba were pure realism. An honest examination of the embargo on Cuba would offer little achievements and maybe solid arguments that it has been detrimental in attaining a more equitable and democratic government in the island country. Because of free market involvement, almost all previously communist countries have abandoned communist economic policy. This has often resulted in democratised societies and increased freedom across the globe. Sanctions imposed on Cuba have hindered the Cuban people from witnessing and comprehending the advantages of liberalised economic policies and free societies. If the president can persuade Congress to abolish the embargo completely, the tourist sector may grow, benefiting both consumers and companies in the United States and Cuba.

Normalization of relations benefited all sides, and an end to the embargo would benefit all parties much more. Trade flows between Cuba and the U.S. would boost industry, manufacturing, agricultural exports, and international diplomacy.

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<sup>200</sup> B. Obama, (2009). "Remarks by the President at the Summit of the Americas Opening Ceremony". Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-presidentsummit-americas-opening-ceremony>



## 3.1 Barack Obama vs. Raúl Castro

### 3.1.1 Obama's foreign policy

U.S. foreign policy has changed profoundly since the beginning of the term of Barack Obama in 2009. In fact, Obama launched his presidential campaign in 2008 by proposing a major transformation in its direction<sup>201</sup>. He pledged to question and modify the reflexive attitudes and obsolete dogmas that had dictated previous administrations' policies, from efforts to control the world to ill-conceived attempts at nation-building in remote countries that have never been a priority to the U.S. Restoring strategic solvency was fundamental to Obama in order to allow for more effective American engagement where he considered it was most needed. Overarching goals included shifting the focus of United States military and economic attention from the Middle East to a more active Asia-Pacific area. For the first time since the Cold War's final years, America's focus has shifted away from Europe's economic and security advancements. The new president vowed to go back to policies more in accordance with American ideals and the U.S. Constitution as well as to abandon "un-American" practices like torture. Obama made these promises with a newfound realist outlook on the world. However, he made it clear that he had no intention of limiting the president's authority<sup>202</sup>: Obama had worked to harness the authority of the contemporary president, not to undermine it. His belief was that he could alter the substance of American foreign policy without disrupting its operational organization.

*Status of Forces Agreement* (SOFA) signed by George W. Bush about a month before Obama's inauguration outlined the timetable for the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq in January of that year. To meet the deadline of December 2011, all American troops were to be withdrawn. On the contrary, the doubling of U.S. personnel in Afghanistan was a significant shift but not unexpected<sup>203</sup>. During the campaign, Obama had consistently emphasized the importance of this struggle (as opposed to Iraq) in the United States' worldwide war on terrorism and pledged to devote more resources to the combat in Afghanistan than his Republican predecessor had. However, neither the president nor most Americans expected to see U.S. troop levels in Iraq and Afghanistan remain at the unsustainable levels he had inherited for as long as they did, as a net effect of the simultaneous Iraq draw-down and Afghan build-up. «I don't want to just end the war, but I want to end the mindset that got us into war in the first place»<sup>204</sup>, he said during a Democratic primary debate in January 2008. I

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<sup>201</sup> Unger, D. (2016). The Foreign Policy Legacy of Barack Obama. *The International Spectator*, 51(4), 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2016.1227914>; <https://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/unger.pdf>

<sup>202</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>204</sup> CNN. (2008, January 31). *Transcript of Thursday's Democratic presidential debate - CNN.com*. CNN Politics. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/01/31/dem.debate.transcript/>

April 2009, President Obama pledged in Prague «America’s commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons»<sup>205</sup>. To match Washington’s persistently overambitious policy aims and constrained military and budgetary resources, Obama vowed a more solvent approach to national security. More crucially, Obama said he would strive to logically analyse where key U.S. security interests were actually at risk and where they were not, and where the U.S. should engage militarily and where it should not. He promised, among other things, a reconsideration of the U.S. global position given during the Cold War.

However, during his first two years in office, Obama’s strong two-house majority decreased: first in the House of Representatives (2010) and then in the Senate (2014). U.S. intelligence services underestimated the Arab Spring and the Islamic State’s long-term viability and global aspirations in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In addition, no one foresaw Bashir Assad’s five-year battle for control in the Syrian capital of Damascus. The post-Cold War international balance of power was rewritten by new nationalist leaders in China, Russia, India, and Japan. Overall, Obama’s foreign policy accomplishments were significant, notwithstanding his failure to achieve widespread change.

## ***Cuba***

The resignation of Fidel Castro in February 2008, with the consequential appointment of General Raúl Castro as President of the Cuban Councils of State and Ministries, came amid the presidential campaign in the United States. Obama showed a willingness to communicate from the beginning considering it a substantial turning point, indulged by Raúl Castro himself, who had expressed concern about the island’s economy and advocated for a shift in official attitude and mentality toward the so-called non-state sector. During the campaign, targeting the younger generation of Cuban Americans, Obama emphasized his commitment to allowing unrestricted family visits and remittances to Cuba, a stance that contrasted with those of Democrat Hillary Rodham Clinton and expected Republican candidate John McCain<sup>206</sup>. Obama sought to bet on an emerging dynamic among Cuban Americans. Hardliners demanding a comprehensive embargo against the Castro regime have traditionally controlled the expatriate Cuban vote, which is considered crucial to success in Florida. A candidate who strayed from their position risked losing the election. However, as younger Cuban Americans reach adulthood and elder Cuban Americans become unhappy with the embargo’s lack of progress, the community’s tone has shifted. Since the early 1960s, the embargo

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<sup>205</sup> Obama, B. (2009, April 5). *Remarks By President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered*. Whitehouse.Gov. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>

<sup>206</sup> Brown, C. B. (2008, May 23). *Obama’s Cuba, Latin America policy*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.com/story/2008/05/obamas-cuba-latin-america-policy-010591>

has limited who may travel to Cuba and what can be sent there, but new restrictions imposed in 2004 during the Bush era have made it much more difficult to visit and send presents to the communist island. «Now I know what the easy thing is to do for American politicians – affirmed Obama –. Every four years, they come down to Miami, they talk tough, they go back to Washington, and nothing changes in Cuba»<sup>207</sup>. On the contrary, McCain expressed his solidarity with the Cuban exile community during a speech in which he criticized Obama’s political approach and vowed to maintain the embargo until the country established the fundamental elements of a democratic society, including the unconditional release of all political prisoners, the legalization of all political parties, unions, and media, and the scheduling of elections<sup>208</sup>.

By speaking of peace with Cuba, Obama finally gained Florida Hispanic minority, i.e. 5% of the overall population at the time, and with them the whole state – historically the most important swing state along with Ohio and a typical Republican bastion since 1980 –, which effectively won him the presidential mandate<sup>209</sup>. To his desire for reconciliation, a precise internal political strategy was thus successfully added, evolved in comparison to the past owing to a variety of circumstances, including not just Cuba’s declared aspirations to modernize its economic model, but also a number of issues. Domestically, the growth in migratory flows, the fragmentation of American society, and, in foreign policy, the BRICS nations’ rising economic prominence, as well as the surge in wars from Iraq to Afghanistan to Syria and Libya<sup>210</sup>.

Cuban American exiles in Florida had driven U.S. policy for years, but when the Obama administration took office in 2009 it was resolved to change the tide toward positive engagement via executive action and direct discussions on establishing diplomatic relations, in order to appease Democratic Party activists who had long called for a thawing of tensions with Havana<sup>211</sup>. As Cuba started to open its doors to outside investment as part of its own internal process of economic and social reform to “perfect” the Cuban socialist system, prominent Cuban American business leaders also came out in favour of easing ties with the island. Obama was able to fulfil his campaign pledge to reduce restrictions on travel and remittances for Cuban Americans in early 2009 after winning over these constituencies. However, the U.S. President also expressed concern about the human rights situation and political prisoners in Cuba, as well as Venezuela’s aggressive statements towards the U.S. He repeated that the Cuban government must satisfy certain requirements in order to proceed with talks. These included the release of political prisoners and a reduction in the amounts the

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>209</sup> CFR.org Editors, *op. cit.*

<sup>210</sup> Cañedo, R. E., Domínguez, M. E., & Estrada, G. (2014). *De la confrontación a los intentos de “normalización”*. *La política de los Estados Unidos hacia Cuba (Ciencias Sociales) (Spanish Edition)*. Nuevo Milenio. pp. 398 - 400

<sup>211</sup> Piccone, T. (2017). U.S. - Cuba Normalization: U.S. Constituencies for Change. *IdeAs*, 10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4000/ideas.2107>; <https://journals.openedition.org/ideas/2107>

government deducts from funds sent back by Cuban Americans to family members on the island. Anyway, he said there were encouraging indicators<sup>212</sup>.

A broader coalition of stakeholders was needed to help implement and sustain the transition to a more flexible policy based on mutual respect and cooperation. After the first legislative set of modifications, a wide range of elites and the general public were interested in knowing more about Cuba, which put pressure on both the administration and Congress to further lessen the embargo<sup>213</sup>. Among the interest groups were:

- leaders in the fields of travel and tourism, hospitality, agriculture, health care, telecommunications and building construction;
- high-profile journalists and news organizations attempting to break into Cuba's tightly controlled media landscape;
- the Council on Foreign Relations, the Aspen Institute, Brookings Institution, Washington Office for Latin America, Ford Foundation, Atlantic Philanthropies, Americas Society/Council of Americas and other think tanks and civil society organizations;
- research-focused academics and colleges looking to provide more appealing study abroad options for their students;
- environmentalists who were enthralled by Cuba's comparatively unpolluted nature;
- religious organizations motivated by Popes John Paul I and II, Benedict, and Francis' vows to strengthen and unify the Cuban family, as well as Cubans' renewed religiosity;
- authorities from the military and law enforcement who sought to collaborate with Cuban security forces to safeguard U.S. borders from contraband and migrants;
- Americans and other nations' ambassadors who had seen first-hand how the U.S. embargo helped the Castros mobilize national and worldwide support against the "imperialist Yankees";
- the Cuban cultural scene had long been a draw for artists, musicians, and institutions<sup>214</sup>.

While these groups benefited from the Obama administration's first steps to remove travel restrictions, they were handicapped by the huge expenses and red tape associated with a system suffocated by thousands of regulations and micromanagement on both sides of the Florida Straits. Their attempts were impeded further when Cuba arrested Alan Gross<sup>215</sup>.

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<sup>212</sup> Lee, C. E. (2009, April 19). *Obama's new Cuba policy*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2009/04/obamas-new-cuba-policy-021413>

<sup>213</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>214</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>215</sup> *Ibidem*. See Paragraph 3.1.3

### 3.1.2 Raúl Castro's foreign policy

It was Raúl Castro's election as Fidel's successor in February 2008 that officially kicked off the process of normalization. Cuba's National Assembly elected Raúl as president in 2008, after Fidel's announcement that he would not be returning to government, and he served two five-year terms until April 2018. Fidel Castro died in November 2016 at the age of 90, more than a decade after he stepped down from office. He contributed with writings for the Cuban press that threw doubt on Raúl's administration, pushing the party's "hard liners" and government bureaucrats to stall Raúl's economic reforms<sup>216</sup>. The transition at the top of the state apparatus, in fact, signalled the start of an internal reform process that dramatically altered and continues to alter the face of the island.

Two key policy changes occurred during Raúl Castro's leadership. First, initial market-oriented economic policy measures included allowing for limited private sector activity, legalizing property rights, and widening the door to foreign investment to a limited extent. Some argue that the government did not go far enough in implementing measures that would help the Cuban economy flourish and provide long-term stability. Second, there was the re-establishment of diplomatic connections and government-to-government interaction and collaboration on a broad variety of topics with the Obama administration.<sup>217</sup> The new order established on the island was a mixture of public and private, in which various forms of production, ownership and investment coexisted alongside a simpler welfare system and greater personal freedom, with state enterprises run by the military in strategic sectors of the economy and the one-party system<sup>218</sup>. This urge for modernization was confirmed by Raúl Castro's statements in 2010: «Either we reform, or we perish».<sup>219</sup>

Migration was one of the sectors most impacted by the wave of changes, with the major emphasis being on facilitating international travel. In fact, this was a particularly regulated and highly bureaucratized area: owing to the post-revolution outflow of trained labour and capital, the government intervened actively in restricting the movement of its own people from the 1960s forward. The continuous involvement of exiles in the regime's subversive efforts in the United States was deemed a concern of national security. Until recently, leaving the nation required special authorization from the government, particularly for highly controlled categories such as doctors, sportsmen, and scientists<sup>220</sup>. The maximum term of a Cuban's lawful stay abroad had also been

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<sup>216</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Cuba: U.S. Policy in the 116th Congress and Through the Trump Administration* (No. R45657). Congressional Research Service, p. 4. Available at: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R45657.pdf>

<sup>217</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>218</sup> Sweig, J. E., & Bustamante, M. J. (2013). Cuba After Communism: The Economic Reforms That Are Transforming the Island. *Foreign Affairs*, 92(4), 101–114, p. 101. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23526911>.

<sup>219</sup> Voss, B. M. (2010, December 19). *Raul Castro says Cubans must back economic reforms*. BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-12029873>

<sup>220</sup> Hufbauer, G. C., & Kotschwar, B. (2014). *Economic Normalization with Cuba: a Roadmap for U.S. Policymakers*. Peterson Institute for International Economics, p.21.

increased to two years, from eleven months earlier, after which there was a danger of losing one's bank account, housing, or employment. Flights of Cubans to and from Miami to visit family members expanded dramatically as a result of Havana's and the United States' less restrictive migration policies – Obama lifted restrictions on family visits in 2009.

The ultimate purpose of this new migration strategy was to stimulate the economy while also making it simpler for Cubans to travel, work abroad, and return home. Remittances have played a crucial role in protecting the Cuban economy from going into chronic decline since the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the government had gradually expanded small enterprise, connections between the island and the diaspora had delivered much larger effects than just transferring money to augment meagre government wages. Today, Cubans living abroad assist their relatives and friends by investing in the tiny enterprises sprouting up all over the island. Islanders, on the other hand, transfer money outside so that their loved ones may purchase them consumer products that are not accessible in Cuba. In addition to remittances and assistance in starting small firms, the island needed medium and big investors above all, since greater spending was the only way to repair the Cuban economy's fundamental problem: its depleted production base. Raúl Castro recognized this necessity and, as a result, undertook the essential changes for decentralization, increased growth of the private sector, and foreign investment attractiveness.

It is evident how the political turnover in both countries was a fundamental condition for the opening of a dialogue. According to Loris Zanatta:

It would have been considerably more difficult with Fidel in power. Indeed, there was a time during the Carter and Clinton administrations when the U.S. attempted to fix the matter, but circumstances always precluded agreement. It is impossible for a leader who has built his career on this settlement – he was the only leader who was not defeated by the U.S., and his legacy is founded on this conflict – to settle things simply. Fidel Castro's political capital stems from his effective resistance to the United States. To negotiate was like to erasing everything of his prior political history. Raúl, on the other hand, has shown a solid political realism. In the problem with political detainees in 2010, for example, he accepted mediation by the Church.

From the standpoint of the United States, Cuba had become much less relevant since the conclusion of the Cold War and the *guerrillas* in Latin America, and since Latin America has moved closer to democratic systems. It was no longer a threat from the past, but a failing, impoverished state. A nation that people were leaving. Consider Venezuela's Chavez, a Castro disciple. He could not set up a Castroist regime, therefore he had to rely on elections in a new setting. The United States' openness was logical. After so many years, this isolationist approach toward Cuba had accomplished nothing, and the Cuban danger was vanished. Obama's approach was founded on common sense, on the understanding that regimes like the Cuban one can either fall via an external conflict – which no one wanted to start – or by an internal collapse caused by openness: more commerce, more interchange,

more knowledge. However, because of its liberal Anglo-Saxon Protestant mentality, the United States has never understood that the Hispanic Christian tradition, as well as the nature of the political and social order and values associated with it, are complicated, and that the Cuban regime, by its very nature, is perceived not as a kind of sacred, i.e. immutable, order, but as a kind of earthly representation of the divine order. As a result, the United States' realistic optimism that Raúl Castro would launch a genuine process of reform in Cuba in exchange for this strategy of openness was unfounded. So much so that for 40 years they had asked Fidel Castro when the transition would begin in Cuba, and Fidel had answered that the revolution had been the transition in his opinion<sup>221</sup>.

### Talking about the embargo he pointed out:

It was expected that the next step in Obama's policy of détente would be the lifting of the embargo. However, for this to happen, the U.S. Congress must agree. What has Cuba done in response to Obama's policy of détente to get Congress to lift the embargo? Nothing. Because Cuba has always believed that it did not have to concede anything: the embargo had to be lifted unilaterally. Indeed, many forget how the embargo came about in 1961. Fidel Castro expropriated – he said “nationalised” – all the assets of American citizens in Cuba (more than a billion dollars at the time), huge sums. He proposed compensation, but that was not enough. That is one side. On the other side, Fidel said it many, many times: the Cuban regime needs the embargo. The revolution needs the enemy. After all, the enmity of the United States is the guarantor and security for Cuba. Because if the entire anti-American and anti-liberal world protects and defends Cuba, it is by definition thanks to its anti-Americanism. Cuba that makes peace with the United States is no longer Cuba, it is no longer a symbol.

The only two times in history when the embargo was almost lifted under Carter and Clinton were the Cubans themselves who forced the United States to relent. In Carter's time, they sent 400,000 troops to Angola to fight for a Marxist-Leninist regime allied with the USSR. In Clinton's time, negotiations were delayed, but Castro ordered the Cuban air force to shoot down two planes of the *hermanos al rescate* – civilian aircraft helping Cubans trying to flee the island and reach the Florida coast – blocking any negotiations on the embargo.

The embargo has been a fig leaf almost since the 1980s, maybe even since the 1970s. Today, no one but the U.S. abides by the embargo and the island can trade with anyone in the world. The U.S. is Cuba's fourth largest trading partner because they can exchange food and medicine. The problem is that they demand that Cuba pay, but Cuba is not a good payer because its economic system produces nothing. The three million Cubans abroad produce infinitely more than the 11 million Cubans at home, so the country is poor. I would lift the embargo tomorrow because it is a blatant form of geopolitical self-harm by the U.S. Nobody in the world supports the sensibility of the embargo<sup>222</sup>.

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<sup>221</sup> Author's interview with Prof. Loris Zanatta, Full Professor of Latin American History in the Department of Political and Social Sciences at the University of Bologna, October 22, 2021.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibidem*

### 3.1.3 Alan Gross and the normalization: “Change is going to happen here”

The trigger for the thaw was the release of the American contractor Alan Gross by the Cuban authorities. He had been hired by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and sentenced in December 2009 to fifteen years in prison for “actions against the territorial integrity of the State” (or espionage). Washington’s version is that he was actually just trying to provide Cuba’s Jewish community with the know-how to circumvent internet censorship. The Gross case overlapped with that of the so-called “Cuban Five”, five agents of the Cuban secret service who were arrested in Miami in 1998. There were fierce disputes in Washington between proponents of an open approach and others who advocated a harsh position to overthrow the government. The second group was driven by hard-nosed economic and political reality rather than benevolence<sup>223</sup>. When Cuba opened up to international investment, several American businesses and investors expressed interest. And, according to Obama, «the notion that the same policies that we put in place in 1961 would somehow still be as effective as they are today in the age of the Internet and Google and world travel doesn’t make sense»<sup>224</sup>.

Finally, thanks to Pope Francis’ involvement – after a year and a half of secret negotiations<sup>225</sup> –, the two presidents were able to negotiate the release of Gross and an imprisoned U.S. intelligence officer in return for the five Cuban spies, marking the start of a new era in diplomatic ties.



*Figure 3.1 – Alan Gross embraces Tim Rieser, a member of Senator Patrick Leahy’s office, on the tarmac as he disembarks from a U.S. government plane with wife Judy at Joint Base Andrews in Maryland outside Washington / Independent.ie*

On December 17, 2014 (also known as D17 or 17D), President Obama and President Raúl Castro unveiled a proposal to normalize relations between the two nations, which had been broken

<sup>223</sup> Vagnoux, I., & Habel, J. (2017). *Op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>224</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>225</sup> Del Pero, M. (2017). *Era Obama*. Feltrinelli, p. 146



since 1961. Along with this decision, President Obama announced that he would remove Cuba off the list of terrorist-supporting countries and expand travel, commerce volume, and information flow to the island. With the lawmakers sent to pick up Gross in Cuba, Jeff Flake<sup>226</sup>, Republican congressman, was an obvious option for National Security Adviser Susan Rice to invite to join the two Democrats aboard – Rep. Chris Van Hollen and Sen. Pat Leah –, in order to make the event bipartisan<sup>227</sup>. According to Hillary Clinton, at the time former Secretary of State and likely Democratic presidential frontrunner in 2016: «Despite good intentions, our decades-long policy of isolation has only strengthened the Castro regime’s grip on power. As I have said, the best way to bring change to Cuba is to expose its people to the values, information, and material comforts of the outside world. The goal of increased U.S. engagement in the days and years ahead should be to encourage real and lasting reforms for the Cuban people. And the other nations of the Americas should join us in this effort».<sup>228</sup>

In April 2015, Washington consented to Cuban participation in the OAS VII Summit of the Americas – the region’s first gathering of leaders of state and government –, and the two leaders met for the first time in Panama. It was also the first time since 1962 that Cuba was permitted to participate in an OAS Summit and reintegrate into the inter-American dynamic. Many political dissidents were released, and the economic liberalization prompted new trade contacts and investment. After decades of retreat, diplomatic ties with Cuba were formally restored on July 20, 2015, when the U.S. Embassy in Havana and the Cuban Embassy in Washington, D.C. reopened. On August 14, 2015, John Kerry travelled to Havana with a high-level legislative, commercial, and Cuban delegation to witness the ceremonial opening of the U.S. Embassy. He was the first Secretary of State from the United States to visit Cuba in 70 years. Moreover, the Treasury and Commerce Departments revised the CACR and the EAR, respectively, to reduce restrictions on travel, remittances, trade, telecommunications, and banking and financial services, as part of the actions taken to promote travel, commerce, and information flow to Cuba. It was also allowed for some U.S. firms or other organizations to establish

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<sup>226</sup> When it came to Cuba policy, the White House had traditionally depended on Jeff Flake to rally Republican support. According to a person familiar with the exchange, when Obama announced policy changes in 2011 that would enable Cuban Americans to travel more easily to the nation and send money to family, the White House encouraged Flake to express concern that the reforms did not go far enough. Flake’s support for a major shift in U.S. policy toward Cuba was consistent with what he had said and done in the past. He had signed legislation to prohibit the president from barring all Americans from visiting Cuba, and he had co-sponsored legislation to end the Cuban embargo with former Rep. Ron Paul (R-Texas). The Arizona Republican’s unconditional support for Obama’s policies had enraged many senior members of his own party, and that was not the first time Flake had found himself as a lone voice against the GOP establishment. His stance on Cuba set him against the Republican establishment, as well as some of the more liberal Republican members with whom Flake had found partners on issues like trade, privacy, and marijuana legalization. Flake also thought that as time went on, more Republicans would voice support for a gradual normalization of ties with Cuba. It would take time to change the long-held conservative position on the Cuba embargo – for decades, Cuban Americans have been loyal Republicans because of the party’s stance on the Castro regime. French, L. (2014, December 20). *Obama’s Republican ally on Cuba*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/12/jeff-flake-obama-cuba-113717>

<sup>227</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>228</sup> Parti, T. (2014, December 17). *Clinton backs Obama on Cuba*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/12/hillary-clinton-cuba-113661>

a physical presence in Cuba<sup>229</sup>. These actions were a precondition for a slew of other political, bureaucratic, and economic initiatives aimed at consolidating the growing constituency for change.

Finally, in March 2016, Obama became the first U.S. President to visit the island in over 90 years, after Calvin Coolidge (1928). His three-day visit to Cuba was an enormous political success: he met Raúl Castro, watched a baseball game between the Cuban national team and the Tampa Bay Rays, walked with his family through Old Havana amid a festive crowd, and met some political dissidents. In a press conference, the two presidents talked about human rights, the economic embargo (according to Obama, it should be ended because after fifty years it had served neither the interests of the United States nor those of the Cuban people). President Obama affirmed in that occasion that the United States would «continue to speak up on behalf of democracy, including the right of the Cuban people to decide their own future».<sup>230</sup> Speaking to the Cuban people through television, Obama advocated again for human rights and said that individuals should be free to express themselves without fear and that the rule of law does not include arbitrary detentions<sup>231</sup>. The President issued a policy order in October 2016 aimed at normalizing ties with Cuba, which outlined six medium-term goals, including: government-to-government interaction, engagement and connectivity, expanded trade, economic reform, and Cuba’s integration into regional and international systems<sup>232</sup>.



Figure 3.2 – A poster features portraits of Cuba’s President Raul Castro, left, and President Barack Obama and reads in Spanish “Welcome to Cuba” outside a restaurant in Havana, Cuba, March 17, 2016 | Ramon Espinosa/AP Photo<sup>233</sup>

<sup>229</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>230</sup> Castro, R., Obama, B. (2016, March 21). *Remarks by President Obama and President Raúl Castro of Cuba in a Joint Press Conference*. Whitehouse.Gov. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/21/remarks-president-obama-and-president-raul-castro-cuba-joint-press>

<sup>231</sup> Obama, B. (2016, March 22). *Remarks by President Obama to the People of Cuba*. Whitehouse.Gov. Available at: <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/03/22/remarks-president-obama-people-Cuba>

<sup>232</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 2

<sup>233</sup> Saenz, S. M. A. A. (2016, March 20). *President Obama’s Trip to Cuba: What You Need to Know*. ABC News. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obamas-trip-cuba/story?id=37760340>

Right-wing critics were outraged, even if the Obama administration's delegation included some Republicans who backed normalization, namely Jeff Flake. Support came from all the representatives of the states that had an economic interest in the revival of relations between Cuba and the U.S., especially the possibility of exporting agricultural products. Most of the primary contenders, as well as the party's top officials, were opposed to the visit. A totalitarian dictatorship was given legitimacy by Obama's openness, according to Paul Ryan, the new Speaker of the House of Representatives elected in 2015<sup>234</sup>. To the Texas Senator and 2016 Republican presidential candidate Ted Cruz, it was «so sad, and so injurious to our future as well as Cuba's, that Obama has chosen to legitimize the corrupt and oppressive Castro regime with his presence on the island»<sup>235</sup>. In an opinion article for Politico, he wrote that the administration's actions had «[created] a channel for inside deals between large corporations and the Cuban military, which holds all the keys to the island's economy»<sup>236</sup>. Cuba relations are a personal matter for Cruz, whose father was born and raised in Cuba. The Texas senator often talks about his father Rafael's imprisonment during the Batista regime before Castro<sup>237</sup>. Marco Rubio, the other Cuban American senator running for the 2016 Republican nomination, reiterated that the visit was «one of the most disgraceful trips ever taken by a U.S. president»<sup>238</sup>.

On the contrary, public opinion seemed to support Obama. In a Gallup poll<sup>239</sup> of February 2016, a net majority had a positive opinion of Cuba – 54 to 40 with a 6% of undecided. There were partisan differences: 56% of Democrats viewed Cuba favourably, compared to just 36% of Republicans. Ten years before, the ratio was 21 to 71; in 1996 it was 10 to 81. Americans apparently shared the President's opinion, according to which refusing to open interactions with the island was at that point anachronistic.

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<sup>234</sup> Del Pero, M., *op. cit.*, p. 146

<sup>235</sup> Klein, B., Selsky, L. (2016, March 20). *Ted Cruz: "No mojitos" for Cuban political prisoners during Obama visit - CNNPolitics*. CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/03/20/politics/ted-cruz-cuba-barack-obama-political-prisoners/index.html>

<sup>236</sup> Cruz, T. (2016, March 20). *In Cuba, Obama Will Legitimize the Corrupt and Ignore the Oppressed*. POLITICO Magazine. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/03/obama-cuba-visit-ted-cruz-213749/>

<sup>237</sup> «I am the son of a Cuban who was beaten and tortured by Batista's regime, and my aunt was likewise brutalized by Castro's thugs. Thankfully, both my father and my Tía Sonia found freedom in the United States. That freedom can come to Cuba, and I pledge to work to make it so. But it cannot happen by enriching and empowering the dictatorship, while they export terrorism throughout Latin America. And it cannot happen by forgetting the heroism and suffering of the brave souls who have opposed the Castros for so many decades». *Ibidem*.

<sup>238</sup> Rousselle, C. (2016, March 20). *Townhall: Marco Rubio: Obama's Cuba Trip Is A Disgrace*. U.S. Senator for Florida, Marco Rubio. Available at: <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/3/townhall-marco-rubio-obama-s-cuba-trip-is-a-disgrace>

<sup>239</sup> Gallup, Inc. (2021, March 5). *Cuba | Gallup Historical Trends*. Gallup.Com. Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1630/cuba.aspx>

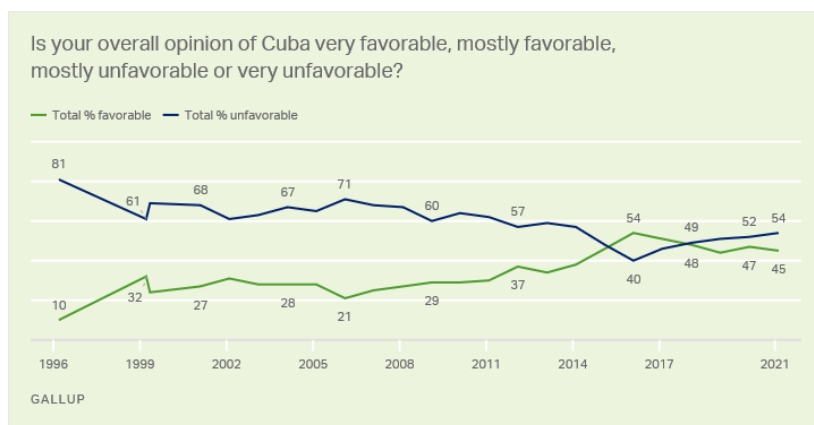


Figure 3.3 – Survey on U.S. citizens’ opinion about Cuba 1996-2021 | Gallup

In a New York Times/CBS News poll<sup>240</sup>, commissioned just before Obama’s trip (March 11-15, 2016), 58% of the interviewed was in favour of the opening and relaunch of diplomatic relations, even though there were not many expectations about the positive effect of a political impact on Cuba. Those opposed were the 25%. The percentages were very similar when talking about the end of the embargo, supported by 55% and contested by 27%. Especially, it was one of the only political issues with a convergence within the electors of the two parties, or, at least, a minor polarisation. Also, the majority of the Republicans interviewed supported Obama’s initiative (44 to 42%). According to Mario del Pero, Professor of International History and History of U.S. Foreign Policy at SciencesPo Paris, these data help understand the first of the three structural factors that facilitated Cuban openness: the relentless weakening of a significant opposition inside the United States. The political effect of the Cold War, that conditioned Washington’s attitude toward the Castroist regime, had disappeared. Moreover, the Cuban lobby that exerted a disproportionate weight on U.S. politics along the years – thanks to its concentration in a crucial state for presidential elections, Florida, where 70% of all the Cuban American population live – was extremely weakened too. The generational factor decisively influenced this trend, with the reduction of the weight of who abandoned Cuba after the Revolution of 1959 and the growth of who had arrived in the U.S. more recently (or who was born there). The latest had usually maintained contacts with their families on the island and had migrated for economic reasons rather than political ones<sup>241</sup>.

Finally, Congressional opinion was divided, with some members favouring and others opposing the reform. When it came to legislation, there were measures that would have relaxed

<sup>240</sup> Sussman, D. (2016, March 21). *Most Americans Support Ending Cuba Embargo, Times Poll Finds*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/international/obama-in-cuba/most-americans-support-ending-cuba-embargo-nyt-poll-finds>; CBS News. (2016, March 21). *CBS/NYT Poll: Majority of Americans support restoring U.S.-Cuba ties*. Available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/cbsnyt-poll-majority-of-americans-support-restoring-us-cuba-ties/>

<sup>241</sup> Del Pero, M. (2018). *Op. cit.*, p. 146. See Chapter 4.

sanctions and others that would have blocked them and imposed new ones; no action was taken on either policy approach in the 114th Congress, which was in session from 2015 to 2016<sup>242</sup>.

### **3.2 Donald Trump vs. Miguel Díaz-Canel: the obstacles towards a normalization**

#### **3.2.1 Trump's National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) on Cuba**

Fidel Castro's death and Donald Trump's election in 2016 revived disputes regarding U.S. policy toward Cuba. Trump kept his vows to undo most of the Obama administration's rapprochement with the island once he became president.

In a speech in Miami in June 2017, he announced his new policy approach to the island, signing a national security presidential memorandum (NSPM) on Cuba, which replaced President Obama's October 2016 presidential policy directive, setting out objectives for the normalization process<sup>243</sup>. During his statement, President Trump called on the Cuban regime to halt its persecution of dissidents, free political prisoners and stop imprisoning innocent people, apart from returning U.S. fugitives from justice in Cuba:

Last year, I promised to be a voice against repression in our region [...] and a voice for the freedom of the Cuban people. You heard that pledge. You exercised the right you have to vote. You went out and you voted. And here I am like I promised. [...] And now that I am your President, America will expose the crimes of the Castro regime and stand with the Cuban people in their struggle for freedom. Because we know it is best for America to have freedom in our hemisphere, whether in Cuba or Venezuela, and to have a future where the people of each country can live out their own dreams. For nearly six decades, the Cuban people have suffered under communist domination. To this day, Cuba is ruled by the same people who killed tens of thousands of their own citizens, who sought to spread their repressive and failed ideology throughout our hemisphere, and who once tried to host enemy nuclear weapons 90 miles from our shores.

The Castro regime has shipped arms to North Korea and fuelled chaos in Venezuela. While imprisoning innocents, it has harboured cop killers, hijackers, and terrorists. It has supported human trafficking, forced labour, and exploitation all around the globe. My administration will not hide from this truth, excuse it, or glamorize it. And we will never, ever be blind to it. We know what's going on and we remember what happened. [...] It's hard to think of a policy that makes less sense than the prior administration's terrible and misguided deal with the Castro regime. They made a deal with a government that spreads violence and instability in the region and nothing they got – think of it – nothing they got – they fought for everything, and we just didn't fight hard enough. But now those days are over. The previous administration's easing of restrictions on travel and trade does not help the

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<sup>242</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>243</sup> *Idem*, p. 24

Cuban people – they only enrich the Cuban regime. The profits from investment and tourism flow directly to the military. The regime takes the money and owns the industry. The outcome of the last administration’s executive action has been only more repression and a move to crush the peaceful, democratic movement. Therefore, effective immediately, I am cancelling the last administration’s completely one-sided deal with Cuba. [..]

Our policy will seek a much better deal for the Cuban people and for the United States of America. We do not want U.S. dollars to prop up a military monopoly that exploits and abuses the citizens of Cuba. Our new policy begins with strictly enforcing U.S. law. We will not lift sanctions on the Cuban regime until all political prisoners are freed, freedoms of assembly and expression are respected, all political parties are legalized, and free and internationally supervised elections are scheduled. We will very strongly restrict American dollars flowing to the military, security and intelligence services that are the core of Castro regime. We will enforce the ban on tourism. We will enforce the embargo. We will take concrete steps to ensure that investments flow directly to the people, so they can open private businesses and begin to build their country’s great, great future. [..]

My action today bypasses the military and the government, to help the Cuban people themselves form businesses and pursue much better lives. We will keep in place the safeguards to prevent Cubans from risking their lives to unlawful travel to the United States. They are in such danger the way they have to come to this country, and we are going to be safeguarding those people. And we will work for the day when a new generation of leaders brings this long reign of suffering to an end. And I do believe that end is in the very near future. We challenge Cuba to come to the table with a new agreement that is in the best interests of both their people and our people and also of Cuban Americans.

To the Cuban government, I say: Put an end to the abuse of dissidents. Release the political prisoners. Stop jailing innocent people. Open yourselves to political and economic freedoms. Return the fugitives from American justice. [..] And finally, hand over the Cuban military criminals who shot down and killed four brave members of Brothers to the Rescue who were in unarmed, small, slow civilian planes. Any changes to the relationship between the United States and Cuba will depend on real progress toward these and the other goals, many of which I’ve described. When Cuba is ready to take concrete steps to these ends, we will be ready, willing, and able to come to the table to negotiate that much better deal for Cubans, for Americans. Much better deal and a deal that’s fair. A deal that’s fair and a deal that makes sense<sup>244</sup>.

In the 2017-2018 Congress, reactions were varied, with legislative attempts reflecting the political rift between those who wanted sanctions increased and those who wanted them loosened. However, many of the Obama administration’s policy measures, such as normalizing diplomatic ties and easing sanctions to encourage travel to and business with Cuba, remained in effect – namely Obama’s decision to stop the so-called *wet foot/dry foot* policy for Cuban migrants<sup>245</sup>. As part of President Trump’s 2017 NSPM, he restricted financial dealings with enterprises owned by Cuban

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<sup>244</sup> Trump, D. (2017, June 16). *Remarks by President Trump on the Policy of the United States Toward Cuba*. Whitehouse.Gov. Available at: <https://uy.usembassy.gov/remarks-president-trump-policy-united-states-towards-cuba/>

<sup>245</sup> See paragraph 3.3.2

military, intelligence, or security service officials, as well as abolished people-to-people educational travel for individuals. The new policy was put into effect by Treasury and Commerce Department rules that were updated in November 2017<sup>246</sup>.

In 2017 and 2018, the U.S. and Cuban administrations continued to discuss a variety of bilateral topics via meetings and talks. Since 1995, the two countries conducted semi-annual migration meetings that continued between April and December 2017 and July 2018 to assess and coordinate their efforts to promote safe, legal, and orderly travel between the two nations<sup>247</sup>. Even after President Trump's inauguration in January, the United States and Cuba continued Bilateral Commission meetings that had been established during President Obama's administration. The sixth and seventh meetings of the Bilateral Commission were held in September 2017 and June 2018, respectively. For instance, the State Department reported that at a June 2018 meeting, the two countries discussed issues ranging from human trafficking to marine safety and search and rescue to certified claims; it expressed concerns about the arbitrary detention of independent journalists and human rights advocates and acknowledged Cuba's progress in repatriating those with final removal orders while also stressing that the country needed to accept greater numbers of returnees<sup>248</sup>. However, Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also criticized several aspects of U.S. policy, including the "intensification" of the embargo and the "political manipulation of the alleged health cases," which it said was used to reduce staff and thus affect embassy operations in both countries<sup>249</sup>. They continued to work on other bilateral matters throughout this time. In July 2017 and January 2018, the U.S. Coast Guard and the Cuban Border Guard conducted professional exchanges on a wide range of issues, including search and rescue. September 2017 and July 2018 law enforcement conversations between the U.S. Departments of State, Justice and Homeland Security with Cuban counterparts discussed fugitives and the repatriation of Cuban citizens with final removal orders. Furthermore, in 2018, bilateral meetings and exchanges took place on a variety of topics, including cybersecurity and cybercrime, counternarcotics and counterterrorism in January, anti-money laundering and human trafficking in February, search and rescue in March, as well as agriculture and scientific cooperation related to environmental disasters in April<sup>250</sup>.

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<sup>246</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury, "Cuban Assets Control Regulations," 82 Federal Register 51998-52004, November 9, 2017; and U.S. Department of Commerce, "Amendments to Implement United States Policy Toward Cuba," 82 Federal Register, 51983-51986, November 9, 2017.

<sup>247</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 24

<sup>248</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>249</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson. (2018, June 15). *United States and Cuba Hold Seventh Bilateral Commission Meeting* [Press release]. Available at: <https://cu.usembassy.gov/united-states-and-cuba-hold-seventh-bilateral-commission-meeting/>

<sup>250</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 25

The United Nations projected in 2018 that U.S. trade restrictions had cost Cuba more than \$130 billion since the embargo's introduction<sup>251</sup>. The same year, Raúl Castro's chosen successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, was inaugurated as president.

### 3.2.2 Trump's increased sanctions from 2019 to 2021; the troika of tyranny

To put pressure on Cuba's government – by targeting its sources of revenue such as tourism and Cuba's foreign medical missions – for its human rights record and backing for Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, the Trump administration sharply tightened economic sanctions in 2019.

