

The University of Chicago

Por culpa de Fidel:

Deconstructing Hialeah's Electoral Identity



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both Latin American & Caribbean Studies and Public Policy Studies, respectively.

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I will close these acknowledgments with a personal anecdote. I have been a Miami Cuban my entire life: born in Hialeah and raised in *La Sagüesera*.¹ Though as I progressed through adolescence in this new age of American polarization, my understanding of the bubble where I am so privileged to have spent my formative years quickly diminished, leading to a feeling of communal and political disillusionment from my home and heritage that I have carried through my undergraduate studies. However, with each non-Cuban who rejected me on the presumption that I myself carry no empathy for others, or that I myself am backwards in my way of thought only because I am a “Miami Cuban,” I began to acquire the will to apply what I have experienced outside of the bubble to alter my worldview inside of it.

Dedicating my BA Thesis to my hometown has brought me closer to my roots than I could have otherwise imagined. It brought me back to my local leaders in elected office and in community activism. It brought me back to my first Church during their annual festival. It brought me back to my grandparents’ townhouse from where I was driven to preschool. It brought me back to the timeless *ventanita* and *bodega* that give life to the strip mall across the street. But most importantly, it brought me back home: the source of my drive. Every time I now hear a conversation end with something to the effect of, “...*bueno, cuando se caiga Fidel*,” I am reassured that my people are continuing to look towards the future. Because such a statement is not one of vengeance, but rather an acknowledgement of what could be on the island where our roots are set, even as we continue to branch beyond its shores.

Qué orgulloso estoy de ser cubano, y qué privilegio es ser americano.

¡Viva Cuba libre! ¡Y que viva Cristo Rey!

¹ As a side note and fun fact, the word *Sagüesera* is a Cubanization, as Cubans (and oftentimes Cuban Americans, myself included) routinely mispronounce the word *Southwest* in colloquial settings.

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I. Abstract

This quantitative and historically-grounded thesis is constructed to explore the factors that have contributed to the fundamentally Republican-friendly lean of the Cuban American electorate in Miami-Dade County, utilizing the City of Hialeah as a statistically consistent and sociologically representative case study for the whole. Using a three-pronged, mixed-methods approach, I have identified two electoral cycles – 1980 and 2000 – that provide insight into the extent that Cuban American policy prioritizations have been shaped by two temporally parallel dialogues established long before the Trump-era elections. The first of these is the front-facing conflict between Fidel’s communist regime and the United States, while the second is the destabilizing relationship between the diaspora and the rotating assortment of non-Cuban, Washington-based policymakers that formulate the oftentimes contradictory American response to the Cuban regime. Through this work, I have acquired three conclusions which are problem statements in themselves, unlocking new questions regarding assimilation and identity in both the sociological and political contexts. This thesis closes with applications of such conclusions to the recent Trump elections, providing political strategies on how Democrats could prevent longer-term electoral repercussions amongst the Cuban and Latino vote.

In light of the 2024 Presidential Election, there has been a newfound interest in the electoral politics of urban areas nationwide, particularly amongst the cleavages that distribute Latino communities across the American political spectrum. It is my hope that by highlighting the long-standing conservative, yet urban Latino community that raised me, additional research and scholarship can be conducted concerning our counterparts in other American cities, eventually translating into a widespread understanding of the fastest growing electoral demographic in the United States.

II. A Note on Terminology

According to Merriam-Webster, the term *Hispanic* describes someone or something “of or relating to the people, speech, or culture of Spain,” while the term *Latino/a* describes those concerning the like of Latin America.² Cuban Americans satisfy both of these terms, and as such I will utilize these words interchangeably throughout the duration of this work.

That being said, as a Hialeah-born and Miami-raised Cuban American myself, I carry a personal connection to the subject I have chosen to analyze on both a quantitative and qualitative standard. While terms such as *Latino* and *Hispanic* can and are used by our community as a source of ancestral pride in a variety of cultural mediums and social settings, these terms can also be divisive when used by the country’s majority demographic(s) to draw political fault lines that they anticipate as being appropriate, predictive, and – in some circles – explanatory of our values, beliefs, and priorities. Meanwhile, Latinos are the majority in all respects in Miami-Dade County: in the Census, at the polling place, on the executive boards, and across our legislative delegations. For this reason, my use of terms such as *Latino*, *Hispanic*, and *Cuban American* will intentionally be employed to describe, and not to reflect any pre-dispositional characteristics that these words would traditionally suggest. By treating these terms as empty labels, I can ensure that these demographic distinctions are not to be understood as categories that are explanatory of the communities whose experiences are being revealed, in turn justifying or condemning the use of these terms in spaces of political punditry and campaign operations.

In addition, and in line with the rationale of then fellow UChicago Public Policy Studies and Latin American & Caribbean Studies undergraduate student Zoe Alexandra Wynne (BA ‘22), I have elected to refrain from using the term *Latine/x* to identify the demographic groups of

² Merriam-Webster (2025)

Latin America, both in the singular and plural contexts.³ My decision in keeping to this diction is informed by a variety of factors, primarily stemming from my personal experience with the term's reception in the Cuban, Venezuelan, Nicaraguan, and Colombian American communities of Miami-Dade County. Moreover, multiple polls have indicated that the use of *Latine/x* is generally unpopular among the Latino population in the U.S., with only 40% of LGBTQ+ Hispanics approving of the word's use.⁴ Also to note is the official position of the Real Academia Española (RAE), which in 2020 formalized its opposition to the use of the *-e/-x* suffixes, given the Spanish language's already inherent gendered nature and inclusive interpretation of the *-o* suffix in a variety of linguistic situations.⁵

Please note that the preference for *Latino/a* is in no way meant to be a value judgement of mine on one's use of the term *Latine/x*, nor is it meant to delegitimize the lived experiences of those who depend on, value, or prefer the use of the omitted terminologies in this writing.

Lastly, my use of the terms *white* and *black* in the context of Cuban Americans is purely on a self-identification basis, unless otherwise noted. The conception of one's "race" from the Cuban perspective and from the standpoint of most Latin American countries is not as distinguishable as it is from the U.S. perspective. For over 500 years, both the Spanish and Portuguese practiced *blanqueamiento*, producing racially-mixed offspring with the goal of eventually "cleaning the blood" of one's indigenous and/or African genetics.⁶ As a result, Latin America did not experience the same dynamics of racial segregation that were present in the U.S. Both history and the U.S. Census captures this disjoint relationship, one that I hope will become clearer by the end of this thesis' argument. To those reading, I thank you for your understanding.

³ Wynne, Zoe Alexandra (2022, 4)

⁴ Martinez, Gracie, Mark Hugo Lopez, and Luis Noe-Bustamante (2024, 2)

⁵ Real Academia Española (2020, 5-6)

⁶ Hernández, Tanya Katerí (2012, 21)

III. Introduction

*Si tú pasas por mi casa
Y tu vez a mi mujer
Tú le dice que estoy en Hialeah
Trabajando en factoría
Por culpa de Fidel
Hey, hey, hey, hey!!!
–DJ Laz, “Block Party” (2008)⁷*

With the neighborhood *ventanitas* open by 6am at the latest, *gallos* congregated in parking lots or causing bumper-to-bumper traffic on the streets, and multi-unit residential structures as far as the eye can see, there is nothing more Cuban in America – or perhaps even in Cuba itself – than Hialeah. Since its founding in 1925, The City of Progress has transformed from a planned paradise for the rich and famous of the country’s North – physically removed from the African American communities that characterize Miami’s urban core – to the living embodiment of the Cuban diaspora in the United States. As the excerpted song above (lovingly known as an “anthem” across many of Miami’s Cuban American spaces) implies, Hialeah has long been a predominantly working class and industrial municipality in Miami-Dade County. Having been faced with an influx of Cuban migrants since the 1960s, the city has since shed its prairie-like roots to become one of Florida’s densest municipalities. With an urbanized geography and a citizenry that is predominately of the working class and – at least from the perspective of the United States – “of color,” one would think that Hialeah is a shoe-in for the Democratic Party and its traditionally left-leaning candidates, right?

However, such a presumption could not be further from the facts, as Hialeah has long been amongst the safest urban baskets for Republican votes nationwide precisely because of its overwhelming Cuban American population. To this end, the 2024 Presidential Election debunked

⁷ Mendez, Lazaro “DJ Laz” (2008)

a longstanding presumption from political pundits about the American electorate, particularly amongst those who identify with the political left: Latino voters enter the ballot box first (and perhaps only) as Latinos. From occupation to income to age, Latinos and other people of color have been largely excluded from these more robust characterizations used to analyze the country's white, non-Hispanic/Latino demographics until November's aftermath. They have been *other-ized* and treated as given for candidates and causes that traditionally rely on more diverse coalitions to succeed electorally.

In the case of the majority Latino Miami-Dade County, home to the only successful⁸ diasporic major city of the twentieth century in the United States, the topline of the evolving Cuban American experience serve as a useful framework to understanding the electoral identities of other Latino enclaves as American communities across the United States. Moreover, a faithful analysis of the values and history of the Cuban American electorate in Miami-Dade County reveals a host of clues indicating that, perhaps, the results of the 2024 Presidential Election – characterized by a monumental shift amongst Latino men aged 18 to 29⁹ – should have been anticipated multiple cycles ago.

Part of this faithful analysis requires a revisiting of the terminologies used to frame the questions and discussions asked in the spaces of political punditry. For example, to reconcile the disparity between conventional wisdom and electoral outcomes, academic scholarship and the mainstream news media alike have characterized the typical Cuban American voter's conscience

⁸ Here, I use the term *successful* to illustrate the presence of the Miami MSA as an entity in the minds of those who do not live there, both domestically and internationally. As such, Miami – which did not exist as an incorporated body until the 1890s – now stands among cities such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago as characteristic of the U.S. for global populations, primarily due to its cultural relevance (e.g. music, tourism, food, and the fine arts), economic output, and political leverage in the jurisdictions where which Miami is governed. Supporting evidence regarding this point is distributed across this paper as a consequence of the sociological and political topics discussed.

⁹ Lange, Jason, Bo Erickson, and Brad Heath (2024)

as a matter of “socialism,” a capacious term that, for many, could justifiably correlate with anything that resembles a liberal or left-wing sentiment or ideal. However, Hialeah also holds the zip code with the second highest percent of Obamacare enrollees in the United States, only trailing the Colombian and Venezuelan dominated municipality of Doral, located to Hialeah’s immediate west.¹⁰ There is also considerable evidence to support the argument that both Democratic Presidential candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton actually won Florida’s Cuban American vote in 2012 and 2016, respectively.¹¹

Furthermore, sources have already commented on the history of Cuban American exiles to the United States, oftentimes incorporating fundamental institutional developments in Cuba and across Latin America to justify each wave of migration to the United States. However, this existing scholarship on the push and pull factors of Cuban migration to the U.S. is then overlooked in the frameworks and methodologies of derivative works and quantitative surveys published in academic journals, research centers, and public opinion institutions.¹²

Finally, the recent results of the 2024 Presidential Election and corresponding down-ballot races indicate a broader trend not further to the right, but rather a shift away from the political mentality of the diasporic community. These trends imply a completion of the Latino demographics’ political integration into the larger American electorate.¹³

¹⁰ Marchante, Michelle (2024)

¹¹ Caputo, Marc (2012)

¹² Liu, Joseph (2014)

¹³ Ramos, Paola (2024, 187)

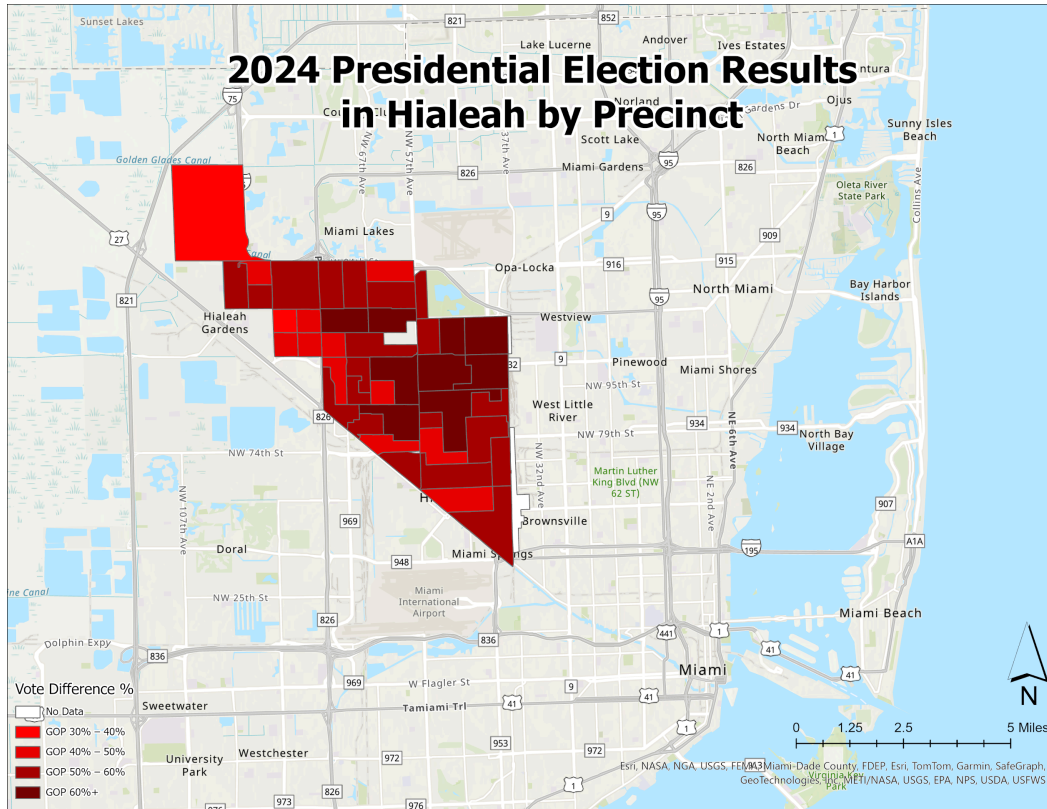


Figure 1: Map illustrating the 2024 Presidential Election Results in Hialeah, represented by the percent difference between the Republican and Democratic tickets in each precinct. As a general note, President Donald Trump (R-FL) carried the City of Hialeah by 39,999 votes, representing a margin of victory of 53.42% over his Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris (D-CA). Voter turnout county-wide was 72.41%.¹⁴ Third party and write-in vote totals are negligible to the results, and as such were disregarded to facilitate quantitative analysis and cartographical presentation.

As such, this thesis focuses on the transformation of political culture in the Cuban American diasporic city of Hialeah, Florida. In doing so, I seek to deconstruct the prevailing presumptions of American social and political terminology associated with Cuban Americans, demonstrating how a grounded understanding of political culture is essential to constructing predictive analyses on any given electorate. My thesis asks three underlying questions, utilizing a

¹⁴ Each precinct's voter and geographical data used to create the ArcGIS map and caption attached was sourced entirely from the Election Results Archive in the Miami-Dade County public website. The City of Hialeah's political boundaries were sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau' public website.

mixed-methods approach to address each question as part of a broader historical narrative. First, why has the Cuban American demographic predominately voted in a more Republican manner than every other Latino electorate in the United States? Second, considering the nationwide shifts seen from the 2016 election and culminating in the 2024 election, to what extent can we integrate the takeaways of the Cuban American electoral past into predictable insights for non-Cuban Latino electorates elsewhere in the country? Third, and perhaps most fundamentally, what identity – from occupation to religious affiliation to familial relation(s) – does the representative Cuban American (and non-Cuban Latino) voter carry with them to the ballot box?

The results of the thesis' argumentative structure reveal a pendulum-like dynamic for the manner in which the Cuban American electorate in Hialeah shifts. On one hand, even though Cuban American voters are already understood to be a more conservative electoral demographic, the Presidential Elections of 1980 and 2000 demonstrate a partisan (re)alignment in favor of the Republican Party. On the other hand, the intermediate periods of the 1970s, 1990s, and 2010s have indicated that Cuban American allegiance to the GOP is not unwavering, especially when the Democratic apparatus governs and messages in a clear and decisive manner. This newfound model of electoral understanding then serves as the basis for addressing the root causes of the Democratic Party's regression in 2020 and 2024 amongst Cuban Americans, culminating in a series of proposed strategies that Democratic campaigns and incumbents can employ to swing the pendulum in their favor once more.

IV. Research and Methodology

Por culpa de Fidel implements a mixed-methods approach in collecting and inferring the data used throughout all of its sections, with a distinguishing prioritization of argumentation that is culturally informed and data driven. Many of the interventions conducted for this thesis will center on the City of Hialeah, an urban municipality of Miami-Dade County of roughly 220,000 people, of which just over 75% identify as Cuban and/or Cuban American, with a further 80% of those (approximately 136,000) having been born in Cuba.¹⁵ For interviews and other historical sources that do not pertain to the City of Hialeah directly, an explanation justifying its inclusion into the arguments made throughout the thesis will be provided. Outside of Hialeah, the geographical scope of supporting evidence is mostly limited to Cuba and the State of Florida.