Among other things, lawsuits were allowed against those dealing in property confiscated by the Cuban government, restrictions on U.S. travel and remittances to Cuba were tightened, an attempt was made to stop Venezuelan oil exports to Cuba, and the Cuban government was designated a state sponsor of international terrorism in January 2021<sup>252</sup>. According to a State Department official in January 2020:

The United States will cut off Cuba's remaining sources of revenue in response to its intervention in Venezuela. We've already eliminated visits to Cuba via passenger and recreational vehicles. We suspended U.S. air carriers' authority to operate scheduled air service between the U.S. and all Cuban airports other than Havana. This will further restrict the Cuban regime from using resources to support its repression of the people of Cuba. Countries in the region have also taken action regarding the Cuban Government's program which traffics thousands of Cuban doctors around the world in order to enrich the regime. Brazil insisted on paying the doctors directly at a fair wage. The Cuban regime in response withdrew the doctors from Brazil. Doctors have also now left Ecuador and Bolivia<sup>253</sup>.

National Security Adviser John Bolton delivered a speech in Miami (Florida) in November 2018: the first sign of a more aggressive policy approach toward Cuba. «We will only engage with a Cuban government that is willing to undertake necessary and tangible reforms – a government that respects the interests of the Cuban people»<sup>254</sup>. Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua were referred as a “troika of tyranny” – using anti-communist political rhetoric reminiscent of the Cold War – and the «cause of immense human suffering, the impetus of enormous regional instability, and the genesis of

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<sup>251</sup> Reuters Staff (2018, May 9). *U.S. trade embargo has cost Cuba \$130 billion, U.N. says*. U.S. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-cuba-economy-un/us-trade-embargo-has-cost-cuba-130-billion-un-says-idUSKBN1IA00T>

<sup>252</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 2

<sup>253</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson. (2020, January 8). *Senior State Department Official on State Department 2019 Successes in the Western Hemisphere Region*. Available at: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/senior-state-department-official-on-state-department-2019-successes-in-the-western-hemisphere-region/index.html>. Mentioned in Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. 2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, pp. 25-26

<sup>254</sup> Bolton, J. R. (2018, November 2). *Remarks by National Security Advisor Ambassador John R. Bolton on the Administration's Policies in Latin America*. Whitehouse.Gov. Available at: <https://usoas.usmission.gov/remarks-by-national-security-advisor-ambassador-john-r-bolton-on-the-administrations-policies-in-latin-america-foreign-policy/>



a sordid cradle of communism in the Western Hemisphere». Moreover, according to Bolton the Venezuelan regime's repression had been «enabled by the Cuban dictatorship». Because of Venezuela's worsening political situation and the United States' increasing sanctions on the Maduro government, the Trump administration had been more critical of Cuba's backing for the dictatorship. Unless Cuba ended its military assistance for Maduro's regime, President Trump warned a «full and complete embargo» on the island and «highest-level sanctions» in April 2019<sup>255</sup>.

U.S. sanctions imposed on Cuba from 2019 to January 2021 included a broad range of restrictions overturning some of the Obama administration softening as well as additional bans and constraints<sup>256</sup>. To make it easier for more people to visit Cuba, Obama issued blanket permits for all 12 types of lawful travel as well as easing other limitations. People-to-people educational travel were rescinded by Trump, requiring tourists to return to planned excursions. Air travel between the United States and Cuba was limited, cruise ship travel prohibited. By authorizing contracts with state-owned enterprises in travel, telecommunications, medicines, construction, agriculture, and consumer goods, Obama opened the Cuban market to U.S. corporations. But Trump merely restricted contracts with military-run Cuban businesses; even then, he did not block any existing or potential contracts in the port, airport, or telecommunications sectors, in which all but a small number of present-day American businesses engage. Remittances were restricted to family members, the category of “donative” remittances was abolished, and Western Union was forced to stop operating in Cuba as a consequence of new rules. As a result of other trade and financial restrictions, Cuba was denied access to commercial planes; third-party enterprises exporting items to the island with more than 10% U.S. origin were required to get a license to do so, and the usage of U-turn transactions was banned. Additionally, Cuban oil exports were targeted by sanctions. In accordance with the *Libertad Act*<sup>257</sup>, the Administration authorized litigation against anyone accused to be dealing in seized property in Cuba. Several high-ranking Cuban officials, including Raúl Castro, had their visas restricted as a result of human rights breaches.

### 3.2.3 Miguel Díaz-Canel and Cuban Constitutional changes

After Raúl Castro's second five-year term ended in April 2018, current president Miguel Díaz-Canel Bermúdez – a 60-year-old trained engineer – took office. Cuba does not hold direct presidential

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<sup>255</sup> Ordoñez, F. (2019, April 30). *Trump Threatens 'Full and Complete Embargo' against Cuba for Meddling in Venezuela*. Miami Herald. Available at: <https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article229875434.html>

<sup>256</sup> LeoGrande, W. (2021, February 13). *Perspectives on U.S.-Cuba Relations Under Trump*. AULA Blog. Available at: <http://www.cries.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/013-LeoGrande.pdf>

<sup>257</sup> Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act of 1996 (Codified in Title 22, Sections 6021-6091 of the U.S. Code) P.L. 104-114, One Hundred Fourth Congress of the United States of America. Available at: <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/126/libertad.pdf>

elections. Instead, the National Assembly of People's Power chose Díaz-Canel as president of the then 31-member Council of State, making him the country's head of state and government under the 1976 Cuban Constitution (Article 74)<sup>258</sup>. Raúl continued in his position as first secretary of the PCC until April 19, 2021.

In 2013, Díaz-Canel was appointed first vice president, making him the recognized constitutional successor in the event that Castro died or was unable to perform his responsibilities. His nomination also marked a step toward generational transition in Cuba's political system; Raúl Castro had stood down as president at the age of 86. Díaz-Canel joined the Politburo (the PCC's highest decision-making body) in 2003, held senior PCC posts in two provinces, and served as higher education minister from 2009 until 2012, when he was appointed to the Council of State as vice president. The 2018 political transition in Cuba was important because for the first time since the 1959 Cuban revolution the government was not led by a Castro. The Castros had ruled Cuba for 50 years, and the majority of Cubans had only known life under their rule. It was also the first time that Cuba's president was not the PCC's leader (until April 2021)<sup>259</sup>.

The former 31-member Council of State's membership was reshuffled as part of the 2018 transition. Salvatore Valdés Mesa, 72, was chosen as first vice president by the National Assembly. Not from the younger generation, but neither from the revolutionary time, Valdés Mesa is a member of the PCC Politburo and a former vice-president, is the first Afro-Cuban to occupy a prominent administration position. Ramiro Valdés, the 86-year-old vice-president of the council, was one of many senior leaders who remained on the council; however, 77% members were born after the Revolution in 1959, with a median age of 54<sup>260</sup>.

In December 2018, Díaz-Canel took a series of choices that seemed to show his independence from the Castro regime as well as his willingness to listen to public concerns and criticism. He eased off on upcoming severe requirements for the private sector, which many observers believed would have resulted in the sector shrinking. After the public slammed a proposed constitutional change that would have allowed same-sex marriage, his administration dropped the proposal. In a third action, the administration decided not to fully enforce the contentious Decree 349, which was published in July 2018 and aimed to limit creative expression. Following a barrage of protest from Cuba's cultural community, the government said that the order would be phased in over time and by agreement.

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<sup>258</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 4

<sup>259</sup> Faiola, A. (2018, April 19). *Castros' successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, takes over in Cuba, pledges 'continuity.'* Washington Post. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the\\_americas/castros-successor-miguel-diaz-canel-takes-over-in-cuba-pledges-continuity/2018/04/19/06790d94-418b-11e8-b2dc-b0a403e4720a\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/castros-successor-miguel-diaz-canel-takes-over-in-cuba-pledges-continuity/2018/04/19/06790d94-418b-11e8-b2dc-b0a403e4720a_story.html). Mentioned in Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. 2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 5

<sup>260</sup> LeoGrande, W. M. (2018, April 24). *Cuba's New Generation Takes the Helm With an Immediate Test: the Economy.* World Politics Review. Available at: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/24603/cuba-s-new-generation-takes-the-helm-with-an-immediate-test-the-economy>. Mentioned in Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P., *op. cit.*, p. 5

Nonetheless, as the government proceeded to tighten down on creative expression in 2019 and 2020, criticism to Decree 349 grew.

A large majority (including those in critical ministries like defence, interior, and international relations) of President Díaz-Canel new Council of Ministers were Castro regime holdovers when they were nominated in July 2018. However, there were nine new ministers and two new vice presidents among the 26. Díaz-Canel replaced the previous government's finance and transportation ministers in January 2019<sup>261</sup>.

In a countrywide referendum held on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2018, over 87% of Cubans voted in favour of a new constitution. It was the first time in 43 years that the Cuban people could express support or opposition to a plan that radically rebuilt sections of the Cuban economy and political system. After the National Assembly adopted the modification of the 1976 Constitution in July, thousands of workplaces and community assemblies around the country had public debates on the issue. In December 2018, the National Assembly revised the draft constitution and ratified a new version, after popular feedback, which came into effect in April 2019.



*Figure 3.4 – The Cuban authorities actively lobbied for the adoption of a new constitution. Ratification drives dominated radio and television programming, and billboards proclaiming “Yo Voto Sí” adorned the streets of Cuba | Yamil Lage/Agence France-Presse/Getty Images*

Art. 140-141 stipulates that the President shall propose, and the National Assembly must designate the prime minister as head of government; art. 126-127 limits the presidential mandate to two five-year terms – as in parliamentary systems – and sets an age restriction of 60 years for the

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<sup>261</sup> *Ibidem*

commencement of the first term. Even while art. 22 defines the right to private property and art. 28 acknowledge the importance of foreign investment in the country's economic growth, art. 19 guarantee the state's grip on the economy and centralized planning. Finally, the Communist Party remains the only one to be recognised at art. 5<sup>262</sup>.

The new text contains several important changes to Cuba's conventional economic and political paradigm. In addition, the drafting of the constitution involved a relatively extensive consultation process with citizens, which even led to changes in the final document, indicating that the Cuban government's gradual reform process will continue. For example, the new constitution prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, guarantees women's sexual and reproductive rights and protects them from gender-based violence, establishes the presumption of innocence in criminal proceedings and the right to habeas corpus, strengthens the authority of local governments and allows dual citizenship. The amendments are clearly substantive. They reflect and accelerate the process of economic reform, improve the protection of citizens and increase the transparency of the political process. Even if they are not as revolutionary as some had expected, they should not be dismissed as worthless or superficial.

### 3.3 Migration issues

Fundamental to understanding the internal differences within the Cuban minority in the United States when it comes to voting for the Republicans or the Democrats in the presidential election is the migratory history of the Cuban people, the period in which a person emigrated to the U.S. or, if born there, their generation.

#### 3.3.1 The Cuban Adjustment Act<sup>263</sup> and the Mariel boatlift

The strong U.S. foreign stance towards Cuba's communist state resulted in preferential treatment for Cubans under U.S. immigration policy from 1959 until recently. After the passing of the *Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act)*<sup>264</sup>, Cuban immigrants started arriving in large numbers in the United States. Immigrants from the Western Hemisphere were limited to

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<sup>262</sup> *Constitución de la República de Cuba*, Gaceta Oficial de la República de Cuba. (April 10, 2019). <https://www.gacetaoficial.gob.cu/es/constitucion-de-la-republica-de-cuba-proclamada-el-10-de-abril-de-2019>

<sup>263</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>264</sup> The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 (or Immigration and Naturalization Act – INA), repealed the policy of barring immigration based on national origin. Instead, the United States Congress “erected a legal framework that prioritized highly skilled immigrants and opened the door for people with family already living in the United States”. Latin American Program, Correa-Cabrera, G., & Spagat, E. (2020, October). *U.S. immigration policy for Cubans: from Revolution to Covid-19*. Wilson Center, p. 1. Available at: [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/FINAL%20U.S.%20IMMIGRATION%20POLICY%20FOR%20CUBANS-%20FROM%20REVOLUTION%20TO%20COVID-19\\_0.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/FINAL%20U.S.%20IMMIGRATION%20POLICY%20FOR%20CUBANS-%20FROM%20REVOLUTION%20TO%20COVID-19_0.pdf)

120,000 visas under this regulation<sup>265</sup>. In response to the rising number of Cubans and other people from the Western Hemisphere who were given permanent resident status in the United States, a waiting list formed. The *Cuban Adjustment Act* (CAA; adopted in 1966) “allows Cuban natives or citizens living in the United States, who meet certain eligibility requirements, to apply to become lawful permanent residents”, in an effort to lessen the backlog. Anyone who came to the United States lawfully after January 1, 1959 and has remained in the nation for a period of one year or more is covered under the CAA<sup>266</sup>. There were no restrictions on the number of applicants, and the only requirement was that they be Cuban. Cuban migration to the United States soared as a result of this shift in policy creating a problem: it was not clear if the Hart-Celler Act’s new quota system applied for these Cubans or not. As a result, the United States was restricting the amount of visas available to other Western Hemisphere immigrants by allocating visa numbers under the Western Hemisphere immigration quota to Cubans. According to the former director of the U.S. Interests Section in Cuba from 2011 to 2014, John P. Caulfield: “this affected everyone else from the Western Hemisphere, because it wasn’t ‘first come, first served’. The Cubans came first, and then everyone else”<sup>267</sup>. In the end, a majority of the judges on the panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit concluded in 1979 that the visa numbers used for Cubans should be reinstated in the Western Hemisphere quota, guaranteeing that increased volumes of Cuban immigrants entering under the new CAA would not have an impact on Western Hemisphere immigration.

With the start of the Johnson administration (1963-1969), any Cuban citizens who landed in the United States, even those who came by sea, were permitted to stay. This changed in 1980, when Fidel Castro stated that any Cubans intending to travel to the U.S. must board at the port of Mariel, west of Havana. Shortly thereafter, a massive naval exodus began, organised by Americans of Cuban origin with the authorisation of Castro, which took place between 15 April and 31 October. However, the exodus began to have negative political repercussions for then United States President Jimmy Carter when it was discovered that a percentage of the exiles were released from Cuban prisons and mental hospitals. The Mariel boatlift ended with the joint agreement between the U.S. and Cuban governments, but by then more than 125,000 people had arrived in Florida, called *Marielitos*. The *Refugee Act* of 1980, which established a contemporary asylum system in the United States, was approved the same year. The Act specified how persons in the United States may get asylum (if they are already on American soil) or refugee status (if they are abroad and fleeing their country for various reasons). The text stipulated specifically that “those people are fleeing because of the discrimination

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<sup>265</sup> *Ivi*, p. 2

<sup>266</sup> Originally, the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 permitted Cuban people to become permanent residents after spending at least two years in the United States. Following the enactment of the Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1976, this requirement was decreased to one year. *Ibidem*.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibidem*

based on their race, national origin, their political beliefs, their membership in a social group, or their religion”<sup>268</sup>. This corresponded to the *United Nations Refugee Convention* (or *Geneva Conventions*) of July 28, 1951: who satisfied the conditions outlined above was awarded refugee status.

Again, the situation was different with the Cubans. “If you were a Cuban citizen, you did not have to demonstrate that you were victim of any form of political violence or mistreatment based on your political beliefs. It was very simple; all you had to do was to be Cuban”.<sup>269</sup> Despite the fact that the majority of them matched the qualifications for refugee status, they were permitted to the U.S. on parole and awarded permanent residence under the CAA. These circumstances persisted till the final decade of the twentieth century. A Cuban citizen could not be deported until then, even if he was denied entry to the United States because he had been convicted of a minor crime, since Cuba refused to readmit individuals who had left the island.

### **3.3.2 Wet foot/dry foot and beyond**

As Soviet Union collapsed and economic backing for Cuba was cut off, many Cubans desired to leave the island in the early 1990s, particularly under the Clinton administration. The Cuban authorities, perhaps seeking an outlet for rising tensions, ignored increasing numbers of Cubans fleeing to the United States on rafts. Consequently, rafters (*balseros*) began to flock to the United States from the island. Clinton’s administration sent the Coast Guard in response to this situation and began talks with the Cuban government over immigration. In 1996, the United States and Cuba signed a new agreement that allowed the U.S. Coast Guard to detain most immigrants who attempted to enter the United States by raft or boat. When the Coast Guard intercepted immigrants at sea, the Cuban government promised to repatriate them and would not punish them upon their return. On the contrary, Cuban nationals were permitted to enter and remain in the United States after reaching land. The *Wet foot/dry foot* policy got its name from this practice. Fewer individuals tried to cross the border into the United States by boat or raft because the number of persons who were permitted to enter and stay in the country was restricted. According to Caulfield:

If you were Cuban and landed on the dry land of the United States, you could stay and, after one year, apply for adjustment as permanent resident. That was a huge advantage that only Cubans had. It meant that any Cuban who got here could immediately be employed; they were legal residents and eventually could become U.S. citizens. Even if you were a Cuban living in Venezuela, and you didn’t like the way things were going, you could come to the United States and remain legally. You had almost all the

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<sup>268</sup> *Ivi*, p. 3

<sup>269</sup> *Ibidem*

privileges of a green card holder from the day you arrived. Within one year of arrival to U.S. territory, you could obtain a green card (and eventually U.S. citizenship), which was quite a privilege for Cubans<sup>270</sup>.

Despite the fact that the Cuban government had publicly welcomed repatriations, it did not always cooperate. In 2019, Cuba started receiving more deportees, although they constituted just a tiny proportion of the tens of thousands of Cubans who had received final orders to depart the United States. As of January 2020, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the agency in charge of flying deportees home, designated Cuba as “uncooperative” or “recalcitrant”, making it one of just ten nations in the world with such status<sup>271</sup>.

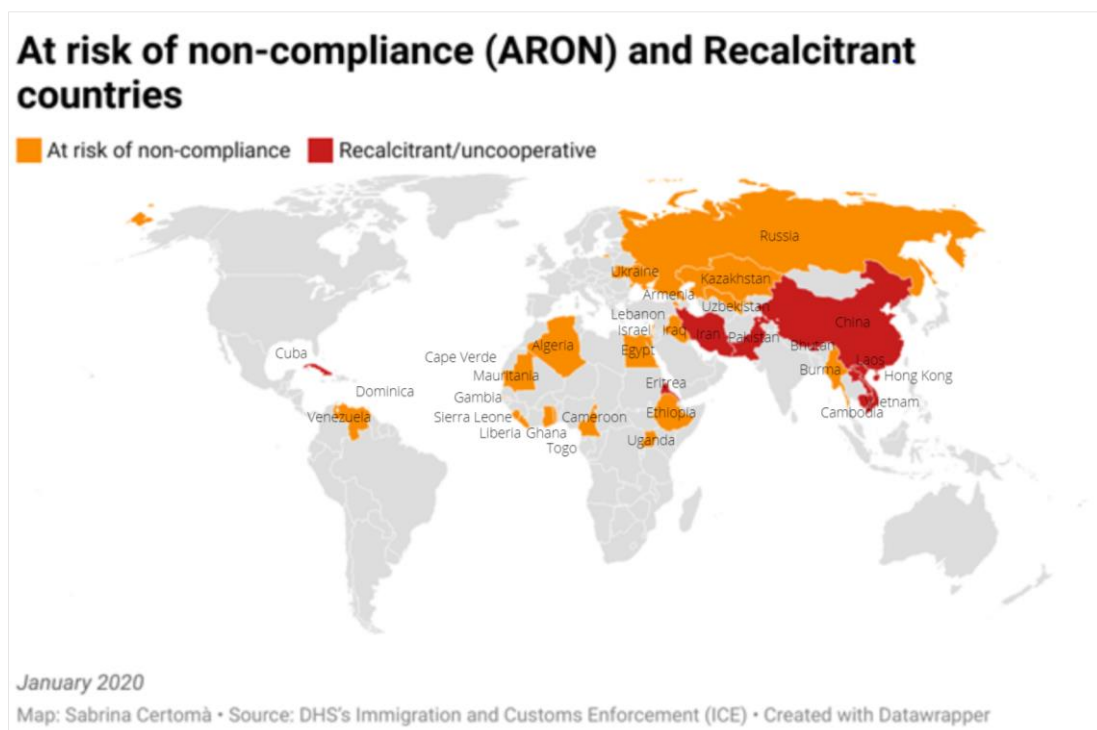


Figure 3.5 – At risk of non-compliance (ARON) and Recalcitrant countries | ICE<sup>272</sup>

In January 2013, the Cuban government implemented changes to the country’s immigration and travel policies. For most nationals, this meant that they could apply for a passport on their own, as President Raúl Castro had indicated. “Initially, people were sceptical, but the Cuban government honoured the new rules, even allowing emigrants to retain their property in Cuba. Under the previous rules, they would be punished for leaving the country without permission, would forfeit their property

<sup>270</sup> Ivi, p. 4

<sup>271</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2020, January). *Immigration: “Recalcitrant” Countries and the Use of Visa Sanctions to Encourage Cooperation with Alien Removals*. Available at: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/homesecc/IF11025.pdf>

<sup>272</sup> Responsive map available at: <https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/U2vQo/1/>

and could not legally come back to Cuba”<sup>273</sup>. People who wanted to flee Cuba to the United States stopped using rafts because they were too dangerous and there were now safer and more convenient alternatives: from 2013 onwards, thousands of undocumented Cuban migrants began to take routes by land, mainly through Mexico. In fact, they could simply stroll up to the U.S.-Mexico border and ask for permanent status after passing through a checkpoint: as the Cubans left Mexico, these migrations were of no concern to its government, that let them pass without profound investigations<sup>274</sup>. Between 2013 and 2016, a large number of Cuban migrants used this route. The normalization of ties between the United States and Cuba occurred throughout part of this time period (beginning December 2014). President Barack Obama finally declared the immediate termination of the *Wet foot/dry foot* program in January 2017 (the Thursday before his term ended). Any Cuban citizen trying to enter the United States illegally and not eligible for humanitarian assistance would be deported.

Cuban restrictions had been eased during the Obama administration, but President Trump rolled back some of those easings in June 2017. He did not, however, reinstate the *Wet foot/dry foot* policy ended by Obama. In the same year, the U.S. Embassy in Havana halted most visa processing due to a decrease in personnel. The huge surge of Cubans seeking refuge in the United States after the suspension of the *wet foot/dry foot* policy in January 2017 was not a coincidence. As a result of the policy change, immigration courts handled 24,198 additional deportation proceedings against Cubans in fiscal year 2019, compared to only 388 in the previous year. Cubans now face the same obstacles as everyone else and are subject to the U.S. government’s general enforcement goals<sup>275</sup>.

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<sup>273</sup> Correa-Cabrera, G., & Spagat, E. (2020, October). *Op. cit.*, p. 5

<sup>274</sup> Congressional Research Service, & Sullivan, M. P. (2021, January 22). *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>275</sup> Correa-Cabrera, G., & Spagat, E., (2020, October). *Op. cit.*, p. 6



## CHAPTER FOUR - The weight of the Cuban diaspora in the United States: Florida

### *Introduction: Cuba and its diaspora*



Figure 4.1 – Straits of Florida map | Google<sup>276</sup>

“Cuba and its diaspora have a relationship dating back 200 years”<sup>277</sup>. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a composite mixture of people coming from different social strata, with different cultural, economic, political, and cultural characteristics emigrated from the island. The diaspora community split up between Latin America, Europe, the United States, and recently Africa. “In its majority, this diaspora views itself as an integral part of the Cuban nation and, as such, has provided uninterrupted support for the literary, artistic, musical, religious, economic, and political endeavours of all who consider themselves to be Cuban, whether they live on the island or elsewhere”<sup>278</sup>. Most of diaspora’s relations with Cuban authorities have been hostile, especially after 1959 – the worst being the one between Cuba and the diaspora’s largest communities in South Florida.

<sup>276</sup> Google. Available at: <https://asud.net/usaaid-investe-milioni-di-dollari-in-propaganda-contro-cuba/>

<sup>277</sup> Cuban Research Institute & Florida International University. (2011, July). *The Cuban Diaspora in the 21st Century*. p. 11. Available at: <https://cri.fiu.edu/cuban-america/the-cuban-diaspora-in-the-twenty-first-century/the-cuban-diaspora-in-the-21st-century.pdf>

<sup>278</sup> *Ibidem*

According to data on the Cuban community in the United States, the country is the main destination chosen by Cuban expatriates. Numbers reveal the community's economic and political influence there: the 2020 United States Census<sup>279</sup> counted 62 million Hispanics, 18,7 percent of a national population of 331.4 million. In 2019, according to the latest data available, there were approximately 2.4 million individuals of Cuban descent in the U.S., that accounted for 3.8% of Hispanics, in third place after Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. These three groups together still represent three-quarters of the U.S. Hispanic population. Cubans are also more likely than the overall immigrant population to be naturalized U.S. citizens. The U.S. Census Bureau 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) shows that 59 percent of the approximately 1.3 million Cuban immigrants in the United States were naturalized citizens, compared to 51 percent of the total foreign-born population. This comparatively high rate may be explained by the *Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA)*<sup>280</sup>, which put Cubans on a much faster path to citizenship<sup>281</sup>. This policy, nonetheless, incentivised emigration from the island even among people without adequate documentation. Together with citizenship, Cuban American political representation is much greater than that of other immigrant ethnicities at local, state, and federal government. Ten Cuban Americans currently serve in the U.S. Congress: Ted Cruz (Senator, R-Texas); Mario Díaz-Balart (Congressman, R-Florida); Carlos Giménez (Congressman, R-Florida); Anthony González (Congressman, R-Ohio); Nicole Malliotakis (Congresswoman, R-New York); Robert Menéndez (Senator, D-New Jersey); Alex Mooney (Congressman, R-West Virginia); Marco Rubio (Senator, R-Florida); María Elvira Salazar (Congresswoman, R-Florida); Albio Sires (Congressman, D-New Jersey). “The presence of these Cuban Americans in both houses of Congress, along with the efficacy of the organized political lobby led by Cuban American civil society groups, has been an influential – but not the only – factor in U.S. laws and policies toward Cuba under successive administrations, both Democratic and Republican”<sup>282</sup>.

Most of Cubans living in the U.S. moved to Florida (more than 60%) and reside in the South Florida region. As a result, Cuban Americans dominate the demography of Miami-Dade County (69,4%)<sup>283</sup>, followed by Broward, Hillsborough, and Palm Beach. Their vast presence in this State, always makes their political involvement decisively important in presidential elections' years,

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<sup>279</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2020). *Hispanic or Latino, and not Hispanic or Latino by race*. Available at: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=hispanics%20in%20the%20United%20States&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2&hidePreview=true>

<sup>280</sup> Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act passed on November 2, 1966. It was needed to facilitate a legal status for Cuban citizens who arrived in U.S. territory, passed inspection by the immigration authorities, and waited one year without working to apply for residency. The authorities decide whether to grant residency upon review of each case.

<sup>281</sup> Batalova, J., Blizzard. B. (2021). *Cuban Immigrants in the United States*. Migrationpolicy.org. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-immigrants-united-states-2018>

<sup>282</sup> *Ivi*, p. 39.

<sup>283</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2021). *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Miami-Dade County, Florida*. Census Bureau QuickFacts. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/miamidadecountyflorida/LFE041219>

therefore the relationship between Cuban emigrants in the United States and the United States Administrations' foreign policy is strictly connected.

#### 4.1 Socioeconomic framework

According to the framework idealized by the sociologist Peggy Levitt and the anthropologist Nina Glick Schiller<sup>284</sup> outlined in the report of the Cuban Research Institute & Florida International University *The Cuban Diaspora in the 21st Century* (2011), the relations of states with their diaspora's communities can be divided in three different types: *strategically selective states*, *transnational nation-states*, *disinterested and denouncing states*<sup>285</sup>. Cuba stands in the last category, the least common: it is a “disinterested and denouncing state, which treat emigrants as though they no longer belong, often branding them as traitors”<sup>286</sup>. When two states live a situation of conflict and belligerence for years – such as Cuba and the United States – expatriates support is considered very important from both sides, therefore, relationships between the countries of departure and arrival are difficult if not dangerous<sup>287</sup>. For instance, the Cuban government still refuses to give dual citizenship<sup>288</sup> and other legal rights – as the external vote – to those who emigrate from the island. There are, in fact, concerns surrounding emigrant rights and dual citizenship, which, as elsewhere, impinge on key aspects of the dominant notion of the nation-state. This is especially important in Cuba, given the country's history of heavy emigration, with around 10% of the population residing abroad (it is impossible to provide a specific estimate since it depends on whether children and grandchildren of Cubans are included). The majority of Cuban emigrants reside in the United States and have obtained U.S. citizenship; to visit Cuba, however, they must possess a Cuban passport, while they must use their U.S. passport or permanent residence ID to re-enter the country. However, over the last decade, between 250,000 and 300,000 Cuban Americans have visited the island each year<sup>289</sup>.

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<sup>284</sup> Levitt, P., & Schiller, N. G. (2004). Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. *International Migration Review*, 38(3), pp. 1002-1039. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2004.tb00227.x>

<sup>285</sup> “Strategically selective states allow expatriates to participate in their countries of origin but do not extend them citizenship rights or incorporate them completely into national affairs. Although this type of government considers the diaspora to be part of the nation, it has yet to institutionalize its relationship with its citizens residing abroad. Examples of strategically selective states include Haiti, Ireland, Turkey, and India. The second type is transnational nation-states, which define migrants as long-distance members of the nation by recognizing dual citizenship and including them as an integral part of public policy. Among other measures, transnational nation-states restructure their ministerial and consular bureaucracies; extend the right to vote to their citizens abroad; allow these same citizens to run for public office; offer a range of state services to expatriates; and reinforce their sense of belonging to their countries of origin. The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Mexico are examples of this type of state”. Cuban Research Institute & Florida International University, *op. cit.* p. 17

<sup>286</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>287</sup> Waldinger, R., & Fitzgerald, D. (2004). Transnationalism in Question. *American Journal of Sociology*, 109(5), pp. 1177-1195. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/381916>

<sup>288</sup> Cuban citizens who adopt another nationality lose their Cuban citizenship in theory, but in practice many who are living abroad maintain two passports and to come back to Cuba visiting, they must request an entry permit from a Cuban diplomatic or consular office. Cuban Research Institute & Florida International University, *op. cit.* p. 23

<sup>289</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung (2020). *BTI 2020 Country Report – Cuba*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, p. 7. Available at: [https://bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country\\_report\\_2020\\_CUB.pdf](https://bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2020_CUB.pdf)

Immigrants from Cuba who came to the United States at various moments in history and with different past experiences under the regime have developed a variety of perspectives about life in the United States and on their native island<sup>290</sup>. To begin with, when Fidel Castro took power in 1959, Cuban émigrés who had grown up before the revolution and opposed its radical restructuring departed the island in its first few years. They are the so-called *Exiles*. Many of them were brought up in an environment of wealth and were frustrated with the revolution for taking away their old lifestyle when they fled their motherland. Secondly, the *New Cubans* are the emigrants who experienced both the revolution and the economic collapse of the Soviet Union. These emigrants had no prior exposure to commodities, civic culture or any kind of social life outside the state. Before the crisis, they were completely reliant on the state for everything they needed to survive. Against this background, the majority of *New Cubans* fled their motherland in search of a better life, regardless of their political disillusionment.

Depending on how old they were when they were forced to leave their homeland, their past carries a different weight. In a group of newcomers, adults came to the new nation with pre-existing attitudes that influenced their adaptation and connections to their birthplace. Younger immigrants, on the other hand, were exposed to both the culture of their new nation and that of their old one. The earliest immigrants saw their departure from the country as a political act. They left with a pre-revolutionary ideology that prejudiced them against their homeland's social, cultural, political, and economic transformation and against Castro, the man they held responsible for their tragic loss. That is why many of them have remained steadfast in their generational struggle against him and his allies from American soil even after the Revolution.

In opposition, the island crisis of the 1990s was the event that shaped the lives of Cubans who fled in the post-Soviet period. The profound despair triggered a new family-centred perspective on life and undermined trust in the regime. This second group of island-born Cubans saw uprooting as economically rather than politically motivated<sup>291</sup>.

In the United States, the two groups of emigrants adapted in different ways. Many of the people who escaped the Revolution were able to participate in the American Dream both economically and politically because of the social, cultural and economic advantages they had gained in Cuba; however, they never lost sight of who they were and why they were there. They even learned to use the U.S. political system to achieve their goal of overthrowing the Castro-led government, by pushing for the construction of a political barrier across the Florida Straits. *New Cubans*, on the other hand, have a different perspective on cross-border connections. Island generational development led

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<sup>290</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland* (1st ed.). Routledge, pp. 1-126

<sup>291</sup> *Ibidem*

them to want the exact transnational linkages that initial post-Castro emigrants rejected. This led to the desire for a bridge across the strait among emigrants who had lived in Cuba during Castro's rule. However, due to their lack of political influence, their grievances have mostly gone unspoken. Unlike the early post-Castro immigrants, fewer of them were able to participate economically or politically in the American dream nor to build a civic associational life.

Between the *Exiles* and the *New Cubans* came another wave of emigrants. Depending on their age, they saw and experienced their country before and after the Revolution: the *Marielitos*<sup>292</sup>, called after the Cuban port from which many of them departed. These newcomers had a broader range of experiences than those who left the country in the early years of Castro government or during the turmoil of the post-Soviet period.

The Cold War was experienced differently by the three waves of emigrants and contributed to shape their identity. For example, the first islanders to come to the United States opposed to Castro's Soviet Union alliance and to his reconstruction of the island's political economy. They began to flee after Castro's commitment to Marxism-Leninism, the confiscation of their property and the establishment of an official government run by the Communist Party. They were rewarded for escaping an anti-American country allied with the Soviet Union: Washington gave them a hero's welcome as part of its effort to win the Cold War. No other immigrant group had access to the same privileges as they did. After the end of the War, as Soviet aid and commerce dried up, Cubans were no longer able to make ends meet on the meagre wages they received, but Washington no longer cared to give Cuban immigrants priority over other newcomers, even though they were in greater need. In fact, *New Cubans* on both coasts of the Florida Straits were harmed by the conclusion of the Cold War. As a consequence, they came to the United States at a time when diverse economic circumstances and employment opportunities existed, and they moved to cities with diverse populations and cultural backgrounds. Early Hispanic emigrants paved the way for later immigration by creating a welcoming atmosphere in which newcomers found it easier to adjust. Miami, where the majority of *New Cubans* resided, became the "northernmost Latin American metropolis"<sup>293</sup> amid nativist reaction and a culture war.

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<sup>292</sup> See Chapter 3

<sup>293</sup> Fajardo, B. L. (2016, May 16). *How Miami became the capital of affluent Latin America*. BBC News. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-36281648>

### 4.1.1 Comparing waves

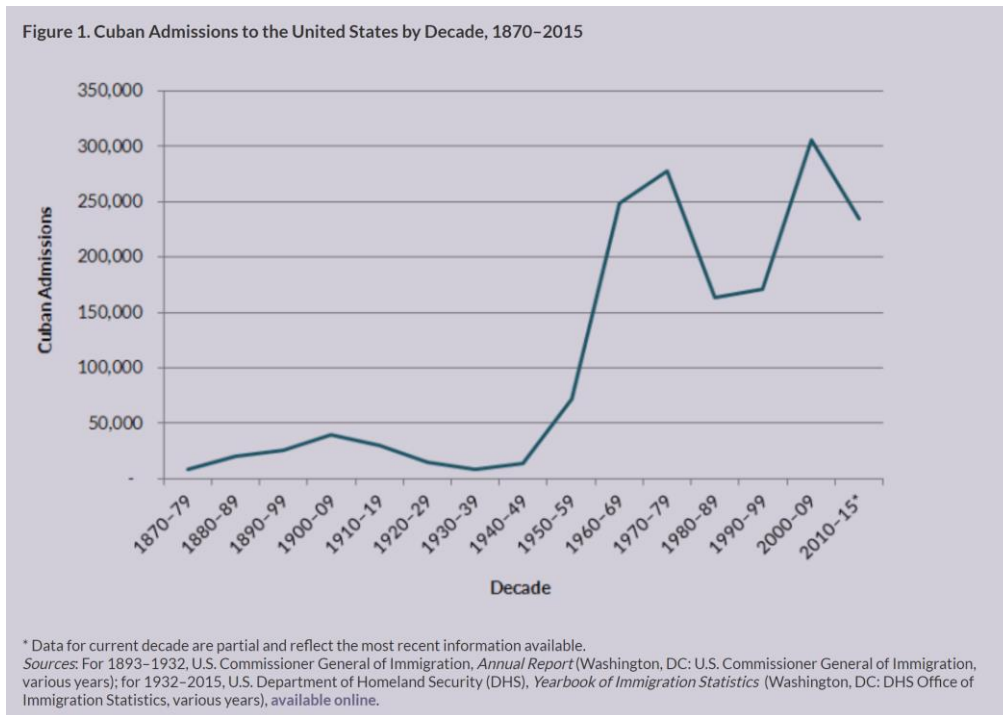


Figure 4.2 – Cuban admission to the United States by decade, 1870-2015 | MPI<sup>294</sup>

### Exiles, 1959 to 1980

Few Cubans fled the island prior to the Revolution, despite high unemployment and political persecution<sup>295</sup>. At the time, U.S. immigration policy favoured Europeans, but Cubans and the majority of Latin Americans had yet to learn the benefits of moving to the United States to escape difficulties in their own country. Firstly, those who had been close to Batista, the so-called *Batistianos*<sup>296</sup>, began to escape under Castro's rule; as a result of the new government's expropriation of large and middle property and the expropriation of all businesses by 1963, the wealthy classes quickly joined them, followed by political activists disillusioned with the extreme and authoritarian orientation of the revolution. The majority fled because they could no longer maintain their standard of living after losing their main source of income and to avoid jail, or even death for their political beliefs. This wave of emigration ended with the last of the Freedom Flights<sup>297</sup> in 1973.

<sup>294</sup> Duany, J. (2021, May 11). *Cuban Migration: A Post revolution Exodus Ebbs and Flows*. Migrationpolicy.Org. Available at: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-migration-postrevolution-exodus-ebbs-and-flows>

<sup>295</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>296</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>297</sup> "The Freedom Flights were an unusual instance of cooperation between the U.S. and Cuban governments. During the Camarioca boatlift in 1965, Castro opened up the Cuban port of Camarioca for the departure of Cubans with relatives in the U.S. (excluding men of military age). The number of boats and fleeing Cubans was so great that the boatlift overwhelmed the U.S. Coast Guard. In an effort to support refugees, the U.S. agreed with Cuba to finance the Freedom Flights, which transported Cuban refugees with U.S. relatives



Figure 4.3 – Martin Esteban, “Cuban refugees being greeted after arriving in Miami on a Freedom Flight”, 2015 | Digital Public Library of America



Figure 4.3 – “A Freedom Flight arrives in Miami from Varadero, Cuba”, 1970 | University of Miami Libraries

to Miami twice daily, five times per week between 1965 and 1973. The Freedom Flights would bring about 300,000 Cubans to the U.S. and cost approximately twelve million dollars. Although Castro initially agreed to the program, Cubans who signed up faced harassment and humiliation before their departure and property confiscation after”. Digital Public Library of America. (2018, February 28). A photograph of Cuban refugees arriving in Miami on a Freedom Flight. | DPLA. Available at: <https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/cuban-immigration-after-the-revolution-1959-1973/sources/1684>

They were mostly entrepreneurs, managers and professionals who made up 9% of the labour force under Batista (and accounted for over a third of the Cubans who emigrated to the United States during the first three years of Castro's takeover)<sup>298</sup>. These wealthy Cubans were all light-skinned – 97% of 1960s emigrants identified as *White*<sup>299</sup>, feeding a racial prejudice to emigration –, conservative Catholics who admired the U.S. and thought that their permanence there would have been temporary. As they hated the government, they tried to overthrow it in 1961, with the invasion of the Bay of Pigs<sup>300</sup>.

That god-damned place where everything I knew was destroyed. Wrecked in the name of fairness. In the name of progress. In the name of the oppressed and of love for the gods of Marx and Lenin.<sup>301</sup>

Workers fled in lesser but rising numbers; yet few from the lowest strata of the socio-economic spectrum left. This was primarily due to the new state-guaranteed jobs, the wage increases for low-paid employees, the expansion of free education and health care, and other changes. The class basis for emigration was determined not only by those who lost and who benefited from the Revolution, but also by U.S. prejudice on entry. By first providing precedence to Cubans who had already held a travel permit to the U.S. before the Revolution, and to qualified islanders, Washington created a class prejudice that remained in place in the years that followed<sup>302</sup>. Later, when Washington promoted family reunion, the relatives of early emigrants benefited from an admission advantage.

Finally, the Cubans who left the country before the Revolution were on average much younger than those who left during Castro's first decade in power: he managed to win the younger generations' hearts by skilfully persuading them to become revolutionaries.

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<sup>298</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>299</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>300</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>301</sup> Eire, C. (2004). *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy*. Free Press.

<sup>302</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*



Table 1.2 Race, gender, and age-of-immigration among Cuban Americans in Miami and nationwide in census years 1970–2000 (percentage of cohort)

Census year <sup>a</sup>	Age at migration						
	White <sup>a</sup>	Male	Under 18 <sup>c</sup>	18–24	25–39	40–64	65+
<b>A. National</b>							
1970							
Pre-1960s	95	48	23	23	40	13	1
1960s	97	46	27	9	31	28	5
1980							
Pre-1960s	84	49	19	24	42	15	0
1960s	86	46	26	10	33	29	2
1970s	80	46	27	7	27	31	8
1990							
Pre-1960s	86	47	22	26	42	10	0
1960s	89	45	27	11	35	26	1
1970s	82	45	27	7	28	33	5
1980s	81	55	20	13	33	27	7
2000							
Pre-1960s	90	44	23	27	44	6	0
1960s	92	43	33	13	36	18	0
1970s	87	45	30	8	32	29	1
1980s	83	55	21	14	37	25	3
1990s	86	54	16	14	37	27	6
<b>B. Miami</b>							
1970							
Pre-1960s	99	47	24	17	41	17	1
1960s	100	46	26	9	29	31	5

1980							
Pre-1960s	91	47	18	21	42	18	0
1960s	89	45	23	9	32	33	2
1970s	84	45	24	6	27	34	10
1990							
Pre-1960s	95	46	22	25	41	12	0
1960s	94	44	23	11	35	30	1
1970s	90	44	23	6	29	36	6
1980s	91	52	20	11	32	29	8
2000							
Pre-1960s <sup>b</sup>	95	43	18	24	49	9	0
1960s	95	41	28	13	38	21	0
1970s	94	43	25	7	33	34	1
1980s	91	52	20	13	36	27	4
1990s	92	52	16	14	36	28	7

Source: Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)*, Version 3.0 (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects University of Minnesota, 2003, www.ipums.org).

Notes:

- a Non-Whites mainly include census respondents who self-identified as mixed-race or Black.
- b In all census tables in the book I classify immigrant children under age five as US-born, since most of their outside-the-home socialization occurred in the US. My conceptualization of second-generation immigrants accordingly is sociological, not specifically country-of-birth defined. Cuban ethnicity in the 1970 census derives from the Hispanic identity variable, while in the 1980 to 2000 censuses Cuban ethnicity draws on “Cuban ancestry” as well as Hispanic identity information.
- c Total percentages on age-at-migration do not always equal 100 due to rounding up to the nearest whole number.

Figure 4.4 – Race, gender, and age of immigration among Cuban Americans in Miami and nationwide census 1970-2000 / *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*<sup>303</sup>

### *Mariel Émigrés, 1980*

In the late 1970s, the first large-scale emigrants return trips spurred the evacuation of over a hundred thousand Cubans from the port of Mariel. The Mariel generation was likewise varied in terms of socio-economic status: compared to the earlier emigrants and the labour force on the island, it contained several notable intellectuals who came disproportionately from the working class; it was also ethnically different because more people with dark skin joined the migration<sup>304</sup>. In addition, Castro filled the boats with mentally ill and criminal immigrants, which damaged the reputation of the whole Marielito population<sup>305</sup>, despite the fact that 80% of those who arrived in 1980 had no criminal record at all<sup>306</sup>.

Since the Mariel migration, the demographics of individuals fleeing shifted in both age and gender: there was a dramatic increase in the number of young people – 18/24 years old –, who entered the United States. This was the first group of emigrants to have never experienced pre-revolutionary

<sup>303</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>304</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>305</sup> Jacklin, J. M. (2019). The Cuban Refugee Criminal: Media Reporting and the Production of a Popular Image. *International Journal of Cuban Studies*, 11(1), pp. 61-83. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.13169/intejcubastud.11.1.0061> ; Talk of the Nations. (2010, July 20). *Marielitos' Stories, 30 Years After The Boatlift*. Npr.Org. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128646441&t=1643473939952>

<sup>306</sup> “The U.S. and Cuba reached an agreement in 1984 whereby the United States began to accept Cubans on a regular basis and Castro agreed to take back most of the 8,000 who were regarded as excludable”. McBride, M. J. (1999, May). *The evolution of US immigration and refugee policy: public opinion, domestic politics and UNHCR* (Working Paper No. 3). Political Science Department, Whittier College. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/3ae6a0c74.pdf>

existence. Moreover, males outnumbered women for the first time under Castro. *Marielitos* were in a better position to assess the country's transformation since they had been there longer than the *Exiles*. However, all *Marielitos* opposed the revolution, despite knowing more about its complexity than previous immigrants.

### *New Cubans*

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the crisis had the greatest impact on young people: they were the last employed in a state where job possibilities were scarce. As they struggled to survive, they realised that socialism was not the solution. Although many Cubans became more self-centred and family-oriented in the face of the catastrophe, others retreated to communal activities. Moreover, the younger generation generally agreed that emigration was better than reforms at home. Many islanders, despite decades of government and party criticism of people who left, began to view the diaspora more positively<sup>307</sup>.

Originally, Washington admitted few Cubans after the fall of the Berlin Wall, hoping to stoke resentment among the islanders to the point where Cubans would follow the example of their former communist counterparts and push for a free-market democratic transition. However, when instability arose in 1994<sup>308</sup>, Castro again used the situation to his advantage. He let islanders who intended to emigrate to depart by sea without obtaining a U.S. entrance visa. Faced with the arrival of an exodus of 33,000 (“rafters”), Washington decided in 1994 and 1995 to sign bilateral immigration agreements that formally allowed at least 20,000 Cubans a year to enter the United States<sup>309</sup>.

Cuban Americans soon became the most populous group. The *New Cuban's* social profile varies from that of earlier emigrants in terms of gender, ethnicity and age. According to U.S. census data, post-Soviet newcomers included more men than women, as well as people of prime working age – a trend that began with the *Marielitos*. The *New Cubans* considered individual departure as part of a family plan. Those who emigrated were expected to share new country revenues. As a result, working-age islanders dominated the outflow more than ever before, with men seen as more employable than women and as breadwinners who would support the wives and children who remained on the island. Men left their families in greater numbers than in previous years, partly because exit fees were too expensive for several people, as state revenues were no longer sufficient

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<sup>307</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>308</sup> Taylor, A. (2020, August 27). *20 Years After the 1994 Cuban Raft Exodus*. The Atlantic. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2014/11/20-years-after-the-1994-cuban-raft-exodus/100852/>

<sup>309</sup> See Chapter 3. United States General Accounting Office. (1995, September). *CUBA: U.S. Response to the 1994 Cuban Migration Crisis* (GAO/NSIAD-95-211). United States General Accounting Office Washington, D.C. 20548. Available at: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-95-211.pdf>

to support themselves in the new economy. Finally, recent and earlier emigrants had such different views of life and experiences that they sometimes looked down on each other while they were both fleeing for political reasons<sup>310</sup>.

## **4.2 Cuban immigrant adaptation in the U.S.**

How have Cubans from the various waves of migration adapted to life in the United States, and how can these disparities be explained? Wherever significant numbers of Cubans arrived, they adapted and acculturated to their new surroundings. Cuban exiles had the greatest impact, bringing in the United States the most transportable goods and a global political ambition. They reshaped community cultural practises, civic associational and economic life and, as it later turned out, politics, giving them their own homeland-influenced meaning<sup>311</sup>. They imposed their values on others, both the immigrants who followed and the non-Hispanics in their midst. Again, Cubans who immigrated at various periods have adapted differently to their new nation in ways that may be traced back to their diverse pre-immigration histories. In a next step, this thesis will examine how Cuban emigrants who uprooted at different times adapted to the social, cultural, economic and political environment of their new country.

### **4.2.1 Geographic adaptation: Miami and Union City**

Cuban immigrants have historically congregated in their new country, and this trend has accelerated in recent years. They are one of the most demographically concentrated groups of recent immigrants, having amplified their impact by settling among their own people. The first revolutionary refugees settled mainly in Miami<sup>312</sup>, already knew from their travels before the Revolution. In smaller but significant numbers, they also settled in Union City, New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Manhattan. Many migrants had relatives there because of a small pre-revolutionary Cuban community, moreover, Hudson County at the time had an abundance of manufacturing jobs. It attracted the many working-class Cubans who were arriving in the United States in the mid-sixties to mid-seventies, part of the second wave of Cuban immigrants from 1965 to 1973 when the nationalization of small businesses by the government in Cuba pushed many small entrepreneurs and

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<sup>310</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>311</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>312</sup> American Experience. (2017, December 29). *Cuban Exiles in America*. American Experience | PBS. Available at: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/castro-cuban-exiles-america/#:~:text=The%20First%20Arrivals.established%20professionals%2C%20including%20many%20doctors.>

working-class members to leave the island<sup>313</sup>. The Cubans had such a profound impact on the two cities that they were nicknamed *Second Havana* or *Havana North* and *Havana on the Hudson*<sup>314</sup>.

According to census data, at the highest point in the 1980s, more than 17,600 Cubans resided in Union City, representing 32% of the population<sup>315</sup>. Because Miami was so much larger, the inflow associated with nearly half of the original immigrants living there accounted for only 4% of the city's population<sup>316</sup>. However, Union City's attractiveness as a place to settle diminished over time. In the 1990s, barely 4% of immigrants had moved to New Jersey, and in 2005 only 2% of newcomers had notified the Department of Homeland Security of their intention to settle in the state<sup>317</sup>. Instead, Cubans increasingly flocked to Miami. Emigrants previously resident in Union City and elsewhere in the United States also started migrating again to Florida with its island-like climate and higher Cuban population. They refused to disperse despite being urged to do so by the U.S. government<sup>318</sup>.

To reduce hostility to the influx of Cuban refugees in Miami, Washington first attached the advantages of the Cuban Refugee Program<sup>319</sup> – for the first time the United States Government found it necessary to develop a program to help refugees from another nation in this hemisphere – to resettlement in other states. After the programme ended in 1973, Miami became an even more popular destination for foreign nationals. By the turn of the century, more than half of the roughly 1.2 million people in the United States who claimed Cuban ancestry, and more than 60% of the island's natives, resided there<sup>320</sup>. The proportion of the Cuban American population in the city rose to 30%. By 2005, islanders were so taken with the *Second Havana* that 84% of new immigrants expressed a desire to live there<sup>321</sup>. Over time, the proportion of islanders who lived somewhere other than Miami or New Jersey fell from 40 in 1970 to 32 in 2000<sup>322</sup>. The years spent in the United States influenced geographical concentration rather than dispersion. *Exiles* were the first to settle in Miami, and they set the tone for future Latin Americans. At the beginning of the 21st century, the city had the largest

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<sup>313</sup> Prieto, Y. (2000). *Beyond Miami: the concentration of Cuban migrants in New Jersey, 1950–2000*. Available at: <https://cri.fiu.edu/research/commissioned-reports/beyond-miami.pdf>

<sup>314</sup> Share America. (2016, November 1). "*Havana on the Hudson*": Union City, N.J. Available at: <https://share.america.gov/havana-on-hudson-union-city-n-j/>; Robbins, L. (2016, November 29). In '*Havana on the Hudson*, Few Are Left to Celebrate Fidel Castro's Death'. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/28/nyregion/in-havana-on-the-hudson-few-are-left-to-celebrate-fidel-castros-death.html>

<sup>315</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>316</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>317</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>318</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>319</sup> Mitchell, W. L. (1962, March). *The Cuban Refugee Program* (Bulletin March 1962). Social Security. Available at: <https://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/ssb/v25n3/v25n3p3.pdf>. "The principal port of entry for these refugees has been, and is, Miami, and most of them remain in the Miami area. Many of the refugees quickly exhaust any personal resources they may have. The economic and social problems that they face and that they pose for Miami and for all of southern Florida are obvious. State and local official and voluntary welfare agencies in the area have struggled valiantly with these problems of shelter, of food, of employment, of schools, of public health that are too much for any single commodity to meet. In keeping, therefore, with the traditional policy of the United States to grant asylum as long as they need it to people fleeing from oppression, the Federal Government has stepped in".

<sup>320</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>321</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibidem*

share of foreign-born residents in the U.S. and more immigrants overall than any other U.S. city except Los Angeles and New York.

*Table 2.2* Racial and ethnic composition of Miami in census years 1970–2000 (percent)<sup>a</sup>

	<i>Cubans</i>	<i>Non-Hisp White</i>	<i>Non-Hisp Black</i>	<i>Other Hisp</i>
Year				
1970	4	79	14	3
1980	26	45	18	11
1990	31	31	19	20
2000	30	21	20	28

*Source:* Steven Ruggles and Matthew Sobek, et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)*, Version 3.0 (Minneapolis: Historical Census Projects University of Minnesota, 2003, www.ipums.org).

*Figure 4.5 – Racial and ethnic composition of Miami in census 1970-2000 | The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland<sup>323</sup>*

Although Cubans remained the biggest Hispanic group, they barely made-up half of all Hispanics. Anglos, or non-Hispanic Whites, were more outnumbered as Cuban and other Latino immigrants made Miami their home. Between 1970 and 2000, their share of the city’s population dropped from 79 to 21%, due to the growth of the city with the arrival of Latin Americans and to the fact that many non-Hispanic Whites had left because of the conditions. Cubans increased their presence in Miami-Dade County, Greater Miami, by settling only in certain areas and towns. Hialeah and Westchester had Cuban populations of nearly 60% at the time of the 2000 census, while Hialeah Gardens, Sweetwater, Coral Gables, Miami City and South Miami had smaller but still significant Cuban populations. In a 2004 random survey of more than eighteen hundred Cuban Americans in Miami conducted by *Florida International University’s Institute for Public Opinion Research*, only 14% said they lived in areas where few Cubans lived<sup>324</sup>.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>324</sup> *Ibidem*

According to the latest data available:

Metropolitan Area	Immigrant Population from Cuba	% of Metro Area Population
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL	789,000	13.0%
Tampa-St.Petersburg-Clearwater, FL	65,000	2.2%
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	62,000	0.3%
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, FL	28,000	1.1%
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	26,000	0.4%
Cape Coral-Fort Myers, FL	21,000	3.0%
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	20,000	0.1%
Las Vegas-Henderson-Paradise, NV	18,000	0.8%
Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island, FL	17,000	4.7%
Louisville-Jefferson County, KY-IN	9,000	0.7%

Table: Sabrina Certomà • Source: MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau pooled 2014-18 ACS • Created with Datawrapper

Figure 4.6 – Top concentrations by metropolitan area for Cuban immigrants, 2014-2018 / MPI<sup>325</sup>

Even after forty or more years in the United States, 40% of those who had fled the Revolution lived mostly among co-ethnics. The socio-economic status of the emigrants determined where they settled. The upwardly mobile moved to more upscale neighbourhoods in the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, but the densely packed Union City and adjacent West New York, where many islanders also moved, remained working class. The working class and poorest moved to Hialeah and the City of Miami respectively, while the wealthy settled in Coral Gables and other affluent areas of Greater Miami<sup>326</sup>. Certain waves of migration were associated with different ethnic residences depending on the class: for instance, the *Exiles* mostly settled in the well-to-do districts. As a result, the class distinctions that had existed in Cuba before the revolution, but had been weakened by the social upheaval, were reintroduced in the United States.

“Miami was more Cuban than Cuba”<sup>327</sup>, and not merely because ties among the Cuba-born were so strong but because Cuban culture was (and still is) more accessible in Miami than on the island: “You can find any Cuban music or book here, and more easily than in Cuba”<sup>328</sup>.

<sup>325</sup> Duany, J. (2021, May 11). *Op. cit.*

<sup>326</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>327</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>328</sup> *Ibidem*

#### 4.2.2 Social and cultural adaptation

*Exiles* gathered among compatriots and, expecting their time in the United States to be brief, until the fall of Castro, they used Spanish in their daily lives<sup>329</sup>. Unlike previous generations of immigrants, Cuban emigrants used their mother tongue in both public and private life. *Exiles* encountered no opposition in their efforts to turn Union City into a majority Cuban city, but they were under pressure to become linguistically acculturated in Miami, where Anglos formed the numerical majority until about 1980. The interethnic language conflict that followed shows how power and politics can influence cultural adaptation. Anglos who resisted the *Exiles*' linguistic transformation of the city were among those who left, when they believed they had exhausted their efforts to keep English as the dominant language in Miami. The culture war began when English speaking residents banded together to demand that English become the official language of the city<sup>330</sup>. A Washington Post article of August 30, 1980, reported:

More than 44,000 residents have signed petitions demanding a November referendum to eliminate Spanish as the second official language in Dade County. If passed, the measure would prohibit spending county money for "the purpose of utilizing any language other than English or promoting any culture other than that of the United States". The movement is an angry backlash against the gradual Latinization of Miami, as well as to the summer's Freedom Flotilla tidal wave, still pouring 150 refugees a day into Key West. A total of 121,400 Cubans has arrived since April. [...] Dade County, which includes the city of Miami, has been officially bilingual since 1973, the only city of its size in America to take such a step. County commissioners voted unanimously to provide all county services in both languages "to aid the Spanish-speaking population to enter more evenly the mainstream of the American way of life". Increasing numbers of Latin taxpayers were complaining that the language barrier prevented them from equal access to government services. «Latin newspaper reporters would call the police department and say 'I'm dying' in Spanish, and there would be no response. They were not understood», said Aida Levitan, information director for Miami. «It was evident there was a problem». «People thought that the Cubans would quickly assimilate and stop speaking Spanish, but that doesn't happen with the first generation», said Levitan, who left Cuba in 1961. Since the first Cuban influx two decades ago, the county's population has grown from 6 percent to 38 percent Latin among the current 1.6 million residents. Meanwhile, the hardworking first generation of Cuban refugees, who originally moved into decaying slums, is producing bank presidents and political leaders. What was a sleepy tourist downtown a decade ago is a Manhattanized international finance center. [...] «We have been Cubanized to death», said Plunke, who moved here 31 years ago from New York.

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<sup>329</sup> Castellanos, I. (1990). The Use of English and Spanish Among Cubans in Miami. *Cuban Studies*, 20, pp. 49-63. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24486986>

<sup>330</sup> Johnson, J. (1980, August 30). *Anti-Latin Rage: A War of Words Waged in Miami*. Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1980/08/30/anti-latin-rage-a-war-of-words-waged-in-miami/189a4f60-5742-42a0-be3a-7f5d3fec1c5/>

«There is no more room. Besides, you can't get a job unless you're bilingual». Schaller said: «This is America, and I think we should let anyone in who is oppressed. But I think they should live by our rules. I don't see why we should have to change our way of living»<sup>331</sup>.

English speaking residents used both electoral and legal tactics to achieve their goals. In 1980, an “English Only” organisation<sup>332</sup>, the first in the country, successfully spearheaded a campaign to overturn a bilingual-bicultural ordinance approved in 1973 at the polls. Supporters of the movement also made it unlawful to use county funding for activities conducted in languages other than English or that promoted a culture “other than that of the United States”. The growing political influence of the *Exiles* was reflected in the 1973 ordinance that established Spanish as the official second language of the county before the Mariel influx triggered a nativist backlash. The Department of Bilingual and Bicultural Affairs was established, county documents were translated into Spanish, and Latinos were recruited to work in the county. But in 1988, the English-Only campaign succeeded in amending the Florida Constitution to make English the official language of the state<sup>333</sup>. The amendment was approved by 84% of the state’s voters. The Official English amendment declared that “English is the official language of the State of Florida. [...] The legislature shall have the power to enforce this section by appropriate legislation”<sup>334</sup>. Supporters of the amendment sustained that it sent “a clear message to government to conduct its business in English”<sup>335</sup>. Opponents, however, charged that the amendment was driven by anti-Hispanic sentiments and that it advertised Florida as a land of bigots<sup>336</sup>. Despite the amendment’s landslide victory, the Florida legislature declined to pass any legislation to enforce it, and it was repealed in 1993<sup>337</sup> by a majority of the electorate, which comprised fewer *Marielitos* but a greater number of *Exiles*. It is clear that the retention of the home language held all Cuban emigrants together despite their differences and partly separated them from the rest of the society.

*Exiles* were also involved in other cultural struggles. They attempted to impose politically motivated and biased cultural norms on both Cuban Americans and non-Cubans. For instance, they tried to prevent artists and entertainers who were considered Castro loyalists from participating in arts festivals in Miami. They even went so far as to attempt to legislate the limits they deemed acceptable. When legal means were not sufficient to enforce their politically defined cultural norms,

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<sup>331</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>332</sup> Padilla, A. M., Lindholm, K. J., Chen, A., Durán, R., Hakuta, K., Lambert, W., & Tucker, G. R. (1991). The English-only movement: Myths, reality, and implications for psychology. *American Psychologist*, 46 (2), pp. 120-130. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.46.2.120>

<sup>333</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>334</sup> Greenspan, D. M. (1994). Florida’s Official English Amendment. *Nova Law Review*, 18 (2). Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1563&context=nlr/>

<sup>335</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>336</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>337</sup> The Associated Press. (1993, May 19). *Board in Miami Repeals an English-Only Law*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/05/19/us/board-in-miami-repeals-an-english-only-law.html>



they resorted to violence and intimidation. *Exiles* successfully persuaded the Miami-Dade County government in 1996 to pass a law banning the use of county funds for events featuring musicians from the island in order to curb the cultural influence of Castro. Because the law drew little public support from non-Cubans and limited support from Cuban Americans, it was seen as an attempt by the hardliners to impose their standards on others, especially non-Cubans who had immigrated into their society<sup>338</sup>.

Finally, *Exiles* erected monuments – the last in 2021<sup>339</sup> as a symbol to those who fought against the regime – and memorials and opened museums to celebrate their cause. For example: the veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion set up a museum to commemorate their doomed attempt to retake Cuba in 1961 and a Freedom Torch in honour of their martyrs who died fighting to overthrow Castro.

### ***Groups formed in the new country***

*Exiles* founded several civic organisations, many of which had a limited membership and espoused an anti-Castro ideology. Some joined umbrella groups such as *Junta Patriótica and Unidad Cubana* in Miami and *Organizaciones Cubanas Unidos (OCU)* in the Union City region. In Miami alone, almost two dozen organisations were linked with *Unidad Cubana* in 2001. The number of organisations affiliated with OCU was smaller: Miami, because of its larger Cuban American community, had a richer and more integrated associational life. *Exiles* formed municipal groups to help residents of the old country reunite, re-establish old relationships and maintain old cultural customs while helping them adapt to the new country. In doing so, they promoted and hindered integration and acculturation in equal measure. In addition, the groups took care of the economic needs of the newcomers. They assisted immigrants in finding employment via the networks of group members and gave modest loans to people who did not qualify for bank financing. From a political point of view, initially, they organised subversive actions aimed at overthrowing Castro, with the implicit, if not explicit, cooperation of U.S. intelligence services<sup>340</sup>. The groups gave community-of-origin information as well as island-based connections who may be anti-Castro allies.

Municipio organizations incorporate religion into their daily activities, reinforcing their members' traditional Catholic Cuban viewpoint. The umbrella organization's *Exile*-dominated leadership attempted to reach out to more recent immigrants, since the association's survival was in jeopardy as the founding generation died off. However, it was a resounding failure. The organizations'

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<sup>338</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>339</sup> Benitez, B. G. (2021, July 13). *Monument honoring those who fought against rise of Castro regime unveiled in Little Havana.* Wsvn.Com. Available at: <https://wsvn.com/news/local/monument-honoring-those-who-fought-against-rise-of-castro-regime-unveiled-in-little-havana/>

<sup>340</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

cultural environment did not connect with the younger Cubans. Members were so determined to establish their history that Mariel emigrants mocked the organizations, saying they had created a time warp resembling Cuba in the 1950s<sup>341</sup>. *New Cubans* stayed on the outside of municipal groupings too, despite the fact that they might profit from the services provided.

To summarize, emigrants' pre-immigration lives affected their civic participation in their new nation. They developed their own communities out of choice, but also because they were first rejected from Anglo groups. Whatever their beginnings, the clubs provided as a foundation for preserving beliefs developed in Cuba, while also integrate and acculturate members into mainstream American culture and construct new pan-Hispanic identities that were fundamentally Cuban Americans. Notably, among the foreign-born, only *Exiles*, particularly the well-to-do, were established in U.S. civic life.

### 4.3 Political adaptation

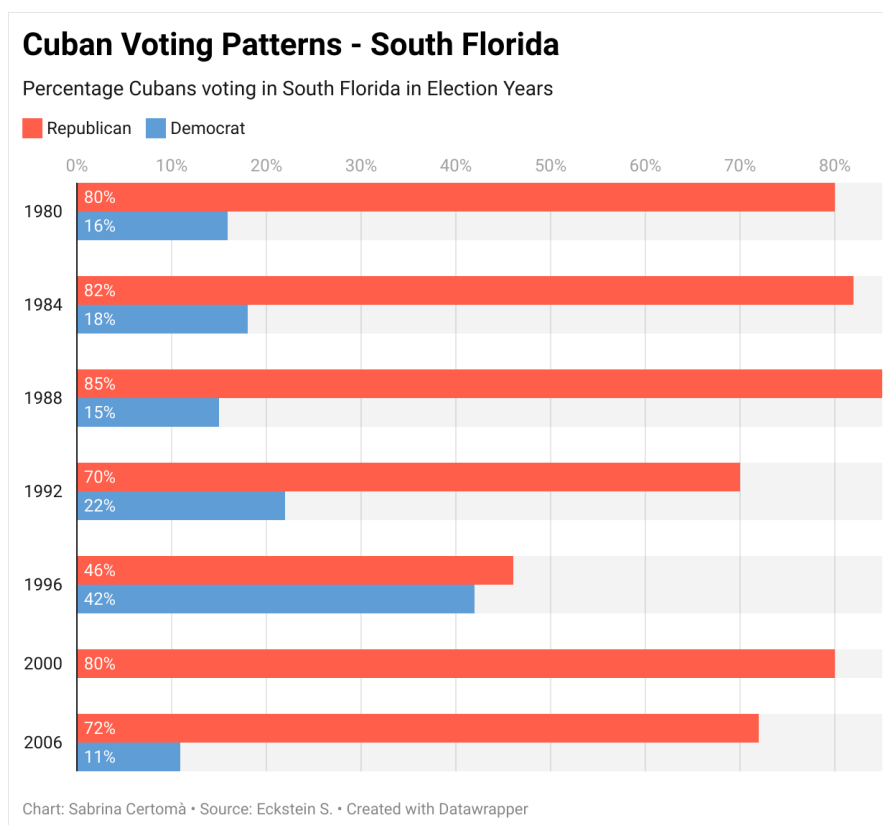


Figure 4.7 – Cuban voting patterns 1980-2006 | *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*<sup>342</sup>

<sup>341</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>342</sup> *Ibidem*

Immigrants' background influences their political adaption in their new nation too; hence political engagement differs between *Exiles* and *New Cubans*, particularly across generations. While adult immigrants' political beliefs are likely to be impacted by their previous nation's ideology, kid immigrants are more likely to be influenced by politics learnt at home paired with experiences in the new country.

*Exiles* joined the political class in the United States to use politics for personal and community benefit, from the local to the national level, aiming at advancing their anti-Castro agenda. They based their participation in American politics on practises and attitudes that were familiar to them from their time in Cuba. In the post-Cold War era, their goal was to maintain and deepen the embargo in order to weaken the Cuban government to the point of collapse.

Otherwise, the *New Cubans* stayed on the political side-lines. Even as they used their citizenship rights and vote more and more frequently, they remained underrepresented in the Cuban American political elite and uninvolved in politically significant organisations. As a consequence, their desire for a life beyond borders gained little political support. *New Cubans* had little experience with political life outside of the state, and many despised the state-directed political life they were used to. Meanwhile, their condition in the United States exacerbated their political marginalization. The economically disadvantaged lacked the socioeconomic characteristics normally linked with political participation in the United States. In this context, *New Cubans* supported political participation from *Exiles* and their children born in the United States, even if they disagreed with the Cuba policies they espoused.

Similarly, *Marielitos* did not participate in politics. They, too, were uninvolved in political groups and lacked representation in the Cuban American political elite, despite having resided in the United States for as long as *Exiles* had when they first became politically engaged in the U.S. In contrast, the children of the earliest émigrés have entered the political elite. They were more eclectic in their beliefs since they were raised with exposure to mainstream U.S. institutional life rather than just opinions taught at home. Community standards and the Cuban American-dominated media predisposed them to be concerned with Cuban issues from an *Exile* perspective, despite their lack of direct knowledge of the island. At the same time, their upbringing in the United States has made them more accepting of compromise politics than their parents' generation.

The emerging political elite, both Cuban and U.S.-born, advocated extreme *Exile* interests. Until the turn of the century, the Cuban political class talked nearly entirely in unison. Although *Exiles* shared certain concerns with all island-born émigrés, when it came to strengthening the wall across the Straits, they and the *New Cubans* were diametrically opposed. The *New Cubans*, who lived through the post-Soviet period crises with friends and relatives on the island, advocated measures that

built cross-border bridges. While these perspectives were first ignored, rigid hegemony started to crack around 2000. The changing demography of the Cuban American community contributed to the schism, but so did some powerful Cuban Americans, who rethought their attitude toward Cuba after suffering a severe electoral setback. In addition, the death of Cuban Americans' most prominent and influential leader – Jorge Mas Canosa<sup>343</sup> – left a power vacuum that hardliners were unable to fill.

#### 4.3.1 *Exile* domination of voting and office-holding

After five years of leaving in the United States, almost all Cuban emigrants are eligible for citizenship and hence the right to vote. Due to the Cold War-era *Cuban Adjustment Act* of 1966<sup>344</sup>, even illegal arrivals have such rights after one extra year. According to census statistics, an increasing number of Cuban Americans exercised their citizenship rights between 1970 and 2000. As of the turn of the century, 73% of Cuban Americans in the United States, and 67% in Miami, were citizens. The longer had they lived in the United States, the more likely they had become citizens; hence, *Exiles* had the greatest rate. “Indicative, in 2010, 92% of 1960s, compared to 41% of 1990s and 10% of first decade of this century immigrants had become U.S. citizens, and thus eligible to vote and elect people to represent their interests. All Cubans who arrived in the U.S. before 2004 were eligible for citizenship by 2010, owing to the 1966 *Cuban Adjustment Act*”<sup>345</sup>. Polls conducted by Florida International University in Miami demonstrate that Cuban Americans who became citizens took their voting rights significantly. In 2004 and 2007, 90 and 91% of Cuban Americans of voting age were registered voters, respectively<sup>346</sup>. Registration rates were high for all émigré groups, but they were highest among Cubans who fled before the Freedom Flights terminated in the early 1970s. Additionally, Cuban Americans cast ballots to elect “their own” to public office, and, usually, the Cubans they chose belonged to families who had left the revolution early on. Most Cuban-born politicians departed while they were young, during Castro’s early years in power, and second-generation Cuban American politicians seldom visited the island, so the emerging political elite envisioned Cuba primarily under Castro and opposed him. Politicians soon discovered that taking a hard stance against the Castroist government paid off in terms of winning votes at the polls and receive financial donations from Cuban Americans to their campaigns<sup>347</sup>. In the 1980s, Cuban Americans started to be elected to political office. They became members of the political class not

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<sup>343</sup> See Paragraph 4.4.2

<sup>344</sup> See Chapter 2

<sup>345</sup> Eckstein, S. (2012). How Cubans Transformed Florida Politic and Leveraged Local for National Influence. *Boston University*. Available at: [https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=las\\_hhfc](https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=las_hhfc)

<sup>346</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>347</sup> *Ibidem*

just in working-class neighbourhoods, but also in wealthier places where class affiliation would transcend ethnicity to influence voter preferences. Initially, they won seats in municipalities with large émigré populations, but later, thanks to the votes of non-Cubans, they also won seats in areas where Cuban Americans were a demographic minority. As more Cuban Americans entered politics, they rose to become mayors of Miami-Dade municipalities. One example is Raúl Martínez: he won elections in Hialeah in 1981, where the majority of the vote was composed by working-class or lower middle-class Cuban immigrants. He remained mayor for more than 20 years (1981-2005). Alex Penelas – who came to the U.S. in 1960 as a child – became Miami-Dade County’s first Cuban American mayor in 1996<sup>348</sup>. Carlos Alvarez replaced him eight years later (the county mayor is one of the most powerful positions in the state).

From 1985, the City of Miami counted several Cuban American mayors: Xavier Suárez, Joe Carollo, Manny Díaz – now Francis Suarez, who became the 80th President of the U.S. Conference of Mayors on January 2022<sup>349</sup>. They were all Cuban-born (apart from Francis Suarez who was born in Miami) who had immigrated to the United States as children. In 2000, Cuban Americans occupied one-third of the country’s highest appointed jobs, more than any other ethnic group.

Regarding State politics, the first Cuban American was elected to the state legislature in 1982 – the Republican Roberto Casas –, and within a decade Cuban Americans held half the seats in the state legislature, mostly as members of South Florida districts<sup>350</sup>. Then, from 2006 to 2008, a Cuban American, Marco Rubio – now Senator –, became the first Cuban (and first Hispanic) speaker of the Florida House of Representatives<sup>351</sup>. Cuban American legislators were well-known to each other, had similar views, caucused together, and voted as a bloc because of their common ethnic networks. By 2002, three Cuban Americans had also been elected to the Miami Congressional delegation: Lincoln and Mario Díaz-Balart, and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen<sup>352</sup>. In 2004, Florida elected its first Cuban American Senator, Mel Martínez. At the same time, Hudson County, New Jersey, elected two Cuban American congressmen in those years: Robert Menéndez, a former mayor of Union City who became a senator after serving in Congress between 1992 and 2005; Albio Sires, a Cuban American congressman from New Jersey, was mayor of West New York, near Union City. He was elected to the congressional seat vacated by Menéndez when the latter became a senator<sup>353</sup>.

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<sup>348</sup> Nielsen, K. (1996, September 30). *Diverse Dade County Elects Its First Mayor*. The Christian Science Monitor. Available at: <https://www.csmonitor.com/1996/0930/093096.us.us.5.html>

<sup>349</sup> Forney, T. (2022, January 4). *Miami Mayor Francis Suarez elected President of the US Conference of Mayors*. WPLG. Available at: <https://www.local10.com/news/local/2022/01/03/miami-mayor-francis-suarez-elected-president-of-the-us-conference-of-mayors/>

<sup>350</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>351</sup> *Biography - U.S. Senator for Florida, Marco Rubio*. (n.d.). Marco Rubio U.S. Senator for Florida. Available at: <https://www.rubio.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/biography>

<sup>352</sup> Nielsen, K. (2017, June 14). *Cuba Libre?* Pacific Standard. Available at: <https://psmag.com/social-justice/cuba-libre-4540>

<sup>353</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

The Cuban American electorate backed candidates who addressed their concerns about Cuba: three-quarters of Cuban Americans in Miami surveyed by Florida International University in February 2004 said politicians' attitudes toward Cuba influenced their voting behaviour<sup>354</sup>. 86% of more than 1,800 Miami Cuban Americans interviewed agreed that it was important that the three South Florida Cuban American Congress members represented them well on Cuban matters<sup>355</sup>. The three representatives were vocal anti-Castro activists who lobbied for and supported embargo tightening measures. Even in the contest of local elections with little foreign policy power, the first who fled the Revolution passed on a devotion to Cuba to their descendants, so that U.S. Cuban policy became an intergenerational issue. The *New Cubans* settled for Congressional members who cared about Cuba, even if they did not support their preferred ideas. In this context, Cuban American hardliners took advantage of the ethnic constituency and marginalized anyone who disagreed with them. They were able to gain hegemony in two ways: first, candidates from the Cuban American community outperformed those from other ethnic groups; then, during intra-ethnic elections, hardliners rejected Cuban American candidates who advocated for the construction of cross-border bridges<sup>356</sup>. When Ros-Lehtinen fought for re-election in 1992, and Mario Díaz-Balart first stood for Congress a decade later, they both faced opponents who called for the lifting of trade obstacles between the United States and Cuba, as well as U.S.-Cuba dialogue. The elections of Ros-Lehtinen and Díaz-Balart gave hardliners a monopoly on the South Florida Cuban American congressional delegation, which they held until 2008. The Cuban American electorate wanted its elected officials to remember where and why their ancestors came from. For them, the embargo represented a generic battle against Castro. It was extremely important to Cuban Americans in the United States for the longest time, even when they realized it was unsuccessful; they felt compelled to support it on principle.

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<sup>354</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009b). The Personal Is Political: The Cuban Ethnic Electoral Policy Cycle. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 51(1), 119–148. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30136766>

<sup>355</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>356</sup> *Ibidem*

Table 1. Political Participation, Partisan Preferences, and Ethnic Representation Among Cuban Americans in Miami, 2004 and 2007 (percent)

	Year of Emigration				U.S.-born	All
	1959-64	1965-74	1975-84	1985-2004		
Citizens	96 (97) <sup>a</sup>	90 (97)	71 (81)	24	98 (99)	67
				1985-94: 56		
				1995-2007: 19		
Registered voter if citizen and age-eligible	95 (97)	93 (98)	86 (92)	82	86 (94)	90 (91)
				1985-94: 85		
				1995-2007: 60		
Registered Independent	7 (12)	(13)	(17)	14	26 (22)	
				1985-94: 10		
				1995-2007: 13		
Registered Republican	74 (77)	80 (73)	68 (73)	67	42 (50)	69 (66)
				1985-94: 66		
				1995-2007: 61		
Candidate's position on Cuba important in determining vote	75	75	74	78	69	75
Satisfaction with Congress member representing interviewee's views on Cuba	85	92	85	84	77	86

N = 1,811 in 2004, 1,000 in 2007  
<sup>a</sup>Data for 2007 in parentheses  
Source: FIU-IPOR 2004, 2007

Figure 4.8 – Political participation, partisan preferences and ethnic representation among Cuban Americans in Miami, 2004/2007 | *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*<sup>357</sup>

With two-thirds of registered Miami Cuban American voters approving the embargo in 2007, and slightly more preferring *Exile* military action to topple the Cuban regime, candidates that promoted a tough stance on Cuba performed well<sup>358</sup>. Nonetheless, against the background of selective embargo-loosening Congressional attempts, the Miami Cuban American electorate grew more polarized in their opinions. By 2007, a narrow majority of registered Cuban American voters supported U.S. corporations exporting food to Cuba, and two-thirds supported shipments of pharmaceuticals, which Washington had allowed since 2000. However, support for the one-way embargo lifting differed by émigré cohort and generation. *Exiles* remained the most vocal opponents. They sought to halt food sales in particular. They were also mostly opposed to cross-border dialogue and the establishment of diplomatic ties with Cuba under Castro.

### 4.3.2 The Cuban American National Foundation

Cuban Americans demanded (and obtained) ethnic concessions all the way up to the highest levels of national policymaking. Their success was founded on a dense network of mutually reinforcing social, cultural, economic, and political relationships. *Exiles* were the one who organized, lobbied, and made political donations that stretched their realm of influence beyond their geographical base in Florida, and across the party split, even as they became overwhelmingly Republican in their personal views<sup>359</sup>. Beginning in the early 1980s, they controlled power via the

<sup>357</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>358</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>359</sup> *Ibidem*

Cuban American National Foundation, led by the charismatic Jorge Mas Canosa, with the principal purpose of developing freedom and democracy in Cuba after a regime change. Until the early 2000s, no other Cuban American organization rivaled the Foundation in terms of power brokering. Mas Canosa and the foundation's staff lobbied for legislation and helped elect politicians they trusted to further their cause.