A. Why Hialeah?

The year 2025 marks the centennial anniversary of the City of Hialeah, allowing the scope of this project to reflect on a century's worth of the unprecedented change that has characterized the greater Miami MSA. That is, the City of Hialeah opened to the public in 1923¹⁶ and was incorporated in 1925¹⁷ as a part of the larger real estate rush known as the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s. Encouraged by the nationwide prosperity of the Roaring Twenties and endorsed by Henry Flagler's newly constructed Florida East Coast Railway, Northern entrepreneurs and real estate visionaries raced to the Sunshine State to construct expansive ranches, luxury residences, and recreational wonderlands for America's rich and famous.¹⁸

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, 2023

¹⁶ Turner, Gregg M. (2015, 35)

¹⁷ Hialeah, FL (2024)

¹⁸ Henry Morrison Flagler Museum (2024)

In Hialeah’s case, the Curtis-Bright Ranch Company billed the new settlement as “The Gateway to the Everglades,” inheriting a pueblo architectural style tangentially inspired by Hialeah’s Seminole roots. Anchored by the Hialeah Park Racetrack, the city ultimately found its place on the map given the company’s successful marketing and broader cultural significance of horse racing in the early 20th century,¹⁹ even with a population of only 2,600 people in 1930.²⁰ The city’s land remained primarily rural until the post-war era, as World War II veterans found the climate of South Florida to be particularly desirable to raise a family or to retire. However, the Cuban Revolution of 1959 – followed by subsequent migration waves facilitated by the Camarioca Boatlift, Freedom Flights, Mariel Boatlift, and independent *balseros* – completely overhauled the demographic growth and makeup of the city, turning the predominately white municipality of just under 20,000 into an “affordable Eden” for roughly 200,000 Cuban exiles and their descendants at the turn of the century.²¹ Today, the city is a microcosm of the many migration waves of Cuban exiles that have sought a new beginning in America through the decades, leading Princeton Social Anthropologist Patricia Fernandez-Kelly to underscore how Hialeah is “the most economically successful immigrant enclave in U.S. history” and “the only U.S. industrial city that continues to grow.”²² Outside of the City of Miami itself, Hialeah is the municipality with the largest population of Cubans and Cuban Americans anywhere in the U.S.²³

¹⁹ Turner, Gregg M. (2015, 35-36)

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau (2023)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Dumenigo, Argelio (2002)

²³ Turner, Gregg M. (2015, 36)

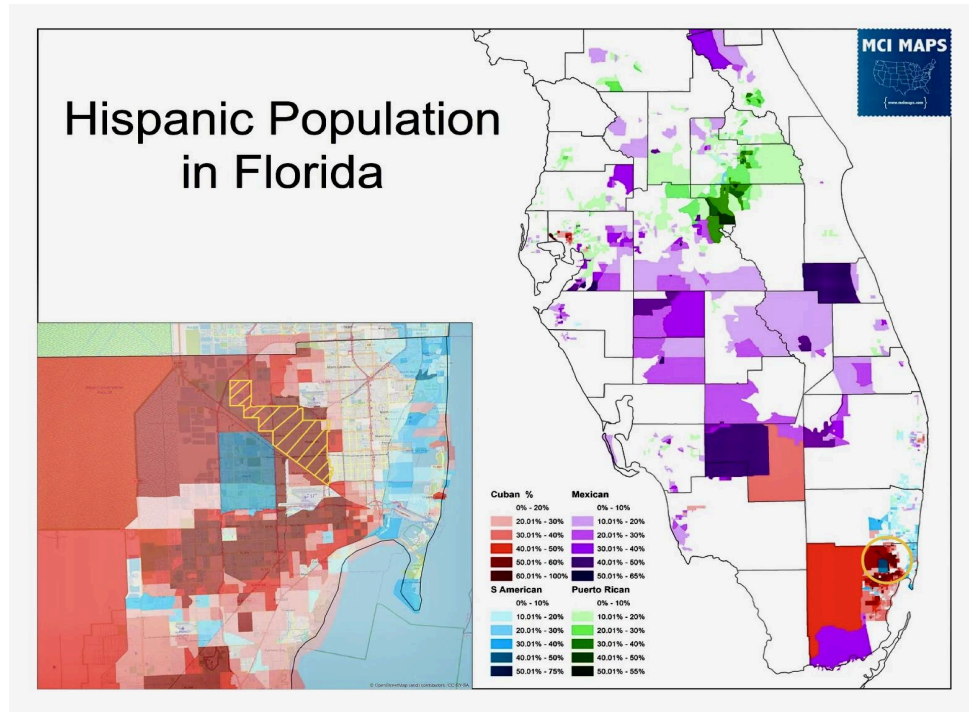


Figure 2: Maps displaying the population proportions of selected Hispanic groups across the State of Florida, by precinct (as they stood in 2021).²⁴ The secondary map – which zooms into much of Miami-Dade County – identifies a northern collection of high-density Cuban precincts which almost exclusively outline the municipal boundaries of the City of Hialeah (shown in yellow), while the southern collection of precincts encompass the increasingly gentrified neighborhoods of “La Sagüesera,” most notably Little Havana.²⁵

This is all to say that Hialeah is one of America’s best (and only) examples of what is known in sociological spaces as an institutionally-complete ethnic enclave, characterized by a functional independence of the locality from the rest of the urban structure.²⁶ For example, the City of Hialeah is one of the county’s largest employers, the city has an independent street grid from the rest of Miami-Dade County, and the city is self-characterized as “full-service,” meaning that the city government independently provides its public goods with minimal reliance on the county.²⁷ Moreover, unlike the rest of the county that has opted to evolve into the cosmopolitan

²⁴ Isbell, Matthew (2021)

²⁵ Castillo, Louis, Romina Herrera, Sherezade Rodríguez, Christine Tormey, and Moses Shumow (2013)

²⁶ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

²⁷ Hialeah, FL (2024)

envy of Western Hemisphere, Hialeah has remained true to its Cold War-era ways as socioeconomic development and private investment is largely sourced not from outside developers, but from the residents themselves. With a comparatively monolithic demographical composition and geopolitical structure across nearly all variables,²⁸ Hialeah finds itself at the intersection of dynacity and consistency, exactly what is desired for in conducting statistical and otherwise more quantitatively based analyses.

(It also benefits the scope of this project greatly that I currently live minutes away by car, so the logistical difficulties of conducting fieldwork throughout the city and broader county was greatly reduced. For this reason, my fieldwork was conducted as part of three separate trips back home: Winter Break in December 2024, February 2025, and Spring Break in March 2025).

B. The Survey Questionnaire

The primary intervention conducted in pursuit of additional research is in the form of a Survey Questionnaire for Hialeah residents, which is divided into four sections. Each of the first three sections contain between seven and thirteen questions, graduating shifting from more cultural and/or historical topics to more political themes. The aim of the first, second, and third sections is to collectively “define” three words oftentimes misused by political pundits when identifying the priorities of the Cuban American electorate – *religious*, *foreign*, and *socialism* – each in the terms of the beliefs held by the respondents through their answers.²⁹ The final section is a general biographical section in the factual sense, covering grounds on the respondents’ partisan affiliation, birthplace, information intake, and respective migration wave. To maintain the psychological integrity of the survey, the three aforementioned words are almost

²⁸ For more information on the city’s comparatively monolithic statistics, please refer to Appendices C and D.

²⁹ Psychological studies have described this as Associative Learning Theory.

entirely absent from any of the survey's questions, avoided wherever possible.³⁰ It is also important to note that both an English and Spanish version of the survey questionnaire was independently constructed to avoid any inaccurate translations. The English and Spanish versions of the complete survey questionnaire can be found in Appendices A and B, respectively.

To be eligible for the survey questionnaire, all participants must be residents of the City of Hialeah, be at least 18 years of age, be Cuban or of Cuban descent, and have the ability to vote in U.S. federal elections. Survey participants were selected using the snowball sampling method, beginning with family friends and continuing on with any referrals they independently made. Appendix C compares the demographic makeup of the survey's respondents to those of the broader Cuban American makeup of Hialeah and Miami-Dade County wherever possible.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Census does not collect complete demographic data on the details of the Hispanic/Latino populations who self-identified as part of "two or more races." For this reason, further analytical research on this topic will benefit from a survey that is more representative of the racial makeup of the city than the one conducted for this thesis. As opposed to collecting via the snowball sampling method, a more randomized sampling of the city's population might rectify this intrinsic limitation in the survey's implementation.

The predecessor to this questionnaire-like intervention is the biennial Cuba Poll from Florida International University's (FIU) Cuban Research Institute. Spearheaded by Drs. Guillermo J. Grenier, Hugh Gladwin, and Qing Lai, this survey has routinely sampled a large subsection of Miami-Dade County's Cuban American community since 1991. While its questions focus primarily on policy towards Cuba, more recent iterations of the Cuba Poll have emphasized domestic priorities. The Cuba Poll has been cited in news coverage nationwide,

³⁰ Delamater, Andrew R, and Matthew K Lattal (2014)

while also being the starting point of choice for campaign strategies concerning South Florida's unique electorate on all levels of government.³¹

While the FIU Poll more than succeeds in its intended purpose, it has done so by constructing a highly policy-oriented survey, restricting its applicative lifespan for general and specialized audiences alike. Therefore, the goal of this survey is to provide a framework for evaluating the Cuban American electorate by identifying its worldview. This builds on long-standing political theory endorsing the idea that community – including immediate family and social apparatuses – is amongst the primary determinants of one's political beliefs.³² This 30,000-foot approach remains distinct from its political and sociological predecessors in that it relies on recent psychological achievement, in addition to responsible practices in political punditry, to validate its construction. When complemented by a series of more detailed, *why* questions from a subset of the survey's respondents via consensual interviews, this intervention finds its strength in its self-validating nature with the broader mixed-methods approach.

C. Interviews

No sociological intervention is complete without a diverse collection of interviews encompassing a variety of characterizations, lived experiences, and values. To this end, *Por culpa de Fidel* is also in-part a materialization of such interviews to their most complete extents: the interviewees, the key takeaways, and the manner by which each matter was presented and responded to. In addition to the surveyed residents who consented to an optional interview, further interviewees included public figures, business owners, and distinguished academic scholars. Each interview was treated independently from the rest, with set questions and topics

³¹ Grenier, Guillermo J., and Qing Lai (2024)

³² Shepsle, Kenneth A. (2010, 14)

that were unique from person to person, depending on the aspect(s) of their identity that was most of significance to the argument of this work. Interviews were also free-flowing in nature, with most interviewees electing to allow the conversation to take a less structured format. Select quotes from interviewees will be sprinkled liberally throughout the body of the thesis.

D. Cartographical and Graphical Data Visualizations

Utilizing both existing and collected data from archival sources and the previously mentioned interventions alike, I have acquired and created a series of graphs and maps to communicate the Cuban diaspora to the U.S. as a function of time and place. Each of these maps are made using ArcGIS, a cartographic software program that allows for the customization of topographic and geopolitical maps according to impositions of imported data. While images of these maps will be scattered throughout the thesis as its arguments necessitate, Appendix D will also contain a link to interact with these graphs and maps both as GEO files (for maps only) and as their underlying spreadsheets wherever possible. Please note that, while all maps displayed were constructed using ArcGIS, I did not personally author them all. For this reason, not all maps used throughout the duration of this thesis will have accessible GEO files attached.

The content of these visualizations can be segmented into two categories. The first is electoral data, collected directly from the Election Archives of Miami-Dade County. Some of these graphs and maps illustrate precinct results from relevant elections, while others demonstrate electoral shifts between two cycles. The second category is demographic data, synchronized from a variety of municipal, county, state, and national databases – both publicly accessible and otherwise. Graphs and maps in this mold encompass precinct data on metrics including race/ethnicity, age, educational attainment, and income.

V. Literature Review

Existing scholarship on the Cuban American electorate is found at the intersection of an unconventional collection of sources, many of which were not written with the specific intent on addressing the Cuban American diaspora in Hialeah, let alone South Florida more broadly. However, the thematic categorizations of relevant texts and data – historical surveys, cultural works of the Cuban American diaspora, and sociological texts on Latino conservatism – provide clarity on the current trends of both academic and pragmatic discussion on the Cuban American electorate in the United States. What remains unaddressed, however, is an explicit understanding of how the nuances of the Cuban American diaspora translate to a unique set of electoral politics that diverges from other Hispanic/Latino diaspora groups in the United States.

The first thematic grouping that I have used in redefining the terms by which the Cuban American electorate ought to be evaluated are historical surveys, with some highlighting the Cuban diaspora and others focusing on the incorporated City of Hialeah as a geopolitical entity in the State of Florida. However, while these surveys largely do not engage with the perspectives or behaviors of the diaspora directly, they do provide important context on the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions that educate the push factors of Cubans away from the island in the latter half of the 20th century. For example, historian Ada Ferrer explores the post-Columbian history of Cuba as an active observer and unofficial, ambivalent embodiment of the U.S. perspective in her *Cuba: An American History*. In doing so, Ferrer reveals an active dialogue that is contingent, yet in parallel with the formal diplomatic and military engagements with/against the island. It is also through Ferrer's work that the socioeconomic shift's magnitude accompanying the Cuban diaspora to the Miami area is most tangibly communicated. The smallest details can also communicate the diaspora's particular effect to the City of Hialeah, a

city that stands on its long-standing textile industry. As a case study, she writes, “The garment sector’s labor force went from 94 percent to just 18 percent non-Hispanic white in less than ten years, the difference due almost entirely to newly arrived Cubans.”³³ Demographic shifts pronounced to such an extent strongly indicate a shift in the socioeconomic integrity of the city away from its early twentieth-century Anglo-American incorporation and prior Seminole roots.

Nonetheless, historical surveys speak of its referenced people in broad terms, prioritizing demographic and political generalities over the individualized pathos that ultimately has decided the Cuban American vote over the decades, especially since American political institutions began to perceive them as a cohesive voting bloc in America. As such, this thesis evaluates this materialization of the electorate through the decades: prologued in the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion of 1961, formalized through Ronald Reagan’s law-and-order campaign following the social instabilities of the Mariel Boatlift and the Arthur McDuffie Riots of 1980, and ignited during the international custody dispute over Elián González in 2000.

The second thematic grouping is best classified as diasporic texts, focusing on the day-to-day developments and experiences of the Cuban American diaspora in Hialeah and across the United States. These works, both fictional and non-fictional, collectively argue that the Miami’s Cuban American diaspora successfully established themselves as not only “Americans,” but as the majority American demographic in a significant geographical, political, and economic part of the U.S. mainland. For example, Patrick Symmes’ *The Boys from Dolores: Fidel Castro’s Schoolmates from Revolution to Exile* highlights the human emotion of exiles that cannot be quantified from the outside. By inviting a reflection on hindsight, morality, and trauma through his multiple interviews of Castro’s former classmates – turned political and military enemies –

³³ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 403)

from the Colegio de Dolores, Symmes puts into words a fundamental journey of human processing, expectation, and acceptance even in the absence of understanding. It is through this psychological understanding in the historical context that one can better understand the source of legitimacy across many of the social institutions present in today's institutionally-complete ethnic enclave of Hialeah, and to a lesser extent, the Miami MSA. Take, for example, Symmes' capturing of the centralized Cuban information space with the following: "[*Granma* is] the only newspaper in the world in which the events that the newspaper report on have nothing whatsoever to do with reality."³⁴ With a lived experience defined by the mistrust one has for their fellow countrymen, it should not be a surprise that the pridefully conservative *Radio Mambi* – whose modern incarnation was realized in 1985 – was among the first homegrown social institutions of the new and ardently anti-communist diasporic city.

The microanalysis of the Cuban American experience continues with Jennine Capó Crucet's *How to Leave Hialeah*, where the juxtapositions between what is cultural commonplace and what is morally acceptable are grounded in a series of short stories that encompass the day-to-day developments of the city's industrial, working-class composition. Experienced-based understandings of the diaspora's footing in American spaces translate Cuban American cultural pillars into an electoral identity, defining the terms of its voting behavior as a function of shared priorities that extend beyond traditional polling theory and American political thought.