By 1980, a successful entrepreneurial class with accumulated surplus capital had emerged within the Cuban American community. This new prosperity could be tapped to create a presence in Washington. This convergence of economic and political conditions made possible the creation of the Cuban American National Foundation<sup>360</sup>.

As Cuban Americans became prosperous, the Reagan administration found itself in need of an organization to promote its goals for Cuba and Latin America. Cuban Americans embraced any assistance from the United States government and were anxious to have their opinions heard in Congress. Reagan, in turn, needed a voice other than his own to persuade the American people that it was necessary to take tough action on Cuba<sup>361</sup>. It was critical for both factions to influence public opinion in the United States during this period. For the Reagan administration,

An alliance with exiles from the island, who were themselves intent on maintaining pressure on Castro, certainly made sense. Both the Reagan administration and a Cuban American lobby had much to gain from each other.<sup>362</sup>

As a result, the CANF was founded in Miami, where most of its membership, leadership, and financial contributors lived. And it was in Miami, and more generally in Florida, that it established its original influence-peddling political base. It accomplished this by openly supporting and covertly sponsoring the campaigns of politicians who supported its anti-Castro objective. Reagan understood that Cuban Americans could be an asset at the polls, not merely to help him win re-election but to further the Republican's new strategy to win over the South<sup>363</sup>; until that moment, Florida used to be Democratic. Indeed, the Cuban American party's shift from Democratic to Republican helped the state become a battleground<sup>364</sup>. Reagan also recognized that with their wealth attained in the U.S.,

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<sup>360</sup> Grenier, G. J., & Perez, L. (2003). *The Legacy of Exile: Cubans in the United States*. Boston: Florida International University. Cited in: Henn, M. K. (2008). *The Cuban American National Foundation and Its Role as an Ethnic Interest Group* (Thesis). Boston College. Available at: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:102064>

<sup>361</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *The Cuban American National Foundation and Its Role as an Ethnic Interest Group* (Thesis). Boston College. Available at: <https://dlib.bc.edu/islandora/object/bc-ir:102064>

<sup>362</sup> Haney, P. J., & Vanderbush, W. (1999). The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation. *International Studies Quarterly*, 43 (2), pp. 341-361. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00123>

<sup>363</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>364</sup> *Ibidem*



Cuban Americans could be a source of campaign financing, and that, given their antipathy to Communism, they could be counted on to help defeat Left-leaning political movements then in the hemisphere, especially in Central America<sup>365</sup>. Moreover, whereas Carter had emphasized easing tensions, Reagan's hard-line policies allowed the political space for a group intent on undermining Castro to speak. On the CANF's official website they state their goals to:

Work tirelessly to restore freedom, democracy, and respect for human rights in Cuba. Convinced that the profound and irreversible reforms that Cuban society requires will never come from the Castro regime, but only from the will and solidarity effort of the Cuban people, within and without the island, we consider our fundamental mission to empower civil society through direct support to groups and leaders of the independent civil society in non-violent efforts that promote citizen participation in claiming fundamental rights and freedoms and in community activism projects to favour the neediest and most marginalized sectors of the population<sup>366</sup>.

CANF continues to lobby and educate for essentially the same purposes as before. It continues to work for the strengthening of civil society as it did in the 1980s during the Reagan years, and the achievement of its goals has always been and continues to be linked to the hope of one day returning to Cuba<sup>367</sup>:

What we thought would be six months turned into more than forty years . . . Cemeteries in the U.S. are filled with the hopes of thousands of exiles who died yearning they would return soon to Cuba<sup>368</sup>.

Jorge Mas Canosa, the organization's first president, immigrated to the United States in the 1960s. He took part in the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961 and was also a member of other organizations that advocated violent activities to destabilize the Castro dictatorship. In the 1980s, he owned a \$700 million telecommunications corporation and was able to spend part of his profits to establish CANF<sup>369</sup>. The high number of middle-aged and older people, as well as the low fertility rate and high female labour force participation, all contribute to the money and influence that important Cubans in Miami have amassed. In contrast to many Hispanic immigration groups, Cubans in general have previously established themselves and earned employment skills; the majority are not coming out with young children and negligible work records. These circumstances have enabled Cubans in Miami to

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<sup>365</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>366</sup> Cuban American National Foundation site. Available at: <https://www.canf.org/about-us/purpose>

<sup>367</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>368</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>369</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

establish an ethnic enclave, which in turn works to help new immigrants in adjusting to Cuban life in the United States<sup>370</sup>.

Recent Cuban immigrants enter the U.S. market, primarily through the large number of enterprises in South Florida that are owned and operated by other Cubans who arrived earlier<sup>371</sup>.

Under Mas Canosa's tutelage, the Foundation influence came to extend to the state and national levels, establishing itself as one of the most effective and best financed ethnic lobbies.

Reagan provided a major first financial boost to the Foundation by sending hundreds of thousands of public funds to a Foundation-affiliated group via the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). As a condition for utilizing NED cash to assist finance political campaigns, the Foundation required backing for its anti-Castro crusade. Predictably, the Cuban American National Foundation was one of the earliest recipients of NED financing. CANF received \$390,000 for anti-Castro actions between 1983 and 1988. This may seem unsurprising given the Reagan administration and Republican Party's support for the organization in the 1980s; yet the CANF continued to receive significant financing long into the twenty-first century. According to a Right Web investigation, the International Republican Institute's biggest gift of \$350,000 in 2002 went to Cuba-related initiatives<sup>372</sup>. However, the Foundation swiftly generated its own funding stream. Mas Canosa persuaded other *Exiles* to make significant yearly donations to the group. By the early 1990s, the Foundation had 50,000 members, and by the turn of the century, it had 5,000 more, with 170 directors, trustees, and associates reportedly donating \$1,000 to \$10,000 each year to the organization<sup>373</sup>. Mas Canosa led the development of both a nominally independent lobbying group, the Cuban American Foundation (CAF), and a political action committee (PAC)<sup>374</sup>, the Free Cuba PAC<sup>375</sup>, as he steered the Foundation to leverage power in Washington. He developed these spin-off organizations in order to comply with official U.S. laws and to conform to the acknowledged U.S. manner of politicking in high-level policy-making rooms. Between 1982 until the turn of the century, the Free Cuba PAC accounted for all but 1% of Cuban American PAC donations. During these years, it raised roughly \$1.7 million and received \$1.3 million in political contributions<sup>376</sup> and it financed the campaigns of

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<sup>370</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>371</sup> Pérez, L. (1986). Cubans in the United States. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 487 (1), pp. 1261-137. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716286487001008>

<sup>372</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>373</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>374</sup> OpenSecrets. (n.d.). *What Is a PAC?* Available at: <https://www.opensecrets.org/political-action-committees-pacs/what-is-a-pac>

<sup>375</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009b). *Op. cit.*

<sup>376</sup> *Ibidem*

Cuban Americans who promoted its hard-line stance on Cuba. All Cuban American Congressmen, for example, received Cuban American PAC contributions.

Even when Cuba presented no national security danger in the post-Cold War period, the Foundation's foreign policy impact was fuelled by astute lobbying and political contributions. It successfully pushed for various pieces of legislation, such as a measure introduced in Congress in 1990 to create a publicly supported TV Martí<sup>377</sup>, or the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992. By soliciting political donations from both 1992 presidential candidates, the Foundation was able to get more support for the embargo-tightening legislation<sup>378</sup>.

### ***Bills baked by the CANF***

George H. W. Bush received the fifth most campaign contributions from Cuban Americans. Clinton got significantly less funds, but he was quite open about his terms. During his campaign, he proclaimed his support for the *Cuban Democracy Act* (CDA), which was then pending in Congress, after earning \$275,000 from Cuban Americans at two Miami Foundation-related fundraising events. But, taking advantage of his presidential incumbency, Bush signed the law before the 1992 election<sup>379</sup>. It was Connie Mack, a Republican congresswoman from Florida, who presented the CDA during the Bush administration in 1991. The critical part of this measure was the one that increased the pressure on Cuba's post-Cold War economy by prohibiting subsidiaries of U.S. corporations from dealing with the island. Due to the Bush administration's concerns about the bill's impact on international allies and industry, they voted against it: the bill would increase diplomatic expenditures for the United States and limit the President's constitutionally required authority to handle foreign affairs<sup>380</sup>. In the wake of Clinton's support for the CDA, Bush was obligated to back the bill in order to keep the Democrats from gaining momentum in Florida. The CDA was presented this time by Congressman Robert Torricelli and Senator Bob Graham. It would put a halt to U.S. company subsidiaries dealing with Cuba once again, but it would also make it simpler for people to communicate with one another and bring their families to Cuba. This act was exactly what the CANF desired: the Foundation started lobbying the legislative branch in order to push it. Despite the newfound support for this law, the

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<sup>377</sup> In creating Radio Martí, President Reagan sought to provide news and information to the people of Cuba, who he claimed were misinformed by their own government (these radio broadcasts were already used in Eastern Europe). The difference, of course, is while these countries were thousands of miles away, Cuba was situated just 90 miles from U.S. shores, making it easier for Cubans to retaliate against the U.S. with radio operations of their own. Dumping propaganda on the people of Cuba was not purportedly one of Radio Martí's aims; however, in reality, many have argued that the station quickly became a propaganda arm of the CANF. Once Radio Martí began broadcasts, Fidel Castro almost immediately began jamming the radio waves and blocking those broadcasts. As a result of this jamming, only a very small percentage of the Cuban population was ever able to hear Radio Martí. In 1990, a similar project, TV Martí was created but met with even less success than the radio station. Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>378</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>379</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>380</sup> *Ibidem*

Bush administration remained unconvinced; it was only via electoral politics that this measure was eventually able to pass with Bush's backing. With the 1992 presidential election just around the corner, Mas Canosa offered the Democrats to give assistance for Clinton's presidential campaign if he opted to back the CDA<sup>381</sup>. Clinton expressed his support. In the face of a lack of cash, a desire to compete in Florida against President Bush in the general election, and even a Rodham family tie to the Cuban American population in Florida, candidate Clinton signed on in Miami<sup>382</sup>. He was the Democratic candidate who received the most campaign contributions from the Foundation (\$169,000 for his two presidential campaigns); Bush received \$165,225. After Clinton publicly acknowledged his support for the bill, Bush agreed to work with Congress on a CDA that he would sign<sup>383</sup>.

CANF had been able to use its money and votes to influence a sitting president to support a policy toward Cuba that he had previously argued was unnecessary, if not harmful to U.S. interests, and constitutionally problematic<sup>384</sup>.

Since the end of the Cold War, a number of new groups have emerged to promote the spread of democracy and respect for human rights in Cuba and to oppose the CANF.

These included nongovernmental organizations and private voluntary organizations with an interest in sending humanitarian aid to the island, think tanks, business groups, environmental organizations, and public health groups...they all advised improvement of economic and diplomatic relations<sup>385</sup>.

The increasing anti-immigration attitude in the United States during the early 1990s was another problem that endangered the CANF's total control over policy towards Cuba<sup>386</sup>. This problem was particularly felt in Florida: due to a very high influx of refugees from Cuba and Haiti, which had put a heavy strain on the state's social services and created an anti-immigrant backlash among voters. In resolving the 1994 crisis, CANF failed to retain the influence it once had. For the first time in years, the president made a decision about Cuba in which CANF was not involved and with which it ultimately disagreed. As Cuba became less of a foreign policy issue and slipped out of the control of the executive branch, CANF also had to increase its influence on Congress. It shifted its focus to take

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<sup>381</sup> Haney, P. J., & Vanderbush, W. (1999). The Role of Ethnic Interest Groups in U.S. Foreign Policy: The Case of the Cuban American National Foundation. *International Studies Quarterly*, 43 (2), pp. 341-361. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0020-8833.00123>

<sup>382</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>383</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>384</sup> Haney, P. J., & Vanderbush, W. (1999). *Op. cit.*

<sup>385</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>386</sup> *Ibidem*

advantage of the Clinton administration's new emphasis on promoting democracy for its own desires. This pattern was to continue more or less for the rest of the administration<sup>387</sup>.

The next anti-Castro law the Foundation supported in 1996 was the *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (Libertad) Act*<sup>388</sup> which further tightened the embargo. The bill was unofficially referred to as the *Helms-Burton* bill, after its two main sponsors, both of whom received substantial Cuban American campaign contributions either shortly before the bill was introduced or at the time Congress was considering it. Dan Burton, a Republican from Indiana, received \$61,000 from Cuban Americans in the 1990s and no funds before that, while Republican Jesse Helms received \$76,000, almost all in 1995-96, when he was running for re-election<sup>389</sup>. Knowing that passing measures to tighten the embargo required broader support than legislators, Cuban American PAC directors strategically directed funds to candidates across the country whose support the lobbyists sought. Legislators who supported the two bills tended to receive significantly more donations than those who opposed them, and few recipients of Cuban American funds voted against. Clinton administration was forced to pass the bill after Cuba shot down two planes of the Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue<sup>390</sup>.

The *Helms-Burton* Act, like the Torricelli Act, was passed in an election year. Both events were influenced by a fear that the president would be accused of weakness toward 'Castro's Cuba'<sup>391</sup>.

The 1996 law was the Foundation's last embargo-tightening bill before Mas Canosa died in 1997. After his son, Jorge Mas Santos, took over the Foundation in 2000, CANF lobbyists were unable to prevent the approval of embargo exemptions permitting the supply of food and medication to Cuba. Agribusiness has advocated for the exception because it had a financial stake in reaching the Cuban market. Nonetheless, the Foundation maintained enough clout to get a clause placed into the law requiring the Cuban government to pay in cash for purchases: it was assumed that the economically strapped government could only afford a few items if they were purchased on credit. That same year, the Foundation successfully persuaded Congress to overturn a measure to ease travel restrictions. It persuaded lawmakers to impose a once-a-year travel limit for Cuban American family visits. Mas Canosa also acted as a gatekeeper, vetoing a critical presidential nomination. Refusing to accept any kind of ethnic representation at the highest level, he vetoed Clinton's nomination of

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<sup>387</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.* p. 40.

<sup>388</sup> See Chapter 2. It laid the legal basis for U.S. citizen rights to sue international investors over property that the Castro-led government had expropriated, to which they laid pre-revolutionary claims. Moreover, it specified that such investors be denied U.S. entry visas, and barred Washington from normalizing commercial relations with any Cuban government that included Fidel or his brother Raúl.

<sup>389</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.*

<sup>390</sup> See Paragraph 4.4.3

<sup>391</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.* p. 45

Cuban-born Mario Baeza, a partner in a top Manhattan law firm, to the office of Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs<sup>392</sup>. Mas Canosa urged important Democrats whose campaigns were supported by the Foundation PAC to help reject the nomination, because Baeza was too soft on Cuba. The clincher was Baeza's attendance at a Euromoney conference on commerce and investment in Cuba in 1992, which included a trip to Havana to speak with authorities. Mas Canosa, like other extreme *Exiles*, was opposed to both commercial connections with Cuba and visiting the island under Castro. Baeza was dropped from consideration for the powerful job.

In this way, the Foundation was able to influence U.S. foreign policy by leveraging the financial prosperity of Cuban Americans under Mas Canosa's leadership. CANF skilfully used the U.S. political system's structure of interest group politics.

#### 4.3.3 The Presidential election cycles between 1992 and 2004

*Exiles'* national policy impact was based on vote-rigging and judicious use of political donations and lobbying. Presidential elections, particularly in the post-Cold War period, offered *Exiles* with a chance to get ethnic concessions by persuading existing presidents, rather than just lawmakers, to promote policies they desired. Even as the *Exiles'* influence over Congress waned, their discretionary authority over presidents persisted<sup>393</sup>.

The cycle of ethnic policy concerns the exchange of policies in favour of a particular ethnic group in return for political support. The deal to get votes in the Cuban American case has to do mainly with foreign policy: it is based on promoting and maintaining a hard line on Cuba aimed at isolating and destabilising the Castro regime in order to make it collapse. Susan Eckstein<sup>394</sup> examined how, between 1992 and 2004, Cuba's domestic policies was integrally connected to the presidential election cycle. Thus, ethnic government initiatives differed between election and non-election years, responding to the concerns and aspirations of the ethnic electorate in election years and being reversed or not implemented in non-election years when reforms initiated by the electorate clashed with non-election government concerns. Although Cuban Americans constitute less than 1% of the U.S. population, as said before, they have capitalized on the importance of their vote by primarily residing in the largest swing state, Florida, and electing "their own" candidates to local offices, voting in large

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<sup>392</sup> Cohen, R. (1993, February 4). What happened to Mario Baeza? Washington Post. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1993/02/04/what-happened-to-mario-baeza/6130a32e-9493-47ad-8d90-b9d35a3312b4/>

<sup>393</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>394</sup> Susan Eckstein is a Professor in the Pardee School of Global Studies and in the Sociology Department at Boston University. She has written numerous books and articles on Mexican urban poor, political-economic developments in Cuba, Cuban immigrants, immigration policy, impacts of Latin American revolutions, and edited books on Latin American social movements and social rights, and on immigrant impacts in their homelands. Available at: <https://www.bu.edu/sociology/profile/susan-eckstein/>

numbers, and prioritizing ethnic concerns when casting ballots. Moreover, the electoral college system, which is founded on the winner-take-all principle<sup>395</sup>, has increased the significance of their vote in presidential elections. Cuban Americans made up 8% of Florida’s electorate at the turn of the century, in a state that accounted for one-tenth of the electoral college vote.

Table 3.7 Summary of US embargo tightening and loosening measures in the post-Cold War era, and whether incumbent president loses Florida in the election

Year	Personal embargo		Macro embargo		Incumbent	
	Loosening	Tightening	Loosening	Tightening	Wins Fla	Loses Fla
1992		x		x	x	
1994		x				
1995	x					
1996		x		x	x	
1998	x					
1999	x					
2000	[Elián] <sup>a</sup>	x <sup>b</sup>	x			x <sup>c</sup>
2003	x <sup>d</sup>					
2004		x			x	

Notes:  
a Elián returned to Cuba, amidst Cuban American opposition.  
b Codification of travel cap, amidst congressional pressure to lift travel restrictions (but no alteration of frequency of permitted visits).  
c Incumbent vice president runs for office, associated with incumbent president’s Elián policy.  
d Loosening of restrictions for Cuban Americans, though tightening of restrictions for other Americans.

Figure 4.9 – U.S. embargo tightening and loosening measures, 1992-2004 | *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*<sup>396</sup>

The table summarizes embargo relaxing and strengthening measures undertaken between 1992 and 2004 in presidential election and non-election years. It shows if the measures were enacted by an incumbent and whether the incumbent who enacted the embargo measures won the vote in Florida. When embargo regulations were inconsistent with non-ethnically based governance concerns, they grew more stringent in presidential election years and less restrictive in non-election years. In election years, the power of rich hard-line ethnic lobbyists who can offer votes is projected to surge<sup>397</sup>.

The ethnic policy cycle started in 1992, with the passing of the *Cuban Democracy Act*, against the background of the Foundation’s impact detailed above. Despite his doubts, George H. W. Bush backed the Act as he sought for re-election in order to secure the votes of Cuban Americans in Florida. Knowing how vital the state was to his re-election, he intentionally signed the bill in Miami<sup>398</sup> on the eve of the election, and recognized Mas Canosa as one of the major drivers behind the new law. Another evidence that his position on the law was influenced by political considerations was that he had previously vetoed the so-called *Mack Amendment*, the forerunner to the 1992 statute – this way, Bush proved that ethnic PAC donations did not guarantee presidential support for legislation in non-

<sup>395</sup> *Winner-take-all*. (n.d.). Ballotpedia. Available at: <https://ballotpedia.org/Winner-take-all>

<sup>396</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>397</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>398</sup> Bell, J. S. (1993). Violation of International Law and Doomed U.S. Policy: An Analysis of the Cuban Democracy Act. *The University of Miami Inter-American Law Review*, 25 (1), pp. 77-129. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40176331>

election years. However, as Bush stood for re-election, he listened to lobbyists and political donors, after his opponent, Clinton, proclaimed his support for the *Cuban Democracy Act*, which was then before Congress. In connection with the election, Bush reversed his objection to strengthening the embargo by extraterritorial measures. When given the decision between supporting business and allied interests and seeking the votes of Cuban Americans in Florida in order to get re-elected, he chose the latter. Further indicative of the fact that his changed position was electoral rather than ideological, Bush at the time allowed U.S. companies to trade with communist China, both from the U.S. and third countries. In the case of China, commercial interests had prevailed, as before, at the height of the Cold War. Bush's opportunism paid off: three quarters of Cuban Americans in Florida voted for him, enough to win the state. However, in the post-Cold War period, most of the national population cared little about U.S. policy toward Cuba; his support for the *Cuban Democracy Act* was insufficient to gain him re-election and Clinton won. A Democrat entered the White House after twelve years of Republican administrations. With the conclusion of the Cold War, the emphasis shifted from combating communism as a global force to defending democracy and human rights. This move encouraged some members of the Clinton administration to urge for a fresh strategy and a softer stance on the Cuban crisis. Because CANF members continued to embrace a severe stance, this new opposition constituted a fresh challenge in Cuba-related affairs<sup>399</sup>.

The election of 1996 set off a new cycle of ethnic politics in the country. Clinton, like Bush in 1992, used his position to promote fresh embargo-strengthening legislation – a legislation that he had earlier opposed – during his re-election campaign. He, too, was worried about the law's extraterritorial assertions, which were widely seen as unconstitutional. The *Helms-Burton Bill* was even more unpopular than the Cuban Democracy Act among businessmen and international governments: it was considered a breach of GATT and WTO norms, as well as an affront to national sovereignty and commercial rights. Despite general opposition, Clinton approved the *Helms-Burton Act* shortly after the downing of planes flown by the exile group *Hermanos al Rescate* in Cuba in February 1996 – which exacerbated the anger of Florida Cubans. Following the accident, 75% of Miami Cuban Americans backed the Bill, and as a result of this massive turnout, Clinton shifted his position on the measure in the backdrop of heightened anti-Castro fervour during an election year. He, too, signed the bill in Florida, as did Bush. He planned it to coincide with the start of the state's primary election, inviting notable Cuban Americans to the ceremony. Clinton's support for the legislation helped him win about a third of the Cuban American Florida vote that November, not enough to break the Republican hold on the state's Cuban American electoral bloc, but enough to win the state's electoral college votes and, as a result, his presidential re-election bid. He was the first

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<sup>399</sup> *Ibidem*



Democratic candidate to win Florida in 20 years. Despite the fact that his backing for the bill was excellent election-year politics in Florida, it weakened any possibility he had in a second term of lifting the embargo in return for island changes and reforms. In fact, the *Helms-Burton Act*, among other things, limited the president's power to remove the embargo without Congressional consent. Clinton had worked for four years to acquire votes in Florida for his re-election bid: although he was interested in improving U.S.-Cuba bilateral ties and in promoting reforms on the island, when forced to pick, he prioritized his re-election<sup>400</sup>. His support for the 1996 legislation was clearly political. After winning a second term, he never enforced the provision of the bill that foreign governments and investors found particularly despicable – the one that gave U.S. citizens the right to sue international investors who “trafficked” in property they owned prior to the revolution. Only the passage of the Act, with its extraterritorial scope, infuriated the international community, resulting in a huge surge in country votes in the United Nations General Assembly condemning the embargo<sup>401</sup>.

The 2000 election extended the ethnic political cycle to unprecedented heights. Prior to the vote, Clinton signed a legislation authorizing U.S. food shipments to Cuba into law. He backed the embargo-lifting during an election year when he was unable to run again. When Al Gore won the national popular vote, Cuban Americans helped George Bush win the electoral college vote. Florida was pivotal in deciding the election result. Officially, Bush won the state by 537 votes<sup>402</sup>, with more than 80% of Cuban Americans supporting him. The ethnic election cycle of 2000 was affected by the affair of Elián Gonzalez. He was a six-year-old Cuban kid who was rescued at sea on Thanksgiving Day 1999, when the raft carrying his mother and many others overturned; his mother perished in the disaster. Once in Miami, a custody dispute erupted, with the boy's family contending that since they could provide him with a better life than his father in Cuba, they should be granted custody. The custody struggle that occurred between the boy's family and his father in Cuba was a rallying point for Cuban Americans in Miami.

It was Elián's potential as a political subject, what he represented metaphorically in terms of dominant ideologies about citizenship and immigration in the U.S., and his position in a particular immigrant community, the Cuban exile community in Miami, that so captured an American media audience<sup>403</sup>.

79% of Miami Cuban Americans thought Elián should remain in the United States with his family, whereas 63% of Americans thought Elián should live with his father, and just 25% of them

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<sup>400</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>401</sup> UNGA. (1998, October 14). *Assembly urges states to repeal or invalidate laws with extraterritorial effect on sovereignty, free trade, navigation of other states / Meetings Coverage and Press Releases* [Press release]. Available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/1998/19981014.ga9479.html>

<sup>402</sup> <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/on-this-day-bush-v-gore-anniversary>

<sup>403</sup> Henn, M. K. (2008). *Op. cit.* p. 57

supported the Miami relatives<sup>404</sup>. The Cuban American National Foundation funded Elián's Florida relatives' quest for custody of the kid. During this time, Gore and Bush, who were both running for the approaching 2000 presidential election, felt compelled to express their views in order to earn the support of the Cuban community and Elián unwittingly contributed to Bush's unusually high level of popularity among Cuban Americans that year. Despite the community's inclination for bloc voting, it had never used the ballot box in such unison in a presidential election before. In fact, Cuban Americans banded together to oppose Al Gore, Clinton's vice president. Although he openly split with the President in order to support the Miami families in their fight to retain Elián in the United States, he was doomed by his relationship with the Clinton administration – Gore was even afraid to campaign in Cuban American areas in Miami. Following the government's decision to repatriate the child to his father in Cuba, the child's paternal family fought and refused to let him leave. The government attempted to provide many options to his great-uncle Lázaro González, but he refused. On April 20, 2000, the administration requested that federal authorities act immediately. On the morning of April 22, eight federal officials knocked on Lázaro González's door and rushed in to take the child away<sup>405</sup>. Efforts made by the Clinton administration to enforce international custody rights cost Gore dearly. Elián's return to the island outraged Cuban Americans so much that they rushed to back Bush when his election was challenged. As a result, the local authorities in charge of conducting a recount were frightened to the point of assisting to put an end to the verification process<sup>406</sup>.



*Figure 4.10 – On 22 April 2000, Alan Diaz of the Associated Press took a photo showing the armed intervention of U.S. federal agents in Miami, Florida, to return the Cuban child Elián González to his father. The following year, the photo won the Pulitzer Prize | AP Photo/Alan Diaz*

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<sup>404</sup> *Ibidem* p. 58

<sup>405</sup> Il Post. (2020, April 22). *Il ritorno di Elián González, 20 anni fa*. Available at: <https://www.ilpost.it/2020/04/22/elian-gonzalez-20-anni-fa/>

<sup>406</sup> *Ibidem*

George W. Bush remarked that: «The photograph of the frightened boy being removed from his home at gunpoint was chilling and not an image a freedom-loving nation wants to show the world»<sup>407</sup>.

After the scandal, his popularity among Cuban Americans in Florida declined from 82 to 77% when he ran for re-election in 2004. Nonetheless, even with this degree of support, hardliners pressed Bush for policy compromises: they were disappointed that he had done nothing to further their anti-Castro cause during his first term. For instance, Bush had not reversed the Clinton administration's *wet-foot policy* of returning to Cuba islanders discovered at sea while trying to escape without U.S. entry clearance; moreover, Bush, like Clinton, had stopped implementation of the *Helms-Burton Act* clause. Finally, Bush had relaxed the so-called personal embargo, as well as limits on family access and remittance-sending privileges. Paralleling the activity of hard-line lobbyists with political donations, David Rivera<sup>408</sup>, a U.S.-born Tallahassee politician, pressed Bush to implement more tough regulations. Rivera was well-connected in exile networks: he had previously worked for then-Florida Senator Connie Mack (who advocated for the predecessor to the Cuban Democracy Act in the 1980s) and for the Cuban American National Foundation, Radio and TV Martí before becoming a state representative<sup>409</sup>. Despite never having been to Cuba, he claimed exile validity because to his familial origins. According to him: «Every Cuban American has a moral obligation to continue the cause of a free and democratic Cuba. You grow up and all your family does is talk about Cuba. Your parents, your grandparents, they instil in you a sense of pride in the homeland»<sup>410</sup>. Rivera and other Cuban Americans threatened to withdraw Republican financial and tactical support, including assistance in fundraising, if Bush did not react to their demands. The Florida legislature was especially enraged when the Bush administration returned twelve Cuban boatpeople to the island in 2003, despite the fact that it had done so legally. Members of Congress from both parties were firmly committed to granting special status and rights to Cuban citizens in their respective states, including a freedom to visit without official authorization. The Bush administration never answered to all of their requests, but in spring 2004, it introduced more severe measures, based on the freshly announced recommendations of the Commission for the Assistance of a Free Cuba<sup>411</sup>, which was led by Colin Powell, then Secretary of State. New support for TV Martí and dissidents on the island was

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<sup>407</sup> Van Natta Jr., D. (2000, April 23). *Bush Criticizes Administration For Removing Boy "at Gunpoint."* The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2000/04/23/us/bush-criticizes-administration-for-removing-boy-at-gunpoint.html>

<sup>408</sup> In 2002, he ran for Florida's 112th state house district. He defeated Ray Gonzalez in the Republican primary, 52-48%. He won the general election unopposed. He won re-election unopposed in 2004, 2006, and 2008.

<sup>409</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>410</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>411</sup> "President Bush formed the U.S. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba to explore ways we can help hasten and ease Cuba's democratic transition. As this report shows, the United States seeks to cooperate with neighbours in the hemisphere and nations across the globe to help Cubans prepare for democratic change". *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba*. (n.d.). U.S. Department of State Archive. Available at: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/wha/rt/cuba/index.htm>

announced, in addition to a tightening of restrictions on Cuban-Americans’ ability to travel to the island and send money back home. In the midst of his re-election campaign, Bush went back on some of his earlier loosened limitations, showing a new ethnic electoral cycle, dominated by radical *Exiles*. They still hoped that a more severe restriction on people-to-people level would put an end to the Castro regime. Florida Republican state representatives, Miami Cuban American officials, the Cuban American south Florida congressional contingent, and hard-line Cuban American groups – such as Mothers and Women Against Repression, the Cuban Liberty Council (CLC), and Unidad Cubana – were all satisfied by the new measures<sup>412</sup>.

Under Bush, the “ethnic bargain” featured economic benefits as well. Anti-Castro organizations in Miami received millions from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which was supposed to support democracy in Cuba. At the same time, 30% of agency spending on Cuba were determined to be suspicious: the help provided by Washington seemed more concerned with securing the support of Florida *Exiles* than encouraging change on the island<sup>413</sup>. Therefore, both individually and collectively, Cuban Americans gained significantly from their support for Bush. However, between 1998 and 2004, Democrats received more Cuban American PAC funding than Republicans. The PAC directors distributed campaign money to purchase political influence, regardless of the politicians’ party affiliations. Nevertheless, the Cuban American electorate voted Bush in 2004, as it did in 2000, although in smaller numbers – with still a high percentage of *Exiles* supporting him<sup>414</sup>.

	Year of arrival				US-born	All
	1959-64	1965-74	1975-84	1985-2004		
Citizens	96 (97)	90 (97)	71 (81)	24 (1985-94: 56) (1995-2007: 19)	98 (99)	67 (66)
Registered voter if citizen and age-eligible	95 (97)	93 (98)	86 (92)	82 (1985-94: 85) (1995-2007: 60)	86 (94)	90 (91)
Registered Republican <sup>a</sup>	74 (77)	80 (73)	68 (73)	67 (1985-94: 66) (1995-2007: 61)	42 (50)	69 (66)
Candidates' position on Cuba important in determining how vote	75	75	74	78	69	75
Satisfaction with Congressman representing interviewee's views on Cuba	85	92	85	84	77	86

Source: FIU-IPOR 2004 and 2007 (FIU-IPOR 2007 [www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba2004/years.htm](http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba2004/years.htm) and [www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba8/polresults.html](http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba8/polresults.html)).  
 Note: N = 1,811 in 2004, and 1,000 in 2007.  
 a In 2004 7 percent and 14 percent of the 1959-64 and post-1984 emigrants, respectively, and 26 percent of the US born were registered as Independents. In 2007 12, 15, 17, 10, and 13 percent of 1959-64, 1965-74, 1974-84, 1985-94, and 1995-2007 emigrants were registered as Independents, as were 22 percent of the US born.

Figure 4.11 – Political affiliation among Cuban immigrants per year of arrival | *The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland*<sup>415</sup>

According to the data, although most Cuban Americans registered Republican in Miami, in 2004 the rates were higher among those who departed before the Freedom Flights ended.

<sup>412</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>413</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>414</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>415</sup> *Ibidem*

Finally, high-level patronage appointments were made more common under the Clinton and Bush administrations. For example, Clinton nominated Paul Cejas of Miami, the second-largest Cuban American Democratic political donor between 1979 and 2000, to serve as his ambassador to Belgium<sup>416</sup>. As compared to Bill Clinton, George W. Bush placed more prominent Cuban Americans in high positions. During his first term, he appointed Cuban Americans to the National Security Council and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and during his second term, to the Department of Commerce. All of the appointees had fled Cuba as children during Castro's early years in power. The high-level appointments offered Cuban Americans in general symbolic authority, but, at the same time, Bush urged the appointments to push his own political agenda<sup>417</sup>. For example, he openly asked Mel Martínez, his first Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, to maximize Cuban American turnout in the battleground state when he ran for re-election and, later, to increase Republican presence in Congress by co-chairing the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, which legitimized the 2004 embargo-tightening measures, and by supporting a Cuban American's resignation to run for Senator in Florida. During his second term, it was the turn of Carlos Gutiérrez, Bush's Secretary of Commerce, to defend his Cuba policy.

Although the 2004 election was not as closely fought as the previous one, it was still extremely close, and Florida was once again at stake as a critical swing state.

#### **4.3.4 The end to *Exile's* control and the break in the ethnic politics cycle**

After the turn of the century, the hard-line *Exile's* political monopoly started to erode. The hardliners power was built not just on votes and political contributions, but also on preventing opposing views from being heard. When they were left without a prominent leader following Mas Canosa's death, the core contradictions, which were mostly based on generational and emigrational differences, rose to the surface. Differing perspectives on cross-border interactions split the emigrant community, both at the leadership level and more broadly. Furthermore, national-level political changes have increasingly shown to be detrimental to hardliners. The public's attention was drawn increasingly to other anti-embargo interests, such as business and human rights advocacy. More and more Latino immigrants and *New Cubans* had gained the right to vote by becoming citizens, reducing the influence of *Exiles* in the polling process. As time passed, an increasing number of second-generation Cuban Americans came of age. All of these new voter groups were less supportive of maintaining conflictual ties with the island.

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<sup>416</sup> *Biography: Paul L. Cejas*. (n.d.). U.S. Department of States Archive. Available at: [https://1997-2001.state.gov/about\\_state/biography/cejas\\_paul.html](https://1997-2001.state.gov/about_state/biography/cejas_paul.html)

<sup>417</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

## *The leadership divide*

*Exiles* created a new PAC in 2003: the U.S.-Cuba Democracy PAC<sup>418</sup> raised more than half a million dollars in individual contributions in its first year, nearly four times more than the Free Cuba PAC had raised between 1998 and 2004, and twice as much as it had raised in its most successful year, 1984, when Reagan was courting Cuban Americans. As a result, it became one of the 150 greatest political action committees in the United States, as well as the largest single foreign policy donor, and the basis for ongoing promotion of a severe position on U.S. policy toward Cuba<sup>419</sup>. The new PAC – as those previously created – used funds to elect anti-Castro and pro-embargo politicians, as well as to build an anti-Castro base among Congressmen. In its initial election cycle, funds were distributed to as many as seventy-five congressional candidates. At a time when the U.S. was developing ties with other communist nations and pressing for global economic liberalization, the new PAC battled hard to maintain and expand barriers to the island. All but four of the backed candidates were elected in 2004, and Congress repealed attempts to ease travel and commerce with Cuba in 2005. The new PAC, like the Foundation before it, sponsored politicians across party lines and outside its mostly Floridian taxpayer base. In 2007, the new PAC aided in the defeat of a proposal by the newly Democrat-controlled Congress to relax prohibitions on agricultural commerce with Cuba.

In the 2007-2008 cycle, the U.S.-Cuba Democracy PAC raised \$322,500 in political donations<sup>420</sup>. Fifty-two of the sixty-six Democrats who voted against the proposed easing of the embargo, including seventeen of the twenty-two freshmen Democrats, had received contributions – the PAC was still going on fighting to keep intact an embargo that had failed to overthrow the Castro government in more than forty years. However, while the PAC and the Foundation under Mas Canosa's influence had effectively lobbied for the tightening of the measures, the new PAC's success was limited to defensively rejecting Congressional moves to relax the embargo.

The formation of the new PAC followed the detachment of influential *Exiles* from the Foundation to join the Cuban Freedom Council (CLC) in 2001, whose mission to promote liberty and democracy in Cuba differed little from the Foundation's itself. The break occurred at a time when the Foundation was facing leadership and financial challenges. Mas Canosa's son, Jorge Mas Santos, took over the organization when his father died in 1997; however, the son lacked his father's charisma as well as validity as a legitimate voice for people who departed Cuba in opposition to the Revolution,

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<sup>418</sup> *U.S. Cuba Democracy PAC*. (2015). United States. [Web Archive] Retrieved from the Library of Congress. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0010970/>

<sup>419</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>420</sup> *Ibidem*

since he had never been to Cuba. He was competent, but his political approach was more business-like and Americanised than his father's, which his supporters preferred<sup>421</sup>. In terms of financial difficulties, the Foundation received just \$5,000 in donations in 2004, after the establishment of the U.S.-Cuba Democracy PAC. Furthermore, the value of MasTec shares, the Foundation's primary source of financing, had fallen. At the time of Mas Canosa's death the stocks had been valued at about \$5 million. By 2001 their value had halved<sup>422</sup>. CANF was forced to cut its employees, shut its Washington lobbying office, and close its radio station<sup>423</sup>. Although Mas Santos had successfully negotiated a deal that prohibited U.S. funding for Cuba's food purchases, severely limiting the island's purchasing capacity, he started to promote moderation and conciliation in bilateral ties with Cuba. Mas Santos even stated his readiness to meet with high-level Cuban leaders, in addition to Fidel and Raul Castro, to negotiate a democratic transition. Therefore, the hardliners chose to leave the Foundation<sup>424</sup>. Moreover, during the 2008 presidential campaign, after a speech by then-presumptive Democratic nominee Barack Obama, Mas Santos openly campaigned for relaxing the ban on a people-to-people basis. The CLC's hardliners, on the other hand, insisted on regime change as a prerequisite for cross-border cooperation. The conflicts also turned cultural: in 2001, Mas Santos and the then-Mayor of Miami-Dade County, Alex Penelas, born in the United States, urged that the Latin American Grammys should be held in Miami, citing the prestige and attention that the event would bring to the city<sup>425</sup>. Hardliner *Exiles*, on the other hand, were opposed since the gala would draw globally famous Cuban artists to the city. After a judge invalidated the constitutionality of the rule barring the county from doing business with organizations and persons headquartered in Cuba, the Grammy organizers continued to prepare the 2001 ceremony in Miami: Cuban performers were excluded from the embargo. Finally, three weeks before the event, the organizing committee caved in to demand and relocated the Grammys to Los Angeles. This initial struggle was won by hard-line *Exiles* who, nevertheless, became aware of the existence of a new generation of Cuban Americans. Two years later, the Grammys organizing committee, with the Foundation's backing, rescheduled the event in Miami. This time, hardliners took use of their political capital, links to then-Governor Jeb Bush<sup>426</sup> and his access to the White House. As a consequence, the Cuban musicians who were supposed to attend the awards presentation were denied travel permits by the State Department. The

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<sup>421</sup> Font, M. A., Larson, S., & Xuereb, D. (2004). *Cuba Today. Continuity and change since the 'Periodo especial.'* Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, p. 136

<sup>422</sup> Miami Herald (August 8, 2001). Available at: <http://64.21.33.164/CNews/y01/ago01/08e7.htm>, p. 3; cited in Font, M. A., Larson, S., & Xuereb, D. (2004). *Cuba Today. Continuity and change since the 'Periodo especial.'* Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, p. 138

<sup>423</sup> *Idem*, p. 136

<sup>424</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>425</sup> *Idem*, p. 137

<sup>426</sup> Jeb Bush was the 43rd governor of the state of Florida, serving from 1999 through 2007. He was the third Republican elected to the state's highest office and the only Republican in the state's history to be re-elected. *Jeb Bush*. (n.d.). The Institute of Politics at Harvard University. Available at: <https://iop.harvard.edu/fellows/jeb-bush>

event went on nevertheless, despite the fact that no Cuban artists were there<sup>427</sup>. With his re-election campaign looming, President Bush used his discretionary authority in this issue to side with the hardliners on whom he relied for financial, media, and political support. As a result, the ethnic political cycle tied to elections took on a cultural shape in 2003. After the turn of the century, the new Foundation was not alone in fostering the development of cross-border connections. It joined more than twenty other groups in 2005 to establish Consensus Cubano, an umbrella organisation dedicated to peace and nonviolent transformation in Cuba. Among the linked organizations was the newly founded Cuba Study Group, which was made up of powerful and rich businesspeople and professionals who had departed as youths shortly after Castro took control<sup>428</sup>. According to the group's mission statement, "in the aftermath of the Elián González incident, the founding members realized that policies based on strategic rather than reflexive considerations were needed", and with this in mind, they committed themselves to "practical, proactive, and consensual approaches towards Cuba policy"<sup>429</sup>. While they were firmly devoted to regime change in their country, the anguish of the unsuccessful effort to retain Elián in the United States had caused them to reconsider their attitude on Cuba. Hardliners reclaimed control in the early 2000s, preserving their clout via lobbying, political donations, and ballot-box votes. However, by the time of the 2008 elections, their impact on national politics had decreased, since Jeb Bush was no longer governor, and his brother was not eligible for re-election as president. Furthermore, the Cuban American community found itself more and more divided in 2008.

### ***The cohort and generational divide***

Meanwhile, a profound political schism arose in the whole Cuban American community, owing to distinct cohorts of emigration and generational divides. *New Cubans* and Cubans born in the United States preferred retaining ties with the island, which hard-line exiles vehemently opposed. According to Miami poll data, Cuban Americans were more divided on the embargo in general and the sale of medication and food in particular, as well as on re-establishing diplomatic contacts and conversation with the Cuban government, on tourism and sending remittances. Again, the perspectives of Cuban Americans differed mostly depending on when they emigrated<sup>430</sup>.

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<sup>427</sup> Font, M. A., Larson, S., & Xuereb, D. (2004). *Cuba Today. Continuity and change since the 'Periodo especial.'* Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies, p. 137

<sup>428</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>429</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>430</sup> *Ibidem*



*Table 3.4 Views toward US Cuba policies among Cuban Americans in Miami in 2004 and 2007 (data for 2007 in parentheses)*

	<i>Year of arrival</i>				<i>US-born</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>1959-64</i>	<i>1965-74</i>	<i>1975-84</i>	<i>1985+</i>		
1. Favor reestablishing diplomatic ties	29%	26%	38%	61%	56%	43% (57%)
2. Believe that embargo overall does not work	68 (71)	70 (65)	73 (70)	81 (1985-94: 79) (1995-2007: 83)	78 (82)	75 (77)
3. Favor continuation of embargo	75 (78)	77 (79)	68 (68)	56 (1985-94: 48) (1995-2007: 41)	54 (54)	66 (58)
4. Favor dialogue among exiles, dissidents & Cuban government	45 (43)	41 (49)	54 (50)	68 (1985-94: 66) (1995-2007: 79)	71 (83)	56 (65)
5. Support direct US military invasion to overthrow Cuban government	62 (61)	67 (51)	64 (55)	50 (1985-94: 46) (1995-2007: 41)	69 (64)	60 (51)
6. Support military action by exile community to overthrow Castro government	66 (74)	65 (66)	60 (75)	52 (1985-94: 71) (1995-2007: 72)	64 (69)	60 (71)
7. Should stop agricultural trade with Cuba	65 (63)	69 (52)	56 (51)	35 (1985-94: 36) (1995-2007: 26)	33 (30)	51 (40)
8. Favor allowing companies to sell medicine to Cuba	61 (59)	58 (64)	64 (69)	80 (1985-94: 69) (1995-2007: 85)	79 (68)	69 (72)
9. Favor allowing US companies to sell food to Cuba	42 (37)	39 (46)	50 (56)	72 (1985-94: 62) (1995-2007: 78)	65 (69)	55 (62)
10. Favor return to Bush policies until 2003	(36)	(52)	(49)	(1985-94: 71) (1995-2007: 86)	(64)	(64)

*Sources:* FIU-IPOR ([www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba8/pollsresults.html](http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cuba8/pollsresults.html)).  
*Note:* N = 1,811 in 2004 and 1,000 in 2007.

*Figure 4.12 – Views toward U.S. Cuba policies among Cuban Americans in Miami, 2004-2007 | The Immigrant Divide: How Cuban Americans Changed the U.S. and Their Homeland<sup>431</sup>*

On every political topic, the *New Cubans* favoured reducing barriers. Even though they had more years to acquire the host community’s beliefs, early post-Castro expatriates in Miami varied the most in their perspectives from non-Cuban Americans: in a 2000 study, 60% of non-Cubans in Miami stated they would vote to abolish the trade embargo backed by the exiles if given the chance<sup>432</sup>.

Generational differences between those born in the United States and those born in Cuba were also increasing. In the early 2000s, about half of all Cuban Americans were born in the United States. In Miami, U.S.-born Cuban Americans were more similar to *New Cubans* than to their parents’ generation in terms of views on foreign policy (see the Table above). However, the basis for this similarity of opinion had different origins: the newcomers were shaped by their continued commitment to friends and family who remained on the island, while the U.S.-born by their North American upbringing. When it came to backing an exile-led military assault, those born in the United States were just as determined as their parents’ generation: supporting the invasion, vengeance, and regaining Cuba all constituted unfinished business for them. Those born in the United States were therefore rather paradoxical in their opinions on Cuban events, reflecting on both their familial and American experiences. The ideological disagreements that drove the CLC’s break with the Cuban American National Foundation were generational in character: second-generation Cuban Americans made up the bulk of the group that stayed linked with the Foundation. They remained dedicated to their parents’ generational war against Castro while being affected in strategy by the more conciliatory style of U.S. politics imprinted in their upbringing in the U.S. The Cuban American

<sup>431</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>432</sup> *Ibidem*

division was also seen in partisan politics. In 2004, influential Cuban Americans openly split from the Republican majority that *Exiles* had worked to construct in the 1980s. For instance, American Joe García<sup>433</sup> resigned as executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation in the run-up to the 2004 presidential election to work for the New Democrat Network in Washington. His task was to persuade Cuban American Democrats to vote Democratic. In the new climate, numerous important Cuban Americans openly questioned the Miami Republican Party's authority (such as García and Raúl Martínez – Democrat mayor of Hialeah – contesting Mario and Lincoln Díaz-Balart, respectively, for the Congressional seats they held. They had never faced a major challenge from other Cuban Americans until the 2008 election). The Democratic candidates attempted to bridge the “generational divide” among Cuban Americans by concentrating less on the Castro brothers and more on relaxing the personal embargo imposed by Bush in 2004, as well as on internal concerns. Two-thirds of U.S.-born Cuban Americans, all of whom are by definition U.S. citizens and so entitled to vote if of voting age, opposed Bush's 2004 tightening of the personal embargo (see the Table above). In 2008, certain presidential candidates initially indicated support for lifting the personal embargo against the background of a widening divide in opinion among the voters and the breakdown of hardliner rule at the leadership level. The Republican candidate, John McCain, stated his support for the continuance of Bush's policies. Hillary Clinton had a similar stance in the absence of policy change in Cuba. Barack Obama, on the other hand, declared that he would relax the Bush administration's limitations on Cuban Americans' ability to visit relatives in Cuba and send remittances, stating that his predecessor's actions had made Cubans too reliant on the Castro dictatorship. Clinton got CLC and PAC assistance throughout her Democratic primary campaign, as did McCain during his Republican effort. Obama, who denied the PAC's funding, was not associated with Cuban Americans who opposed the lifting of the embargo, carrying the political danger of alienating hardliner Democratic supporters<sup>434</sup>. A restoration to Bush's more lenient personal embargo regulations, which were in force until 2004, was supported by half of the registered voters at the time, albeit just a third of the exiles. Obama won Florida with one-third of the Cuban American vote, and he loosened travel restrictions after just two months in office.

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<sup>433</sup> Joe García represented Florida's 26th congressional district in the House of Representatives from 2013 to 2015. A Democrat, Garcia represented most of western Miami-Dade County and the Florida Keys in Congress. He previously served as executive director of the Cuban American National Foundation and in the Department of Energy. In 2021, he became a registered lobbyist on behalf of the government of Ethiopia.

<sup>434</sup> Eckstein, S. (2009). *Op. cit.*

## CHAPTER FIVE - Florida as a *swing state* from 2008 to 2020. A comparative analysis

### *Introduction*

Although the last few Florida elections have been very close, this has not always been the case. The state of Florida voted Democratic in almost every election throughout the first half of the twentieth century due to its residents' devotion to the Democratic Party in the southern states. With the passage of the *Civil Rights Act*, the Democratic Party's stances started to evolve, and some Floridians began to adjust their views as well. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Cuban Americans have consistently voted Republican since the dawn of the Cuban Revolution. Many believe that the resentment Cubans had against Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs and the Cubans' relationship with Reagan in the 1980s are to blame for this. After continuing until the 1990s, this pattern has begun to shift in recent years.

Since the Cuban American population has been rapidly changing over the previous two decades, political experts have anticipated that Cuban Americans would suddenly switch their political allegiance and vote Democrat<sup>435</sup>. By the year 2000, for example, the population was about evenly divided between immigrants who came before and after the 1980 Mariel boatlift. Post-1980 immigrants tended to be economic exiles who lacked the anti-Castro passion that distinguishes older émigrés' political convictions. The dramatic transformation in the demographic makeup and views of the Cuban American community over the last two decades begs the issue of why Democratic politicians do not get greater support among Cuban American voters.

Predictions of dramatic change in the attitudes and behaviour of the Cuban American electorate are based on a distinguished literature on voting behaviour, which holds that social psychological attachments such as partisanship and predispositions toward key actors and key issues strongly influence vote choice<sup>436</sup>. From this vantage point, the shifting demographics predict potentially substantial changes in voting patterns as a result of rising numbers of post-Mariel immigration and native-born Cuban Americans, who are producing an electorate that is less solidly Republican and less vehemently anti-Castro. While the logic of quick shift in Cuban Americans' voting preferences is theoretically persuasive, previous elections have shown little evidence for the argument that the Cuban American electorate is growing more progressive.

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<sup>435</sup> Bishin, B. G., & Klofstad, C. A. (2011). The Political Incorporation of Cuban Americans. *Political Research Quarterly*, 65 (3), pp. 586–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912911414589>

<sup>436</sup> *Ibidem*

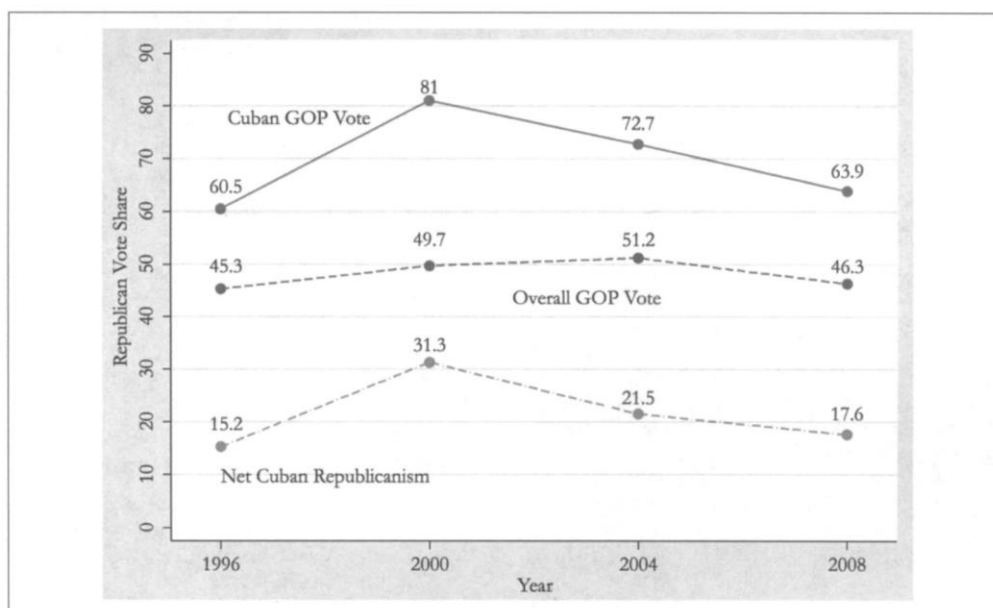


Figure 5.1 – Republican presidential vote share among Cuban Americans in Miami Dade County, 1996-2008 / FIU Cuba Poll<sup>437</sup>.

The top line in *Figure 5.1* displays the percentage of Cuban Americans who voted for the Republican Party in Miami Dade County in presidential elections between 1996 and 2008, while the centre line depicts the proportion of all voters who voted for the Republican Party. The graph’s bottom line depicts the disparity between overall GOP support and Cuban American support for the GOP.

While the 2008 election showed the continuation of a pattern of reduced support for the GOP among Cuban Americans since 2000, John McCain nevertheless won nearly 63.9% of their vote, a proportion greater than the 60.5 percent gained by Bob Dole in 1996. Furthermore, in each of the three 2008 South Florida congressional contests in which incumbent Cuban American Republicans (Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Mario Diaz-Balart, and Lincoln Diaz-Balart) were opposed by Cuban American Democrats, the Republican won convincingly, despite the Democratic Party fielding strong competitors and offering major financial assistance. In addition, given the unique circumstances surrounding the Elian Gonzalez case, the 2000 election seems to be a watershed moment for Cuban American Republican support. Given this background, identifying a trend is difficult, but if a decrease is occurring, it looks to be gradual rather than abrupt<sup>438</sup>.

According to research, political integration occurs gradually over time as an individual’s resources, English proficiency, age, education, generations in the United States, and, most crucially,

<sup>437</sup> Source: Data for 1996 from FIU Cuba Poll (Grenier and Galdwin 1997); 2000 data from Goodnough (2004); 2004 data from 2004 exit poll of voters in Miami Dade County (Bishin and Stevens 2004); 2008 data from 2008 exit poll of voters in Miami Dade County (Bishin and Klostad 2008). Bishin, B. G., & Klostad, C. A. (2011). The Political Incorporation of Cuban Americans. *Political Research Quarterly*, 65 (3), pp. 586–599. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912911414589>

<sup>438</sup> *Ibidem*

the period of time a person has been in the United States all grow rather slowly. As a result, the studies on political incorporation's predictions contradict the assumptions given by standard analyses of voting behaviour, which seldom account for immigration<sup>439</sup>. In answering the question *Why do Cubans still support Republican candidates at the ballot box?* research on political integration better explains the voting behaviour of Cuban Americans. As the foreign-born population has grown in size and importance in the United States, ideas of incorporation have become more significant in interpreting American political behaviour. As seen in the previous chapter, those who arrived after the Mariel boatlift in 1980 had different perspectives than those who immigrated before, due to their diverse socialization experiences. Furthermore, consistent with the literature on political incorporation, post-Mariel immigrants' relatively low socioeconomic status, combined with the disparities in incentives provided by the U.S. government at the time of their arrival, results in their dramatic underrepresentation in the voting electorate when compared to pre-Mariel immigrants.

Predictions of change stem from the observation that the changing demographics will alter the political makeup of the Cuban American community; however, several factors seem to portend moderation in Cuban Americans' voting behaviour. First, members of the second and third generations are increasingly entering the community and electorate. Conventional wisdom suggests that having not experienced communist Cuba, these native-born voters may not feel the passion for the issues that relate to it. Second, because of the influx of new immigrants and the passing of the older exiles, demographic trends depict a community that increasingly consists of post-Mariel immigrants<sup>440</sup>. As with the generational effects, these cohort differences are also manifest in attitude and partisan differences. Presenting direct evidence that cohort or generational effects are associated with Cuban Americans' voting decisions will be the subject of the following section, which will be enriched by a comparative analysis of Florida as a *swing state* from the 2008 election to the last election in 2020.

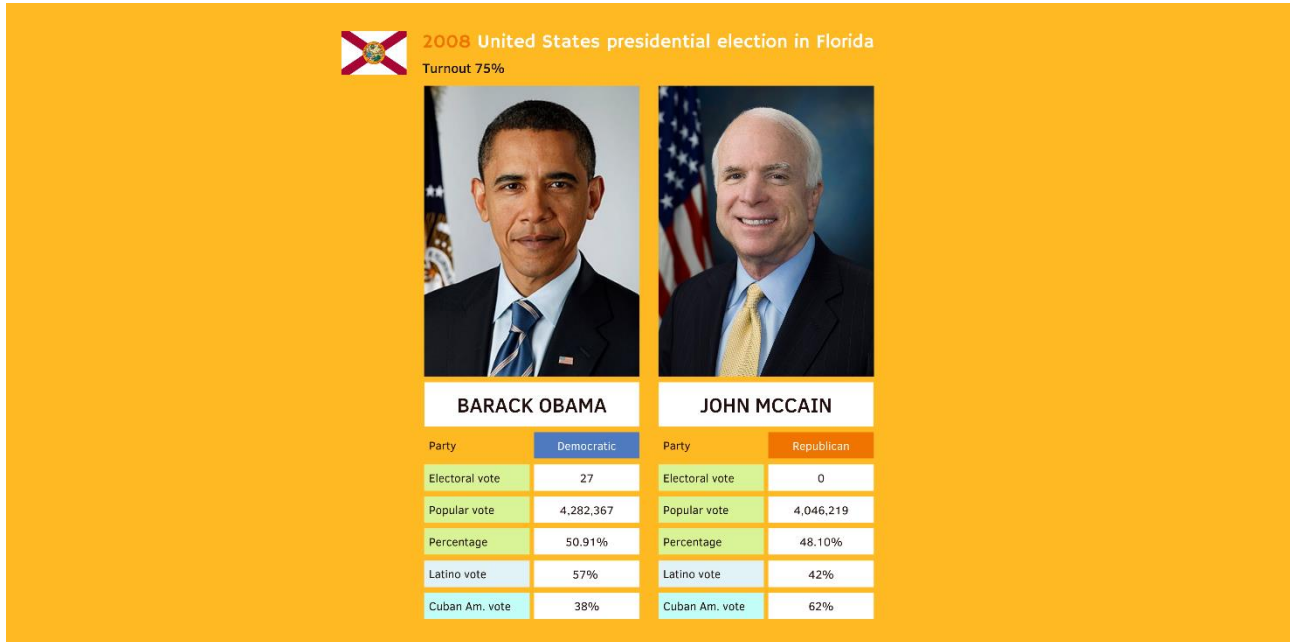
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<sup>439</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>440</sup> *Ibidem*

## 5.1 Obama

### 5.1.1 2008



\*Graphic elaboration by the author of this thesis

Florida was won by Democratic contender Barack Obama by a 2.82 percent margin of victory in 2008, the first time the state was won by a Democrat since 1996. Prior to the election, most news agencies regarded Florida as a *swing state*, since both camps extensively targeted it. Despite polls showing John McCain in the lead for most of 2008, Obama gained momentum in the two months leading up to Election Day. Obama won the state with 51% of the vote, including victories in four counties held by George W. Bush in 2004. According to exit polls, Obama won the state with 96% of the African American vote, 57% of Latino votes, and 52% of Independents<sup>441</sup>.

There was a lot of discussion among the presidential contenders over Cuba's stance. Senator McCain was unambiguous in his support for the continuance of the Bush administration's policy of restrictive measures and the embargo. When it came to the Democrats, the presidential candidates were just as cautious as the local Democratic candidates: although there was agreement on easing travel and money transfers and growing exports to Cuba, neither Senator Clinton nor Senator Obama addressed repealing the embargo<sup>442</sup>. Senator Obama did vow to ease the limitations on family travel

<sup>441</sup> *Local Exit Polls - Election Center 2008 - Elections & Politics from CNN.com.* (2008). CNN. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#val=FLP00p1>

<sup>442</sup> Vagnoux, I. (2009). Washington-Miami-Havana 1999–2009: Towards the End of a Ménage à Trois? *European Journal of American Studies*, 4 (2). Available at: <https://journals.openedition.org/ejas/7623#tocto1n5>

to Cuba and the limits on remittances in his Miami address in front of the CANF on May 23, 2008, but the overall message was clear:

I will maintain the embargo. It provides us with the leverage to present the regime with a clear choice: If you take significant steps toward democracy, beginning with the freeing of all political prisoners, we will take steps to begin normalizing relations. That's the way to bring about real change in Cuba—through a strong, smart and principled diplomacy<sup>443</sup>.

As a result, whether justified or not, the “embargo as leverage” looked to be the lowest common denominator among all contenders. The explanation is simple: promptly removing the embargo would have still been political death in South Florida<sup>444</sup>. No one wanted to risk enraging the elder generation, which was still politically engaged and influential (fewer than 10% of South Florida’s 800,000 population were of Cuban heritage at the time). According to a Miami-based Democratic pollster, Bendixen & Associates, 85% of the elder exiles who reject any concessions were registered to vote, compared to only 18% of those who arrived after 1980<sup>445</sup>. Furthermore, the subject of Cuba was not as heated as in the previous years, so changing course politically would not have been worth it. In other words, despite the fact that Democrats controlled both houses of Congress in 2008, no measure lifting a portion of the embargo made it all the way through the legislative process before being presented to the President for approval<sup>446</sup>. The Democratic leadership did not press those measures, and Harry Reid of Nevada<sup>447</sup> – the Democratic Senate leader in 2008 who passed away in December 2021 – favoured a firm stance on Cuba. However, the Democratic Party did not have a consistent position on the issue, and Obama’s election was unlikely to result in significant policy changes in the near future.

In Florida, Latino voters grew by 403,000, or 49%, compared to 2004, and backed Obama by a 57-42% margin after having backed George W. Bush by a 56-44% margin in 2004<sup>448</sup>, an unprecedented figure for a Democratic candidate since the first Hispanic exit polling in 1988. However, he only received 35% of the Cuban American vote in the heavily Cuban districts of Miami Dade (a 10% increase over John Kerry in 2004), where Bush received 78%<sup>449</sup>. According to exit

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<sup>443</sup> Zeleny, J. (2008, May 24). *Obama, in Miami, Calls for Engaging with Cuba*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/24/us/politics/24campaign.html>

<sup>444</sup> Vagnoux, I. (2009), op. cit.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>446</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>447</sup> *Harry Reid | Biography & Facts*. (2021, December 28). Encyclopedia Britannica. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Harry-Reid>

<sup>448</sup> The Power of the Latino Vote in America. They Tipped Elections in 2008; Where Will They Be in 2010? (2010). *America's Voice*. Available at: [http://www.asph.sc.edu/cli/documents/ee14c7a86ad579874c\\_o0m6ivfoa.pdf](http://www.asph.sc.edu/cli/documents/ee14c7a86ad579874c_o0m6ivfoa.pdf)

<sup>449</sup> *Among Hispanics in Florida, 2008 Voter Registration Rolls Swing Democratic*. (2020, August 18). Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2008/10/29/among-hispanics-in-florida-2008-voter-registration-rolls-swing-democratic/>

surveys, the age divide was stark: 84% of Miami-Dade Cuban-American voters 65 and older supported McCain, while 55% supported Obama<sup>450</sup>. The FIU questioned 800 Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade in November 2008 and found that 51% of those between the ages of 18 and 44 voted for Obama, compared to only 20% of those 65 and older. Across all age categories, 38% of those polled voted for Obama. In 2008, more Hispanics in Florida were registered as Democrats (513,252) than as Republicans (445,526), while, as recently as 2006, among Latino registered voters in Florida, more were Republican (414,185) than Democratic (369,906)<sup>451</sup>. Their shift toward the Democratic Party was part of a larger realignment in the state's electorate. In 2008, 657,775 more Democrats were registered in Florida than Republicans, while in 2006 Democrats had a 283,856-vote edge against Republicans<sup>452</sup>.

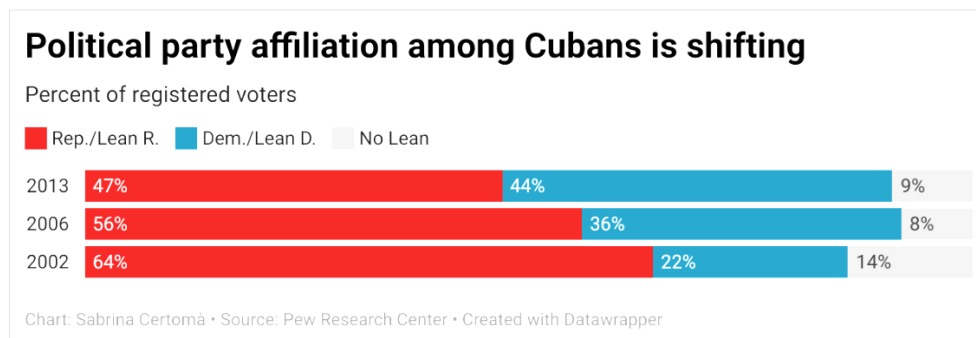


Figure 5.2 – Political party affiliation among Cubans is shifting | Pew Research Center<sup>453</sup>

In any case, Obama won Florida and its 27 electors with just a minority of the Cuban American vote, a strong indication that things are changing and that this ethnic vote could be no longer as important in winning the state<sup>454</sup>.

### ***Unprecedented congressional battle in Miami***

In the 2008 elections, the three Florida Republican Cuban American Representatives of the United States Congress faced unprecedented threats. Prior to 2002, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (first elected in 1989) and Lincoln Diaz Balart (first elected in 1992) ran practically unchallenged. Mario Lincoln,

<sup>450</sup> Vagnoux, I. (2009). *Op. cit.*

<sup>451</sup> Voter registration statistics for Florida are published by the Department of State, Division of Elections. For more information, see <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/>. *Among Hispanics in Florida, 2008 Voter Registration Rolls Swing Democratic.* (2020, August 18). Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2008/10/29/among-hispanics-in-florida-2008-voter-registration-rolls-swing-democratic/>

<sup>452</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>453</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2020, August 28). *After decades of GOP support, Cubans shifting toward the Democratic Party.* Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/24/after-decades-of-gop-support-cubans-shifting-toward-the-democratic-party/>

<sup>454</sup> Vagnoux, I. (2009). *Op. cit.*



Lincoln's brother, joined the partnership in 2002 and won without difficulties in 2004. However, opposition to the three of them developed in 2006, and the tendency accelerated in 2008, when three Democratic Latinos – two of them were powerful Cuban-born Americans – challenged them<sup>455</sup>. Raul Martinez was mayor of Hialeah from 1981 to 2005, and Joe Garcia was a former Miami-Dade Democratic Party Chairman as well as a former top CANF official, which spoke volumes about the organization's political shifts. Both campaigns highlighted non-Cuban concerns, pushing the Castros out of the spotlight. As a result, no candidate from either the Democratic or Republican parties acknowledged Cuba or its leaders during the two months leading up to the election. While Republicans remained the majority of registered voters in South Florida, the number of Democrats and Independents climbed dramatically; however, the ardent anti-Castro Republicans were re-elected by substantial percentages. Although it is usually tough to oust incumbents, the 2008 campaign showed that the Cuban American community could generate other types of politicians and that it would not adhere to its previous hard-line posture against Cuba permanently<sup>456</sup>. It also marked the beginning of a gradual transition from Cubans as *exiles* to full *American* citizens. Though they stood a good chance of winning, those Democratic candidates would not have sought a quick or total lifting of the almost 50-year-old embargo. Martinez and Garcia both said that they sought to loosen restrictions on Cubans who wished to visit or send money to relatives in Cuba, as well as eliminate financing to the U.S. government-funded Radio and TV Martí. They did not, however, anticipate the termination of the embargo<sup>457</sup>.

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<sup>455</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>456</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>457</sup> *Ibidem*

## 5.1.2 2012



\*Graphic elaboration by the author of this thesis

Obama won the 29 electoral votes in Florida by a margin of nearly 74,000 after a long count. He defeated Mitt Romney with 50.01% of the vote to 49.13%<sup>458</sup>. According to exit polls<sup>459</sup>, Obama received 61% of Florida’s Hispanic vote versus Romney’s 39% – an improvement over his 57% to 42% showing in 2008 – highlighting the Republican Party’s lack of appeal among the country’s fastest-growing voting constituency. Statistics given by the Obama campaign showed that South Florida’s substantial Cuban American population, normally a firm Republican voting bloc, also voted in historic proportions for the Democrats<sup>460</sup>. Obama received 48%<sup>461</sup> of the Cuban American vote and defeated Romney in Miami’s Little Havana area, which is considered the centre of the Cuban exile population, where a poll of precincts revealed that Obama received 56% of votes cast<sup>462</sup>. Nationally,

<sup>458</sup> Gray, K. (2012, November 10). *Obama’s final win in Florida gives him 332 electoral votes*. Reuters. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/president.html?mtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=57088399CA3848B8A9BB909039CAF86E&gwt=pay&assetType=PAYWALL>

<sup>459</sup> Florida. (2012). The New York Times. Available at:

<https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2012/results/states/florida.html?mtrref=www.nytimes.com&assetType=PAYWALL&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&assetType=PAYWALLv&mtrref=www.nytimes.com&gwh=CA92186243A4705FE0F4836348E68330&gwt=pay&assetType=PAYWALL>

<sup>460</sup> Gray, K. (2012, November 10). *Obama’s final win in Florida gives him 332 electoral votes*. Reuters. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-campaign-florida-idUSBRE8A702F20121110>

<sup>461</sup> Bendixen & Amandi International, a polling firm that works for Democrats, found in its exit polls that 52% of Cuban American voters cast ballots for Romney, while 48% went for Obama. According to another poll, 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. Lopez, M. H., & Taylor, P. (2020, August 27). *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*. Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>

<sup>462</sup> “In the final week of the race, the Romney campaign mounted a Spanish-language TV ad in Miami in an effort to shore up its support among Cuban Americans. The ad showed Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and the niece of Cuban leader Fidel Castro both saying they would vote for Obama. It was an attempt to push a well-used button in the Cuban American community – linking an opponent with despised Venezuelan and Cuban dictators”. Allen, G. (2012, November 16). *Republican Lock On Florida’s Cuban-*

Latinos voted for President Barack Obama over Republican Mitt Romney by 71% to 27%, according to an analysis by the Pew Hispanic Centre, a Project of the Pew Research Centre<sup>463</sup>. Obama's national vote share among Hispanics was the highest seen by a Democratic candidate since 1996, when President Bill Clinton won 72% of the Hispanic vote. Latinos accounted for 10% of votes (2012), up from 8% in 2004 and 9% in 2008, according to the Centre's research; non-white voters accounted for 28% of the electorate, up from 26% in 2008. Last, Hispanics accounted for 17% of Florida voters (2012), up from 14% in 2008. The state's expanding non-Cuban population, particularly in central Florida, contributed to the president's stronger performance among Hispanic voters: exit polls in the state found that 34% of Hispanic voters were Cuban, compared to 57% who were not<sup>464</sup>. Voter participation among Latinos of Cuban descent was particularly high. In 2012, 67% of Cuban Americans voted in the United States, compared to 48% of Latinos overall<sup>465</sup>. The generation gap among Cuban Americans was felt also in 2012: Obama carried those under the age of 45 by 26 points. He fell short by 29 points among those over the age of 45.

In 2014, when Obama restored ties with Cuba, it was a daring political risk on his party's side, betting that demographic and generational change in the ultimate swing state would outweigh the anticipated response from Florida's older expatriate population. Several academic pollsters and Democratic strategists expected that the Cuban American population in Florida would be enraged, but only for a short time – they observed an age gap, with younger Cuban Americans being more favourable of lifting the trade embargo. However, Cuban Americans influence had already waned a little due to the emergence of other Hispanic communities, notably Puerto Ricans in the Orlando area. Steve Schale, who helped run Obama's winning Florida operations in 2008 and 2012, affirmed:

If you were to go back and we were to have this conversation in 1996, and maybe even as late as 2000, you could maybe make an argument that this was political suicide for Democrats. We're in a vastly different state than we were 15 years ago<sup>466</sup>.

Yet, anti-Castro fervour was still strong in South Florida, where prominent Democrats either voiced cautious hope regarding the prisoner exchange and the easing of hostilities. Critics of the president's action and conservatives predicted that elderly Cuban Americans who remember the

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*American Vote May Be Over*. Npr. Available at: <https://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2012/11/16/165283004/republican-lock-on-floridas-cuban-american-vote-may-be-over>

<sup>463</sup> *President - 2012 Election Center - Elections & Politics from CNN.com*. (2012). CNN. Available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/election/2012/>

<sup>464</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Taylor, P. (2020, August 27). *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>

<sup>465</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Gonzalez-Barrera, A. (2020, August 27). *Inside the 2012 Latino Electorate*. Pew Research Center's Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2013/06/03/inside-the-2012-latino-electorate/>

<sup>466</sup> Hohmann, J. (2014, December 17). *The Democrats' risky Cuba bet*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/12/cuba-democrats-florida-politics-113659>

Castro regime's tyranny would become more politically involved – and turn against Democrats in 2016<sup>467</sup>. «The people who are most passionate about this issue do not have short memories», said Republican consultant Adam Goodman, CEO of the Tampa-based Victory Group<sup>468</sup>.

In 2014, Democratic pollster Paul Maslin conducted a nationwide nonpartisan survey for the Atlantic Council that revealed overwhelming support for normalizing ties with Cuba. He was astounded to learn that support was much stronger in Florida. On one measure, 56% of Americans supported restoring relations with the island. In Florida, 63% of those polled did. But a political scientist at Florida State University, Lance deHaven-Smith, cautioned against overemphasizing long-term trends. He cited the political crisis that erupted around Elián González's deportation during the 2000 election, ending in the raid on a Florida house by federal officials to send a six-year-old kid back to his father in Cuba<sup>469</sup>: «The Cubans had been moving toward the Democratic Party, but when the Elián González thing happened, they went right back to the Republicans»<sup>470</sup>. But that 2000 raid was also a turning point, according to Andy Gomez, a senior fellow at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies at the University of Miami: «We've come to terms that this has been going on for 55 years and there have never been major changes. I would say Elián González was a real turning point in people starting to question how effective American policy is»<sup>471</sup>.

Meanwhile, Cuban Americans born in the United States outnumbered those born in Cuba: the proportion of Cuban Americans born in the U.S. fell from 68% in 2000 to 57% in 2015<sup>472</sup>. At the same time, following Obama's opening of ties with Cuba, a new, more recent wave of Cuban immigrants came in the United States. According to a Pew Research Centre examination of Census Bureau statistics, 56% of Cuban immigrants came after 1990 in 2013. Guillermo Grenier<sup>473</sup>, a Florida International University professor who conducts an annual survey of the state's Cuban community, estimated that 35% of Miami's Cuban American population migrated after 1995 (2008). «There will be a pushback, but I think the future is with the new arrivals. Since 1995, you've had 350,000 Cubans come over. These Cubans are the ones who want to travel back and have remittances. They want to interact with their relatives»<sup>474</sup>, he said. According to Grenier, only about a third of the Cubans who

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<sup>467</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>468</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>469</sup> See Chapter 4

<sup>470</sup> Hohmann, J. (2014, December 17). *The Democrats' risky Cuba bet*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/story/2014/12/cuba-democrats-florida-politics-113659>

<sup>471</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>472</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Krogstad, J. M. (2020, August 27). *As Cuban American demographics change, so do views of Cuba*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/23/as-cuban-american-demographics-change-so-do-views-of-cuba/>

<sup>473</sup> Guillermo J. Grenier, is Professor of the Department of Global & Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University. Born in Havana, Cuba, Dr. Grenier is one of the founders of the Miami school of social analysis and has authored or co-authored six books and dozens of articles on labour, migration, immigrant incorporation, and Cuban American ideological profiles, particularly in the Greater Miami area. Since 1991, he has served as a lead investigator of the FIU Cuba Poll, a project cosponsored by the Cuban Research Institute.

<sup>474</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Krogstad, J. M. (2020, August 27). *Op. cit.*

have come since 1995 were registered voters: Democrats would have a long-term advantage in the community if they could attract them. In terms of voter engagement, older Cuban immigrants varied from the more recent one, who were less likely to vote than those who came before 1990. According to a Pew Research study of Census Bureau statistics, 56% of recent Cuban immigrant arrivals voted in 2012, compared to 75% of those who came before 1990<sup>475</sup>.

The number of Cubans entering the United States has increased considerably since President Barack Obama declared the resumption of relations with the island. During fiscal year 2016, 56,406 Cubans entered the United States through a port of entry, an increase of 31% over 2015, when 43,159 Cubans entered the country in the same manner. In fiscal 2015, Cuban arrivals increased by 78% over 2014, when 24,278 Cubans entered the United States. And those figures for 2014 had already risen considerably from prior years, after the Cuban government’s lifting of travel restrictions. More than twice (9,900) as many Cubans entered the United States via a port of entry in the first three months of 2015 as did so in the same period in 2014 (4,746). The rise continued into fiscal 2016, reaching a climax in the first quarter of that fiscal year (October to December 2015), when 17,057 Cubans entered the United States via a port of entry, an 85% increase over the same period in fiscal 2015<sup>476</sup>.