The third thematic grouping essential to the active deconstruction conducted in this work are those that functionally address Latino conservatism as an electoral dynamic in the mainland United States. One of these highlighted works, which lean into more quantitative methods of argumentation, includes Michelle Margolis' *From Politics to the Pews: How Partisanship and*

³⁴ Symmes, Patrick (2007, 262)

the Political Environment Shape Religious Identity, which argues how the American two-party system is a moral institution in its own right, endorsing the existence of an ongoing dialogue between the State and its religious institutions. When adapted to Paola Ramos' arguments made in her newly-released *Defectors: The Rise of the Latino Far-Right and What It Means for America*, I argue how the American political system allows Cuban Americans (and other Latino groups nationwide) to justify their American identity and acclimative journeys through the electoral process. During this process, Republican coalitions have adjusted their message from one of conservative politics to one of social nativism. Characteristic of her work's construction is her interview with the ultra-conservative Alex Otaola, a Generation X political influencer that ran for Miami-Dade County Mayor in 2024. According to Ms. Ramos, Otaola has elaborated on how "...Vice President Harris is actively plotting with the Cuban government and suggests she's a lying communist herself."³⁵ The undertones of social nativism not only are communicated through his platform to the Miami Cuban American population, however, but rather to the broader Latino diaspora populations across all corners of the United States. As an independent content creator, he holds an outsized presence across nearly all social media platforms, from Facebook to Youtube to TikTok, translating the internal messaging of Cuban talk radio to like minded audiences beyond the county line. While I have implemented this rationale into the relatively strong partisan allegiance of Cuban Americans with the Republican Party, a robust quantitative analysis on the demographic's cultural and linguistic understandings is still required to buck the terminology created and utilized by American pundit spaces. Doing so will avoid further mischaracterizations of the argument's more nuanced components pertaining to Cubans, Latinos, and the non-white working class.

³⁵ Ramos, Paola (2024, 137)

VI. Home Based: The “Fundamentals” of *Cuban* Americans

“Here, as in the Hispanic community, words like ‘familia,’ ‘comunidad,’ ‘educación,’ ‘patria’ y ‘Dios’ are not just palabras. They’re values and virtues that guide everyday life.”

–Al Gore, Vice President of the United States, 1999

In U.S. Electoral Politics, the fundamentals of a political race are characterized by the ever-present statistics and qualities that do not depend on the dynamics of any given electoral climate.³⁶ While the term *fundamentals* is typically used to describe such indicators with respect to a geopolitical locality (such as a battleground state), I will be utilizing the term with respect to the *Cuban* American demographic. Moreover, I italicize the word *Cuban* in Cuban American to indicate how the American political system did not create – nor did it alter – the essence of any one fundamental. The Cuban diaspora *brought* these fundamentals to the United States. To this end, I have identified four fundamental characteristics of Cuban Americans that have had a consistent, considerable, and concrete impact on the engagements between themselves and American political institutions, mainly to the benefit of the country’s right.

A. Fidel Castro = Communist = Bad

“In 50 years...[the Cuban American community] has succeeded in everything except the one thing it came to do, which was to overthrow Castro.”

–Uva de Aragón, “Cuban America,” 2011³⁷

Of the four fundamentals I have established, this first one requires the least justification. It almost goes without saying that the existence of a Cuban diaspora in the United States is primarily because of Fidel Castro, the immediate aftermath of the Revolution which he led, and the Communist regime that has been in power on the island ever since (this thesis is titled *Por culpa de Fidel* for a reason). While the rationale for fleeing the country varies slightly depending

³⁶ Hummel, Patrick, and David Rothschild (2014, 2)

³⁷ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

on migration wave and year, roughly one million Cubans fled the island for the United States in the fifty years following the start of the Cuban Revolution in 1952, with over half of them fleeing between the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion of 1961 and the Mariel Boatlift of 1980.³⁸



*Figure 3: Image of Sentir Cubano's restroom toilet with the command "¡¡¡Haga su sueño una realidad!!!"³⁹ encircling the center of the toilet bowl. A satirical depiction of Fidel Castro is painted across the toilet bowl's base, implying that one has the opportunity to literally sh*t on the Cuban dictator and – in turn – his regime.⁴⁰*

The sentiments of the past – and present – held by the immigrant segment of the Cuban American community are both physically and verbally communicated in all spaces, ensuring that the diaspora's descendents relay the politics of revenge to their generationally-removed offspring. Physically, it is not uncommon to see anti-Fidel statements planted all over Hialeah and Miami-Dade County, from a toilet marked with Fidel's face in the bowl,⁴¹ to the signature American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (known colloquially as The Cuban), a museum opened in 2018 that is headlined by its permanent exhibit *The Cuban Experience: Why Freedom*

³⁸ Eckstein, Susan Eva (2009, 11)

³⁹ This emphatic phrase roughly translates to English as: "Make your dreams a reality!"

⁴⁰ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

⁴¹ Ibid.

Matters.⁴² Moreover, there exists *Los Municipios de Cuba en el Exilio*, an activist organization for the restoration of democracy in Cuba. The organization was founded in 1961 as the rebirth of Cuba's municipal representatives that have since fled the island, continuing the democratic institution of a similar name as mandated by the Constitution of 1940.⁴³

“Perhaps only in South Florida’s Cuban community could candidates for city council, circuit judge, and state legislator win or lose an election solely on the basis of their foreign policy platforms.”
–Miguel González Pando, *“The Cuban Americans,”* 1998⁴⁴

Verbally, the diaspora has long championed the phrase “*cuando se caiga Fidel*”⁴⁵ as a call to political action,⁴⁶ and has bestowed the dishonorable designation of *comunista* or *socialista* to anyone and anything that could be perceived as acting contrary to the diaspora's interests.⁴⁷ With a robust communal messaging apparatus, the diaspora has greatly shifted American policy against the regime in their favor. Representative of this legislative influence can be seen with the longstanding presence of a trade embargo with the island, one that can only be removed with an act of Congress.⁴⁸ However, the diaspora has yet to expel Fidel's regime from the island, a task that is still adopted in the mission statements of those on the U.S. mainland.

The one caveat to this otherwise indisputable fundamental is the rather fluid relationship between what is *communist* and what is *socialist*, and if there even is such a distinction to be made in the eyes of the electorate. *El socialismo*, unlike Communism, is a distinction that has been significantly molded by American political institutions to essentially mean whatever a

⁴² American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (2024)

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

⁴⁵ The phrase “*cuando se caiga Fidel*” translates to “*when Fidel falls*” in English.

⁴⁶ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

⁴⁷ Corben, Billy (2020)

⁴⁸ The Economist (2012)

given administration or political party would want it to mean. Consequently, while the label of *socialista* is negative, who and what policy is labeled as such is inconsistent at best. As such, the extent to which political messaging efforts have been successfully received by Cuban Americans is very temporally dependent, and deserving of further discussion in later sections of this paper.

Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement: Socialism and communism are the same thing.

14 responses

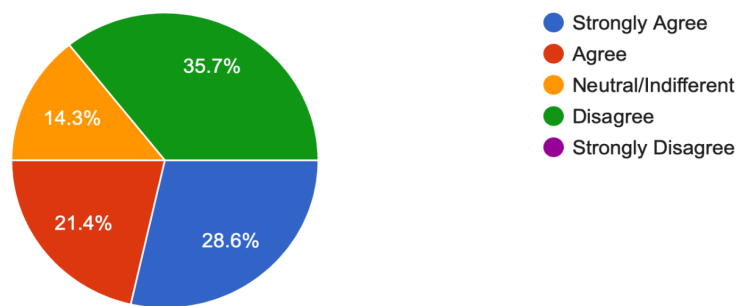


Figure 4: Results of Question 3.6 on the Survey Questionnaire. Only half of the respondents equated socialism and communism to any extent.

B. “Rib Relations” Reign

“Como dice,⁴⁹ en estos 40 años...muchacha gente...clientes son clientes fijos y aquí siempre, se hizo como si fuera una familia...como una familia con otros que vienen...Seguimos los mismos, como él mismo, que su abuelo venía aquí o su papá venía aquí: han venido sus nietos. Siempre quieren regresar aquí como han venido los padres y los abuelos...”⁵⁰
—Óscar, *La Viña Aragon*, 2025

The sociological idea of “rib relations” present amongst Cuban Americans is akin to the day-to-day lifestyle of insular communities worldwide, especially those of Latin America and the Caribbean. For example, imagine a Southern town of 1,000 people that is detached from the Interstate Highway System. With no immediate access to the outside world, the townspeople orient their lives such that they are and continue to be hard-working and self-sustaining. They eat breakfast at the local diner, attend the same church, and are attentive to the needs of their neighbors and to the affairs of their local leaders. News spreads by word-of-mouth, charity is a community initiative, familial ancestry is well documented by the elders, and everyone (at least to some extent) knows everyone.⁵¹

Now imagine that this Southern town is actually an urban municipality of over 220,000 residents. That is Hialeah and, up until the MSA’s rapid globalization in recent years, that was Miami-Dade County as a whole. Hialeah carries a sort of “urban ruralism,” functioning according to the interpersonal relations that are actively fostered across the city’s social spaces. These relations are then adjusted to the cultural norms of the Cuban people and the technological innovations of the United States. Instead of the diner, there is the *ventanita*, a to-go window for Cuban coffee and pastries that was invented and popularized by the invention of the air

⁴⁹ To provide situational context, Óscar is speaking to my mother and myself, directing the response to my mother in this instant. As such, he is referring to me when using third-person singular pronouns and conjugations.

⁵⁰ This quote roughly translates to English as the following: “Like he says, in these 40 years...many people...clients are the same and are always here, it became a family...like a family with others who come. We are still the same, like himself, that his grandfather came here and his dad came here: his grandsons have come here. They always want to come back here like their parents and grandparents have done.”

⁵¹ Capó Crucet, Jennine (2009, 18)

conditioner in the 1960s.⁵² With nearly half of Cuban Americans self-identifying as Catholics, the church is likely Catholic instead of Protestant. The urban density of Hialeah (and much of *La Sagüesera*) is such that neighborly interactions are facilitated with ease. And as the monolithic demographic of Cuban Americans dominates the information space, the urban development of Hialeah and Miami-Dade was accompanied by formal media institutions such as *Radio Mambí*, propagating what is already spread by word-of-mouth.⁵³



Figure 5: February 2024 image of an urban mural titled “¡La Ciudad Que Progresa!,” located on the intersection of W 49th Street and W 16th Avenue. Inaugurated in November 2024, this artwork celebrates the utilization and adaptation of contemporary technologies into the Cuban cultural and familial spaces, illustrating the sociological strength of the Cuban diaspora in the City of Hialeah. This message is further endorsed by the occupants of the building, Verizon, who eagerly welcomed the artistic project onto its leased property.⁵⁴

Take La Viña Aragon for example, a true diamond-in-the-rough of Cuban America located in a humble strip mall across the street from where I spent a large portion of my early

⁵² American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (2024)

⁵³ Blanco, Ali (2024)

⁵⁴ Sol, Roc, Miss Lushy, and Dee Perez (2024)

childhood years. Placed alongside the similarly storied El Gaitero Supermarket and Madahima Pharmacy, my grandfather was a regular here for nearly forty years, ever since the restaurant first opened its doors in the early 1980s. This family-owned restaurant and *ventanita* is run by a gentleman by the name of Óscar, a *marielito* who came to the U.S. in May 1980.⁵⁵ After going with my mom in mid-February to share a breakfast there for the first time since the my grandfather passed away, we had an opportunity to speak with Óscar about his observations as an active participant in the affairs of *La Viña*: what (if anything) about the clientele or space has changed the same over the four decades of its existence. His responses were reflective of the timelessness that the City of Progress maintains in its DNA.

Óscar referenced the family photos on the walls, some framed and some not, accompanied by a Pilon-branded clock and an advertisement for Bacardí that dates back to the 1940s. Even the menu's prices have stood the test of time: *un desayuno completo* – complete with two eggs, rice and french fries – sets you back only \$8.95, while *una tostada cubana* has held firm at \$1.50 for decades. More importantly, however, he remembered who my grandfather was and identified him accordingly, recounting how he would always lean on the counter of the *ventanita* with a cigar in hand. He was one of many from the neighborhood who would wake up every morning to split a *colada* with whoever he happens to share the counter space with. The *colada* is a conversation starter, as Óscar emphasized the catalog of topics that have been discussed, from today's politics to the Yankees game earlier in the week. As the years passed, this cohort of loyal customers would bond as friends, as neighbors, and as family. They would then introduce their spouses, children, and grandchildren to this community of a shared lived experience, allowing these newer generations to keep the tradition going even if they move out

⁵⁵ For more information about The Mariel Boatlift and *marielitos* like Óscar, please refer to Section VII.B.

of Hialeah, or when their relatives eventually pass away. Pointing at me, that grandson who brought his mom back to *La Viña* all these years later, Óscar demonstrated his point.

This consequential aspect of an institutionally-complete ethnic enclave has been well studied in both Miami-Dade County and elsewhere, endorsing the idea that the presence of such institutions at readily accessible quantities facilitates the preservation of the community from dissolving into the ways and means of the broader population. However, the role institutionally-complete ethnic enclaves play in formulating one's political behavior has only sparsely been established and analyzed.⁵⁶ In Hialeah's case, the sociological and political effects of "rib relations" have reinforced the *Cubanía* of the municipality within its borders, while restricting its ability to expand its geographic limits to include varying demographics.

C. "...una Cuba digna y católica...." The Catholic Church is More than *Just* a Church

"If the church as an institution is strengthened, that begins to create a greater balance of social forces and more space for pluralism."

—Max Castro, Sociologist at the University of Miami, 1998⁵⁷

The fundamental that has been consistently discounted, or at times even rejected, by non-local scholarship the most is the role of the Catholic Church as a multi-faceted institution in Cuban (and Cuban American) society. While it is true that Cubans do not practice their Catholicism at the same rates as other Latino groups in the U.S.,⁵⁸ not analyzing the relationship that Cubans and Cuban Americans have with the faith on a cultural, social, and political level writes off a major determinant for the formation of the Cuban American voter's conscience before they are exposed to the mechanisms of American politics.

⁵⁶ Breton, Raymond (1964, 196)

⁵⁷ Navarro, Mireya (1998)

⁵⁸ Gouin, Kelly (2021)

Catholicism and Cuba have been in continuous discourse since 1492, when Christopher Columbus made landfall on the island then believed to be known as *Cubanacán*. Within a year, the Spanish received the Papal blessing to convert the indigenous Taíno by any means necessary. Beginning in the Spanish colonial period, the Cuban Catholic Church was renowned for its academic excellence in Philosophy and the Sciences, as the Spanish crown sponsored the establishment and operation of multiple universities and secondary institutions nationwide, typically with the support of a Catholic order such as the Jesuits. To this end, the Colegio de Dolores and the Colegio de Bélen are two all-male, Jesuit secondary boarding schools where Fidel received his education. Moreover, the Catholic Church was also a legitimizing force in Cuba, oftentimes providing essential services to the people and localities that the State did not have the capacity to attend to themselves. This was especially common in rural and working class communities, where the Catholic Church would be the implementers of welfare policy and professional opportunities through the apparatus of the institutional Church, including the use of the priesthood to lift men out of socioeconomic poverty.⁵⁹

“Quiero que de esta manera sepan ustedes⁶⁰ que mi último pensamiento en la tierra fue para ustedes y mis queridos hermanos...Recuerden que es más importante salvarse que saber inglés...Por favor, no la abandonen [la vida espiritual], que en ningún momento mi problema vaya a afectar al catolicismo de ustedes, al contrario, lo fortalezca.”⁶¹
—Rolegio “Francisco” González Curzo, Political Prisoner Executed at La Cabaña, 1961⁶²

⁵⁹ Crahan, Margaret E. (1989)

⁶⁰ To provide situational context, Rolegio’s final letter – hours before his death by the regime’s firing squad – is addressed to his parents.

⁶¹ This quote roughly translates to English as the following: “I want you to know that my last thought on earth was of you and my dear brothers...Remember that it is more important to be saved than to know English...Please do not abandon [the spiritual life], that at no time may my problem affect your Catholicism, on the contrary, that it will strengthen it.”

⁶² American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (2024)

Following Fidel's rise to power in 1959 and subsequent nationalization of key institutions – including the Church and all private schools – in 1961,⁶³ many Cuban parents were worried that the educational system could be next. Moreover, nationwide transmission of the *Patria Potestad* Hoax – claiming that Fidel's regime was to utilize the educational system to formally strip parental rights and indoctrinate their children in the Soviet Union – prompted the Catholic Charities of Miami to partner with the President Eisenhower's (and later President Kennedy's) State Department and CIA to implement Operation *Pedro Pan* (Peter Pan). This partnership between the Catholic Church's Archdiocese of Miami and the U.S. Government allowed 14,000 children to find freedom in the United States in what would become the largest mass-migration of minors in the Western Hemisphere, eventually evolving into a mechanism for their families to seek asylum in the country as well. In the meantime, the Church operated the orphanages in Miami, enrolled the children in school with dedicated English classes, connected them to the nationwide foster care system, and reunited these children with their actual parents once they too made it stateside.⁶⁴ Through these developments, the Catholic Church became associated as an antithesis to Fidel's atheist regime and a champion of freedom, especially after the clergy and faithful alike were the subject of immense harassment and discrimination from the government. To this end, the Church saw a sort of religious revival in the 1990s following the collapse of the Soviet Union, with church attendance soaring amongst the county's youth who lost faith in Marxism-Leninism.⁶⁵ By extension, Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998 was viewed by both Cubans and Cuban Americans as a sign of hope for the country to start anew, even if the political realities of the island would continue to remain as it was then and is today.⁶⁶

⁶³ Falcoff, Mark (2003, 183)

⁶⁴ Anderson, Maria (2017)

⁶⁵ Falcoff, Mark (2003, 182)

⁶⁶ Navarro, Mireya (1998)



Figure 6: February 2024 image of “The Tower of Snow,” a 2012 bronze statue with the Freedom Tower in the background. Artist Enrique Martínez Celaya depicts a boy on crutches, carrying a house that is tied around his neck. This boy represents the children of Operation Pedro Pan, as it was ultimately the childrens’ responsibility to make a home for themselves in America, with no confirmation that they’ll ever be reunited with their parents. The boy, nonetheless, walks toward the Freedom Tower, the building where nearly all early Cuban exiles were processed for entry.⁶⁷

Faith and freedom *is* alive and well in Hialeah because faith *and* freedom are alive and well in the city; they are the utmost ideals of Cuban Americanism. As is the case with every car owned in my family, the driver of every Uber and bus I used in Hialeah had a rosary hanging from the mirror. Returning to my February morning at La Viña Aragon, Óscar made it a point to identify that Jesus – both artistically and spiritually – looks over the interior of the restaurant as He did when Óscar was a *marielito* at sea, and a framed patriotic graphic with the phrase, “*GOD BLESS AMERICA*,” is situated alongside the varied decorations and familial artifacts.

⁶⁷ Martínez Celaya, Enrique (2012)

After breakfast at *La Viña*, I walked past the townhouse of my dad's childhood and made my way to St. Benedict's Catholic Church, the setting of some of my earliest experiences with the Catholic faith and the place where my grandmother's Requiem was held; it was my first time back since. I was admittedly hoping to interview a member of the Church staff on the role and presence of the Faith in the city outside of the more formal or traditional settings. However, the office receptionist redirected me to the 7 p.m. Spanish Mass instead, citing that I would find my answers there. I did as told, sitting amongst the collection of families that not only know each other, but seem to have planned their attendance in advance. The Mass, celebrated by Fr. Yonhatan Londoño, centered around preparations for their annual Festival, which was taking place that weekend. Father Londoño's homily reflected that, proclaiming that being at Mass allows the congregation to place their sins and concerns at the Altar so that they can be of service to others beyond the Altar come the weekend. Once the Liturgy concluded, the families began to interact: two moms started talking about their booth, several grandparents moved towards the unfinished flea market, a group of teenagers planned their meetups, and a baby joined her parents alongside the instruments.

The Parish Festival was more than a success because it reflected the countless other Parish-led festivals, carnivals, and expos that serve as major pillars of familial and social gathering. Moreover, these events are calls to service for the community at-large, as all parish families are encouraged (almost expected) to participate in the operations of a booth or the planning of the entire event. Even during the pandemic, the Church brought together its surrounding neighborhoods by organizing *Jesus camina por las calles de Hialeah*, a drive-by prayer service complete with offerings of the Sacraments.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Saint Benedict Catholic Church (2024)

*“My grandparents...taught me that when you have God
in every aspect of your life, you grow with different values.
And that gets carried down for generations.”*
–Jesus Tundidor, Deputy Mayor and Councilman of the City of Hialeah, 2025

The Church is more than an institution of religion, but the compass of Cuban American culture and values. The standards of welfare, social charity, and personal integrity are defined by the words of the Church, even if those who listen rarely attend Mass itself. To this end, nine of the fourteen survey respondents maintain a shrine in their residence, and half carry a rosary or cross wherever they go. At the same time, only six identified themselves as a “practicing Christian.” Moreover, even as one of the eight respondents who didn’t identify themselves as a “practicing Christian,” Public School Civics Teacher Nicholas Arencibia (Republican) endorsed the importance of having Catholic morality present in one’s life, even when absent of the Faith’s more traditional components. “That’s a good foundation to have,” he added.

Academically, I was able to speak with my Spiritual Counselor from high school, Belen Jesuit Preparatory School, which happens to be the same school Fidel attended in Havana. The only differences are that, after expelling the Jesuits and the Church from Cuba in December 1961, the school has been relocated to Miami’s western suburbs and is no longer a boarding school. My Spiritual Counselor, Father Pedro Cartaya, was also a student at *Belén*, albeit several years younger than Fidel. Since then, he has led the school’s observatory and astronomy program. While discussing his work in the field, Father Cartaya emphasized how astronomy has been his channel of serving God and society, validating his beliefs in the Catholic structures of Creation and morality with each meteor he tracks and discovery he makes. With an asteroid named after him in 2023 by the Vatican Observatory, Father Cartaya continues the pedigree of Catholic contributions to the Sciences that have benefited studies worldwide for centuries.

Lastly, when I had the opportunity to ask Hialeah’s Deputy Mayor, Jesus Tundidor, how he has seen this relationship with the Faith in the city beyond the Church’s grounds, he recounted the city’s Renewal of the Vows Ceremony. Every year, the city organizes this event with the Church to provide a space for couples who were married in Cuba to renew their vows in the United States. Many of these couples do not have valid marriage documents because the Cuban government refused to provide accurate documents that confirmed their union, especially after the operations of the Catholic Church were terminated. Recently, however, Tundidor has noted how younger couples and newly-weds have started to partake as well, even if they were married in the U.S. He attributes this event’s remarkable success to the influence of the Faith in one’s moral canon and personal integrity, suggesting that being *religious* ought to be determined by more than one’s church attendance.

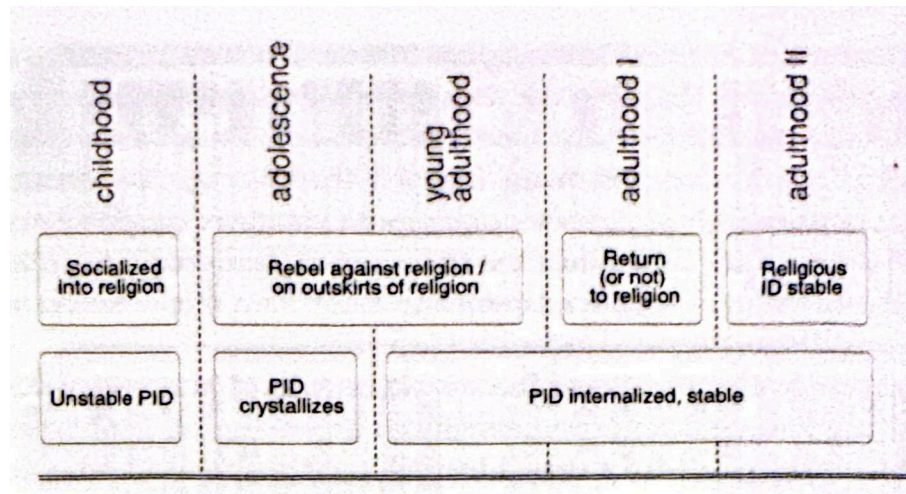


Figure 7: A theoretical depiction of one’s “religious and political socialization process,” as imagined by Michelle F. Margolis. Understanding that the Catholic Church was effectively abolished in Cuba between 1961 and 1992 suggests that millions of Cubans and their offspring lost their opportunity to be socialized into the Catholic faith.⁶⁹ However, upon arrival to the U.S., its structures of tradition, morality, and culture are still able to be received through both the Church itself or – unlike in Cuba – America’s political institutions.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Falcoff, Mark (2003, 183)

⁷⁰ Margolis, Michelle F. (2018, 52-53)

D. Cuban Americans View Race and Immigration from a Cuban Perspective

“As they were constructing U.S. society, leaders among European-Americans fabricated the cultural/behavioral characteristics associated with each ‘race’...Race thus evolved as a worldview, a body of prejudgements that distorts our ideas about human differences and group behavior.”

–American Anthropological Association, “Statement on Race,” 1998⁷¹

The anthropological concept of being white versus being a person “of color” (that is to say, not white) is heavily orientated from the standpoint of the country that the discussion concerns, which in this case is the United States and its history with slavery, immigration, imperialism, and globalization. In particular, the “one-drop” rule – which states that an individual who has a fraction of black ancestry, no matter how small, is black under the court of law – has morphed over the decades to the definitive social understanding of race in the United States. For example, Homer Plessy of the 1896 Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which constitutionalized segregation and Jim Crow in the United States, was not fully of African descent. Rather, Mr. Plessy was an octoroon, an individual with an ancestry that is only one-eighth black. This absolutist interpretation of race, derived to sustain white supremacy in the American South, exists nowhere else in the world, especially in Latin America.⁷²

What does exist in the Latin American context is the colonial legacy of *blanqueamiento* (*branqueamento* in Portuguese), a practice in which the pursuit of mixed-race offspring was encouraged to “whiten” the blood of an indigenous or African family line over time. This genetic “purification,” known in the Spanish colonies as *limpieza de sangre*, would allow the descendants of indigenous and African peoples to move up in the *casta* system with each generation, as the proportion of their indigenous/African ancestry would be halved with each Caucasian that is incorporated into the family tree.⁷³ The result is a largely mixed-race

⁷¹ The American Anthropological Association (1998)

⁷² Davis, F. James (2014)

⁷³ Hernández, Tanya Kateri (2012, 21)

demographic geography that is racially identified according to the classification of the race that comprises the largest proportion of their respective ancestries. The situation is no different amongst Cubans and Cuban Americans, as those whose ancestors are mostly white (light-skinned) identify as “white” in both socioeconomic settings and on official documents.⁷⁴ One such example is seen in the Survey Questionnaire, where 100% of respondents self-identified as “white,” even if this response does fully reflect their respective ancestries.

“I was walking around [Miami] when I saw a sign that read: ‘No Blacks, No Dogs, No Cubans.’ posted in an apartment building and I felt fortunate that I was not a dog, or else, I would have completed that despised trifecta.”
—Ricardo E. González Zayas, “Black Pedro Pan,” 2020⁷⁵

The eventual intersection of these conceptions of race between the U.S. and Latin America significantly contributes to the political psyche of Cuban American voters nationwide, but especially in the Miami MSA. Dr. Courtney Joseph, Associate Professor of African American Studies at Lake Forest College, underscored the Cuban immigrant’s pursuit of aligning with the American binary of “Whiteness” as a mechanism for securing social and political authority. For example, the pre-Mariel Cuban exiles skew heavily towards the *Latin American* image of whiteness, a genetic spectrum that conflicts with the “one-drop” standard of whiteness in the United States. Their self-identification as white, however, did not stop the “white, non-Hispanic” segment of Miami’s population from utilizing the American Southerner’s worldview to discriminate against all Cuban exiles in a variety of societal contexts, from housing to employment. This tension extends to today, where the struggle to *belong* amongst the majority of a U.S. locality only works when they *are* the majority. This has been achieved in Miami-Dade.

⁷⁴ Davis, F. James (2014)

⁷⁵ American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (2024)

Cuban Americans – and only Cuban Americans – also have a different worldview on immigration to the United States. It is admittedly one of great privilege, as for nearly sixty years, U.S. immigration law had not looked at any foreign national more favorably than the Cuban exile. Within two years of the Revolution’s conclusion, President Kennedy initiated the Cuban Refugee Program, implementing a framework to ensure the presence of essential services and semi-permanent resettlement in the country through Miami’s existing welfare apparatus.⁷⁶ This parole program evolved into the landmark Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 under President Lyndon Johnson’s leadership, which allowed Cubans to claim permanent residency after living in the U.S. for two years, paving a clear pathway to citizenship for hundreds of thousands of Cuban exiles and their families. President Carter’s Immigration Act of 1980 further facilitated the process for Cuban exiles, reducing the required residency period to adjust their immigration status to just one year.⁷⁷ And although President Clinton’s “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” interpretation of the Cuban Adjustment Act restricted the application of the law to only exiles who actually set foot on U.S. soil,⁷⁸ the law itself was never formally repealed until President Obama’s final weeks in office in January 2017. Today’s immigration onlook for Cuban exiles resembles that of the early 1960s, as the Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela (CHNV) Parole Program has effectively reinstated immigration policy to the pre-Johnson status quo.

Overall, the immigration experience of the Cuban exile has generally been one of a full glass that is now half-empty, both in policy and in sentiment. Cuban Americans of the earlier migration waves have a tendency to view those of the later waves with a sort of disdain, as if they were mildly content with the conditions of a post-Revolution Cuba. To this end, I had the unique opportunity to discuss this overlooked subject with Ana Sofía Peláez, Co-Founder and the

⁷⁶ Mitchell, William L (1962, 3-6)

⁷⁷ Falcoff, Mark (2003, 160)

⁷⁸ Ibid. (160-161)

current Executive Director of the Miami Freedom Project. While we did agree that much of this rationale is sourced from a genuine worry that their entry into the United States can also bring with them sympathies for certain aspects of Marxism-Leninism, it is also impossible to ignore the disconnect in understanding that pre-Mariel immigrants have because of their socioeconomic status. She continued by highlighting the *marielito* experience as the model case of this sentiment. As a significantly less privileged and more “colored” exile wave, their entry into the United States has yet to be fully embraced by the larger Cuban diaspora to this day. Moreover, because of the interwoven relationship between race and immigration wave in the Cuban American experience, *marielitos* have oftentimes found themselves grouped together with non-Hispanic African Americans by lighter-skinned Cuban Americans.⁷⁹ Such characterizations further subject this wave to a restrictive socioeconomic status while simultaneously displacing long-standing African American communities from public networks and essential services.

Racial/Ethnic Group	Total MSA	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black*	Pre-1980 Migrant	Cuban 1980 or After Migrant	U.S. Born	Other Hispanic	Other
Personal Income	37,407	49,812	26,642***	45,218***	23,961***	34,971**	27,671***	32,724***
N	66,955	25,383	12,003	4,914	5,021	2,069	14,546	3,019

Racial/Ethnic Group	Total MSA	Non-Hispanic White	Non-Hispanic Black	Cuban		U.S. Born	Other Hispanic	Other
				Pre-1980 Migrant	1980 or After Migrant			
Family Income	68,720	84,842	51,361***	82,589	51,071***	78,739***	56,371***	59,674***
N	66,955	25,383	12,003	4,914	5,021	2,069	14,546	3,019

Figure 8: Table titled, “Personal and Family Incomes of Racial and Ethnic Groups in Miami/Ft. Lauderdale Metropolitan Statistical Area (Adults 18–65), 2000.”⁸⁰ When compared to every other analyzed demographic, Cuban migrants arriving in 1980 or later (encompassing the *marielitos* and *balseros*) render the lowest personal and familial incomes. Moreover, Cuban migrants arriving prior to 1980 (encompassing the pre-Mariel exile waves) nearly match the personal and familial incomes of their non-Hispanic white counterparts.

⁷⁹ Duany, Jorge (2014, 488)

⁸⁰ Ibid. (135)

VII. Strike One: The Election of 1980

“While the immigrant looks forward, the exile looks back.”
–Lisandro Perez, “Cuban America,” 2011⁸¹

The circumstances surrounding the U.S. Presidential Election of 1980 defined the modern-day Cuban American electorate. For one, President Carter’s secret engagements with Fidel’s regime established a recurring pattern of Democratic executives routinely acting against the will of an older, wealthier, and whiter Cuban American electorate in Hialeah and Miami-Dade that was staunchly against diplomatic normalization. Combined with the demographic transformations and sociological instabilities ignited by the Mariel Boatlift and the Arthur McDuffie Riots, the Reagan campaign and Republican Party successfully capitalized on a political message that consolidated the electorate in favor of the city’s weakened white, non-Hispanic voter base. To the voting Cuban *American*, the social integrity of Miami – this new “City on a Hill” self-made for and by Cubans, was now under threat.

If Cuba were to be re-democratized, would you want to go to the island?

14 responses



Figure 9: Results of Question 2.7 on the Survey Questionnaire. Not a single respondent indicated an inclination to migrate back to Cuba in the case of re-democratization, even if part-time. This unanimous response is in harmony with Question 2.3, where over 71% of the sample also indicated that the term “Cuban American” perfectly identifies who they are.

⁸¹ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

A. President Carter's Back-Channel Diplomacy and *El Diálogo*

"Carter couldn't get the Russians to move out of Cuba so he's moving out the Cubans."

—Ronald Reagan, 1980⁸²

1979 was a landmark year for the Cuban communist cause. For Fidel to ring in the new year is to celebrate two decades of political success as an increasingly stable and legitimized dictator, even if the functionalities of his dictatorship were not basking in the collateral benefits of his personal achievement. Despite an economy whose recent sugar cane backed "growth" failed to translate to socioeconomic development,⁸³ he did not care about the internal inefficiencies of his government so long as his external image was that of a visionary just as much as he already established himself to align with the label of a revolutionary. In doing so, Fidel continuously identified the actors relevant and essential to achieving and maintaining his unwavering legitimacy: who he had to satisfy, who he indirectly had to answer to, and – most importantly – who he had to cut.

Fidel found his greatest outcomes when he followed the rules to rule. From the long-term trajectory that won the 26th of July Movement control over the levers of power in Havana, to the diplomatic fundamentals that allowed for the implementation of the Freedom Flights for its over seven-year lifespan, Fidel found his wedge as the Cuban executive by acting in lockstep with the Machiavellian strategic school of thought.⁸⁴ (In fact, while in the Sierra Maestra in 1958, Fidel was known to carry a copy of Machiavelli's *The Prince* with him at all times!⁸⁵) During the 1970s, Fidel sought to conduct his international governance under these principles.