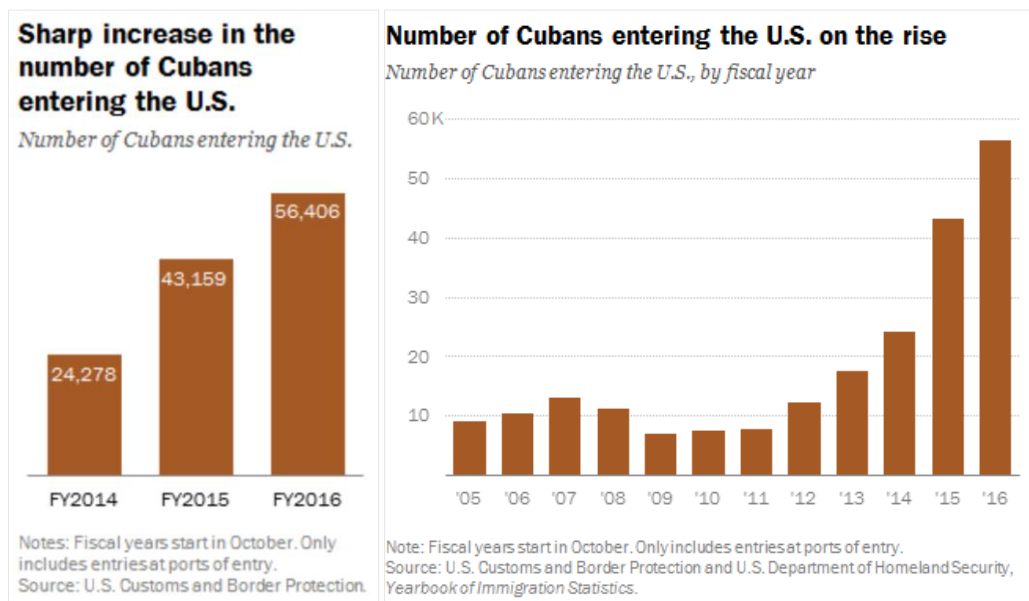


Figure 5.3 – Increase in the number of Cubans entering the U.S. | Pew Research Center<sup>477</sup>

<sup>475</sup> *Ibidem*

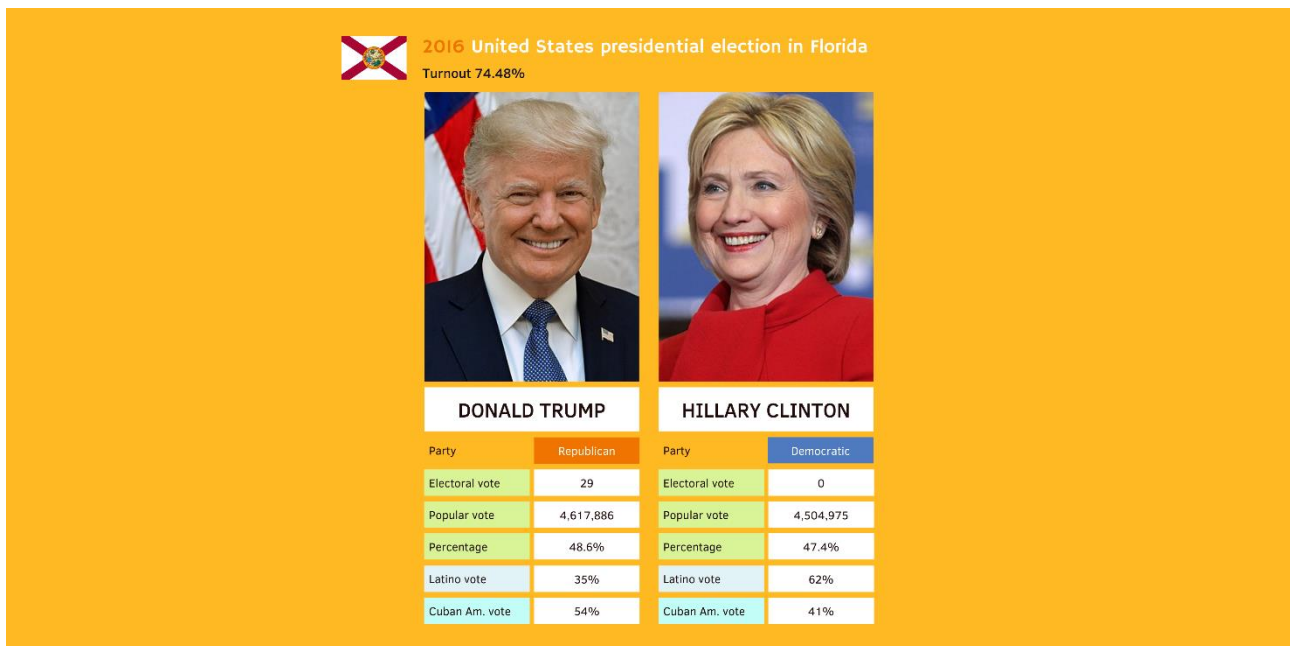
<sup>476</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2020, May 31). *Surge in Cuban immigration to U.S. continued through 2016*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/13/cuban-immigration-to-u-s-surges-as-relations-warm/>

<sup>477</sup> *Ibidem*

Since 2014, there has also been a significant percentage gain of migrants in the Miami sector. Cubans who entered Miami in fiscal 2015 increased from 4,709 to 9,999, and this number increased again in fiscal 2016 (to 10,992)<sup>478</sup>.

## 5.2 2016

### 5.2.1 Trump wins Florida, but Clinton wins Miami-Dade County



\*Graphic elaboration by the author of this thesis

In 2016, Donald J. Trump won the Electoral College with 304 votes compared to 227 votes for Hillary Clinton. Florida was an important *swing state* again: Clinton had the backing of Hispanic voters, and it should have been enough to take Florida, but Trump’s strength among working class voters tipped the scales in his favour.

Despite many expectations that Secretary Hillary Clinton would build on President Obama’s 2012 gains with Cuban voters, they were about twice as likely as non-Cuban Latinos to vote for Donald Trump in Florida. According to National Election Pool exit poll statistics, well over half (54%) of Cuban Latinos backed the Republican president-elect, compared to nearly a quarter (26%) of non-Cuban Latinos<sup>479</sup>. Although 41% of Cubans in Florida voted for Hillary Clinton, this was significantly less than the 71% of non-Cuban Latinos who supported the Democratic candidate. At the same time,

<sup>478</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Krogstad, J. M. (2020, August 27). *Op. cit.*

<sup>479</sup> 2016 election results: Florida Exit polls. (2016). CNN. Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/election/2016/results/exit-polls/florida/president>

support for Trump among Cubans was comparable to that of non-Latinos in the state (51%). Overall, 35% of Latino voters in Florida favoured Trump, a decrease from 2012, when Mitt Romney received 39% of their vote<sup>480</sup>. At the time, 67% of the nation’s 1.2 million Cuban eligible voters lived in Florida<sup>481</sup>, concentrated especially in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach area.

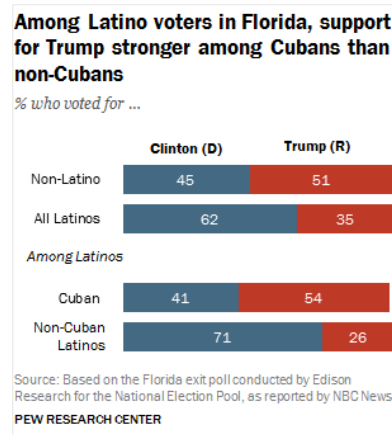


Figure 5.4 – Support for Trump among Latino voters in Florida | Pew Research Center<sup>482</sup>

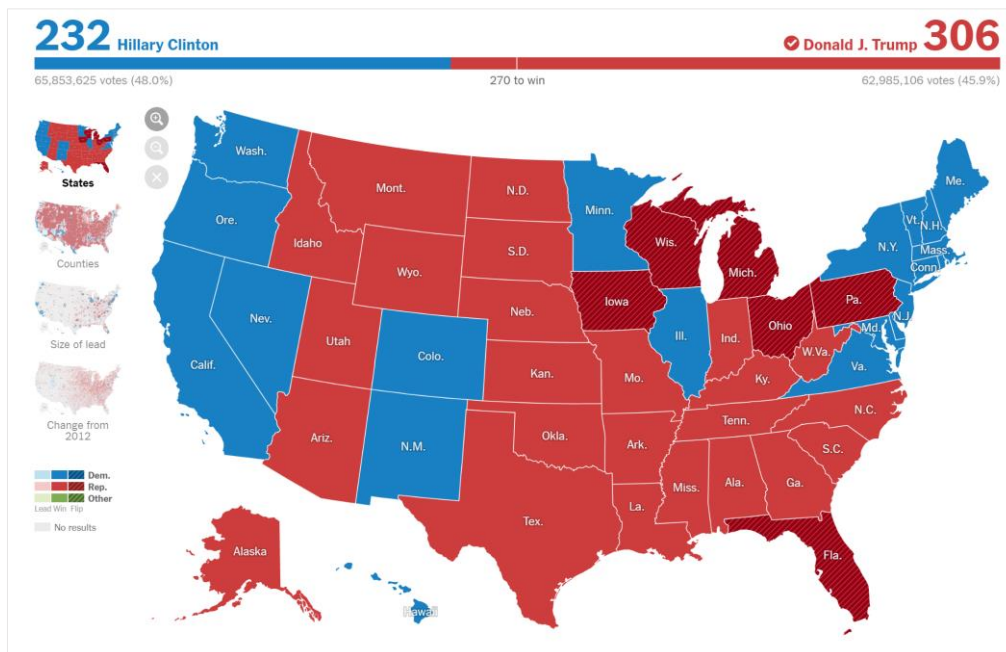


Figure 5.5 – Map of the 2016 Presidential elections results | New York Times<sup>483</sup>

<sup>480</sup> Lopez, M. H., & Taylor, P. (2020, August 27). *Latino Voters in the 2012 Election*. Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2012/11/07/latino-voters-in-the-2012-election/>

<sup>481</sup> López, G. (2020, May 30). *Hispanics of Cuban Origin in the United States, 2013*. Pew Research Center’s Hispanic Trends Project. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2015/09/15/hispanics-of-cuban-origin-in-the-united-states-2013/>

<sup>482</sup> Krogstad, J. M., & Flores, A. (2020, August 27). *Unlike other Latinos, about half of Cuban voters in Florida backed Trump*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/15/unlike-other-latinos-about-half-of-cuban-voters-in-florida-backed-trump/>

<sup>483</sup> *2016 Presidential Election Results*. (2017, August 9). New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/2016/results/president>

Looking at the counties with more Cuban-origin residents – Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Hillsborough County, Palm Beach County and Orange County – one finds that Clinton won there.

County	Clinton	Trump
Miami-Dade	624,146 - 63.2%	333,999 - 33.8%
Broward	553,320 - 66.1%	260,951 - 31.2%
Palm Beach	374,673 - 56.2%	272,402 - 40.9%
Hillsborough	307,896 – 51.0%	266,870 - 44.2%
Orange	329,894 - 59.8%	195, 216 - 35.4%

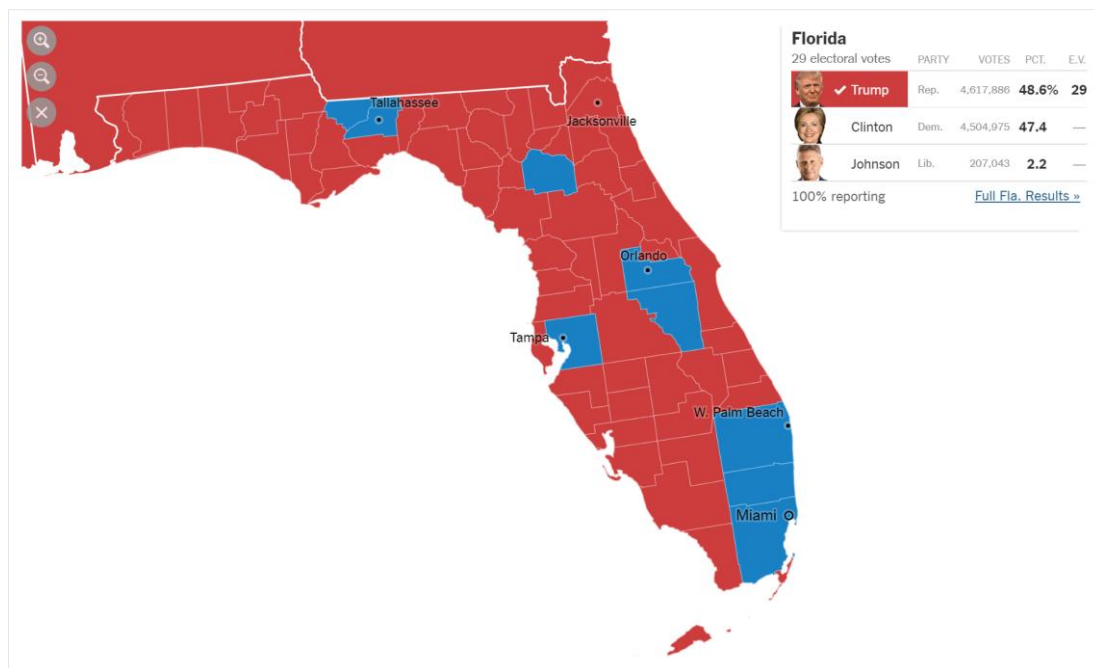


Figure 5.6 – Map of the 2016 Presidential elections results in Florida | New York Times<sup>484</sup>

Latino participation was higher among early voters<sup>485</sup>. According to the Florida exit poll, the state’s Latino voter share increased from 17% in 2012 to 18% in 2016. Cuban registered voters had been shifting toward the Democratic Party for more than a decade<sup>486</sup>. Less than half (47%) of Cuban registered voters nationwide said they identified with or lean toward the Republican Party – down from the 64% who said the same about the GOP a decade ago, according to 2013 survey data. Meanwhile, the share of Cubans who identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party doubled

<sup>484</sup> 2016 Presidential Election Results. (2017, August 9). *Op. cit.*

<sup>485</sup> Cohn, N. (2016, November 7). *This Time, There Really Is a Hispanic Voter Surge*. The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/upshot/this-time-there-really-is-a-hispanic-voter-surge.html?smid=tw-share&r=0>

<sup>486</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2020, August 28). *After decades of GOP support, Cubans shifting toward the Democratic Party*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/24/after-decades-of-gop-support-cubans-shifting-toward-the-democratic-party/>



from 22% to 44% over the same period<sup>487</sup>. Hispanic voters in 2016 were probably swayed by Trump’s policy ideas (including deportation) and harsh rhetoric directed at undocumented Hispanic immigrants. Early voting data unequivocally indicated that Clinton would have benefited from a long-awaited surge in Hispanic turnout, vastly exceeding the Hispanic turnout from four years before.

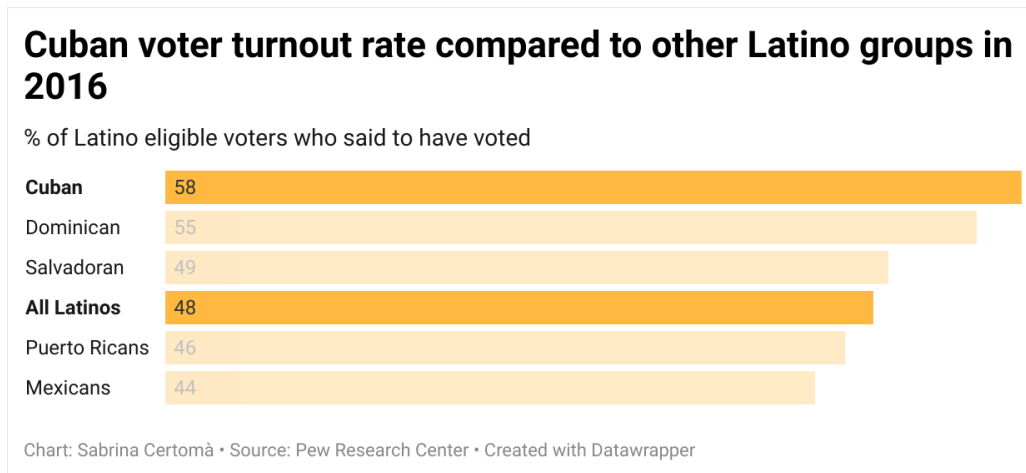


Figure 5.7 – Cuban voter turnout rate compared to other Latino groups in 2016 | Pew Research Center<sup>488</sup>

The 2016 elections brought new complications to the Cuban exile vote. Two years after the momentous re-establishment of diplomatic ties between the United States and Cuba, while some welcomed the change, others have been very dissatisfied. During 2015, the United States gradually advanced with significant improvements to approve travel and business activities, but the Cuban government showed little meaningful reciprocity. And, by all accounts, human rights on the island – ostensibly a primary emphasis of Obama’s policies – remained a huge worry (with claims of almost 9,000 politically motivated arrests in one year) – meaningful progress was therefore halted. The candidacies of Clinton and Trump, as well as their distinct and evolving attitudes on Cuba, added to the difficulty in projecting the Cuban vote in 2016. Despite her desire to keep the embargo in place during the 2008 presidential campaign, Clinton supported President Obama’s Cuba policy<sup>489</sup>.

Trump, who professed support for normalisation at the start of his campaign in 2015, raised the prospect of reversing Obama’s détente in the weeks before the election and while in Florida. And

<sup>487</sup> *Ibidem*

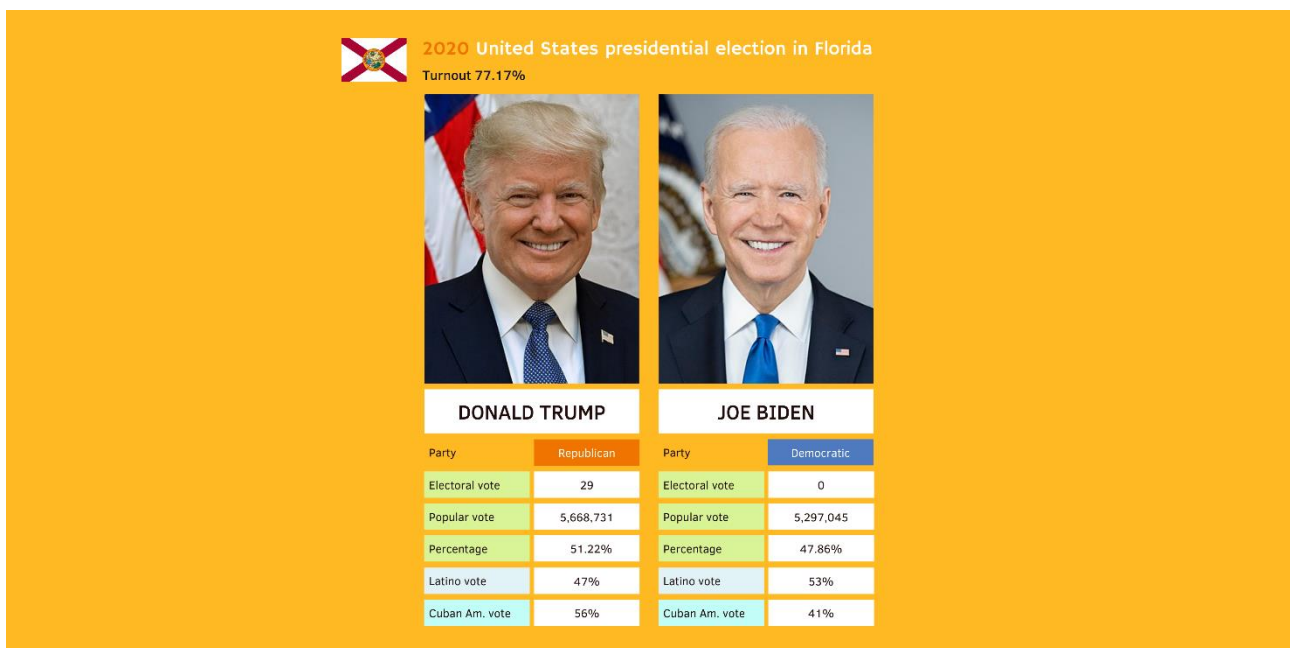
<sup>488</sup> Krogstad, J. M. (2021, April 28). *Most Cuban American voters identify as Republican in 2020*. Pew Research Center. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/02/most-cuban-american-voters-identify-as-republican-in-2020/>

<sup>489</sup> Her husband, President Bill Clinton, had tried to formalise the embargo with the *Helms-Burton Act* in 1996, while facing re-election and in the wake of the downing of two *Brothers to the Rescue* flights. Later, he bemoaned his inability to seek an opening with Cuba and advocated for the release of the child Elian Gonzalez in the infamous international custody fight of 2000. Lopez-Gottardi, C. (2016, November 16). *The Complex Cuban Vote*. U.S. News. Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/op-ed/articles/2016-11-16/2016-highlighted-the-growing-complexity-of-the-cuban-american-vote>

all this just days after Newsweek<sup>490</sup> disclosed that a Trump-controlled corporation investigated commercial prospects on the island in 1998, an unlawful move under the terms of the U.S. economic embargo. Given his fluctuating and inconsistent positions, Trump’s ability to win over older Cuban voters of the old generation appeared doubtful.

Around two million Cuban Americans lived in the United States in 2016. More than two-thirds resided in Florida, and they were over 20% more likely to vote than the broader Hispanic population. Despite the fact that Trump demonstrated that he could win the White House without Florida, he won the Cuban vote in the most important swing state. Keeping an eye on the Cuban voter demographics and how this group perceived the U.S. growing relationship with the Castro brothers in 2020 would have been prudent for both political parties<sup>491</sup>.

### 5.3 2020



\*Graphic elaboration by the author of this thesis

Joseph R. Biden Jr. was elected the 46th president of the United States in 2020, defeating President Trump after winning Pennsylvania, which put his total of Electoral College votes above the 270 he needed to clinch the presidency. Biden won two-thirds of Latinos nationally, identical to Hillary Clinton’s proportion in 2016. Trump’s vote share increased marginally, going from 28% in 2016 to 32% this year. Trump, on the other hand, made advances along the Texas-Mexico border and

<sup>490</sup> Eichenwald, K. (2017, February 13). *How Donald Trump’s Company Violated the United States Embargo Against Cuba*. Newsweek. Available at: <https://www.newsweek.com/2016/10/14/donald-trump-cuban-embargo-castro-violated-florida-504059.html>

<sup>491</sup> Lopez-Gottardi, C. (2016, November 16). *The Complex Cuban Vote*. U.S. News. Available at: <https://www.usnews.com/opinion/oped/articles/2016-11-16/2016-highlighted-the-growing-complexity-of-the-cuban-american-vote>

among Latinos in Florida, two states that saw some of the most dramatic shifts from Democrats to Republicans. When Obama and Clinton were running, many Cuban Americans in Miami switched to the Democratic Party. In 2020, though, they turned out in higher numbers for Trump.

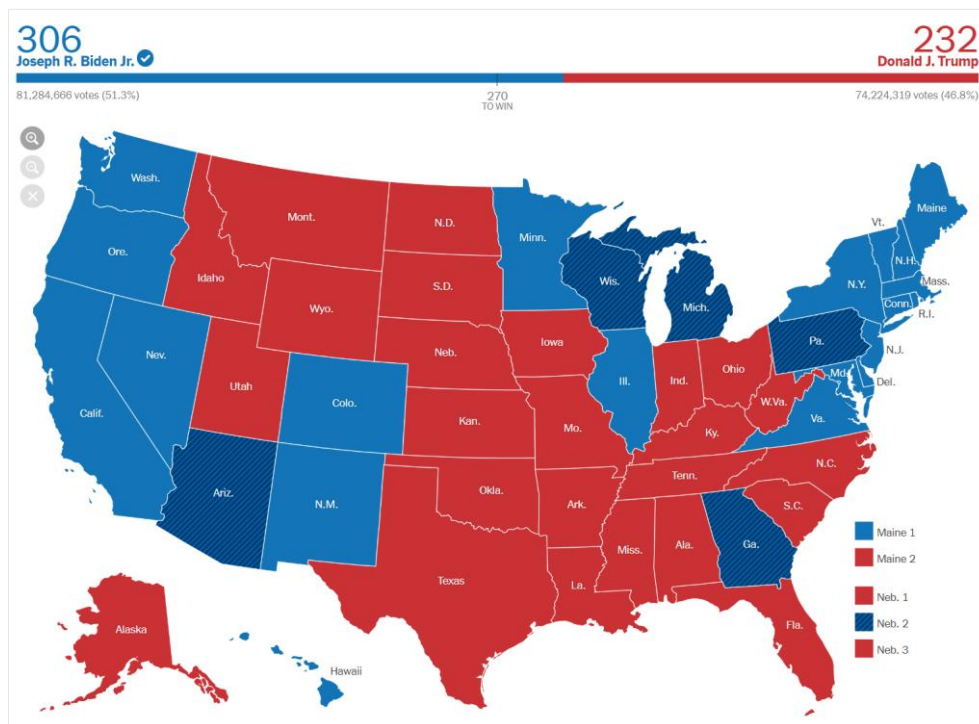


Figure 5.8 – Map of the 2020 Presidential elections results | *New York Times*<sup>492</sup>

In Florida, Democrats and political experts anticipated a close contest between Vice President Biden and Republican nominee Donald Trump. When Republicans dubbed Democrats socialists and radicals to help gain the governorship in 2018, Latino Democratic leaders saw warning signals. However, they did not believe Trump would do so well with Latinos in 2020<sup>493</sup>. According to Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez:

I don't think that this is on Biden solely or specifically, I think it's an indictment of the entire Democratic Party. If people actually gave a damn to actually be paying attention to the Latino community in Florida over years, none of this is surprising. I don't know why anyone in this party still clings to this hope that conservative Cubans are like somehow going to break for Democrats<sup>494</sup>.

<sup>492</sup> 2020 Presidential Election Results: Joe Biden Wins. (2021, June 1). The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html>

<sup>493</sup> Barrón-López, L., Rodríguez, S., & Rayasam, R. (2020, November 7). *Trump's gains in Texas and Florida don't tell the full Latino story*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/06/why-biden-lost-the-latino-vote-florida-texas-434735>

<sup>494</sup> Ibidem

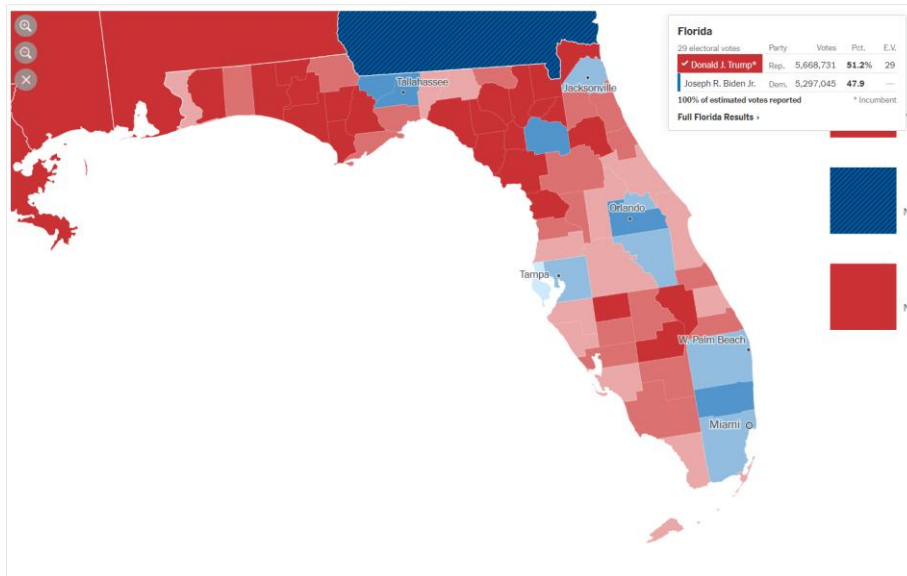


Figure 5.9 – Map of the 2020 Presidential elections results in Florida | New York Times<sup>495</sup>

County	Biden	Trump
Miami-Dade	53.4%	46.1%
Broward	64.6%	34.8%
Palm Beach	56.1%	43.3%
Hillsborough	52.9%	46.0%
Orange	61.0%	37.9%

County	Margin	2016 margin	Est. votes reported	Total votes	Absentee
Miami-Dade	<b>Biden +7</b>	D+29.4	100%	1,156,816	1,148,798
Broward	<b>Biden +30</b>	D+34.9	100%	957,672	831,693
Palm Beach	<b>Biden +13</b>	D+15.4	100%	773,158	614,147
Hillsborough	<b>Biden +7</b>	D+6.8	100%	712,063	603,967
Orange	<b>Biden +23</b>	D+24.4	100%	647,403	532,878

Figure 5.10 – Percentages of 2020 Presidential elections results | New York Times<sup>496</sup>

While Hillary Clinton won Cuban-heavy Miami-Dade County in 2016 by over 30 percentage points, Biden carried it by a margin of only 7.3 percent this time around. South Florida precincts with high Venezuelan and Colombian populations saw Trump outperformed expectations, increasing his lead over 2016 by double digits. He was also able to erode the support of Puerto Rican voters for Biden. In Osceola County, which has a large Puerto Rican population, Trump fared 7 percentage

<sup>495</sup> 2020 Presidential Election Results: Joe Biden Wins. (2021, June 1). The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/results-president.html>

<sup>496</sup> *Ibidem*

points higher than he did in 2016. He also did better in adjacent Orange County. In largely Cuban districts in Miami, Trump received up to 70% of the overall Cuban vote, despite experts expecting he would earn much closer to 60%. However, professional Florida strategists and pollsters maintained that Latinos were not the reason Biden lost the state. Trump received more than 370,000 votes in Florida, and Democratic strategists estimate that Trump received 120,000 more Cuban Americans votes than Biden. «Biden got 38% of the white vote in FL. He was polling at an avg of 42% in Oct. Had that white support held, he would've won FL»<sup>497</sup>, Carlos Odio, co-founder of Democratic firm *Equis Research*, wrote on Twitter. Nonetheless, Trump's strong turnout resulted in Democratic defeats down the ballot. Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez, Republican, expelled Rep. Debbie Mucarsel Powell, the first South American immigrant to serve in the United States House of Representatives; Democrat. Rep. Donna Shalala was defeated by Republican Maria Elvira Salazar in an unexpected result for Democrats. She affirmed that Miami-area districts like hers need to be strengthened by the whole Democratic Party's leadership, not just Biden. «It was the red wedding. It was truly the culmination of four years of anti-socialist messaging on behalf of the Trump campaign»<sup>498</sup>, said a Miami Democratic operative. Local Democrats admit they noticed the warning signals when Republicans went out in droves for early voting in South Florida. However, several urged the Biden campaign and the Florida Democratic Party to pick up their game with more money and a full-fledged ground strategy early on. Democrats said they hope the results would compel the party to reconsider its long-term message and strategy for Latinos, one that is more targeted to the particular experiences of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Venezuelans, Cubans, and others. Nonetheless, they claim that Latino participation for Biden was mainly successful. Stephanie Valencia, co-founder of the Latino-run Democratic firm *Equis Research*, said:

The totality of the entire Latino story illustrates the promise and the peril of the Latino vote and why Democrats have to make a long-term commitment to further understanding the nuance of this community<sup>499</sup>.

There is hope for Democrats, according to Ocasio-Cortez. Though she hopes the party will be able to prevent a future “generational shift”, she affirmed that: «This is also indicative of that failure of whiteness and the overwhelming whiteness of just Democrats in our institutions in general. That there's so much finger pointing and trying to examine the fact that you may have lost like 20% or 30% of an electorate, as opposed to looking at the obvious question [that] white support for Trump

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<sup>497</sup> Barrón-López, L., Rodríguez, S., & Rayasam, R. (2020, November 7). *Trump's gains in Texas and Florida don't tell the full Latino story*. POLITICO. Available: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/06/why-biden-lost-the-latino-vote-florida-texas-434735>

<sup>498</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>499</sup> *Ibidem*

went up»<sup>500</sup>. According to exit polls, Trump won the majority of white voters and white women, despite many surveys in the battleground before the election indicating a bigger erosion for the president with white women. «That is the failure. And there’s no amount of Latinos that will be able to make up for that if that trend continues»<sup>501</sup>, concluded Ocasio-Cortez.

In 2020, more than half of Florida’s counties shifted farther to the right, enabling President Trump to win the state by a margin (+3.4) almost three times greater than he had four years before – in 2016 the margin was +1.2. Biden failed in several precincts with a predominantly Hispanic population, notably in Miami-Dade County’s Cuban American neighbourhoods, which massively favoured Trump. His support among Cuban Americans was bolstered, resulting in an increase of roughly 200,000 votes over four years in the county. Approximately one-third of counties voted more Democratic. Biden performed well in Pinellas – which backed Barack Obama for president twice before voting for Trump in 2016 –, and in Duval – won by Trump by a narrow margin in 2016. Biden’s gains, though, were unable to compensate for votes he lost in populous Miami-Dade in comparison to Hillary Clinton’s results four years earlier<sup>502</sup>.

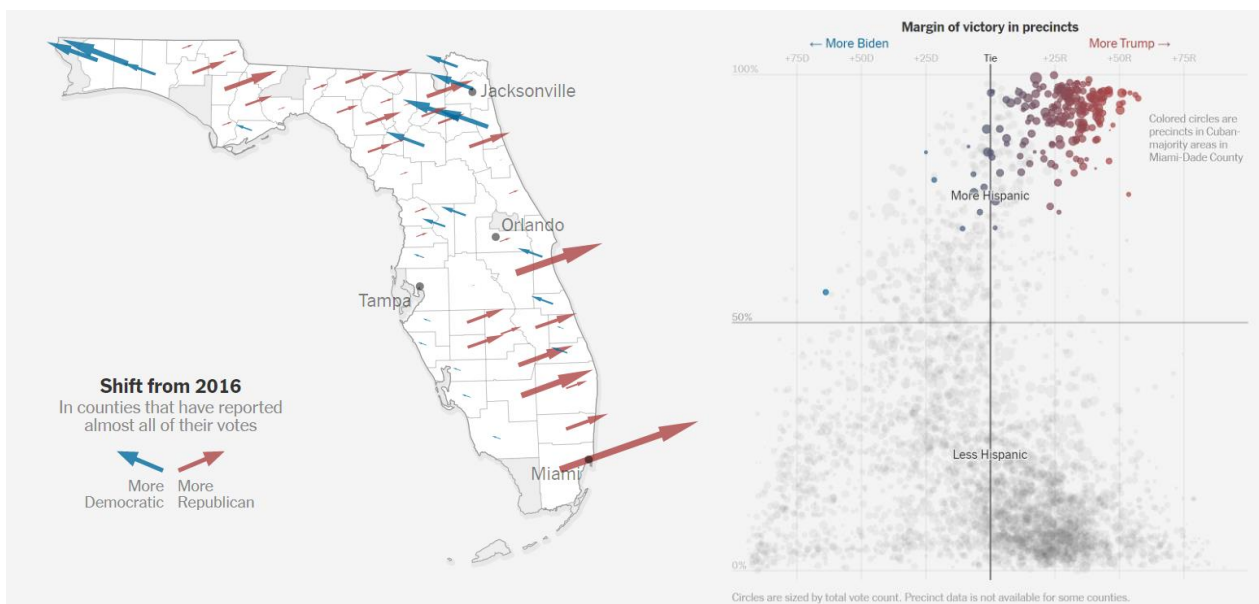


Figure 5.11 – Maps of the 2020 Presidential elections results in Florida: shift from 2016 and margin of victory in precincts / New York Times<sup>503</sup>

<sup>500</sup> Barrón-López, L., Rodriguez, S., & Rayasam, R. (2020, November 7). *Op. cit.*

<sup>501</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>502</sup> Collins, K., Fessenden, F., Gamio, L., Harris, R., Keefe, J., Lu, D., Lutz, E., Walker, A. S., Watkins, D., & Yourish, K. (2020, November 11). *Florida County by County Election Analysis*. The New York Times. Available at: [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/04/us/elections/florida-election-results-by-county.html?action=click&module=ELEX\\_results&pgtype=Interactive%2%AEion=RelatedCoverage](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/04/us/elections/florida-election-results-by-county.html?action=click&module=ELEX_results&pgtype=Interactive%2%AEion=RelatedCoverage)

<sup>503</sup> 2020 Presidential Election Results: Joe Biden Wins. (2021, June 1). *Op. cit.*

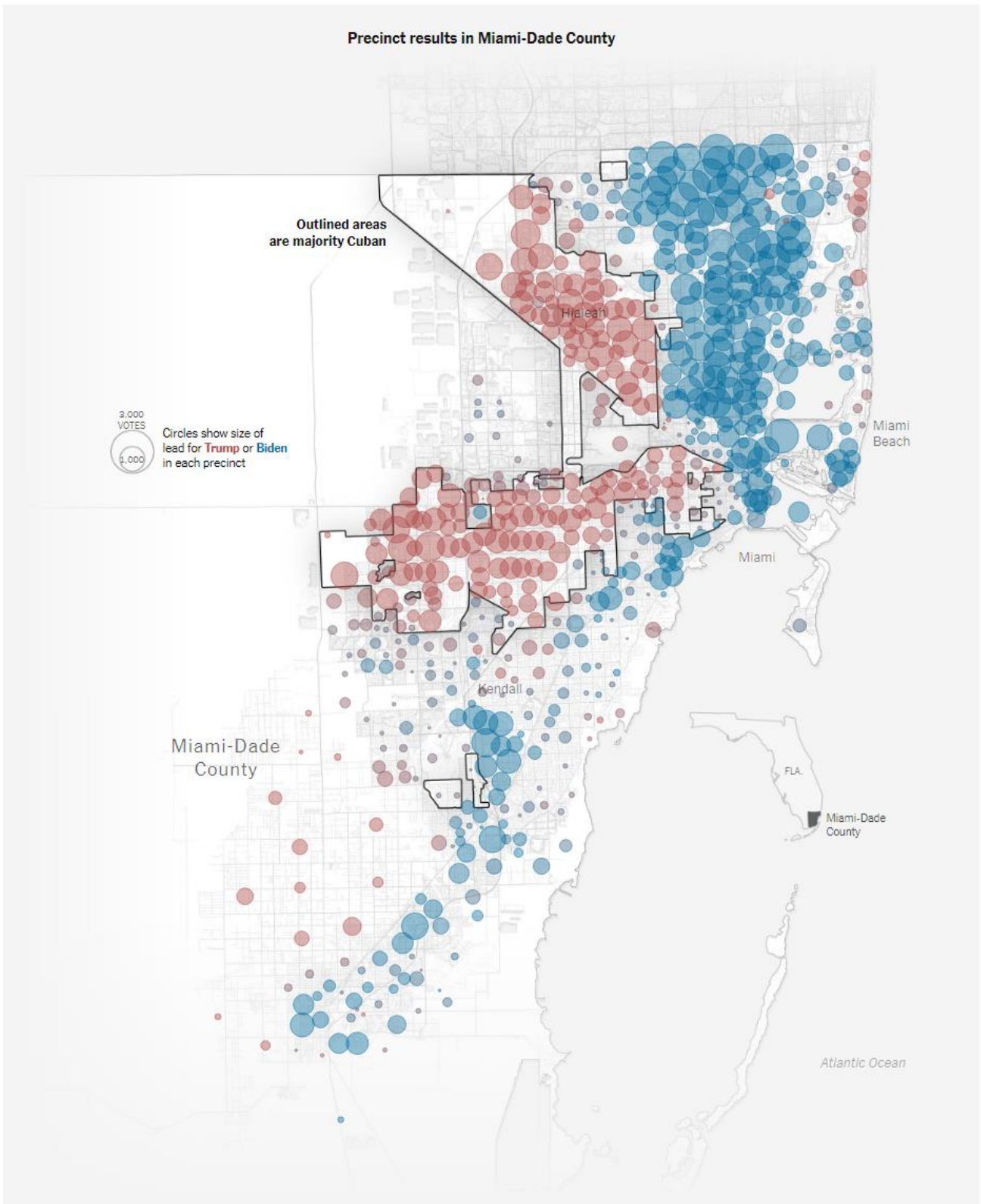


Figure 5.12 – Maps of the 2020 Presidential elections results in Florida: Precinct results in Miami-Dade County | *New York Times*<sup>504</sup>

<sup>504</sup>Florida Exit Polls: How Different Groups Voted. (2021, June 1). The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/11/03/us/elections/exit-polls-florida.html>

## 5.4 A common denominator between 2016 and 2020: Latinos por Trump and the fear of socialism

“President Donald Trump’s obsession with Cubans has paid off”. That is the first line of a Politico article<sup>505</sup> which tries to explain Trump success among Cuban Americans in 2020. He won Florida owing in large part to the huge participation of Miami’s Cuban exile population that also helped the Republican Party reclaim two congressional seats and win big in state House and Senate contests. Republicans’ efforts in the state helped Trump reach about 55-56% of the Cuban American vote there, while he won only four out of 10 Latino votes against Clinton in 2016. According to some Latino activists, this success is due to the fact that Biden neglected Florida during much of his campaign, while Trump held many events in the state<sup>506</sup>. When many Cuban Americans started to shift to the Democratic side during Barack Obama’s successful presidential bids and Hillary Clinton’s candidacy in 2016 (when she easily defeated Trump in Miami-Dade), Republicans reacted by concentrating more on the community and ramping up anti-socialist rhetoric, often portraying Democrats as extreme leftists and socialists, labels that former Vice President Joe Biden and his team battled to escape<sup>507</sup>.

According to analysts, the surge in support for Trump in the last election reflects the growing diversity of economic status, education, political views, immigration history and country of origin among Hispanics in the United States. In fact, although he lost on 3 November 2020, he maintained his lead by a narrower margin than expected. This was partly because he received a higher percentage of votes from minorities, especially the growing Latino or Hispanic community, than in 2016<sup>508</sup>. The increase in the nationwide Hispanic vote for Trump was 32% in 2020, up from 28% in 2016, refuting the claim by many Democrats that Latinos would overwhelmingly vote against him only because of his harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric and immigration policies<sup>509</sup>. Moreover, the Hispanic electorate is overwhelmingly Catholic or conservative Christian: many agree with Trump and the Republican Party’s opposition to gay marriage and abortion. For instance, the three conservative justices of the Supreme Court he nominated during his four-year mandate probably pleased evangelical Latinos in Central Florida who are highly concerned about matters such as abortion. In return, many of these

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<sup>505</sup> Rodriguez, S. (2020, November 5). *How Miami Cubans disrupted Biden’s path to a Florida win*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/04/biden-miami-cubans-election-2020-433999>

<sup>506</sup> *Votantes latinos por Trump ayudaron a mantener reñida la elección*. (2020, November 11). Voz de América. Available at: [https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/estadosunidos\\_votantes-latinos-por-trump-ayudaron-mantener-renida-la-eleccion/6069324.html](https://www.vozdeamerica.com/a/estadosunidos_votantes-latinos-por-trump-ayudaron-mantener-renida-la-eleccion/6069324.html)

<sup>507</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>508</sup> Latinos, however, supported Biden by a margin of about 2:1.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibidem*



voters could overlook his questionable morals or autocratic tendencies<sup>510</sup>. Trump’s pro-business initiatives are also particularly popular among Latinos – notably those aimed at cutting federal taxes and state regulations. By contrast, they have rejected Democrats’ repeated promises to raise wages, expand access to healthcare – they applauded President Trump’s repeal of Obamacare’s mandate that most Americans obtain health insurance or face a fee<sup>511</sup> – and change America’s problematic immigration system.