⁸² LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

⁸³ Central Intelligence Agency (1970, 1)

⁸⁴ Cuzán, Alfred G. (1999, 189)

⁸⁵ Ibid. (178)

Perhaps the most representative example of his strictly utilitarian international engagements concerned his back-channel diplomacy with then President Jimmy Carter's Administration immediately after taking the Oath of Office in January 1977. Given the historical backdrop of the ongoing *Détente* which – in part – allowed Fidel's regime to formally constitutionalize a Cuba governed by Marxism-Leninism in 1976,⁸⁶ Carter long believed that normalization with the Cuban Communists was inevitable for both the enforcement of American national security and the protection of American civil liberties regarding free expression and commerce. And promptly, his team began to secretly engage with the Cubans with such ends in mind.⁸⁷ Among its means the Carter Administration was willing to enact included the lifting of an absolute travel ban to Cuba and the acceptance of the regime's political prisoners.⁸⁸

From Fidel's point of view, engaging with the Americans successfully provided the ability to establish an external image with his principal geopolitical enemy that the regime does carry a concern for human rights, even if forced. On the flip side, President Carter laid the groundwork for an administration that will forever be plagued with the political consequences that will come with the inevitable publication of his confidential affairs with the Communists, even if altruistic in his motives.⁸⁹ By 1980, the Democrat's U.S. foreign affairs concerning Cuba will once again be internalized by the – now-naturalized – Cuban demographic. In the meantime, Fidel had set the diplomatic table, and now the international community has been seated. Recognizing that through a decade of smart politicking and interpersonal relationship investments in back-door diplomacy, he now sought to cash-in on his accrued social capital by crafting an announcement that will make headlines well beyond the *Miami Herald*.

⁸⁶ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 408-409)

⁸⁷ National Security Archive (2004)

⁸⁸ Venceremos Brigade (2020, 1)

⁸⁹ It is also worth noting that President Carter fully understood the electoral consequences of engaging privately with a public enemy of the United States, even during the *Détente*. Nonetheless, he never regretted his decision.

“And, if in the course of trying to make it in America, Cubans forgot what had brought them there to begin with, Fidel Castro could always be counted on to remind them.”

—Ada Ferrer, “Cuba: An American History,” 2021⁹⁰

That reminder came in September 1978, when Fidel encouraged dozens of exiled Cubans in Miami and elsewhere to return to the island and engage in diplomatic-esque talks, albeit through a selection process that purposefully elevated individuals who were more apathetic – or even sympathetic – to the regime’s strategic geopolitical decisions. In extending an olive branch to the general diaspora directly, at least from a messaging standpoint, Fidel gambled on the diverging archetype of the Cuban exile that has held a strengthening foothold in Miami since the initial Golden Exile in 1959. He thought that perhaps the “*cuando se caiga Fidel*” folk would allow their political hostilities to be limited to a public grudge,⁹¹ as a growing number of their exiled neighbors sought a more permanent resolution in the United States via the Cuban Adjustment Act from the decade prior, a group previously identified as *gusanos*⁹² but now identified by the regime as the “Cuban community abroad.” However, Fidel presented this branch with a firm hand, as he declined to actually release roughly 3,000 political prisoners held on the island until the offer was accepted, the same cohort whose freedoms President Carter’s administration negotiated for behind closed doors. In what would become known as *El Dialogo*,⁹³ after two months of publicly targeted opposition from the diasporic hardliners to the two cohorts of selected exiles, Fidel released the prisoners to the United States and allowed return visits of Cuban exiles to the island to reunite with their families...⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 408)

⁹¹ Ibid. (409)

⁹² The Spanish word *gusanos* translates to *worms* in English.

⁹³ Known in English as *The Dialogue*.

⁹⁴ FIU Cuban Research Institute (2011, 25)

...for a week. Nonetheless, it was virtually guaranteed that Miami's Cuban American exiles would act just as so: exiles who sought to return to the land they left. The regime was playing chess against the Free World, and they were winning the seemingly one-sided PR bout. Each returning exile that reunited with their loved ones on the island brought with them unlimited joy and seemingly unlimited cash. However, Fidel understood that the Miami Cubans were setting aside politics for the week despite the regime's strategic new leaf, not because of it. To this end, and capitalizing on an easily manipulatable development, Fidel's brother Raúl declared, "...the overwhelming majority of Cuban emigrants are there [overseas] for economic reasons...almost all of them preserve their love for their family and the homeland where they were born, and show...solidarity towards their compatriots." Such a statement was intentionally crafted to shift the narrative away from the politics of totalitarianism and towards the struggle for a communist utopia, even if that struggle will forever last indefinitely without proven results.

However, in all this execution laid a miscalculation that would cost the Cuban government to concede tens of thousands of more exiles to flee for the United States. Since the Golden Exile in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, Fidel has trashed the names and reputations of those who have fled his totalitarian regime, with propagandic institutions dehumanizing their experiences to being (among other things) "scum" and "lackeys of imperialism." Now that the families of the returning exiles, arriving with gifts and small luxuries from the United States, have seen these *gusanos* turned *mariposas*⁹⁵ for all the imperialist scum that they are *not*. As such, island Cubans began to question not only the merit of the regime's word, but also contemplate the possibility of entering the Land of Opportunity themselves.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ The Spanish word *worms* translates to *butterflies* in English.

⁹⁶ Brantley, Chip, and Andrew Beck Grace (2023)

B. The Mariel Boatlift

“En cuanto se supiera quiénes eran los enemigos, es decir, aquellos que querían irse del país, bastaba con meterlos a todos en la cárcel.”⁹⁷
—Reinaldo Arenas, *“Antes que anochezca,”* 1992⁹⁸

Increasingly through the latter-half of the 1970s, dedicated Cubans from all walks of life attempted to seek refuge from the regime by any means necessary and any way possible.

Typically, this resulted in sporadic attempts to enter the embassies of foreign states on Embassy Row in the Miramar District of Havana. However, most of them failed due to the strong Cuban law enforcement presence protecting the grounds of Embassy Row and its occupants.

Nonetheless, increasing frustration with Fidel’s shaky international relations on the part of the foreign missions ultimately led to the collapse of this fragile arrangement.

On April 1, 1980, emboldened by over a year’s worth of publicly sanctioned family reunions to the island from Miami, six hopeful Cuban exiles-to-be used a city bus to forcefully break through the security perimeter of the Peruvian Embassy. After a fatal exchange between the Cuban guards and the hopefuls, Fidel ordered that Ambassador Edgardo de Habich y Palacio of Peru surrender the six exiles-to-be. The Ambassador refused.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ This quote roughly translates to English as the following: *“As soon as it was known who were the enemies, that is, those who wanted to leave the country, it was enough to put all of them in jail.”*

⁹⁸ Arenas, Reinaldo (1992, 297)

⁹⁹ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 411)



Figures 10.1 and 10.2: Images of the “shrimp boats” that brought survey questionnaire responder and interviewee Lizette Padrere and her family to the United States, May 1980.

What happened next could only be understood through the lens of the Machiavellian Fidel, as it is fully unprecedented in practically every other comparable historical context. In particular, Chapter XIX states, “From this the prince may secure himself sufficiently if he avoids being hated or despised and keeps the people satisfied with him...”¹⁰⁰ Thus, to keep the Cuban people *satisfied*, Fidel let the six and nearly all other hopeful exiles-to-be storm the structures of Embassy Row, punishing the Peruvians in the process. The morning after the Ambassador’s refusal, the regime had dismantled the embassy’s security perimeters and its guards were ordered to abandon their posts.¹⁰¹ Within 48 hours of this move, over 10,000 Cubans flooded the Peruvian Mission’s grounds, all of which had the United States as their final destination. Revolutionary component Napoléon Vilaboa, an opponent of Fulgencio Batista who fled Cuba immediately after the Revolution due to his anti-communist fundamentals, leveraged his previous negotiations with Fidel through *El Diálogo* to have the regime open the Port of Mariel

¹⁰⁰ Machiavelli, Niccolò (1513, 73)

¹⁰¹ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 411)

– roughly 25 miles west of Havana – to sponsored boat pickups from the U.S. mainland.¹⁰² Two weeks later, boats of all shapes and sizes began to cross the Straits of Florida with lists of relatives and loved ones to pick up from the island that held its people in perpetual detention.¹⁰³

One of the respondents to the survey questionnaire is a *marielito*. Lizette Pradere, raised in *el campo* outside of Havana, was just eleven-years-old when she and eight of her family members crossed the Straits of Florida in one of many shrimp boats. Originally, the government restricted her exiled grandfather – who was sponsoring the family to migrate to Miami – to only claiming “one and a half persons” at Mariel in mid-April. Suddenly, only about a month later, the captain hired by Lizette’s grandfather returned to Mariel to learn that nine people from her family could board the boat on the return voyage to the United States, provided that another 300 were cramped into the shrimp boat as well. Upon arrival to the U.S., Lizette and her father stayed with her grandfather until they were able to find more permanent housing elsewhere in Hialeah. She lives in Hialeah to this day with her husband and college-aged children.

There is no better statistical example of a documented diaspora than the Mariel Boatlift beginning on April 1, 1980, not only because the boatlift only had a duration of just over six months, but because Census Day in the United States has conveniently been set at April 1 since 1930! As a result, the effects of the approximately 125,000 *marielitos* that made it to American shores is immediately distinctive amongst the vast demographic data collected of the Miami Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA).

¹⁰² Brantley, Chip, and Andrew Beck Grace (2023)

¹⁰³ Ibid. (413)

Population of Miami-Dade County by Race and Hispanic Origin, 1960-2000				
Year	Total Population	Hispanic Origin	Black Non-Hispanic	White & Other Non-Hispanic
1960	935,047	50,000 (5.3%)	137,299 (14.7%)	747,748 (80.0%)
1970	1,267,792	299,065 (23.6%)	186,369 (14.7%)	782,358 (61.7%)
1980	1,625,781	580,994 (35.7%)	271,749 (16.7%)	773,038 (47.6%)
1990	1,937,094	953,407 (49.2%)	369,621 (19.1%)	614,066 (31.7%)
2000	2,253,362	1,291,737 (57.3%)	427,140 (19.0%)	534,485 (23.7%)

Figure 11.1: Table recording the demographic composition of Miami-Dade County from 1960-2000. The highlighted rows represent the observed shift largely under the Mariel Boatlift. Prior to 1980, more racist/xenophobic metrics were used to estimate the county's Hispanic demographic, principal among those being the use of the Spanish language.¹⁰⁴

Cuban, Foreign-Born Population of Miami-Dade County, 1980-2000			
Year	Total Population	Hispanic Origin	Cuban, Foreign-Born
1980	1,625,781	580,994 (35.7%)	407,253 (25.0% 70.1%)
1990	1,937,094	953,407 (49.2%)	561,868 (29.0% 58.9%)
2000	2,253,362	1,291,737 (57.3%)	650,601 (28.9% 50.4%)

Figure 11.2: Table introducing estimations of foreign-born Cubans amongst the same period. Note that the percentages listed under the “Cuban, Foreign-Born” column are with respect to the “Total Population” (left) and to the “Hispanic Origin” population (right).¹⁰⁵

The Mariel Boatlift of 1980 is the densest migration wave of Cuban exiles in history. The 125,000-person spike in Miami's foreign-born population comprises nearly 80% of this demographic group's overall increase for the entire decade.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, the *marielitos* contributed to the first recorded U.S. Census (1990) where Miamians of Hispanic origin

¹⁰⁴ Planning Research Section (2003, 10)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. (11)

¹⁰⁶ This assumes that deaths among both the marielitos and the already exiled foreign-born Cuban Americans were roughly equal, thus balancing themselves out.

outnumbered their white, non-Hispanic counterparts, nearly claiming the outright majority of the MSA's total population.

However, what is immediately evident in the data beyond the numbers of population growth is the *composition* of these *marielitos*. Unlike their counterparts from the Golden Exile, Camarioca Boatlift, and Freedom Flights, the beneficiaries of the Mariel were predominantly younger people of color without a college degree or a white-collar job.¹⁰⁷ While this can be attributable to the hastily-organized nature of the boatlift's logistics, Fidel is once again responsible. Specifically, whenever a (typically larger) boat docked at the Port of Mariel to conduct a pickup of the individuals they came to transport to America, dozens more without a sponsor – and therefore without a spot on the list – would board the boat anyway under the demand of the regime, oftentimes leading to far exceeded capacities for each as they made the days-long journey back to the Florida Keys. Lizette – who self-identifies as white – was not one of these individuals, as her grandfather sponsored her family and her father was able to secure a stable county job with his existing bilingual proficiency. Rather, these individuals were almost exclusively comprised of political prisoners or those deemed by the regime as “social misfits,” not loyal to the values of the Revolution because of an inherent characteristic of themselves, with the most common characteristic being “members”¹⁰⁸ of the homosexual and disabled communities.¹⁰⁹ Unlike Lizette's family, these *marielitos* had no sponsor, no relatives, limited job prospects, minimal English proficiency,¹¹⁰ and no place in the U.S. to set as a destination. Thus, they were spread throughout seemingly randomly by an overwhelmed U.S. government. Lizette's story, although not originally intended to be one, is characteristic of an outlier.

¹⁰⁷ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 416)

¹⁰⁸ I use quotation marks around the term *members* because – especially with respect to homosexuality – a hopeful (and male) exile-to-be only had to claim that they were gay to be designated as a “social misfit” by Fidel's regime.

¹⁰⁹ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 415)

¹¹⁰ Billy, Alexander, and Michael Packard (2022)

“My grandfather went over there with...five people that rented this [shrimp boat], paid this captain a certain amount of money per person that they were getting. Once you get there, [the Cuban government] gave you the people you had inquired about plus another...300 [people].”
–Lizette Pradere, Survey Questionnaire Respondent (Republican), 2025

Unfortunately, the *marielitos* were not welcomed with open arms, especially outside of South Florida. From the perspective of the mainland, the Mariel Boatlift was yet another PR disaster for the Carter Administration, and yet another victory for Fidel’s regime. Simply put, a sudden mass exodus of over 120,000 into any country will threaten the stability of its immigration, detention, or welfare systems. Moreover, if there was one thing that Cuban Communism and American conservatism could agree on in 1980, it was the mutual hatred held for the LGBTQ+ community and for people with mental illnesses.

Beginning with the former group, homosexuality was not unconditionally removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) until 1987, and the same did not occur until 1992 for the UN’s International Classification of Diseases (ICD). Moreover, as the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 did not affect the grounds of admittance under the prior Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (INA), the U.S. government had the right to refuse entry of *marielitos* under the legal justification that they had “mental defects.” While there is little evidence that this clause was employed to any LGBTQ+ *marielito*, there is plenty of evidence that the court of public opinion – particularly the media – defended their hate under the INA’s framework.¹¹¹ The perfect example of this lived experience is that of Reinaldo Arenas, whose autobiography *Antes que anochezca* elaborates on his short time in Miami as a gay *marielito*. Arenas left during the Mariel only because he told the government that he was *passivo*, as opposed to *activo*. Claiming to be *activo* would have indicated a lean towards

¹¹¹ Wills, Matthew (2021)

masculinity, something the regime believed was not possible amongst the LGBTQ+ community.¹¹² Meanwhile, Miami's traditional social institutions, rooted in the longstanding presence of white Americans from the North and African Americans from the South, were only further endorsed by the mass migration of Cubans to the U.S. mainland. Most of these Cubans were (and still are) devout Catholics and many held (and some still hold) affirmative beliefs on *machismo*,¹¹³ in line with the rhetoric of the Communist regime. Recognizing that safety was at risk in the city – especially amongst the city's broader instability in 1980 – Arenas left within months, concluding his sentiments of Miami with the statement, “*Si Cuba es el Infierno, Miami es el Purgatorio.*”¹¹⁴¹¹⁵

¹¹² Arenas, Reinaldo (1992, 301)

¹¹³ Ibid. (313)

¹¹⁴ Ibid. (314)

¹¹⁵ This quote roughly translates to English as the following: “*If Cuba is Hell, Miami is Purgatory.*”



Figures 12.1 and 12.2: May 1980 Newspaper articles from the Miami Herald and The New York Times, respectively. The Miami Herald concerns the holding center at Fort Chaffee, AR, with the armed locals displaying Confederate flags and warning, “The Cubans are coming.”¹¹⁶ The New York Times’ page is headlined with titles including, “Retarded People and Criminals Are Included in Cuban Exodus” and “THE CUBANS INCLUDE UNWANTED ELEMENTS.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Miami Herald (1980)

¹¹⁷ Schumacher, Edward (1980)

Concerning the latter group, those with disabilities – particularly those with mental illnesses – were the subject of a ruthless beatdown in both the local and national information spaces, in addition to the legal discrimination they faced under the INA. For the sake of exaggeration, several news outlets (most notably the *Miami Herald* and *The New York Times*) likened those with mental illnesses to Cuba’s violent criminals that Fidel removed from the island amidst all the chaos. The most consequential of these stories originates from localities where the migrant crisis crippled the existing infrastructure available to local, state, and national governments. For example, the Arkansas National Guard base Fort Chaffee came to represent the worst of the *marielitos*, with the media depicting its developments as emblematic of the entire exodus. Fort Chaffe exceeded its capacity within weeks of the Mariel’s initial voyages, resulting in many escapes and opportunities for the actual criminals to destroy the surrounding properties. Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton closed the state to any new Cuban arrivals, setting a precedent for several other governors to follow his example.¹¹⁸

“As a consequence, Cuban exiles went from being a ‘model minority’ helping to build Southern Florida’s future to becoming one of the foreign groups viewed with greatest suspicion.”
–Alejandro Portes and Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Legacies,” 2005¹¹⁹

By the end of the summer, even Dade County was ready to close its doors. As nearly no outside government was willing to accept more *marielitos*, the remainder of the exodus defaulted to nearly any and every public space in Miami. The county government resorted to adapting its flagship football stadium, The Orange Bowl, into a makeshift refugee camp for new arrivals. Nearly all of these *marielitos* were accustomed to the (Communist) government guaranteeing some sort of agricultural or industrial work, having not originated from urban wealth like the

¹¹⁸ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 417)

¹¹⁹ Portes, Alejandro, and Rumbaut, Rubén G. (2005, 262)

previous migration waves between the 1950s and 1970s. Without a government willing or able to demand private hirings, Dade County's refugee camps housed an increasing number of exiles for extended periods of time.

The resulting backlash from the white and black Anglo communities was decisive and disheartening, especially with respect to language assimilation. White Anglo communities refused to “*habla español*” with the Cuban workforce, and the radio waves of the county’s urban black Anglo communities preached, “Go away, Jose!”¹²⁰ Alongside the Presidential race, 1980 saw the successful passing of a referendum reversing Dade County’s official status of bilingualism that had been in place since 1973. With the support of a roughly 55% non-Hispanic majority, Dade County banned any taxpayer dollars from being used to produce bilingual and/or Spanish government material.¹²¹ Dade County did not repeal this reversal until 1993, directly corresponding to the new Hispanic plurality on the county commission at the time.



Figure 13: August 1980 headline from the Miami Herald capturing the increasing isolation of the marielitos with respect to the exiles from the prior migration waves between 1959-1979.¹²²

¹²⁰ Johnson, Janis (1980)

¹²¹ Shipp, Randy, ed. (1980)

¹²² Miami Herald (1980)

Up until this point, it would seem like Cuban Americans are unified in losing the social and political battles against Miami's Anglo residents. However, 47% of Miami Cuban Americans aged eighteen and over were U.S. citizens as of the 1980 Census, most of whom having immigrated to the U.S. in the 1960s.¹²³ These are the same older, whiter, urban, and white-color professionals that first left the island following the Revolution. All were anti-Communist, and many – known as the *batistianos* – sympathized with Batista's right-wing dictatorship in the 1950s. With a declining social image locally and nationally as a direct consequence of the Mariel Boatlift, it was *these* Cuban Americans that got to speak for the diaspora through the formal levers of American electoral politics. Whatever their decision, it guaranteed an electoral realignment in favor of the political party that capitalized on the historical happenstances of 1980. Given the Carter Administration's poor handling of Cuban affairs throughout the 1970s, Reagan's Republican Party became that political party, and the Arthur McDuffie Riots was that historical happenstance. For what started as the product of family reunions concluded as the prologue for the Cuban *American*, an immigrant that is actively distinct from the everchanging cohort of exiles from which they once were proud to be a part of.

C. Ronald Reagan's Formalization of the Cuban American Electorate

*"You never really take ownership of a community if
you're always thinking you're gonna go back."
–Freddy Balsera, "Cuban America," 2011*

While the reputation of the Cuban diaspora was on a downward spiral, the Cuban exiles turned naturalized U.S. citizens were realizing an upward trajectory. They were accumulating wealth, developing working and middle class localities (including present-day Hialeah), and

¹²³ Eckstein, Susan (2009, 91)

raising the first generation of U.S.-born Cuban Americans. This is the American Dream in practice, and the dynamics of immigrant success did not go unnoticed by a Republican Party undergoing fundamental change. The lasting consequences of the GOP's intervention during and following the 1980 Presidential Election are observed today in the cohort effect, where voters of the pre-Mariel migration waves are more active in the U.S. political system than any other segment of the diaspora, including those who were born in the United States.¹²⁴

In the aftermaths of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the Democratic Party became the uncontested champion for racial minorities and those otherwise considered by American conceptualizations of race as “people of color.” Under such an electoral arrangement, characterized by increasingly diverse demographics across the United States, those in the Republican Party realized that they can no longer reliably compete across the nation's most critical battlegrounds. The result was the formation of the Republican National Hispanic Association (RNHA) in 1967, which was then officially recognized by the RNC in 1974 as the party's primary tool to engage with Latino voters nationwide.¹²⁵ Although the RNHA carried minimal impact in the Election of 1976 because of the fallout from Watergate, its role in the Election of 1980 was significantly more prominent, as the RNHA was tasked with identifying the Latino electorates that were the most moveable. With a founding member of the RNHA being Cuban American Tirso del Junco, the newly-naturalized Cuban Americans were high on that list.

¹²⁴ Ibid. (90)

¹²⁵ Wynne, Zoe Alexandra (2022, 8)

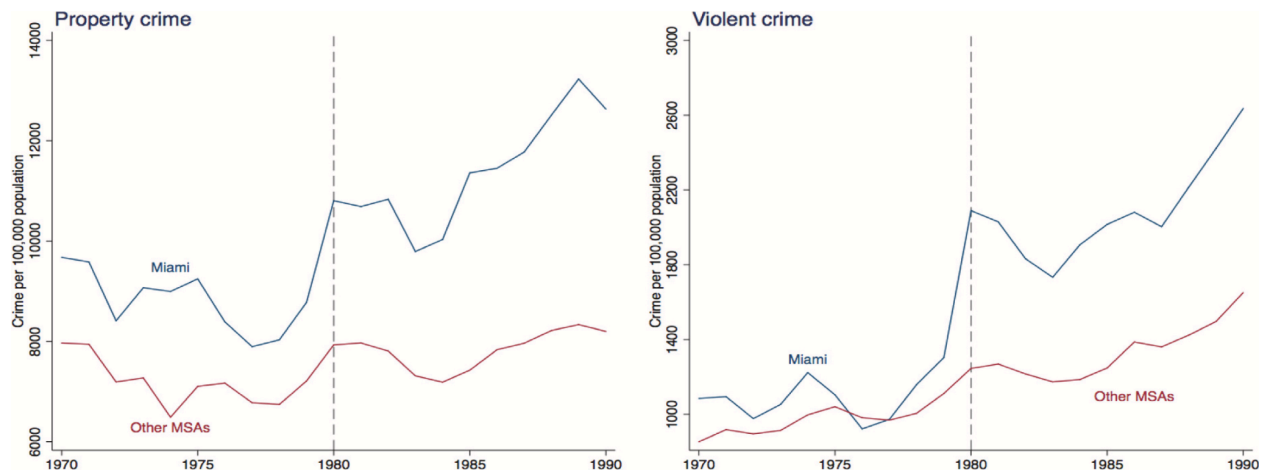


Figure 14.1 and 14.2: Graphs plotting the rates of property and violent crime in the Miami MSA from 1970-1990. The average across America's other major MSAs is also graphed for reference. As both graphs illustrate, 1980 marked a point of divergence between Miami and other MSAs, where the unorganized government response to Mariel – coupled with the contemporary McDuffie Riots' civil unrest – resulted in a clear uptick in Miami's crime rates.¹²⁶

Throughout the summer of 1980, the Reagan campaign and the RNHA consistently attacked the Carter Administration for their poor and nontransparent handling of America's relations with Fidel's regime, capitalizing on both national rage and local indecision held from the ongoing Mariel Boatlift. They also highlighted the alarming rise in crime that had begun to rapidly outpace the national average.¹²⁷ In doing so, they successfully reframed American political affairs with Cuba as not one of foreign policy, but rather one of internal American security and integrity.¹²⁸ This redefinition of the political debate simultaneously includes the naturalized, white, wealthier, older, and more urban Cuban Americans in the electoral conversation while also excluding the most recent, predominately black, less wealthy, younger, and more rural exiles of the Carter years, allowing for the Cuban conceptions of race and immigration to find a new home in a unique enclave the United States.

¹²⁶ Billy, Alexander, and Michael Packard (2022)

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

“A class structure has been created, and it is hard to crack.”
–Lisandro Perez, “Cuban America,” 2011¹²⁹

Meanwhile, historical happenstance only endorsed the Republican campaign case further. Also during the summer of 1980 was the Arthur McDuffie (Miami) Riots, a largely overlooked period of civil unrest amongst Miami’s Anglo-African American population that was in response to the highly-racialized case of Arthur McDuffie, who was allegedly killed in December 1979 after he crashed his motorcycle while fleeing the Dade County Police. The forensic process revealed that a crash could not have happened, and testimonies introduced the allegation that the officers murdered McDuffie themselves. However, an all-white jury acquitted the officers on May 17, 1980, prompting a nearly four-day surge in civil unrest across Miami’s Overtown and Liberty City neighborhoods, eventually expanding into the nearby non-black neighborhoods.¹³⁰

The Arthur McDuffie Riots had several racial undertones, each present depending on the perspective of the demographic evaluating the unrest. To the Anglo-African Americans who have lived in Miami’s urban core since its infancy in the late nineteenth century, the McDuffie Riots were a demonstration not only against the racial injustice displayed through the acquittal, but also against the favorable treatment that all waves of the Cuban diaspora – including the *marielitos* – have received up until the time of the Riots.¹³¹ To the non-Hispanic white Americans, the McDuffie Riots were just another reason to continue exercising their distaste against the city’s African American population. To the naturalized Cuban Americans, however, the McDuffie Riots enabled them to recreate the racially divided Dade County in their image.

¹²⁹ Gasana, Adelin (2011)

¹³⁰ Veitenhans, Coley (2025)

¹³¹ Ferrer, Ada (2021, 418)

In the 1980 Census, between 84% and 91% of the Cuban American population in Dade County identified as white,¹³² a sharp contrast from the more black demographics of Cuba and of the *marielitos*. Now comprising over a quarter of the electorate, these voters had the electoral agency to heavily swing the county’s results in favor of one party or another, and they did. As shown in Figure 15, compared to the 1976 Presidential Election, the Cuban American electorate swung 28% to the right in 1980. Through their ballots, the white Cuban Americans self-identified their socioeconomic identities according to how they stood in Cuba, not in the United States. Their collective vote was a rejection of the Cuba they left in all respects: politically, economically, culturally, and racially. The *marielitos* were thus sidelined from the political debate led by the naturalized diaspora, to which they have yet to fully recover in the socioeconomic sense. Moreover, while the white, non-Hispanic residents of Dade County continued to show disgust towards Cuban Americans, their ability to *discriminate* sharply weakened as their share of the population (and, in turn, the electorate) also declined.¹³³

Cuban American Presidential Election Vote in Miami-Dade County, 1976-1980		
Year	Republican	Democrat
1976 (Ford* vs. Carter)	52%	48%
1980 (Reagan vs. Carter*)	80%	16%

Figure 15: Table showing the proportions of the Cuban American vote won by the Republican and Democratic Parties in 1976 and 1980, respectively. The incumbent candidate in each election is identified with a “” alongside their name. The data, sourced from precinct estimations, shows a clear rightward shift that represents a long-term partisan realignment.¹³⁴*

¹³² Eckstein, Susan (2009, 20)

¹³³ Ibid. (47)

¹³⁴ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

However, the Reagan campaign recognized the electoral utility of the Cuban American demographic in Dade County, even if many of his supporters did not support any Cuban presence in the country to begin with, especially after Mariel. Reagan made multiple stops to South Florida, where he would spend the morning at a Catholic Church and the afternoon criticizing President Carter's engagements with Fidel. Immediately after the election in 1981, President Reagan facilitated the creation of the Cuban American National Foundation (CANF), better known as *La Fundación*.¹³⁵ CANF began as a financial and organizational powerhouse, with its initial funding sourced directly from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and led by Reagan surrogate Mas Canosa. To this day, CANF not only lobbies for the hardline stance of being against any engagement with Fidel's regime, but it also works to elect politicians who will implement such policies once in office.¹³⁶

The results of *La Fundación's* work were immediately apparent in Dade County. In 1981, Raúl Martínez became the first Cuban American elected to the office of a U.S. Mayorship, the City of Hialeah.¹³⁷ Although he was a Democrat, Martínez also billed himself as a *strongman* who likes to get things done. Even through scandals and climates of political opposition, Mayor Martínez's practical policies to develop the city's infrastructure and independence won him 24 years at City Hall.¹³⁸ The electoral successes for the Cuban American electorate continued into Congress, with Miami's Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R, FL-18) and Hialeah's Lincoln Díaz-Belart (R, FL-21) becoming the first and second Cuban Americans elected to the lower chamber in 1989 and 1992, respectively.¹³⁹ Furthermore, in 1985, Amancio Suárez founded Radio Mambí after acquiring the rights to use the 710 AM radio waves. As 710 AM can comfortably reach Cuban

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Eckstein, Susan (2009, 107-108)

¹³⁷ Ibid. (94)

¹³⁸ Clary, Mike (1993)

¹³⁹ Eckstein, Susan (2009, 96)

audiences on the island, *Radio Mambí* became the talk radio station of choice for Cuban exiles. To this day, *Radio Mambí* is the premiere front-facing information source for conservative viewpoints and has become a mobilizing institution for the conservative majority of the Cuban American diaspora, especially for those of the older generations. *Radio Mambí* would go on to single handedly organize the diaspora's responses to Elián González's removal from the U.S. and the subsequent *voto castigo* against the Democratic Party in the 2000 Election.¹⁴⁰

Building off of the previous responses, do you associate yourself more with the typical Cuban living on the island OR with the typical American?

14 responses

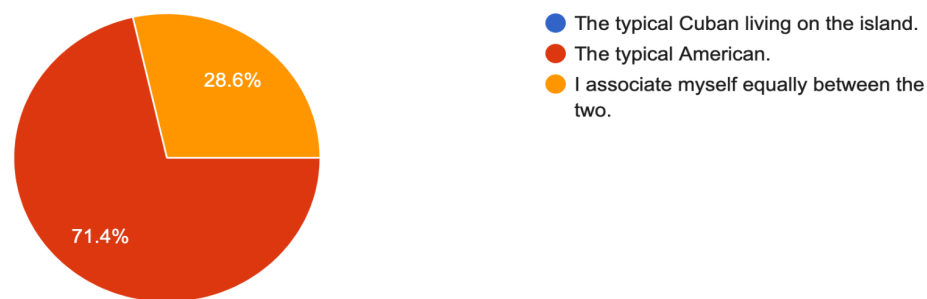


Figure 16: Results of Question 2.5 on the Survey Questionnaire. Not a single respondent associated more with “the typical Cuban living on the island” when compared to “the typical American.” This collective response is yet another example of the fundamental schism that now exists between Cubans and Cuban Americans, one that finds its roots in the Mariel Boatlift.

The long-term anthropological and sociological effects from the Election of 1980 are critical to understanding the electorate today, as this was the first time where the Cuban American vote sent a unified backlash against the Democratic Party. For example, Section 2 of the attached Survey Questionnaire sought to better understand the Cuban American perspective on the term *foreign*. By nearly all accounts, it is clear that the sample does articulate a detached relationship between Cuban Americans and Cuban nationals, as represented most profoundly in

¹⁴⁰ Blanco, Ali (2024)

Figure 16. However, this detachment only appears to be on the basis of race/nationality, alongside many other identity-based metrics. Such a dynamic, as illustrated in Figure 17, endorses the monolithic nature of Hialeah and Dade County in 1980. The Cuban American idea of the “typical American” is, in part, one who fulfills the American Dream as they hope to do. Thus, if they see themselves as ones who are in the process of fulfilling their American Dream, then it makes sense that their respective depictions of the “typical American” are going to mirror their own identities, even if they have never been received in that same light by non-Hiapanic Miamians or by outsiders. Nonetheless, there still remains an outstanding question as to whether it is the *Cuban* or the *American* in *Cuban American* that is contingent on one’s more identifiable characteristics. An overview of the Election of 2000 provides a plausible answer to this question.