After the former president’s victory in Florida, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez joined the chorus of critics who accused Democrats of taking Latino votes for granted while their conservative rivals were more supportive of Spanish-speaking communities. *Latinos for Trump committee*, for example, worked hard to rally voters of Central and South American descent to its side. And through rallies, meetings, and informative messages, it succeeded. The most engaging viral phenomenon was a Trump Spanish-language campaign jingle that featured a salsa trio singing, “*Yo voy a votar por Donald Trump*” (“I will vote for Donald Trump”).



Figures 5.13 and 5.14 – Two frames of the *Latinos for Trump 2020* campaign engaging commercial | *Por Trump*<sup>512</sup>

<sup>510</sup> Verde, I. (2021, October 8). *Opinion | Some Latinos Voted for Trump. Get Over It.* The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/opinion/sunday/trump-latino-vote.html>

<sup>511</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>512</sup> *Latinos for Trump 2020.* (2020, October 20). *Por Trump* [Video]. YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-ZwOfaTMBc&ab\\_channel=DonaldJTrump](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-ZwOfaTMBc&ab_channel=DonaldJTrump)

For four years, Republicans have stayed on topic in Miami-Dade, where more than half of the population was born outside of the United States. Former government officials and strategists on both sides of the aisle say the Trump administration's frequent excursions to Miami to announce additional sanctions on Cuba and Venezuela, as well as rhetoric against socialism, have always been part of an electoral calculation, not simply foreign policy<sup>513</sup>. While in office, Trump has often returned to or sent officials to South Florida to tout his tough stance on Cuba for Cuban Americans. He has also linked Cuba to Venezuela policy in an attempt to persuade Miami's expanding Venezuelan community to vote Republican as well. Trump has gone so far as to expressly inform administration officials that he wanted to keep Sen. Marco Rubio and the Cuban American community pleased in order to assure a Florida victory in 2020<sup>514</sup>. And, officially, he has emphasised Cuban American support for him, even summoning veterans of the Bay of Pigs assault in Cuba to the White House to "reaffirm our unshakable solidarity with the Cuban people"<sup>515</sup>. «We've been on the ground quite frankly since 2016. We – Trump, the state party, the local party – never left and that coupled with Trump's messaging helped»<sup>516</sup>, said Nelson Diaz, chair of the Miami-Dade Republican Party. According to Grenier:

Miami Dade is really just less Democratic than it used to be – and that's because of the groundwork that Republicans have done with Cubans over the years. Republicans have historically been so good at knowing which buttons to push to get attention from Cubans and get everyone on Miami talk radio and media covering it. It's playing out very well in young arrivals and that's what you're seeing this year.<sup>517</sup>

Another main reason explaining Trump success among Cuban Americans is his strategy to compare Democrats to socialists, thus stirring up deep-rooted fears in people of Cuban or Venezuelan origin who do not want socialism to be even remotely mentioned – since a large number of voters of Cuban and Venezuelan origin left their countries ruined by socialist policies. Trump's severe trade restrictions imposed on communist authorities in Cuba and the ouster of embattled Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro were very successful with voters of Cuban and Venezuelan origin in Miami. Biden, long-time senator and vice president during the Obama administration, is considered a moderate. However, some progressives in his party (Bernie Sanders, the junior senator from Vermont who has served in Congress since 1991, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the 31-year-old first-term

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<sup>513</sup> Rodriguez, S. (2020, November 5). *How Miami Cubans disrupted Biden's path to a Florida win*. POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/11/04/biden-miami-cubans-election-2020-433999>

<sup>514</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>515</sup> Havana, E. U. S. (2019, April 22). *Ambassador Bolton remarks to the Bay of Pigs Veterans Association – Brigade 2506*. U.S. Embassy in Cuba. Available at: <https://cu.usembassy.gov/ambassador-bolton-bay-of-pigs-veterans-association-brigade-2506/>

<sup>516</sup> Rodriguez, S. (2020, November 5). *Op. cit.*

<sup>517</sup> *Ibidem*

congresswoman from New York) embraced the definition of moderate socialists and started advocating for more government-funded programmes to expand health care and combat climate change. South Florida’s Spanish-speaking population was bombarded with this kind of misinformation for months in an attempt to slow Biden’s progress among Latino voters: «That message just reverberates in South Florida more. It’s like you’re shouting it in a church where it echoes. It always stirs Cubans’ passions up», explained Grenier.<sup>518</sup>

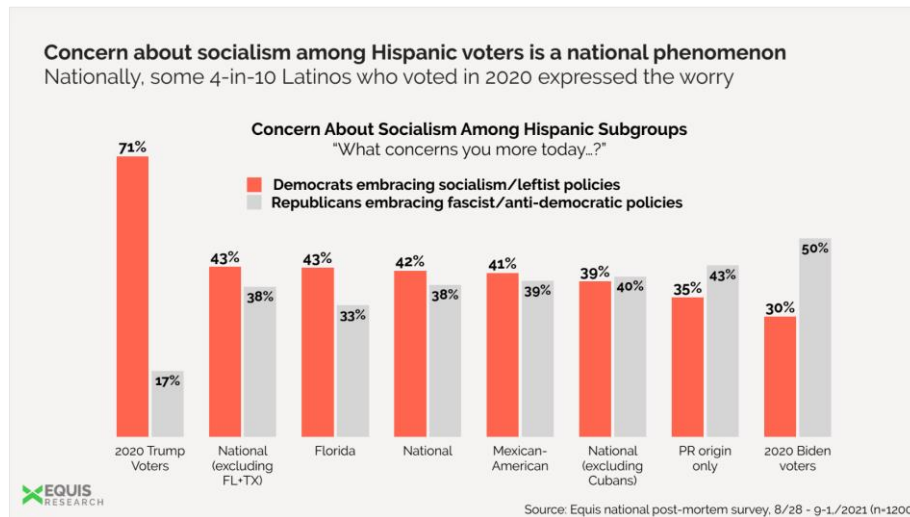


Figure 5.15 – Concerns about socialism among Hispanics voters | Equis research<sup>519</sup>

Cabrera Morris, a prominent member of the Latino community in Florida and a member of the Latinos for Trump campaign advisory board, exemplifies the Cuban American migrant attitude well. She told her experience to DW Español in an interview<sup>520</sup>. She has been a resident of the United States for almost 50 years; she was 15 years old when she and her mother escaped Cuba in 1967. «They took everything away from us. My father was put in a work camp because he didn’t want to give in to the socialists»<sup>521</sup>. International corporations and wealthy Cubans had their assets seized. «That’s why voting is so important for me: because it is a gift that this country gave me, and that before I didn’t have, because they took it away»<sup>522</sup>. As the election approached, Cabrera Morris, who operates a business and political consultancy, said that she was doing all she could to keep Trump in the White House for another four years and to prevent Joe Biden and Kamala Harris from becoming

<sup>518</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>519</sup> Rindels, M. (2021, December 14). *Report: Latino voter shift toward Trump in 2020 driven by economy concerns*. The Nevada Independent. Available at: <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/report-latino-voter-shift-toward-trump-in-2020-driven-by-economy-concerns>

<sup>520</sup> *Latinos por Trump en Florida*. (2020, November 2). [Video]. YouTube. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8770gQZFvQ&ab\\_channel=DWEspa%C3%B1ol](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8770gQZFvQ&ab_channel=DWEspa%C3%B1ol); Deutsche Welle (www.dw.com). (2020, November 4). *Florida woman wants 4 more years of Trump* [Video]. DW.COM. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/a-florida-latina-wants-to-give-donald-trump-4-more-years/a-55378721>

<sup>521</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>522</sup> *Ibidem*

president and vice president, respectively. She admitted that neither former Vice President Joe Biden nor Senator Kamala Harris are socialists. However, she felt that many Democrats, such as Ocasio-Cortez or Sanders, would lead the nation in that direction. «I don't think Joe Biden is a socialist or a communist, but I believe that the people around him are, and they have the same socialist ideas as the people in Cuba and Venezuela. I believe that he is surrounded by these people and that a leader is a good leader if the people around him are good people»<sup>523</sup>.

A lot of Cuban exiles and their descendants still hold the same views that Cabrera Morris did when she gave this interview. She and her mother took refuge in Spain at first. After that, they were allowed to file for green cards and enter the U.S. lawfully. «I believe in the American Dream. They gave it to me»<sup>524</sup>. She thought that persons fleeing Latin American nations such as Honduras or Guatemala should not be permitted to enter the United States, even if they are seeking shelter because they fear losing their lives. As a result, Morris supports Trump's tough immigration policies, as well as measures that allow entrepreneurs like herself and her husband to thrive.

In summary, this series of charts helps to underscore the points highlighted above reiterating the importance of fear of socialism among Latino and especially Cuban voters. The impact is most pronounced in Florida because of the concentration of Cuban American voters in that state.

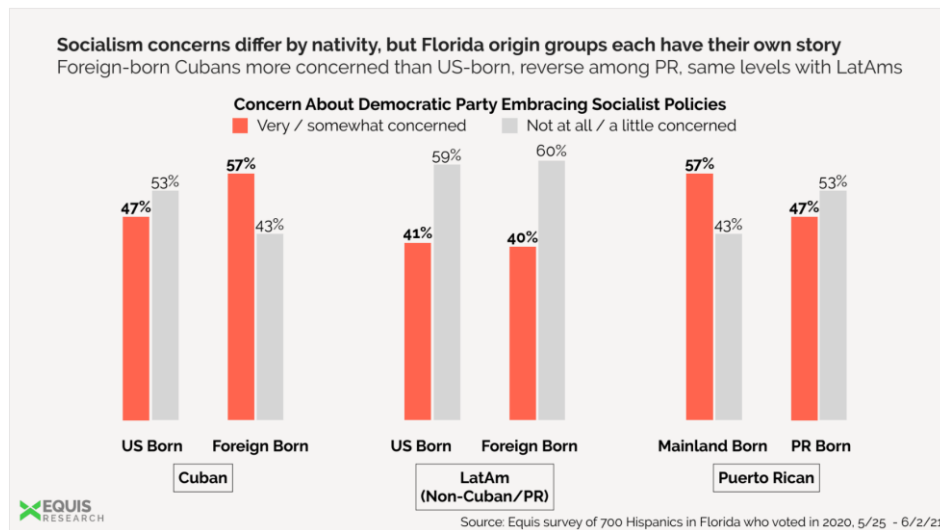


Figure 5.16 – Concerns about socialism among Hispanics voters in Florida | Equis research<sup>525</sup>

<sup>523</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>524</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>525</sup> Rindels, M. (2021, December 14). *Report: Latino voter shift toward Trump in 2020 driven by economy concerns*. The Nevada Independent. Available at: <https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/report-latino-voter-shift-toward-trump-in-2020-driven-by-economy-concerns>

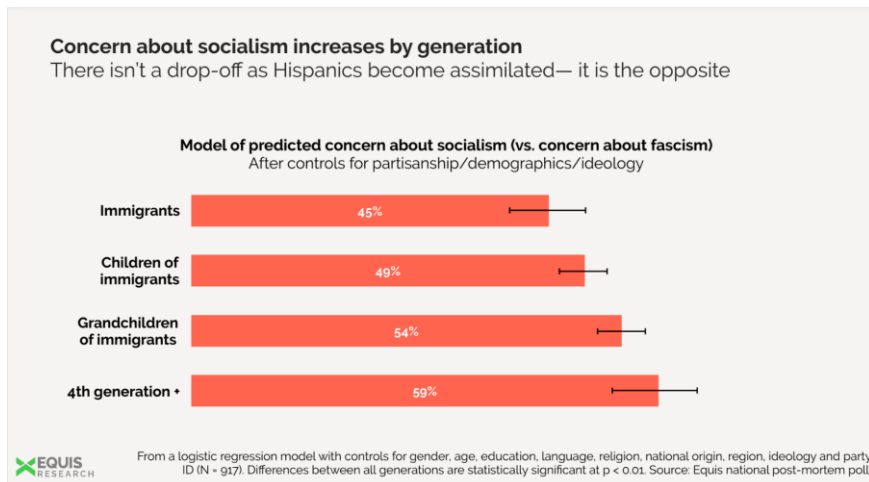


Figure 5.17 – Concerns about socialism increase by generation | Equis research<sup>526</sup>

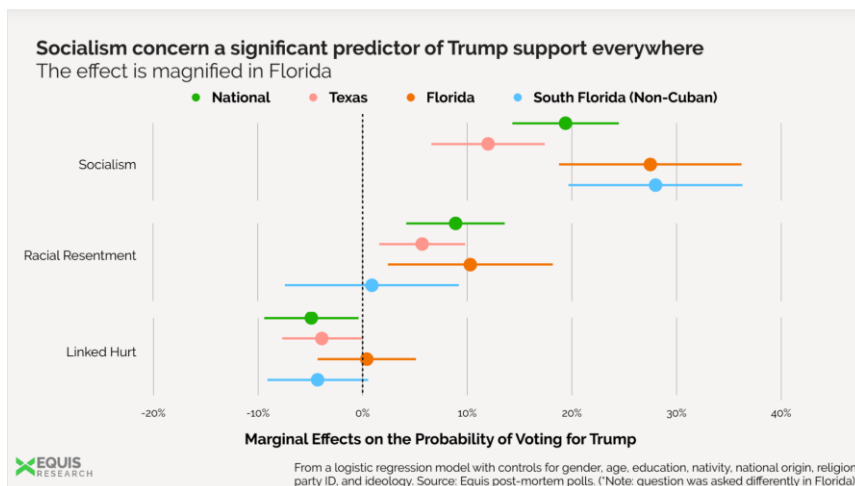


Figure 5.18 – Concerns about socialism and Trump support | Equis research<sup>527</sup>

### What do they mean by socialism? No one answer; attack rings several bells

Prioritization differs slightly by subgroup

	3rd+ Generation (National)	1st/2nd Generation (National)
People will become lazy and dependent on gov't	20%	12%
The government will tell us what we can say or do	16%	16%
This country will become a dictatorship	15%	14%
We will have more rioting and lawlessness	15%	6%
We will become a poor country like Cuba and Venezuela	12%	17%
They will take away our homes, businesses and properties	9%	9%
They will raise our taxes to give money to undeserving people	8%	13%
Other/Refused	5%	14%

Figure 5.19 – Which kind of concerns about socialism? | Equis research<sup>528</sup>

<sup>526</sup> Ibidem

<sup>527</sup> Ibidem

<sup>528</sup> Ibidem

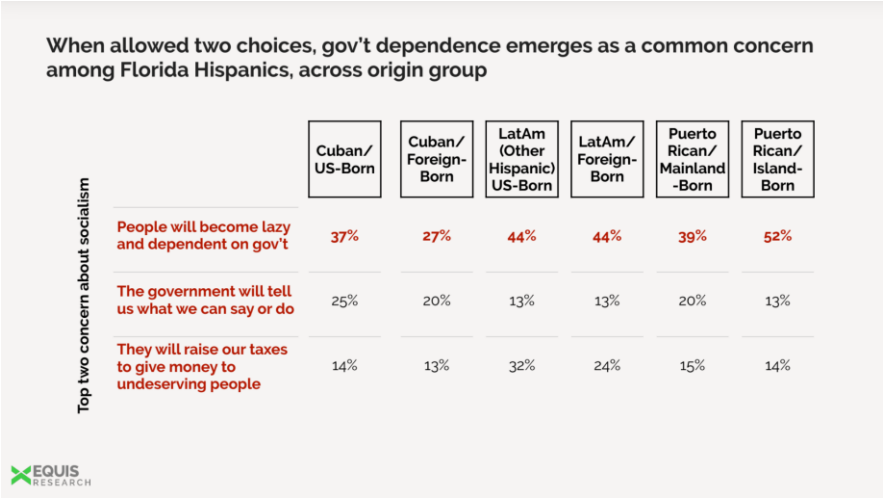


Figure 5.20 – The top concerns about socialism among Florida Hispanics | Equis research<sup>529</sup>

<sup>529</sup> *Ibidem*

## CONCLUSIONS

*If I'm totally honest, I only learned I was a Latina in the last few years. I still don't know what that means. Growing up, I thought of myself as Cuban, or maybe Caribbean. Eventually, I became a citizen and thus a Cuban American. These days I think of myself as an American. [..]*

*I will not fit neatly into the "Latina" box others want to put me into. While my culture may be a prism through which I view the world, it doesn't guarantee that I will identify with or vote like other Cuban Americans, let alone other Latinos. Mr. Trump understood that. Hopefully Democrats do now, too.<sup>530</sup>*

This study has been guided by the author's interest in the shared history of the United States and Latin America, a history that in some ways converges. The influence of the United States on the southern continent began with the existence of the United States itself and continues to this day. But this influence does not unfold in only one direction; on the contrary, it is reciprocal. Therefore, the study, which begins with the historical impact of the U.S. on Cuba, deals in mirror image with Cuba's influence on the most important domestic political practise of the United States: the presidential elections. Among others, Florida, considered to be one of the most important *swing states*, is taken into account. The multiple research questions of this thesis *What is the significance of Latino votes in presidential elections? What sociological and historical factors have led to Cuban Americans voting Republican in Florida? Does anything change in the long run due to generational and demographic factors?* was thus inspired by a willingness to discover the sociological, political and cultural aspect of the Cuban American electorate. Indeed, the five chapters attempt to answer the questions by looking at a long period of time from the beginnings of relations between the United States and Cuba to the present, analysing the voting behaviour of Cubans in presidential elections from historical, legal, political and sociological perspectives. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the evolution of the Latino vote (in general) and the Cuban American vote (in particular).

It has been shown how minorities such as Latinos have gained the right to vote thanks to the *Civil Rights Act* and the *Voting Rights Act* (and its amendment), although voting restrictions are still increasing. How the historical background of relations between the two countries, especially since

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<sup>530</sup> Verde, I. (2021, October 8). *Opinion | Some Latinos Voted for Trump. Get Over It.* The New York Times. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/opinion/sunday/trump-latino-vote.html>

the Castro Revolution of 1959, has contributed to the emergence of different categories of migrants who, with their different historical, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds, sometimes opposing, have brought their personal views to U.S. politics, changing the fate of elections in Florida, and have done so for more than 60 years now. It was also shown how foreign policy towards Cuba was initially a key priority for the exiled population, who advocated a harsh stance towards the island, dictated by the tightening of the embargo. Moreover, it has been analysed how the political turnover in the second half of the 2000s contributed to a climate of détente between the U.S. and Cuba through the normalisation of relations under the Obama and Raúl Castro presidencies. A climate that initially seemed to last, which was also consolidated by Obama's success in the 2012 presidential election, in which he was largely supported by Cuban American voters in Florida. It was then pointed out that normalisation suffered a setback when Trump took office in the White House in 2016. From a demographic and socio-political perspective, the adaptation of Cuban Americans to U.S. society and politics in Florida and Miami was examined, starting with internal differences of the cohorts of *Exiles*, *New Cubans* and *Marielitos*, and how these influenced the elections from 1992 to 2004 differently, with the dominance of early migrants and the intervention of interest groups such as the Cuban American National Foundation. Finally, the elections from 2008 to 2020 were compared, highlighting the change in direction of Cuban Americans, who seemed to be leaning towards the Democrats in 2012 but have returned to their habits of a large Republican majority with the Trump phenomenon, and, in the end, the reasons that led to such a reversal.

Currently, the Cuban immigration and naturalisation rate is still one of the highest in the States, which means that the newcomers will one day get the right to vote and contribute to the election of the U.S. president. Among the top five countries of birth for people naturalising on Fiscal Year (FY) 2020, Cuba was the fourth country of origin for naturalisations, with a rate of 5% and 31,100 naturalisations approved<sup>531</sup>. Together, the top five countries of birth accounted for 35% of naturalised citizens in FY 2020<sup>532</sup>.

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<sup>531</sup> *Naturalizations | Homeland Security*. (2020). U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations>

<sup>532</sup> *Ibidem*



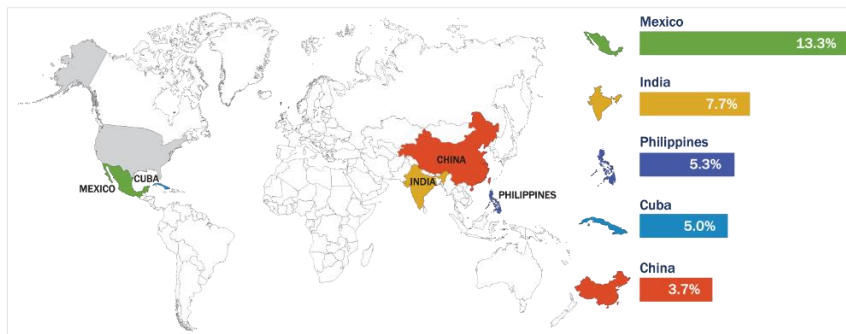


Figure 6.1 – Naturalization rate per country of origin | U.S. Department of Homeland Security<sup>533</sup>

Of all citizens naturalised on FY 2020, 71% lived in 10 states. Florida was second with 79,800 naturalisations approved, just ahead of California and followed by Texas. More than 40% resided in the top three states. The top five cities where naturalised persons resided were (in descending order): Miami; Brooklyn; Houston; the Bronx; and Las Vegas. Miami, with a total of 17,900 naturalisations approved<sup>534</sup>, is once again the top destination for expatriates, having been dubbed “the capital of the world to come”<sup>535</sup> back in 2003.

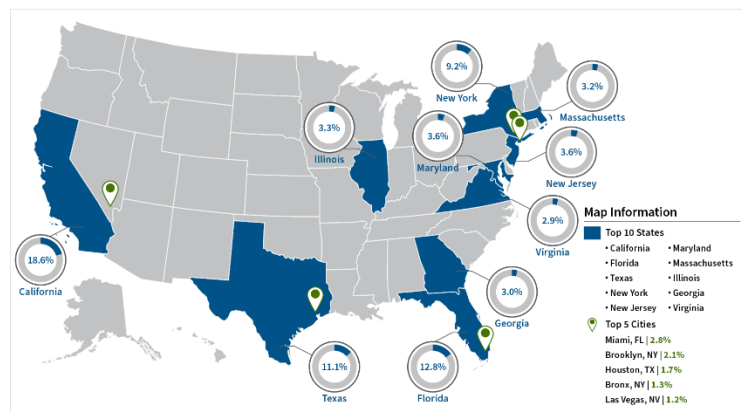


Figure 6.2 – Naturalization rate per State of residence | U.S. Department of Homeland Security<sup>536</sup>

Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Pompano Beach was the 2nd Core Based Statistical Area (CBSA) where naturalised persons resided, with a rate of 8.2%<sup>537</sup>. Generally, a non-citizen must live at least 5 years as a lawful permanent resident to be eligible for naturalisation, while a spouse of a U.S. citizen must live at least 3 years as a lawful permanent resident. The median number of years spent as a

<sup>533</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>534</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>535</sup> Rossella, C. (2003). *Miami. Storie dalla capitale che verrà* (1st ed.). Mondadori.

<sup>536</sup> *Naturalizations | Homeland Security*. (2020). U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Available at: <https://www.dhs.gov/immigration-statistics/naturalizations>

<sup>537</sup> *Ibidem*. The other top five Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) where people who naturalized resided were (in descending order): New York-Newark-Jersey City (10.8%), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (6.9%), Washington-Arlington-Alexandria (4.4%), and San Francisco-Oakland-Berkeley (3.8%).

Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR) by all citizens who naturalised in FY 2020 was 7.1 years, but it varied depending on the citizens' country of birth. Of the top countries, applicants from Cuba spent the second shortest time at 5.7 years<sup>538</sup>.

Having recalled once again the importance of the presence of migrants such as Latino and Cuban Americans in the U.S. and in Florida in particular, the first conclusion we can draw based on the research and analysis conducted in this dissertation – enriched with data from the FIU Cuba Poll 2020 – is that Cuban Americans and U.S.-Cuba relations can be considered “old wine in old bottles”<sup>539</sup>. The Trump administration has reversed all of President Obama’s momentum in U.S.-Cuba relations. A new/old normal has emerged in the Cuban American community as the tone of relations between the two nations has greatly changed. The promise of the Obama policy to restore economic, family, political and cultural interactions has long faded. As a result, the public perception of Cuba is one of antagonism rather than engagement or dialogue. Diplomacy has all but disappeared, although diplomatic ties have not been severed. Since the U.S. Embassy in Havana reduced its consular duties, Cuban migration to the United States has slowed. The restriction of direct flights to the island, as well as the reduction of categories open to legal travel by Americans, has had a significant impact on the island’s economy, which had begun a long process of diversification driven by the openness of the American market. The South Florida diaspora and Cubans faced significant challenges in building relationships due to COVID-19. The Latino community emerges from this research as a non-monolithic actor whose political opinions vary widely by country of origin, religion, gender, generation, length of residence in the U.S. and place of residence. Among Latinos – most of whom have historically voted Democrat – the Cuban American community is part of the contingent that votes Republican. However, Cuban Americans cannot be considered a politically homogeneous monolith either, although certain tendencies may dominate.

As a result of the comparative analysis of the last elections, this thesis aims to paint a complete picture of Trump’s overwhelming victory among Cuban Americans in Florida, reversing the success of Obama in 2012, which seemed to have traced a different path. “The elections of 2016 initiated the Trumpian turn in the Cuban-American community, oxygenating the old Cold War ideologists’ opposition to engagement with the Cuban government but also pumping new Republican blood into the community”<sup>540</sup>. According to experts and pollsters, Biden could have won Florida and also Texas if he had invested more in the Latino community. Indeed, in recent presidential campaigns, Democrats

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<sup>538</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>539</sup> Grenier, Guillermo and Qing Lai. (2020). *2020 FIU Cuba Poll: How Cuban Americans in Miami View U.S. Policies Toward Cuba*. Miami, FL: Florida International University.

<sup>540</sup> Grenier, G. (2021). Engagement with Cuba? How About Engaging with Cuban Americans? How the Democrats Lost and Could Regain the Trust of Cuban Americans. *Center for Latin American and Latino Studies*. Available at: [https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/upload/grenier\\_engaging-with-cuban-americans.pdf](https://www.american.edu/centers/latin-american-latino-studies/upload/grenier_engaging-with-cuban-americans.pdf)

have typically waited until the final weeks before elections to target the Latino community, and the Biden campaign has maintained this line of inefficiency. For example, he did not start running Spanish-language ads in Florida until June, but by then the *Latinos for Trump* campaign was already flourishing in the state. According to the co-founder of *Nuestro PAC* Chuck Rocha:

It's just simply ridiculous that they talk about our community and the way we vote, but they have yet to invest in it. These folks spent a billion dollars talking to white people because it's smart politics: If you want to persuade somebody to go vote for somebody, spend a lot of money talking to them. Then why don't you do that with Latinos?<sup>541</sup>

Moreover, the Republican disinformation campaign in which democrats were branded as socialists – which capitalized on the fears of Hispanics from failed socialist regimes – paid off. Overcoming misinformation is a common difficulty for Democrats<sup>542</sup>. Some Latinos may be especially sensitive to it, owing to their political marginalisation and language problems. Misinformation is traditionally distributed through Facebook, where fact-checking has failed to significantly reduce the transmission of incorrect and misleading information, and through WhatsApp, where disinformation spreads more naturally through people's family and friend networks<sup>543</sup>. Conservative Spanish-language media, such as *Noticias 24* and *PanAm Post*, also play a role<sup>544</sup>. As a result, outlandish conspiracy theories about Joe Biden and the Democrats have penetrated Florida's Latino politics. The conclusion of the state's 2020 election did not come as a complete surprise to Latino organisers, who had been warning about Biden's lack of support in the community for months.

Another important aspect that emerges from this study is the fact that Cuban Americans are divided over policies related to the island, including the effectiveness of the long-standing Cuba embargo. Cubans born in the United States are more evenly split between the two parties than their parents and grandparents, who also escaped Cuba. From the 2020 FIU Cuba Poll, some more precise data on the present trends emerged. 71% of Cuban Americans in South Florida say the embargo has failed<sup>545</sup>: respondents across all demographics hold this view, while registered Republicans and the elderly tend to say the contrary. Nonetheless, an uptick in support for the embargo, initially noticed in the 2018 FIU Cuba Poll, has continued to grow in the present climate<sup>546</sup>. Approximately 60% of the Cuban American population favours the maintenance of the *bloqueo* on the island, either strongly

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<sup>541</sup> Narea, N. (2020, November 12). *Most Latinos voted for Biden, but the election revealed fault lines for Democrats*. Vox. Available at: <https://www.vox.com/21551025/latino-national-vote-biden-trump-2020-florida-texas>

<sup>542</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>543</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>544</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>545</sup> Grenier, Guillermo and Qing Lai. (2020). *Op. cit.*

<sup>546</sup> *Ibidem*

or largely<sup>547</sup>. The programme is supported least by the youngest, those born outside of Cuba, and registered Democrats. However, the vast majority of Cuban Americans do not see Cuba as a threat to essential American interests, apart from the oldest respondents, individuals who immigrated before 1995, and registered Republicans<sup>548</sup>. At the same time, 73% of the respondents' support measures aimed at putting maximum pressure on the Cuban government in order to encourage regime change<sup>549</sup>. Since the inception of the FIU Cuba Poll in the 1990s, the desire to wield a punishing stick on the Cuban regime while simultaneously offering some sort of conciliatory carrot has been a constant in the community's sentiments regarding U.S-Cuba ties<sup>550</sup>. All groups of respondents exhibited overwhelming support for hard-line measures, with only registered Democrats and the oldest participants (76 years of age and older) rejecting the idea by up to one-third of those polled<sup>551</sup>. A majority also supports initiatives aimed primarily at boosting the Cuban people's economic well-being; these proposals also raise sizable opposition (over a third of respondents) by several categories: older respondents, the earliest migrants as well as Republicans and independents<sup>552</sup>. Finally, while there appears to be a shift in sentiments about the embargo as an economic pressure point to effect change, Cuban Americans are also in favour of keeping political ties to the island. The status quo in diplomatic ties is supported by a majority of all groups, with the exception of individuals who immigrated before 1995 and registered Republicans<sup>553</sup>. Nonetheless, support for the continuation of diplomatic relations generally decreased since 2018: it was 67%, compared to 58% support in 2020 among the general population<sup>554</sup>.

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<sup>547</sup> *Ibidem*

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<sup>554</sup> *Ibidem*

### Importance of National Issues by Age

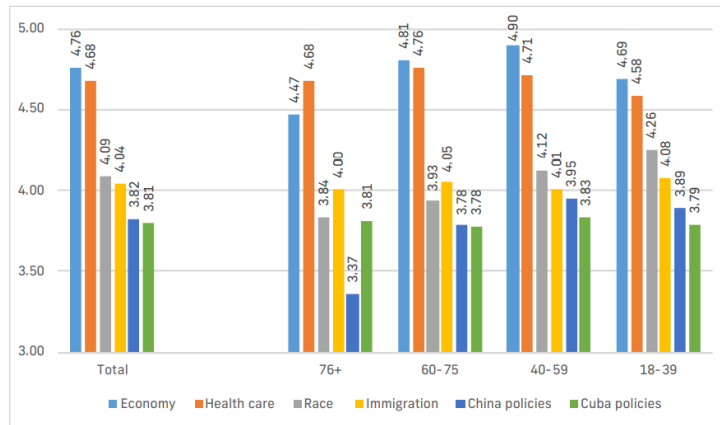


Figure 6.3 – Importance of National Issues by Age | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>555</sup>

### Importance of National Issues by Migration Period

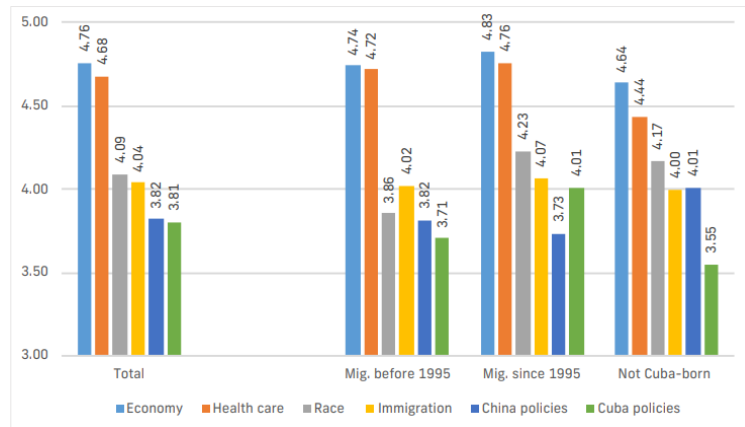


Figure 6.4 – Importance of National Issues by Age | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>556</sup>

### Importance of National Issues by Voter Registration

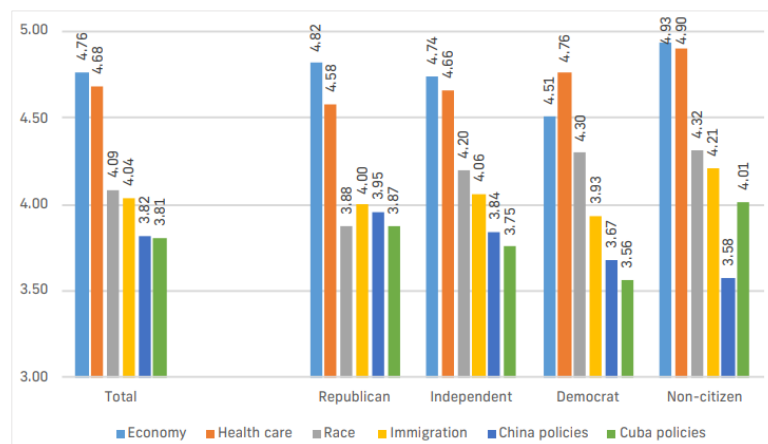


Figure 6.5 – Importance of National Issues by Age | FIU Cuba Poll 2020<sup>557</sup>

<sup>555</sup> Grenier, Guillermo and Qing Lai. (2020). *Op. cit.*

<sup>556</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>557</sup> *Ibidem*

In conclusion, the Republicans' deep party roots in south Florida and Trump engaging strategy with Cuban Americans have paved the way for the Republicans' extraordinary ground game in the 2020 elections. The 23-percentage point swing in Miami Dade County, from Democrat to Republican, cannot be explained only by shifting opinions of Cuban Americans toward U.S.-Cuba ties. The Cuban American community and Miami-Dade County have reached a turning point: Cuban Americans are essential to the Republican wave in South Florida, a wave formed by years of grassroots organisation and constituent service. However, Cuban Americans are still much interested about social concerns. Not only is Cuba nearing the bottom of the priority list when voters are asked to rank concerns, but examination of national statistics reveals that they are substantially more liberal on basic Republican issues than the ordinary Republican. They are more aligned with Democrats on topics such as healthcare, immigration, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), and others. It is certain that the Democratic Party will not gain credibility among Cuban Americans by merely being harder on Cuba and it is also evident that the Democrats have no strategy for engaging Cuban voters at the moment. Though, it is time for the party to develop an approach to appeal to Cuban American voters, by recognising and addressing their diverse social, cultural and economic needs. Engaging in the community, showing interest in the people within it, is the only way to build trust with voters.

## APPENDIX

### Interview with Guillermo J. Grenier

Professor of the Department of Global & Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University. Born in Havana, Cuba, Dr. Grenier is one of the founders of the Miami school of social analysis and has authored or co-authored six books and dozens of articles on labour, migration, immigrant incorporation, and Cuban American ideological profiles, particularly in the Greater Miami area. Since 1991, he has served as a lead investigator of the FIU Cuba Poll, a project cosponsored by the Cuban Research Institute.

1) *The Republican Party seems to have done much more work on the ground in the run-up to the 2020 elections in Florida, it seems to have been more present, more attentive to the needs and demands of Cuban Americans. Is this the reason why the trend that has led to an increase in Democratic turnout since 2012 seems to have reversed?*

The trend is moving in the direction of the Republicans, not the Democrats and you have identified the major reason, in my opinion, why this is the case. Republicans are more “present” in South Florida and much more aggressive than the Democrats<sup>558</sup>. It is also true that the Republicans have established a strong civic infrastructure in South Florida since the 1980s<sup>559</sup>. Top leaders (political and civic) are Republicans. Also, the Spanish speaking radio echo’s the Republican message and criticizes the Democratic message. The Republican narrative has a significant “multiplier effect” throughout the community.

2) *How to explain the Trump phenomenon?*

The Trump phenomenon<sup>560</sup> is a national phenomenon, not just a Cuban American phenomenon. How do you explain it anywhere? Trump was able to give a license to all the (mostly white) members of the population who feel threatened by the increasing multi-cultural/ethnic nature of the U.S. He rang a call to arms to all the “reactionary” forces in the country who crave a return to

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<sup>558</sup> See Paragraph 5.4

<sup>559</sup> See Paragraph 4.3

<sup>560</sup> See Paragraph 5.4

a white America. The Make America Great slogan is a dog-whistle slogan for those who think America was “great” when it was dominated by white males.

- 3) *Now that the Castro brothers no longer rule Cuba, has anything changed in the attitude of the hard-liners in Florida and, particularly, in Miami?*

Not as of this writing. But the only way that the opinions will change is when U.S. policy changes. That is, the policy is what changes opinions, not the other way around. By the time Obama left office, over 60% of Cuban Americans supported his engagement with Cuba. Trump changed course and public opinion followed.

- 4) *The Cuban American National Foundation is still active?*

It is still active but not as visible. It split in the early 2000 into a hard-line and a pro-Obama, engagement faction<sup>561</sup>. Jorge Mas Santos supported Obama’s approach to Cuba. It is very quiet now.

- 5) *Newer arrivals from Cuba are continuing to register as Republicans. Is there an explication for this?*

Since Republicans are more present and powerful in South Florida than the Democrats, as already pointed out, new arrivals see the Republicans as *the* Cuban American party when migrating to South Florida.

- 6) *The 2020 Cuba Poll found that U.S. foreign policy with the island is the last of Cuban-Americans’ priorities, despite politicians’ attempts to engage with the voting bloc with talk of the embargo or of extending diplomatic relations. Economy, healthcare, race, immigration, and China policy all ranked above Cuba as priorities among Cuban Americans this year. What are your thoughts about this?*

Cuban Americans are treated as if Cuba is the only important policy. That is not true<sup>562</sup>. Repeated polls have shown that. But, if you talk to them about Cuba, they will talk to you about Cuba. Other

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<sup>561</sup> See Paragraph 4.3.2

<sup>562</sup> See Conclusions



policies are just as important or more so, but the parties ignore them when talking to Cuban Americans. The parties treat Cuban Americans like “exiles”, not citizens.

- 7) *The 2020 Cuba Poll found that over 70% of Cuban Americans living in South Florida believe that the embargo has not worked, but, at the same time, it found that approximately 54% of the Cuban American community supports the continuation of the embargo. Is not this a contradiction?*

Since the beginning of the Cuba Poll in the early 1990s this has been the case. It is the only policy that ties Cuban Americans to the State (the U.S.)<sup>563</sup>. Cuban Americans support it because no other ideas have been presented through which U.S. can exert pressure on the Cuban government. Most Cuban Americans supported the Obama openings<sup>564</sup> partly because they realized that by creating a “middle class” in Cuba, pressure would increase against the government forcing it to change to the new social structure. If Obama’s policies were to continue, the embargo would go away because Cuban Americans would realize that change can be brought about by engagement, not by isolation.