From the previous question, what is the “typical American” to you? RACE/ETHNICITY

14 responses

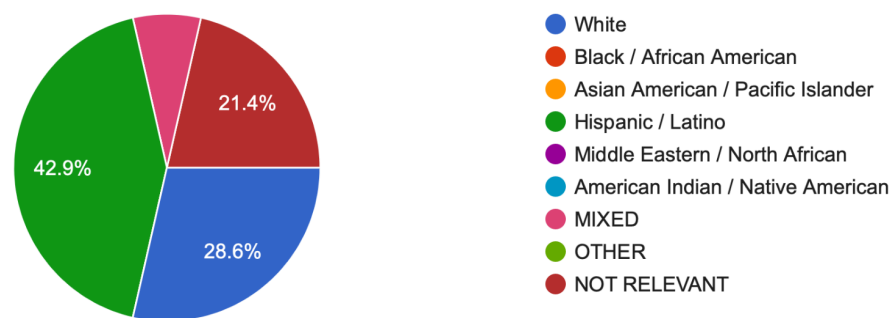


Figure 17: Results of Question 2.6(a) on the Survey Questionnaire. It is important to note how – when viewed in tandem with the other demographic metrics asked for in this manner – there exists a pattern such that the Republican respondents essentially described themselves as “the typical American.” Every surveyed Democrat marked that race/ethnicity (along with every other metric) is “not relevant” in their respective conceptions of the “typical American.”

VIII. Strike Two: The Election of 2000

“I worked hard for eight years to strengthen our position in [Florida] and among Cuban Americans...the Elián case had wiped out most of our gains.”

—President Bill Clinton, “My Life,” 2004¹⁴¹

The Election of 2000 not only reaffirms the idea that the Cuban American electorate sees themselves as *American immigrants* rather than *Cuban exiles*, but introduces the idea that the *Cuban* in *Cuban American* in the eyes of Cuban Americans consists not of one’s citizenship status, but rather of a mentality. This mentality is one that requires the exile to push the letter of the law to its furthest extent for the pursuit of freedom in the Free World, while also obligating the American-born to maintain the development of a metropolis that has become the political antithesis of Cuba in many respects. As such, the development of Hialeah and Miami-Dade through the 1990s and into the 21st century has been consistent with the formalization of an institutionally-complete ethnic enclave. From the monopolistic control held by Cuban talk radio stations, to the incumbents of municipal and county-level political offices, the Election of 2000 challenged the political legitimacy and influence of Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade. Although the diaspora’s political legitimacy is still heavily susceptible to corruption, as it has long been on the island, *El Voto Castigo* molded the hundreds of thousands of Cuban American voters as impossible to ignore to achieve electoral victory. They single-handedly decided the next American President and ousted the incumbent party from the Oval Office. By placing U.S. immigration law aside, one can then understand the reason why Cuban Americans fought to keep Elián stateside, or at the very least, vote to punish those who sent him back to the island.

¹⁴¹ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

A. “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” and the Custody Crisis of Elián González

*“All I’ll say about Elián is thank God he’s Cuban. ‘Cause if he was Haitian, you would’ve never heard about his a**... ‘Sorry fella, all full!’”*
—Dave Chappelle, “Killin’ Them Softly,” 2000¹⁴²

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Cuba entered a nearly decade-long era of economic turmoil and nationwide famine, known as the Special Period. Without a major global power supporting Fidel’s regime, informal channels of outward migration to the Miami MSA began forming and growing in popularity. These immigrants were known as *balseros*, and their numbers gradually began to increase through the first half of the 1990s to nearly 5,000.

Fast forward to August 5, 1994, when the regime faced another major protest by the Cuban people for their civil and political rights. Among these rights and reforms included the end of Fidel’s Communist regime and the democratization of Cuba akin to the 1940s. The *Maleconazo* would welcome a repeat of history from the Mariel Boatlift on August 8, as Fidel publicized once again that the regime would not prevent any demonstrator from leaving the island for the United States. Within two weeks, now President Bill Clinton (who was the Governor of Arkansas during the Mariel Boatlift) ordered the U.S. Coast Guard to capture any *balsero* they intercept at sea and transfer them to Guantanamo Bay. Although they did succeed in capturing over 30,000 *balseros*, at least another 10,000 made it to Florida’s shores nonetheless. Moreover, most of the detained *balseros* were ultimately accepted by the United States,¹⁴³ potentially because of how unpopular the decision was amongst Cuban Americans. According to the FIU Cuba Poll in 1995, only 36% of Dade County respondents supported the decision, and 83% of the county’s respondents supported their acceptance into the country.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Corbon, Billy (2020)

¹⁴³ University of Miami Libraries (2014)

¹⁴⁴ Grenier, Guillermo J., Hugh Gladwin, and Douglas McLaughen (1995, 11)



Figures 18.1 and 18.2: Artwork (left) and photography (right) depicting the balsero experience in Guantanamo and at sea, respectively. The drawing on the left, titled “No Libertad,” was actually done by a child while at Guantanamo in 1994.¹⁴⁵

The end of the 1994 *Balsero* Crisis prompted President Clinton to overhaul the interpretation of U.S. Immigration Law under the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966. The 1995 interpretation of this statute, known colloquially as “Wet Foot, Dry Foot,” only obliged the executive branch to ensure the benefits of permanent residency to Cuban nationals if and only if they physically step foot on U.S. soil. If they were intercepted by the Coast Guard or by any other enforcement arm of the government, then they were to be returned to Cuba.¹⁴⁶ “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” represented the first significant restriction on the immigration process for Cuban nationals since the Revolution, which had otherwise been the most favorable for any people-group in the world. In total, the 1990s saw roughly 170,000 exiles admitted into the U.S., a majority of whom fled the island in the aftermath of the *Maleconazo*.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ University of Miami Libraries (2014)

¹⁴⁶ Falcoff, Mark (2003, 157)

¹⁴⁷ Eckstein, Susan (2009, 11)

President Clinton's policies towards immigration to Cuba had long been restrictive, from the Mariel to Guantanamo, resulting in a disjointed relationship between Washington and Miami. Nonetheless, Clinton's successes at home in the economy helped him maintain mild popularity, with approximately 38% of Dade County Cuban Americans casting their ballot for the President's reelection bid in 1996.¹⁴⁸ However, one of those *balseros* would present a case that conflicted with Clinton's restrictive immigration policy as defined by "Wet Foot, Dry Foot," allowing for the GOP to once again capitalize by internalizing a matter of foreign policy into one that is intrinsically domestic. Conveniently, these developments occurred during a Presidential election season once again.

"Cubans are very Catholic. The story of Saint Lazarus, the story of the Virgin Mary, and the story of someone being lost at sea, la Virgen de la Caridad, as Cubans call her...that's the story Cubans saw with Elián González."
—Rick Sanchez, "537 Votes," 2020¹⁴⁹

On November 25, 1999, three miles off the Florida coast, a five-year-old boy by the name of Elián González was rescued by fisherman from an inner tube that went astray. Elián was one of roughly a dozen *balseros* bound for the United States before their makeshift raft sank, killing nearly all on board, including his mother and step-father. Luckily, Elián's mother had relatives in Miami, who had been there for years, allowing for the legal justification to exist that – perhaps – Elián should not be returned to Cuba.¹⁵⁰

To many in Miami's Cuban American community, Thanksgiving 1999 was a gift from God. Across the diaspora, but especially among the older exiles, Elián González was seen as the materialization of the work of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the Patron Saint of Cuba.

¹⁴⁸ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

¹⁴⁹ Corben, Billy (2020)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

Therefore, the diaspora was determined to ensure that Elián would be safe in the United States, almost as if Miami-Dade was to make true the prophecy desired by her mother. Religious rituals and prayer sessions were routinely held outside of the house of Lázaro González, Elián's great-uncle whom he was living with while in Miami. Elián was also turned into patriotic and religious iconography, with his face placed on the candles, signs, and rosaries used by the faithful and the demonstrators alike.¹⁵¹ For Miami-Dade's Cuban American diaspora, they firmly believed that Elián ought to stay in the United States because it was his mother's intent to make it so. Thinking to the contrary was a rejection of both their legal and moral rationale, the latter of which was developed by the child's allegory to the story of la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre.

Even 25 years later, this general sentiment has not dissipated in the minds of Cuban Americans. For some, their moral compasses were permanently altered with respect to politics and the law. Figure 19 shows Question 1.10 of the Survey Questionnaire, which reveals one of the ways in which one's cultural and/or spiritual faith has altered their moral compass in political spaces. One of the respondents who agreed with the statement, Tussimay Suarez (Democrat), framed it as a matter of mercy one ought to have for their neighbors who have to navigate a harder means to the same end. However, it was also noted how holding this sentiment has lost popularity with respect to other people groups other than one's own. This unfortunate dilemma introduces the plausibility that Cuban Americans would not have acted in the same manner for an Elián that was *not* a Cuban exile.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement: We should prioritize laws that encourage the good, rather than prioritizing those that discourage the bad.

14 responses

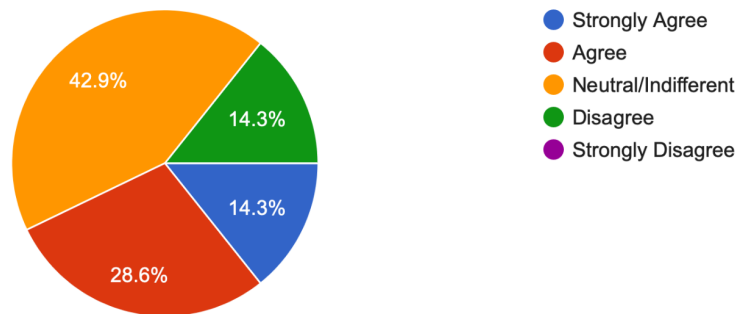


Figure 19: Results of Question 1.10 in the Survey Questionnaire. The agreement and “Neutrality/Indifferent” options share just under 43% of the sample each. When compared to the more secularly skewed sample’s 57% who do not identify as “practicing” Christians, these responses suggest a greater moral influence of Catholic doctrine on their moral orientations.

Meanwhile, Fidel demanded Elián’s return to Cuba within 72 hours under the justification that he was kidnapped from his biological father, who did not join Elián and his mother on the boat Miami. Elián’s father publicly sided with Fidel, and in turn against his in-law Lázaro. Anticipating an international dispute over the custody of Elián, particularly in the wake of the State Department’s abstention from adjudicating the matter themselves, Lázaro recruited Armando Gutierrez – Miami-Dade’s premiere judicial campaign consultant– to speak on behalf of the child and to lead his defense in court.¹⁵² On January 10, 2000, Florida Circuit Court Judge Rosa Rodríguez – one of Armando’s most successful clients – granted Lázaro emergency custody of Elián until March.¹⁵³

However, the Clinton Administration was acting under the mentality that they must enforce the strictest interpretation of federal immigration law. The rationale was justified, in part,

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ PBS (2014)

to not agitate Fidel any further, so as to not risk another immigration crisis to the magnitude of the Mariel Boatlift of *Balsero* Crisis. Therefore, Attorney General and Miami native Janet Reno invalidated the case made by Judge Rodríguez due to a lack of jurisdiction over the case. The DOJ argued that the case of Elián is not primarily one of domestic custody, but rather one of federal immigration law. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) concurred, and sought to deport him back to Cuba.¹⁵⁴ Although they eventually succeeded, Clinton's Administration was unable to do so without force...and a painful election loss later that year.



Figure 20: April 22, 2000 photo taken during the initial encounter between INS units (left) and Elián, who was being held in Lázaro's arms.¹⁵⁵

During the early morning hours of April 22, 2000, Attorney General Janet Reno exercised the full weight of the U.S. Government in Operation Reunion, which resulted in a

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ ABC News (2015)

large-scale blitz of Lázaro’s house by INS in search of Elián. Within three minutes, the armed units captured Elián from his great-uncle, took him to an unmarked white van, and retreated from the scene.¹⁵⁶ However, there was simply no way that Miami-Dade’s Cuban Americans were going down without a fight, for this marked the second time that a Democratic President in Washington backstabbed the electorate. They attacked the political integrity of themselves and of their institutions, and they will be *punished* accordingly.

B. *El Voto Castigo* and the Banana Republic

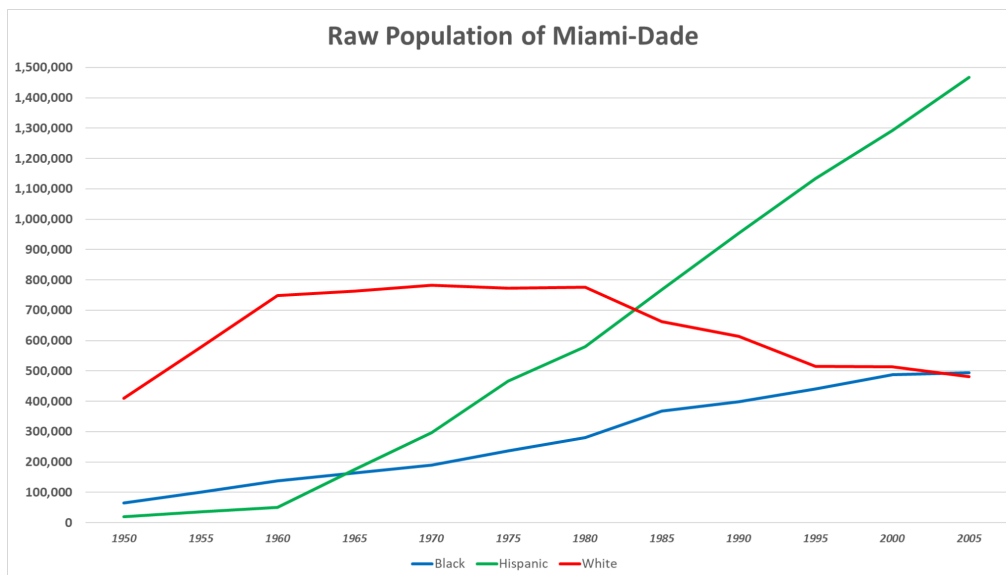


Figure 21: Graph showing the Raw Population of Miami-Dade County from 1950 to 2005.¹⁵⁷ Referencing Figure 11.2, foreign-born Cubans made up 50.4% of the county’s total Hispanic majority of over 1.2 million.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, this graph emphasizes the surge in the Hispanic population due to the growth of the Cuban American family, as the once exiles from the island are now immigrant parents (or even grandparents) to the first and second generations of U.S.-born Cuban Americans.

¹⁵⁶ Corben, Billy (2020)

¹⁵⁷ Isbell, Matthew (2021)

¹⁵⁸ Planning Research Section (2003, 11)

A lot can happen in twenty years. Unlike the sociological situation in 1980, the Cuban American diaspora by 2000 had firmly established itself across all facets of social and civic life. Indicative of the diaspora's influence in Miami-Dade – and by extension, for any demographic in any locality – can ultimately be deduced to two questions: who has control of the information space, and who has control over the political levers of power. In the information space, Cuban talk radio provided the diaspora with an echo chamber for the diaspora's rhetoric, particularly those favoring the worldview of the “white,” conservative hardliners from the pre-Mariel migrant waves. Concerning political power, Cuban Americans were now the plurality in the majority-minority county, outpacing non-Hispanic white Americans and African Americans by 200,000 and 220,000 voters, respectively.¹⁵⁹ Moreover, Cuban Americans – both U.S. and foreign born – occupied offices in all branches and levels of government, including the Miami-Dade County Mayorship and two U.S. Congressional Districts.¹⁶⁰ With the communication and implementation actors being united by a common perspective, the Presidential Election of 2000 was an allegory for the tug-of-war between the federal government against the consolidated opposition of Hialeah and Miami-Dade's local governments.

“Cuban talk radio in South Florida in the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s was the most powerful mobilizing force anywhere in America.”
–Rick Sanchez, “537 Votes,” 2020¹⁶¹

From the dawn of the DOJ's intervention into Elián's custody case, Cuban America's robust talk radio apparatus kicked into high gear. From ten major airwaves, most notably Suárez's *Radio Mambi* (710 AM) and *La Poderosa* (670 AM), over 200,000 Cuban talk radio listeners were religiously informed about the day-to-day developments of Elián's case through

¹⁵⁹ Corben, Billy (2020)

¹⁶⁰ Eckstein, Susan (2009, 96)

¹⁶¹ Corben, Billy (2020)

both the legal and political avenues.¹⁶² Every talk show host that went live turned their broadcast into a call to action, organizing their respective audiences to congregate, protest, and resist. In their on-air arguments, the comparisons between the federal government and Fidel's regime were explicit. President Clinton and Attorney General Reno were often identified as *comunistas*, *socialistas*, and *m*ricones*;¹⁶³ they were no better than Fidel and the G2 (also known as Cuba's *Dirección de Inteligencia*). The result was a series of demonstrations across the county under the command of these empires on the airwaves, especially over the Rickenbacker Causeway and along *Calle Ocho* in Little Havana. These protests often turned violent, with chairs and other household objects used as projectiles against federal law enforcement. The rhetoric also made it on the streets for the rest of the American public to view in real time. During the immediate aftermath of the INS' raid on Lázaro's house for Elián, for example, one unidentified protester proclaimed to the camera, "Is that [raid] democracy?! No, that's Castro tactics! You turned Miami into Havana!"¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Noticias Telemundo (2024)

¹⁶³ As a side note, the disheartening use of the word *m*aricón* is common amongst Cubans and Cuban Americans as not only a slur against the LGBTQ+ community, but also as an identifier for someone that is believed to be of the far-left.