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<sup>563</sup> See Paragraph 2.3

<sup>564</sup> See Chapter 3

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# SUMMARY

## Introduction

«The air you breathe here is Republican. It's hard for Democrats to show up here and try to create a different atmosphere». With these words Guillermo J. Grenier – a professor of sociology and the chair of the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at Florida International University, born in Havana – describes the situation of Cuban American voters in his state, Florida, and, more particularly, in Miami. The city is in fact a stronghold of Cuban exiles and Cuban Americans living in the U.S., with a neighbourhood called *Little Havana*, which is considered the centre of the Cuban exile population. Latino voters, who represent the fastest-growing share of the electorate, do not act as a monolithic bloc: they have different regional, racial, and political orientations that change based on their country of origin and of the experiences lived before their migration to North America. It goes without saying that Latinos are crucial to the result of the presidential elections in the U.S., having represented 16.6 million votes in 2020, with an increase of 30.9% over 2016. By 2032, the overall Latino electorate in the South is projected to grow by two thirds and, at present, 12 million Latinos are eligible to vote but not yet registered. Therefore, it is essential to consider who will most Latinos vote for, and how large that majority is; a majority that could constitute a significant force in winning or losing a *swing state*, such as Florida. Most of the Cuban American Florida residents live in the South Florida region, dominating the demographic landscape of Miami-Dade County. Their overwhelming presence in the state makes their political involvement critically important, particularly in presidential election years. Nationwide, 58% of Cuban registered voters affiliate with or lean toward the Republican Party, while 38% identify with the Democratic Party or lean Democratic. By comparison, around 65% of Hispanic voters who are not Cuban identify as or lean Democratic, while 32% affiliate with the Republican Party. Historically, Cuban Americans have backed the GOP in large numbers, but that support has at times softened as a new generation of U.S.-born, Democratic-leaning Cubans has come of age. As a result, the Cuban American community is by no means a monolith: polling data shows that around 53% of Cubans in Miami-Dade County are registered Republicans, compared to 26% registered Democrats. The 21% of Cubans not affiliated with a party tend to skew right. It is important to investigate the nature and causes of this difference and to examine the political implications of this vote in the U.S. national scenario. The present work aims precisely at analyse how the Cuban American vote have evolved – by considering historical, political, economic and social aspects – in the U.S and, particularly, in Florida. The time frame covered by the study ranges from the 1800s to the present day. The purpose is to change the common stereotype of Latinos in general and Cuban Americans in particular as a monolith. The focus of the research is on the history of Cuban immigrants and their generational divide. The reasons for choosing Florida and Cuban Americans as a case study are essentially two. First, the dissertation author's fascination with the U.S. and the Latin American continent and interest in minority voices in

the 2020 national elections, which were both the confirmation and the starting point of her passion for the history, political and sociological process in the Americas. Second, compared to other Latino communities, Cuban Americans have made significant political and economic efforts to influence national policy and national foreign policy decisions in recent decades. Therefore, it was deemed interesting to explore the background of the current situation and to assess whether the changing demographic structure of Cuban Americans in Florida is reflected in the day-to-day political life of the state's electorate. The multiple research question guiding the analysis is: *What is the significance of Latino votes in presidential elections? What sociological and historical factors have led to Cuban Americans voting Republican in Florida? Does anything change in the long run due to generational and demographic factors?* To answer and provide a more comprehensive understanding, this study pursued certain tasks. First, to what extent have historical relations between the U.S. and Cuba influenced the perceptions of Cuban migrants in the U.S.? Second, how has the Cuban American community responded to and influenced the foreign policy decisions of recent presidents regarding Cuba? Finally, what are the factors that led to Trump's victory in Florida in 2020 and which party is supported by the majority of Cuban Americans today? The goal of this work is to deepen the understanding of an under-researched topic and to examine the cause-effect relationship that led to nowadays relationship of Florida Cuban American electorate with the U.S. presidential candidates and political parties. The answers to the research questions are provided using a historical, legal, social, and political perspective, thus taking into account historic and sociological factors when looking at any social phenomenon or process. The historical, legal, and analytical frameworks, presented in the first three chapters, result functional to understand and contextualize the in-depth study on Florida of the fourth and fifth chapters. As far as the methodology is concerned, the dissertation is developed combining the document and data analysis of the past few elections and the gathering of quantitative and qualitative data through different interviews. The research is based on both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of information gathered through brief interviews with Cuban American voters and Italian and Cuban American experts on the subject, as well as through participation in the *LULAC Voting Rights Townhall* conference. The decision to enrich the study by directly asking Cuban American voters about the reasons for their political choice aims to give voice to those who are the direct subject of this research. The experts and Cuban American voters who participated in the interviews were contacted through different channels. First, through the networks of Latino non-governmental organisations – *LULAC*. Secondly, through the online platform *LinkedIn*. Secondary sources include books, academic papers, official documents and reports from national governments, international and non-governmental organisations specialising in voter rights and the Latino community in the U.S, letters from presidents and diplomats, transcripts of speeches, election polls and election data. The sources were selected because of their suitability to answer the research questions and to provide further input on the elaborated themes. The present work is structured as follows. The first chapter provides a historical and legal framework for understanding Latino suffrage in the U.S.,

outlining the evolution of minority suffrage and the factors that have hindered its realisation since the end of the World War II. The second chapter outlines a second historical background (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) on Cuba-U.S. relations to better understand the relationship between Cuban migrants and their country of asylum. The private correspondence of politicians and presidents is analysed. To assess the impact of the Revolution, the origins of the Castro regime are first outlined, followed by Havana's geostrategic role in the Cold War, which allows for a better understanding of the subsequent imposition of the embargo, with its legal framework. The third chapter deals with the attempts at normalisation made under the Obama presidency and partially reversed by Trump. In the process of normalising relations between the U.S. and Cuba, the succession of political leaders in the two countries has played a very important role. Obama on the one hand and Raúl Castro on the other initiated this process, which culminated on 17 December 2014. During his presidency, Trump reimposed sanctions on the island and, while the White House increased economic pressure on Cuba, Raúl Castro's successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, became president. Finally, the evolution of the migration problem is analysed: the treatment of Cubans arriving in the U.S. since 1959 was marked by different migration policies. The fourth chapter is dedicated to the case study: the weight of the Cuban diaspora in Florida. The evolution of Cuban American generations and their status in the country is analysed in a conceptual order: the socio-economic framework, the adaptation of immigrants in the U.S., the cultural and political aspects. Each paragraph is accompanied by one or more graphs and tables to contextualise what is then analysed using concrete data. What follows is an in-depth examination of the presidential elections between 1992 and 2004. The concluding chapter comparatively examines Florida as a *swing state* from 2008 to 2020, highlighting in particular the *Latinos por Trump* phenomenon. The conclusions, after a digression on the work done, provide an answer to the research questions. It also paints a picture of the current situation of the Cuban American electorate in Florida, on the basis of the information gathered by interviewing Guillermo J. Grenier and by analysing his report FIU Cuba Poll 2020.

## **CHAPTER 1 – Latinos' struggle for justice**

Latinos are the largest minority ethnic group in the U.S. and represent a powerful force, young and wide enough to transform the political balance of the U.S. local, state, and federal governments. This potential depends, however, on the number of people who are legally able to vote. Suffrage has not been an easy right to obtain or maintain for people of colour, including Latinos, and their enfranchisement remains under perpetual threat as voting restrictions hit minority populations harder. The political events leading up to the Second World War can be seen as the basis for the wave of change that became the civil rights movement. In the U.S., young people of all different ethnicities and social classes were drafted or volunteered to fight in Europe in the name of democracy even though many of them did not have access to the same democracy in their home state. When the war was over, many of the non-white veterans began to claim their rightful place as equal members of their society. One of the

first Latinos civil organizations was the G.I. Forum (1948): started by Mexican American veterans in the Southwest it has branches throughout the U.S. The main goal was to ensure that Hispanic-American veterans received the services and benefits of the G.I. Bill of 1944, a law that guaranteed government support for education and provided aid for veterans to buy homes. Lawyers from the forum, together with lawyers from the League of United Latin American Citizens, successfully intervened in some legal cases such as *Hernandez v. State of Texas* (1954) and *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi ISD* (1971). In 1958, the Forum became a national organisation, and its members introduced Mexican Americans into national politics. The civil rights era was characterized by a series of events that took place during the 1960s, most notably the struggles in the southern states, where African Americans and other minorities rose against Jim Crow segregation. Some of the most important national figures were Martin Luther King and Cesar Chavez, but other groups representing different ethnic minorities also came to the fore: the G.I. Forum and LULAC for instance. The U.S. government was aware that it had to promote a major internal transformation if it was to continue to represent the “free and democratic world” against the “totalitarian and undemocratic” communist world. The national and international pressure that characterised the first five years of 1960 culminated in the passage of the two most important pieces of legislation: the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and the *Voting Rights Act* of 1965. The *Civil Rights Act* was signed in 1964. It prohibits discrimination based on race, national origin, religion, sex in employment, education, and improved access to public facilities and accommodations, to voting and employment. In particular, Title I relates to voting rights: it bans the use of literacy tests, the application of voting requirements, and the use of immaterial errors and omissions to disenfranchise eligible voters. Its failure to bring about meaningful change in Southern voting practices led Congress to pass the *Voting Rights Act* (VRA) of 1965, vetoing racial discrimination in voting practices by the federal, state, and local governments laws. The law was far-reaching, securing voting rights for most racial and ethnic minorities, including Latinos. Since 1966, the struggle for civil rights took a new direction. Young people of different racial, ethnic, and social backgrounds created new organisations such as Black Panthers, Brown Berets and Young Lords. The militancy of these groups led the U.S. government to act, and the civil rights era began to wane. Due to the infiltration of federal government agencies, the internal contradictions within the ethnic guerrilla groups and the gender issues that were developing within these groups, they began to disappear. In 1974, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project was founded. It was the first and largest non-partisan Latino voter participation organization in the U.S., firstly committed in eliminating barriers that prevented Latinos to vote. Although registration materials were finally translated into Spanish, Spanish-speakers were still discriminated against at the polls. Two important cases considered a milestone in overcoming English only election structures are the 1970 *Garza v. Smith*, and the 1974 *Torres v. Sachs*. At last, in 1975, following several court battles on behalf of Latino-Americans, President Gerald Ford amended the VRA to end discrimination against “language minorities” (*Bilingual Amendments*). 2006 was a pivotal year for immigration regulation in the U.S. *Border Protection, Antiterrorism and Illegal Immigration Control Act* passed, strengthening

immigration laws, and adding border security measures. In April, a coalition of very different social strata marched across Los Angeles in opposition to the reform bill, because it criminalized undocumented immigrants and churches or organizations that assisted them. The largest racial group was composed by Mexican, Caribbean, and Latin American people. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Latino Community had already captured national attention because of the demographic explosion (from 22.4 million in 1990 to 44 million in 2007). Due to their demographic importance, politicians from both parties seeking election began to cautiously consider them a huge pool of votes, and to pay attention to the immigration reform debate. Since 2010, voting restrictions for Hispanics and Blacks have been increasing again: from strict photo ID requirements to early voting reduction, to the proposal that political districts should not be created based on total population, but on total voter population. Latinos would suffer a major setback in their voting rights: they tend to have more components of non-voting age than other ethnicities and a very high number of not-yet-naturalised immigrants.

## **CHAPTER 2 – Historical background to relations between Cuba and the U.S.**

Ninety miles. That is the distance which separates the southernmost part of Florida – Key West – from the Cuban coast. It is obvious that geography itself determines the mutual importance and influence of the U.S. and Cuba, as well as the interaction between Cuban emigrants in Florida and their families who remained on the island. This connection originated and developed before the independence of the two countries when one was a British colony and the other a Spanish colony. Since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. exerted a strong “Americanising” influence on the island, attempting to transform its ideological (and economic) domination in an actual annexation. At the same time, the emergence of a Cuban national conscience and desire for independence clashed with the North American expectations and plans, until aversion to U.S. power became one of the central characteristics of Cuban political life. The island was important to the U.S. not only for political and commercial reasons but also for geopolitical ones: its strategic geographical location and the presence of the port of Havana for both military and economic purposes. Only a few years later, the principle of *Manifest Destiny* (1845) was promulgated, forming the basis for American expansionism westward and overseas. In 1823, the *Monroe Doctrine* was proclaimed – European powers could not interfere on the American continent and vice versa –, prompted by the uprising of the Spanish colonies in South America seeking independence. In this context, the U.S.’ influence over Cuba was already mature and would continue to develop in the future. While annexation was seen as a natural destiny for Cuba, independence was not: geographical, racial, and cultural factors all militated against freedom. The first attempt at independence, the Ten Years’ War (1868-78), was unsuccessful: the Cuban nationalists were defeated by Spanish troops. A new insurrection broke out in 1895 – in the middle of Democratic President Cleveland’s term – and it did not end until 1898, after three years of war. Republican President McKinley, elected in 1896, was an expansionist: he was willing to go to war with Spain rather than lose major U.S. interests in



Cuba. On April 20, 1898, Congress declared war and passed the *Teller Amendment*. Cuban independence was finally granted in December 1898, but it soon became clear that the island's autonomy was still a long way off due to U.S. military occupation. In 1901, a constitutional convention drew up a new charter that included the *Platt Amendment* that gave the U.S. the right to intervene in Cuban domestic politics by making the island a protectorate. In the 1930s, after a *coup d'état*, Fulgencio Batista, a sergeant, became the dominant figure in the army, he consolidated his position in the coalition government and the U.S. accepted his leadership; the *Platt Amendment* was repealed in 1934, he remained president until 1959. In 1953, a group of Revolutionaries with their leader Fidel Castro, tried to reverse the government, but Fidel and his brother Raúl were sentenced to 15 years in prison. The brothers were amnestied, and after years preparing the Revolution, following Batista's resignation on January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro finally made his triumphant entry into Havana. The Agrarian Reform Law, one of his most radical measures, was implemented: it limited the size of lands to 1000 hectares and expropriated the once beyond that, even if they were owned by foreign companies, in exchange for compensation in Cuban currency. The "de-Americanization" of the island progressed rapidly, so as the centralization of power. In 1960, four points characterized Fidel's government: the nationalization of the economy, a rapprochement with the USSR, a more authoritarian attitude, and the introduction of egalitarian socioeconomic policies. The rising Cold War climate affected the White House, which viewed the USSR's increasing interference in Cuban affairs with suspicion, even in light of the growing number of Communists in the government in Havana. The first crisis began when Castro decided to process Russian crude oil instead of Venezuelan. The U.S. oil refiners on the island refused and Castro seized them. Convinced of the Kremlin's support for him, Castro nationalized all other American businesses and properties. In response, Eisenhower drastically reduced the Cuban sugar quota in the U.S., but then he enlarged the embargo on all trade with Cuba, except for medicine and food. In addition, diplomatic relations were severed on January 3, 1961, inaugurating covert operations as the only means to depose Castro. Kennedy (JFK) won the presidency and inherited the Cuba problem in 1961. He had been pressured to support the exiles' invasion of the island, which Eisenhower had already authorised, and he decided to allow preparations to continue, demanding that there be no discernible U.S. involvement (such as air support). On the night of April 17, 1961, 1400 Cubans landed at the Bay of Pigs. The invasion was neither properly planned nor executed, and the expected popular uprising failed to materialise, ending the operation in a fiasco. The Castro regime was strengthened by publicly professing the socialist nature of the movement on December 1961, and by establishing closer economic and political relations with the USSR. Motivated to defend Cuba from a likely new attack, Moscow began to establish bases for intermediate-range missiles on the island, upsetting the balance of power that had existed until October 1962. The so-called *Missile Gap* – the disparity in the strategic nuclear arms race – in favour of the U.S. greatly worried the Soviets. The Cuban Missile crisis is considered the most dangerous confrontation between the U.S and the USSR in 50 years of Cold War; the crisis dragged on for 13 days, at the end of which Khrushchev and JFK agreed on the immediate dismantling of all

Soviet offensive weapons on Cuban soil. In return, the U.S. promised never to attempt to invade the island and secretly assured the dismantling of missiles stationed in Turkey. Castro was never consulted. The U.S. embargo against Cuba was imposed over 60 years ago and has been maintained to this day. What might initially have been seen as a legitimate sanction was difficult to justify in the long run. It began in October 1960 under President Eisenhower and, since then, each president maintained it. Various legal instruments were used to justify it: the *Foreign Assistance Act* (FAA) of 1961, the *Tariff Classification Act* (TCA) of 1962, the *Cuban Assets Control Regulations* (CACR) of 1963, the *Cuban Democracy Act* (CDA) of 1992, the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* (FRAA) of 1994, the *Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act* (CLDSA) of 1996, the *Omnibus Appropriations Act* of 1998, and the *Trade Sections Reform and Export Enhancement Act* of 2000. In 1977, the new Carter administration launched an initiative to improve contacts with the island to improve the human rights situation there. However, toward the end of the decade, the geopolitical climate changed again: in the late 1970s, Cuba sent its own troops to Africa to take advantage of the wave of turmoil sweeping the continent at the height of decolonization and bring the newly independent states into the communist camp. These interventions were clearly disapproved by Washington and stalled the normalisation process: in 1982 Reagan reimposed all restrictions on U.S. citizens wishing to travel to the island. The disintegration of the USSR in the early 1990s was the last of the major international geopolitical factors to strain relations between the two countries. In 1992, the CDA was passed: it codified and strengthened many of the U.S. sanctions against Cuba that remain in place today. In 1996, the CLDSA further expanded sanctions and made the embargo into law. Protests against the *bloqueo* did not die down and found a prestigious stage in the UN General Assembly, which has passed a resolution condemning the blockade every year since 1992. The last vote took place on 9 June 2021, when 184 countries voted in favour of the resolution, the 29th year in a row.

### **CHAPTER 3 – Attempts at normalization**

In the process of normalizing relations, the succession of political leaders in the two countries has played an indispensable role. Barack Obama on the one hand and Raúl Castro on the other initiated this process, which, however, was to prove far more complicated than it first appeared. Obama, from his side, relaxed the repressive measures of the embargo and increased people-to-people exchanges in the hope of strengthening democratic freedoms and human rights; Raúl reformed and liberalized the island's economy, which had been controlled by the state since the 1960s. Obama's foreign policy initiatives have been harshly attacked for their lack of strategic value and coherence, but his actions in Cuba were pure realism. An honest examination of the embargo on Cuba would offer little achievements and solid arguments that it has been detrimental in attaining a more equitable and democratic government in the island. Normalization of relations benefited all sides, and an end to the embargo would benefit all parties much more. The resignation of Fidel Castro in February 2008, with the

consequential appointment of his brother Raúl as President, came amid the presidential campaign in the U.S. Obama showed a willingness to communicate from the beginning considering it a substantial turning point, indulged by Raúl Castro himself, who advocated for a shift in official attitude and mentality. During the campaign Obama emphasized his commitment to allowing unrestricted family visits and remittances to Cuba, targeting the younger generation of Cuban Americans. Hardliners demanding a comprehensive embargo against the Castro regime have traditionally controlled the expatriate Cuban vote, considered crucial to success in Florida. A candidate who strayed from their position risked losing the election. However, as younger Cuban Americans reach adulthood and elder Cuban Americans become unhappy with the embargo's lack of progress, the community's tone has shifted. By speaking of peace with Cuba, Obama finally gained Florida, which effectively won him the presidential mandate. As Cuba started to open its doors to outside investment, Cuban American business leaders also came out in favour of easing ties with the island. Obama was able to fulfil his campaign pledge to reduce restrictions on travel and remittances for Cuban Americans in early 2009, however, he also expressed concern about the human rights situation and political prisoners in Cuba. A broader coalition of stakeholders was needed to help implement the transition to a more flexible policy based on mutual respect and cooperation. After the first legislative set of modifications, a wide range of elites and the public were interested in knowing more about Cuba, which put pressure on both the administration and Congress to further lessen the embargo. Raúl Castro served two five-year terms until April 2018; Fidel died in November 2016, more than a decade after he stepped down from office. The transition at the top of the state apparatus signalled the start of an internal reform process that dramatically altered the island. Migration was one of the sectors most impacted by the wave of changes, with the major emphasis being on facilitating international travel. The ultimate purpose of this new migration strategy was to stimulate the economy while also making it simpler for Cubans to travel, work abroad, and return home. The release of the American contractor Alan Gross by the Cuban authorities helped the process. He had been sentenced in 2009 to 15 years in prison for espionage. The Gross case overlapped with that of the so-called "Cuban Five", five agents of the Cuban secret service arrested in Miami in 1998. The presidents negotiated the exchange, and on December 17, 2014, unveiled a proposal to normalize relations between the two nations, which had been broken since 1961. Obama would remove Cuba off the list of terrorist-supporting countries and expand travel, commerce volume, and information flow to the island. In April 2015, Washington consented to Cuban participation in the OAS VII Summit of the Americas – the region's first gathering of leaders of state and government –, and the two leaders met for the first time in Panama. Finally, in March 2016, Obama became the first U.S. President to visit the island in over 90 years, after Calvin Coolidge (1928). His visit was an enormous political success, except for right-wing critics. Support came from all the states that had an economic interest in the revival of relations, especially the possibility of exporting agricultural products, and from public opinion. In a poll of February 2016, a net majority had a positive opinion of Cuba – 54 to 40. There were partisan differences: 56% of Democrats viewed Cuba favourably, compared to just 36% of

Republicans. Fidel Castro's death and Donald Trump's election in 2016 revived disputes. Trump undid most of the Obama administration's rapprochement with the island once he became president. In the 2017-2018 Congress, reactions were varied, with legislative attempts reflecting the political rift between those who wanted sanctions increased and those who wanted them loosened. However, many of the Obama administration's policy measures remained in effect. In 2018, Raúl Castro's chosen successor, Miguel Díaz-Canel, became president. His nomination marked a step toward generational transition in Cuba's political system. For the first time since 1959 the government was not led by a Castro. At the same time, to put pressure on the Communist administration for its human rights record and backing for Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, the White House sharply tightened economic sanctions in 2019 until January 2021. Fundamental to understanding the internal differences within the Cuban minority in the U.S. when it comes to voting in the presidential election is the community migratory history. The strong U.S. foreign stance towards Cuba's communist state resulted in preferential treatment for Cubans under U.S. immigration policy from 1959 until recently. With the 1965 *Immigration and Nationality Act*, Cuban immigrants started arriving in large numbers. The *Cuban Adjustment Act* (1966) "allows Cuban natives or citizens living in the U.S., who meet certain eligibility requirements, to apply to become lawful permanent residents", in an effort to lessen the backlog. There were no restrictions on the number of applicants, and the only requirement was that they be Cuban. In 1980, when Fidel Castro stated that any Cubans intending to travel to the U.S. must board at the port of Mariel, west of Havana, a massive naval exodus began. The Mariel boatlift ended with the joint agreement between the U.S. and Cuban governments, but by then more than 125,000 people (the *Marielitos*) had arrived in Florida. The 1980 *Refugee Act*, which established a contemporary asylum system in the U.S., was approved the same year. As USSR collapsed and economic backing for Cuba was cut off, many Cubans left the island in the early 1990s, during the Clinton administration. Rafters began to flock to the U.S. until, in 1996, the two countries signed a new agreement – starting the *Wet foot/dry foot* policy than ended in 2017 – that allowed the U.S. Coast Guard to detain and repatriate most immigrants who attempted to enter the U.S. by raft or boat.

#### **CHAPTER 4 – The weight of the Cuban diaspora in the U.S.: Florida**

Cuba and its diaspora have a relationship dating back 200 years. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a composite mixture of people coming from different social strata, with different cultural, economic, political, and cultural characteristics emigrated from the island. Most of diaspora's relations with Cuban authorities have been hostile, especially after 1959. Most of Cubans living in the U.S. moved to Florida (more than 60%) dominating the demography of Miami-Dade County (69,4%), with important implications in presidential elections' years. According to the framework idealized by the sociologist Peggy Levitt and the anthropologist Nina Glick Schiller, Cuba is a "disinterested and denouncing state, which treat emigrants as though they no longer belong, often branding them as traitors". For instance, the Cuban

government still refuses to give dual citizenship and other legal rights – as the external vote – to those who emigrate from the island. The émigrés can be divided in three different cohorts. Firstly, when Castro took power in 1959, Cubans who had grown up before the Revolution and opposed its radical restructuring departed the island. They are the so-called *Exiles*, usually brought up in an environment of wealth and frustrated with the government for taking away their old lifestyle. Mostly entrepreneurs, managers and professionals who made up 9% of the labour force under Batista, they were light-skinned, conservative Catholics who admired the U.S. and thought that their permanence there would have been temporary. Secondly, the *New Cubans* are the emigrants who experienced both the Revolution and the economic collapse of the USSR; they had no prior exposure to commodities, civic culture, or any kind of social life outside the state and they fled in search of a better life, regardless of their political disillusionment. In the U.S., the two groups of emigrants adapted in different ways. Many of the *Exiles* were able to participate in the American Dream both economically and politically because of the social, cultural, and economic advantages they had gained in Cuba; however, they never lost sight of who they were and why they were there, learning to use the U.S. political system to achieve their goal of overthrowing the Castro-led government. *New Cubans*, on the other hand, have a different perspective on cross-border connections, hoping for a bridge across the Florida strait. Due to their lack of political influence, civic associational life and economic possibilities, their grievances have mostly gone unspoken. Between the *Exiles* and the *New Cubans* came the *Marielitos*. Cuban immigrants are one of the most demographically concentrated groups of recent immigrants, having amplified their impact by settling among their own people. The first refugees settled mainly in Miami, and, in smaller numbers, in Union City, New Jersey, nicknamed *Havana North* and *Havana on the Hudson*. Political engagement differed between *Exiles* and *New Cubans*, particularly across generations. *Exiles* joined the political class in the U.S. to use it for personal and community benefit, aiming at advancing their anti-Castro agenda. In the post-Cold War era, their goal was to maintain and deepen the embargo to weaken the Cuban government to the point of collapse. Otherwise, the *New Cubans* and *Marielitos* stayed on the political side-lines. The emerging elite, both Cuban and U.S.-born, advocated extreme *Exile* interests, until 2000, when rigid hegemony started to crack due to the changing demography of the Cuban American community. In addition, the death of Cuban Americans' most prominent and influential leader – Jorge Mas Canosa – left a power vacuum that hardliners were unable to fill. Since Cuban Americans who became citizens took their voting rights significantly, politicians soon discovered that taking a hard stance against the Castroist government paid off. In 2000, Cuban Americans occupied one-third of the country's highest appointed jobs, more than any other ethnic group. Regarding State politics, the first Cuban American was elected to the state legislature in 1982, and within a decade they held half the seats in the state legislature. Cuban American legislators were well-known to each other, had similar views, caucused together, and voted as a bloc. In this context, the community demanded (and obtained) ethnic concessions all the way up to the highest levels of national policymaking. *Exiles* were the one who organized, lobbied, and made political donations that stretched their realm of influence beyond

their geographical base in Florida, and across the party split, even as they became overwhelmingly Republican in their personal views. Beginning in the early 1980s, they controlled power via the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), led by Mas Canosa, with the principal purpose of developing freedom and democracy in Cuba. Until the early 2000s, no other Cuban American organization rivaled the Foundation in terms of power brokering. Jorge Mas Santos (son of Mas Canosa) took over the Foundation in 2000, and, lacking his father charisma, he failed to retain the influence the CANF once had. Even as the *Exiles*' impact over Congress waned, their discretionary authority over presidents persisted. The sociologist Susan Eckstein examined the so-called "cycle of ethnic policy": the exchange of policies in favour of a particular ethnic group in return for political support. Between 1992 and 2004, Cuba's domestic policies was integrally connected to the presidential election cycle: ethnic government initiatives differed between election and non-election years, responding to the concerns of the ethnic electorate in election years and being reversed or not implemented in non-election years. The ethnic policy cycle started in 1992, with the passing of the CDA, against the background of the Foundation's impact detailed above. G. W. Bush chose to seek the votes of Cuban Americans in Florida in order to get re-elected, and thanks to them, he won the state (although Clinton won the elections). A Democrat entered the White House after 12 years of Republican administrations. During the 1996 election, Clinton used his position to promote fresh embargo-strengthening legislation, which he had earlier opposed. He approved the CLDSA with 75% of Miami Cuban Americans backing it: he won about a third of the Cuban American Florida vote, enough to win the state and his presidential re-election bid. He was the first Democratic candidate to win Florida in 20 years. After winning a second term, he never enforced the provision of the bill. The 2000 election extended the ethnic political cycle to unprecedented heights. While Gore won the national popular vote, Cuban Americans helped G. W. Bush win the electoral college vote: officially, Bush won the state by 537 ballots, with more than 80% of Cuban Americans supporting him, because of the Elián Gonzalez affaire. A 6-year-old Cuban kid was rescued at sea; his mother perished in the disaster. Once in Miami, a custody dispute erupted with the boy's family. Following the government's decision to repatriate the Elián to his father in Cuba, federal officials rushed in his home and took him away. Gore was too closely linked to the party that had the child deported. The Bush administration never answered to all Cuban Americans lobbies requests, but in spring 2004, it introduced more severe measures, and Cuban American electorate voted him again in 2004. After the turn of the century, the hard-line *Exile*'s political monopoly started to erode. Differing perspectives on cross-border interactions split the emigrant community. More and more Latino immigrants and *New Cubans* had gained the right to vote by becoming citizens, reducing the influence of *Exiles* in the polling process. Generational differences between those born in the U.S and those born in Cuba were also increasing, until, in 2004, influential Cuban Americans openly split from the Republican majority that *Exiles* had built. The Democratic candidates attempted to bridge the "generational divide" among Cuban Americans by concentrating more on relaxing the personal embargo imposed by Bush in 2004. In 2008, Barack Obama, declared that he would relax the Bush administration's limitations on Cuban Americans'

ability to visit relatives in Cuba and send remittances. He won Florida with one-third of the Cuban American vote, and he loosened travel restrictions after just two months in office.

## **CHAPTER 5 – Florida as a *swing state* from 2008 to 2020. A comparative analysis**

Although the last few Florida elections have been very close, this has not always been the case. The state of Florida voted Democratic in almost every election throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to its residents' devotion to the Democratic Party in the southern states. With the passage of the *Civil Rights Act*, the Democratic Party's stances started to evolve, and some Floridians began to adjust their views as well. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Cuban Americans have consistently voted Republican since the dawn of the Cuban Revolution, but political experts have anticipated that Cuban Americans would suddenly switch their political allegiance and vote Democrat, due to demographic changes. While the logic of quick shift in Cuban Americans' voting preferences is theoretically persuasive, previous elections have shown little evidence for the argument that the Cuban American electorate is growing more progressive. In answering the question *Why do Cubans still support Republican candidates at the ballot box?* research on political integration better explains the voting behaviour of Cuban Americans. Presenting direct evidence that cohort or generational effects are associated with Cuban Americans' voting decisions will be the subject of the following section, which will be enriched by a comparative analysis of Florida as a *swing state* from the 2008 election to the last election in 2020. The state was won by Democratic Obama with 51% of the vote (57% Latino vote), by a 2.82 % margin of victory in 2008. There was a lot of discussion among the presidential contenders over Cuba's stance: Senator McCain supported the continuance of the Bush's policy of restrictive measures and the embargo, while Clinton and Obama cautiously supported the easing of travel, money transfers and exports to Cuba, but without repealing the embargo. No one wanted to risk enraging the elder generation, which was still politically engaged and influential: 85% of the elder exiles who reject any concessions were registered to vote, compared to only 18% of those who arrived after 1980. In 2012, Obama won again Florida defeating Mitt Romney with 50.01% of the vote to 49.13%, receiving 61% of Florida's Hispanic vote versus Romney's 39%. Statistics showed that South Florida's substantial Cuban American population also voted in historic proportions for the Democrats. Obama received 48% of the Cuban American vote and defeated Romney in Miami's *Little Havana* area, where he received 56% of votes cast. Voter participation among Latinos of Cuban descent was particularly high: 67%, compared to 48% of Latinos overall. In 2014, when Obama restored ties with Cuba, it was a political risk on his party's side, betting that demographic and generational change in the ultimate *swing state* would outweigh the anticipated response from Florida's older expatriate population. Yet, anti-Castro fervour was still strong in South Florida, where prominent Democrats either voiced cautious hope regarding the prisoner exchange and the easing of hostilities. Following the opening of ties with Cuba, a new, more recent wave of immigrants came in the U.S.: Democrats would have a long-term

advantage in the community if they could attract them. In 2016, Florida was an important *swing state* again for Donald J. Trump victory. Clinton had the backing of Hispanics, but Trump's strength among working class voters tipped the scales in his favour. Despite many expectations that Clinton would build on Obama's 2012 gains with Cuban voters, 54% of Cubans backed the Republican president-elect, compared to nearly a quarter (26%) of non-Cuban Latinos. However, looking at the counties with more Cuban-origin residents – Miami-Dade County, Broward County, Hillsborough County, Palm Beach County and Orange County – one finds that Clinton won there. Cuban registered voters had been shifting toward the Democratic Party for more than a decade. Less than half (47%) of Cuban registered voters nationwide said they identified with or lean toward the Republican Party – down from the 64% who said the same about the GOP a decade ago, according to 2013 survey data. Meanwhile, the share of Cubans who identified with or leaned toward the Democratic Party doubled from 22% to 44% over the same period. Joseph R. Biden was elected president in 2020. Biden won two-thirds of Latinos nationally, identical to Hillary Clinton's proportion in 2016. Trump's vote share increased marginally, going from 28% in 2016 to 32%. Trump, on the other hand, made advances among Latinos in Florida, the state saw the most dramatic shift from Democrats to Republicans. While Clinton won Cuban-heavy Miami-Dade County in 2016 by over 30 percentage points, Biden carried it by a margin of only 7.3 % this time around. In largely Cuban districts in Miami, Trump received up to 70% of the overall vote. In 2020, more than half of Florida's counties shifted farther to the right, enabling Trump to win the state by a margin (+3.4) almost three times greater than he had four years before – in 2016 it was +1.2. Biden failed in several precincts with a predominantly Hispanic population. "President Donald Trump's obsession with Cubans has paid off". That is the first line of a Politico article which tries to explain Trump success among Cuban Americans in 2020. According to some Latino activists, this success is due to the fact that Biden neglected Florida during much of his campaign, while Trump held many events in the state. When many Cuban Americans started to shift to the Democratic side during Obama's successful presidential bids and Clinton's candidacy in 2016, Republicans reacted by concentrating more on the community. Moreover, the Hispanic electorate is overwhelmingly Catholic or conservative Christian: many agree with Trump and the Republican Party's opposition to gay marriage and abortion. Trump's pro-business initiatives are also particularly popular among Latinos – notably those aimed at cutting federal taxes and state regulations. *Latinos for Trump* committee worked hard to rally voters of Central and South American descent to its side, and through rallies, meetings, and informative messages, it succeeded. Another main reason explaining Trump success is his strategy to portraying Democrats as extreme leftists and socialists, thus stirring up deep-rooted fears in people of Cuban or Venezuelan origin. Biden is considered a moderate, however, some progressives in his party (Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez) embraced the definition of moderate socialists and started advocating for more government-funded programmes to expand health care and combat climate change.



## Conclusion

This study has been guided by the author's interest in the shared history of the U.S. and Latin America, a history that in some ways converges. The influence of the U.S. on the southern continent began with the existence of the U.S. itself and continues to this day. But this influence does not unfold in only one direction; on the contrary, it is reciprocal. Therefore, the study, which begins with the historical impact of the U.S. on Cuba, deals in mirror image with Cuba's influence on the most important domestic political practise of the U.S.: the presidential elections. The multiple research questions of this thesis *What is the significance of Latino votes in presidential elections? What sociological and historical factors have led to Cuban Americans voting Republican in Florida? Does anything change in the long run due to generational and demographic factors?* was thus inspired by a willingness to discover the sociological, political, and cultural aspect of the Cuban American electorate. Indeed, the five chapters attempt to answer the questions by looking at a long period of time from the beginnings of relations between the U.S. and Cuba to the present, analysing the voting behaviour of Cubans in presidential elections from historical, legal, political, and sociological perspectives. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the evolution of the Latino vote (in general) and the Cuban American vote (in particular). Currently, the Cuban immigration and naturalisation rate is still one of the highest in the States, which means that the newcomers will one day get the right to vote and contribute to the election of the U.S. president. Among the top five countries of birth for people naturalising on Fiscal Year 2020, Cuba was the fourth country of origin for naturalisations. Of all citizens naturalised, 71% lived in 10 states. Florida was second with 79,800 naturalisations approved, just ahead of California and followed by Texas. Miami, with a total of 17,900 naturalisations, is once again the top destination for expatriates – it was dubbed “the capital of the world to come” back in 2003. Having recalled once again the importance of the presence of migrants such as Latino and Cuban Americans in the U.S. and in Florida in particular, the first conclusion we can draw based on the research and analysis conducted in this dissertation is that Cuban Americans and U.S.-Cuba relations can be considered “old wine in old bottles”. The Trump administration has reversed all of President Obama's momentum in U.S.-Cuba relations. A new/old normal has emerged in the Cuban American community as the tone of relations between the two nations has greatly changed. The promise of the Obama policy to restore economic, family, political and cultural interactions has long faded and the public perception of Cuba is one of antagonism rather than engagement or dialogue. The Latino community emerges from this research as a non-monolithic actor whose political opinions vary widely by country of origin, religion, gender, generation, length and place of residence in the U.S. Among Latinos – most of whom have historically voted Democrat – the Cuban American community is part of the contingent voting Republican. However, Cuban Americans cannot be considered a politically homogeneous monolith either, although certain tendencies may dominate. As a result of the comparative analysis of the last elections, this thesis aims to paint a complete picture of Trump's overwhelming victory among Cuban Americans in Florida,

reversing the success of Obama in 2012, which seemed to have traced a different path. In the words of Grenier, “the elections of 2016 initiated the Trumpian turn in the Cuban-American community, oxygenating the old Cold War ideologists’ opposition to engagement with the Cuban government but also pumping new Republican blood into the community”. According to experts and pollsters, Biden could have won Florida if he had invested more in the Latino community. Indeed, in recent presidential campaigns, Democrats have typically waited until the final weeks to target the Latino community, and the Biden campaign has maintained this line of inefficiency. Moreover, the Republican disinformation campaign in which democrats were branded as socialists – which capitalized on the fears of Hispanics from failed socialist regimes – paid off. Overcoming misinformation is a common difficulty for Democrats. Some Latinos may be especially sensitive to it, owing to their political marginalisation and language problems. Another important aspect that emerges from this study is the fact that Cuban Americans are divided over policies related to the island, including the effectiveness of the long-standing Cuba embargo. From the 2020 FIU Cuba Poll, some more precise data on the present trends emerged. 71% of Cuban Americans in South Florida say the embargo has failed. Nonetheless, an uptick in support for the embargo, initially noticed in the 2018 FIU Cuba Poll, has continued to grow in the present climate. 60% of the Cuban American population favours the maintenance of the *bloqueo* on the island. 73% of the respondents’ support measures aimed at putting maximum pressure on the Cuban government to encourage regime change. Finally, while there appears to be a shift in sentiments about the embargo as an economic pressure point to effect change, Cuban Americans – except for individuals who immigrated before 1995 and registered Republicans – are also in favour of keeping political ties to the island. Nonetheless, support for the continuation of diplomatic relations generally decreased since 2018: it was 67%, compared to 58% support in 2020 among the general population. In conclusion, the Republicans’ deep party roots in south Florida and Trump engaging strategy with Cuban Americans have paved the way for the Republicans’ extraordinary ground game in the 2020 elections. The 23-percentage point swing in Miami Dade County, from Democrat to Republican, cannot be explained only by shifting opinions of Cuban Americans toward U.S.-Cuba ties. The Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County have reached a turning point: they are essential to the Republican wave in South Florida, a wave formed by years of grassroots organisation and constituent service. However, they are still much interested about social concerns. Not only is Cuba nearing the bottom of the priority list when voters are asked to rank concerns, but examination of national statistics reveals that they are substantially more liberal on basic Republican issues than ordinary Republican. They are more aligned with Democrats on topics such as health care, immigration, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, and others. It is certain that the Democratic Party will not gain credibility among Cuban Americans by merely being harder on Cuba and it is also evident that the Democrats have no strategy for engaging Cuban voters now. Though, it is time for the party to develop an approach to appeal to Cuban American voters, by recognising and addressing their diverse social, cultural, and economic needs. Engaging in the community, showing interest in the people within it, is the only way to build trust with voters.