¹⁶⁴ Corben, Billy (2020)



Figure 22: CBS News image of an unidentified man in the motion of throwing a wooden stool towards the INS van retreating from Lázaro's Little Havana residence, with Elián under the agency's custody inside the van.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile, with the cultural and technological advances of Y2K came a verbal rebuttal from American media that was just as harsh. For example, *South Park*, *Saturday Night Live*, and other comedy-based productions began to capitalize on the chaos in Miami-Dade to frame the Cuban Americans as the culprits of a new “Banana Republic” in the United States. Non-Cuban talk show hosts, led by Neil Rogers, could also not hold back in trashing the character of the protestors and the diaspora at-large. Even the Cuban propaganda newspaper *Granma* joined the non-Cuban Americans in mocking the diaspora as wholly corrupt and unable to govern themselves. History was beginning to repeat itself from twenty years ago. The national media was rallying against the Cuban enclave in South Florida.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Adams, Cydney (2016)

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

After the INS raid, however, Cuban talk radio promoted the idea of the *voto castigo* (protest/punishment vote), in which the diaspora ought to punish the Clinton Administration at the ballot box, voting in favor of Republican Governor George W. Bush of Texas over the otherwise popular Democratic incumbent Vice President Al Gore. The right-wing of the Cuban American electorate continued to push this rhetoric against the Democrats throughout the multiple rounds of convoluted recounts that occurred in Miami-Dade County, claiming that the election was being stolen from the GOP by the liberal majority in the Florida Supreme Court.¹⁶⁷ The result of the Presidential Election in Florida ultimately was a GOP victory by 537 votes, an outcome that could not have been realized if it was not for the robust, Reagan-era Republican apparatus in Miami-Dade that originated alongside the birth of conservative Cuban talk radio.

*“Every republican politician was there, sucking a** yesterday. They couldn’t get there fast enough to exploit this, and jump on the goddamn bandwagon.”*
—Neil Rogers, “The Neil Rogers Show,” 2000¹⁶⁸

History is written by the victors, and the victors of the Election of 2000 were the proponents of *El Voto Castigo*. Aside from the pre-Mariel hardliners and the faces of Cuban talk radio, the victors of the election were the Cuban Americans operatives of the Miami-Dade County GOP. For example, Representatives Ros-Lehtinen and Díaz-Belart saw their national profiles increase greatly by attracting national media to Elián, personally engaging with the six-year-old in front of the cameras. Within days, Republicans from all over the country followed their example. There was also both Florida GOP Chairman Al Cárdenas and Florida State Senator Mario Díaz-Belart, who engaged in backroom talks with Democratic Miami-Dade County Mayor Alex Peneles to gerrymander a congressional district just for him while his county

¹⁶⁷ Schneider, William (2001)

¹⁶⁸ Corben, Billy (2020)

descended into chaos. Then there was Nydia Stone, the Spanish-speaking wife of Republican strategist Roger Stone, who appeared on multiple Cuban talk radio shows to rally up the hardliner base to flood the streets in protest once more during the recount period.¹⁶⁹

However, no individual had a greater claim to the Republican victory than Armando Gutierrez, the spokesperson for Elián and Lázaro while the custody case was still under litigation. In many respects, Armando was the personification of the Cuban American hardliner, a batistiano exile who fled the island by the early 1960s. Like the rest of Miami-Dade's Cuban American population, Armando was staunchly anti-Fidel. Unlike the rest of the diaspora, Armando was nearly as corrupt as Fidel. That is, Armando had no problem implanting his preferred candidate into power. He bent the law and destabilized the democratic process, akin to how Fulgencio Batista forced his way back into power in the early 1950s. Two of the three members of the Miami-Dade County Canvassing Board, the body responsible to authorize any election irregularities (including recounts), were political clients of Armando himself. Once Republican operatives staged planned protests around the city at strategic locations, Armando's Canvassing Board pawns halted the recount for good.¹⁷⁰

“And in the same way that Elián González had been stolen and sent back to Cuba, the election was being stolen and a call for many Cuban Americans to go defend the ballots in the way that they couldn't defend Elián González.”
—Fernand Amandi, “537 Votes,” 2020¹⁷¹

The circumstantial success of *El Voto Castigo* could also not have been possible without Democrat Alex Penelas as Mayor of Miami-Dade County. The fallout between Mayor Peneles and the Clinton Administration – and eventually Vice President Al Gore himself – effectively

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Filkins, Dexter, and Dana Canedy (2000)

¹⁷¹ Corben, Billy (2020)

guaranteed that the supermajority of Miami's Cuban American diaspora was positioned to firmly reject the national Democrats. Penelas, a first-generation U.S.-born Cuban American, was the poster child of the diaspora's political consolidation over the previous two decades. To the national Democratic Party, however, Mayor Penelas was a politician who understood the nuances of an otherwise traditional Cuban American electorate; he seemingly cracked the code on what it means to run and govern as a popular Dade Democrat in the post-Reagan era. While such an assessment was not incorrect, it presumed that his level of popularity amongst this conservative constituency was nonetheless fully compatible with the platform of the national party.

The custody crisis of Elián González only publicized the disjoint relationship between the popular local Democrat and its national counterparts. Penelas challenged President Clinton, Attorney General Reno, and the national party to defend themselves during and after the INS raid. Penelas no-showed his town hall with Hialeah Mayor Raúl Martínez and the Vice President, where he was set to endorse the Gore-Lieberman ticket in mid-October at the beloved local chain known as La Carreta.¹⁷² He also went silent after the election, failing to respond to the chaos and shenanigans implemented by Republican operatives at the recount office and on the streets. Penelas' administrative incompetency earned him the insulting name Mayor *P*nga Pequeña* by non-Hispanic voters, though his popularity would not fall amongst Cuban Americans until his corrupt discussions with Florida GOP Chairman Al Cárdenas and influential State Senator Mario Díaz-Belart were leaked in the aftermath of the election.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Natta, Don van, and Dexter Filkins (2000)

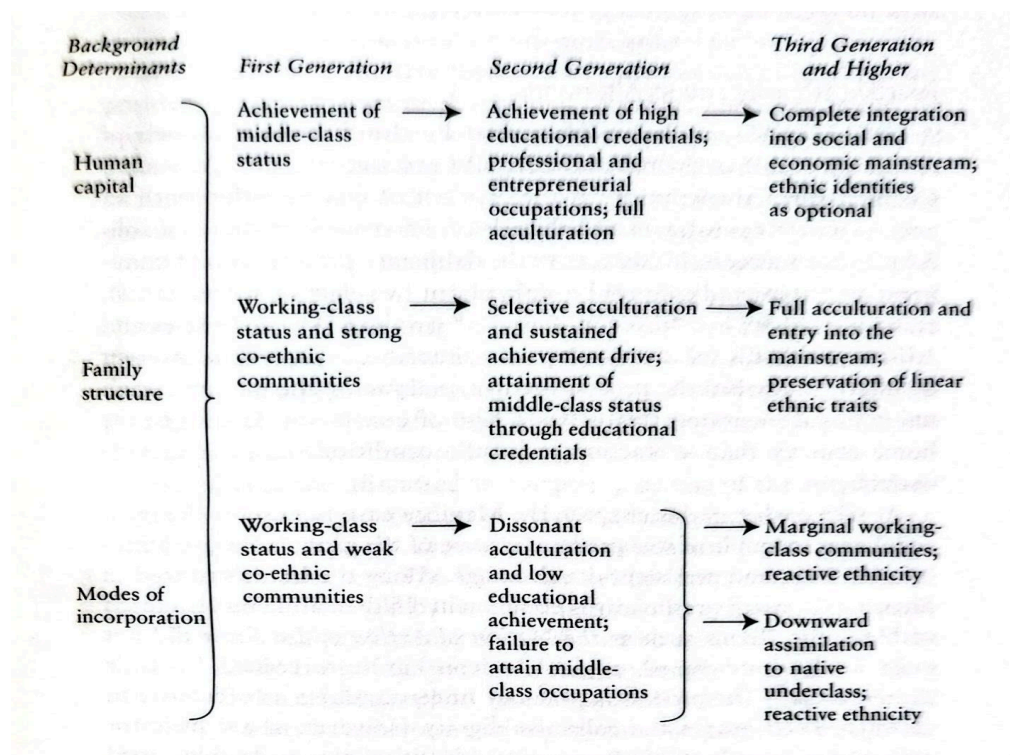


Figure 23: Sociological model demonstrating paths of mobility across immigrant generations, with the first generation referring to the immigrant wave in question.¹⁷⁴ Cuban Americans are unique among U.S. immigrant groups because, with a highly generous immigration status quo and a previously underutilized locality to migrate to, only the top two rows of incorporation apply to the diaspora. Mayor Peneles is among the “Second Generation” individuals who exemplify the top row of socioeconomic mobility in the United States.¹⁷⁵

Regardless, the damage to the Gore campaign was already done. Even though Mayor Alex Penelas displayed a thorough lack of moral character when he sensed that a possible promotion was on the horizon, his actions and identity also represent the positioning of the first generation of U.S.-born Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade and in the United States. Like their ancestors, they still carry an intrinsic connection to the island. And like their ancestors, they contributed to the radical makeover of Miami-Dade from its post-war days. However, unlike their ancestors, they were taught English in school from the beginning. Unlike their ancestors,

¹⁷⁴ Portes, Alejandro, and Rumbant, Rubén G. (2005, 283)

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. (7)

many did not face the realities of socioeconomic poverty that followed forced migration. Unlike their ancestors, they were *born* American citizens.¹⁷⁶

In effect, the first generation of U.S.-born Cuban Americans are no different from their immigrant counterparts, except this cohort acquired a stake in the available civil and societal institutions so that they can speak up on behalf of the diaspora at-large, and they did. Combined with Cuba-born voters, *El Voto Castigo* granted Texas Governor George W. Bush 75% of the Cuban American vote in Miami-Dade County, shifting the electorate 13% to the right and reverting it back to the Republican-friendly margins of the Reagan campaigns. Not only was *El Voto Castigo* a direct repudiation of the American public's condescending opinion on the Cuban diaspora in the United States, but it was also an affirmation of the intrinsic connection between the values of faith, family, and freedom that define the Cuban Americans experience.

Elián represented a continuation of these values that turned the extraordinary family visits of *El Diálogo* into the first voyages of the Mariel Boatlift. Because amongst Cuban Americans, being *Cuban* is not a nationality in the way that being *American* is. Becoming American is the process of naturalization, registering to vote, learning English, eating burgers, and claiming the history of the country as one's own. However, to the Cuban American, one cannot *become* Cuban: *Cubanía* reflects the unconditional desire for freedom and the willingness to stand up against those who take freedom for granted at any moment.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

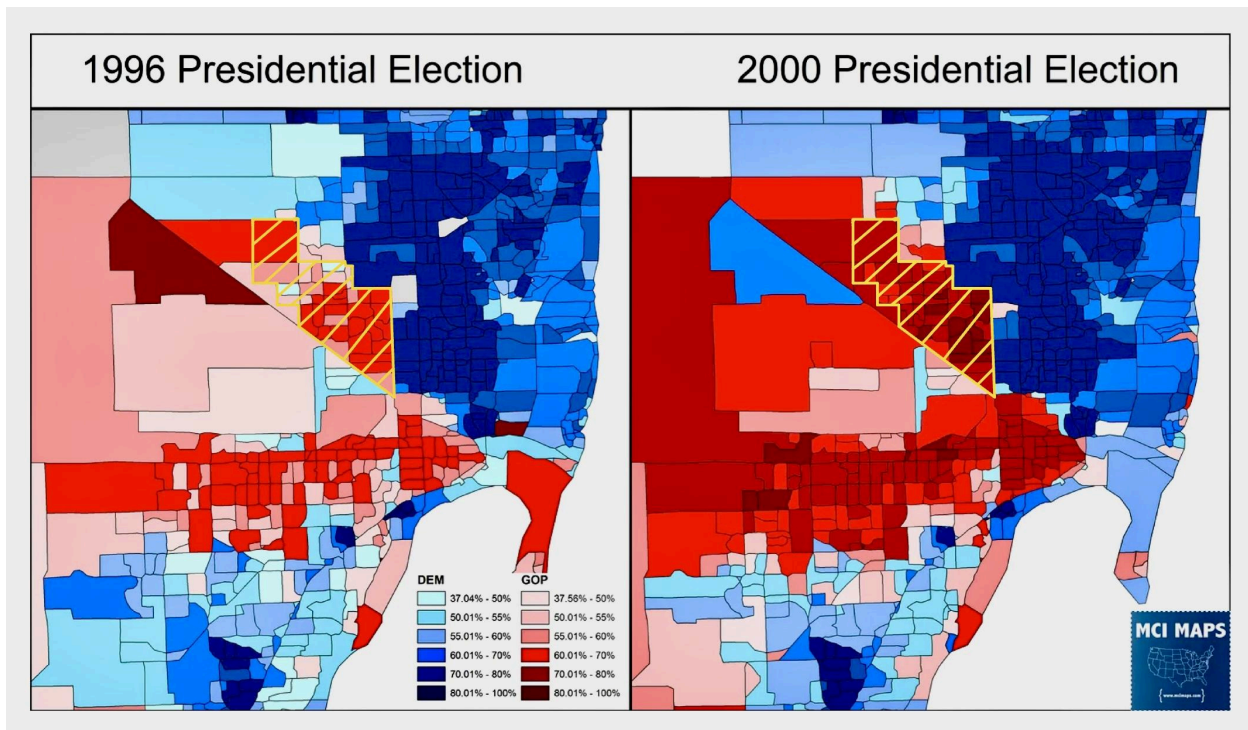


Figure 24: Maps illustrating the percentages received by the winning candidate of each precinct of Miami-Dade County in 1996 (left) and 2000 (right), with the municipal borders of the City of Hialeah outlined in yellow.¹⁷⁷ The results indicate significant gains for the Republican ticket in the Cuban American strongholds of Hialeah and La Sagüesera, estimated to represent a 13% shift to the right amongst Cuban Americans county-wide.¹⁷⁸ Also important to note is the increased partisanship among racial/ethnic lines, particularly along the border between the predominantly Cuban American Hialeah and the similarly lopsided African American communities known as Brownsville and Gladeview.

¹⁷⁷ Isbell, Matthew (2021)

¹⁷⁸ LeoGrande, William M., Annelle Sheline, George Beebe, Mark Episkopos, Anatol Lieven, and Steven Kosiak (2024)

IX. And Strike Three?: Strategy Proposals for Tackling Trumpism

*Mi gente sale a votar sin miedo a la calle
No te quede en la casa
Así que tú no me falles...
...Mano pa'riba a la gente
¡Ciudadana americana!...
...No me creo las mentiras que están volviendo en la televisión
Y aunque digan lo que digan
¡Mujeres por Donald Trump!...
—Los 3 de la Habana, “Canción de Trump,” 2020¹⁷⁹*

The principal success of Trumpism and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) Movement is that it has introduced the idea of the “Culture War” to communities of color, suggesting that they too must ensure the continued integrity of their daily ways of life from a left-wing that is in pursuit of large-scale, externally-forced change. From the lockdowns enacted nationwide as a response to COVID-19 to the sudden contention of “woke” policies in public spaces, it is now the cultural integrity of Cuban America that is perceived as being under threat.

That being said, the political integrity of Cuban America was under threat 25 years ago, and the social integrity of Cuban America was under threat 45 years ago. So no one ever *really* strikes out in American politics, and the same thing is true for the Democratic Party amongst Cuban Americans in Hialeah and in Miami-Dade County. While the three recent electoral cycles – all three with President Donald Trump spearheading the GOP ticket – have underlined a strong downward trend for Democratic candidates up and down the ballot, conducting this thorough historical analysis allows for a clear-eyed perspective on Trumpism and its ongoing electoral success. With a new view on the political landscape of Cuban America, one can now apply the lessons of the Democrats’ past electoral losses to today.

¹⁷⁹ Los 3 de la Habana (2020)

Yes, President Trump carried Hialeah by well over 50%. Yes, President Trump flipped Miami-Dade County for the first time since 1988, approved by at least 68% of its Cuban American electorate and a further 58% of Cuban Americans nationwide.¹⁸⁰ But as a Cuban American Democrat myself, I recognize that these results indicate nothing more than the political pendulum of the Cuban American electorate swinging in the favor of the Republican Party once again, as it has been doing since the 1960s. The only reason that today feels more grim than after past cycles is because, this time, both Cuban Americans *and* the working class have defected from the Democratic Party. The 2024 Presidential Election was the first time in recorded electoral history that voters whose income is greater than \$100,000 sided with the Democrats, while voters whose income is less than \$50,000 sided with the GOP.¹⁸¹ This realignment – anchored by a ten percent margin for Trump with Latino men¹⁸² – raises questions not only about economic factors pushing working class Americans away from the Democratic Party, but also about a more permanent schism on the grounds of increasingly divergent cultural values between urban and rural spaces, between white and blue-collar communities, and between Latino immigrants and their naturalized counterparts.

¹⁸⁰ CiberCuba (2024)

¹⁸¹ Kornacki, Steve (2024)

¹⁸² Cottom, Tressie McMillan (2024)

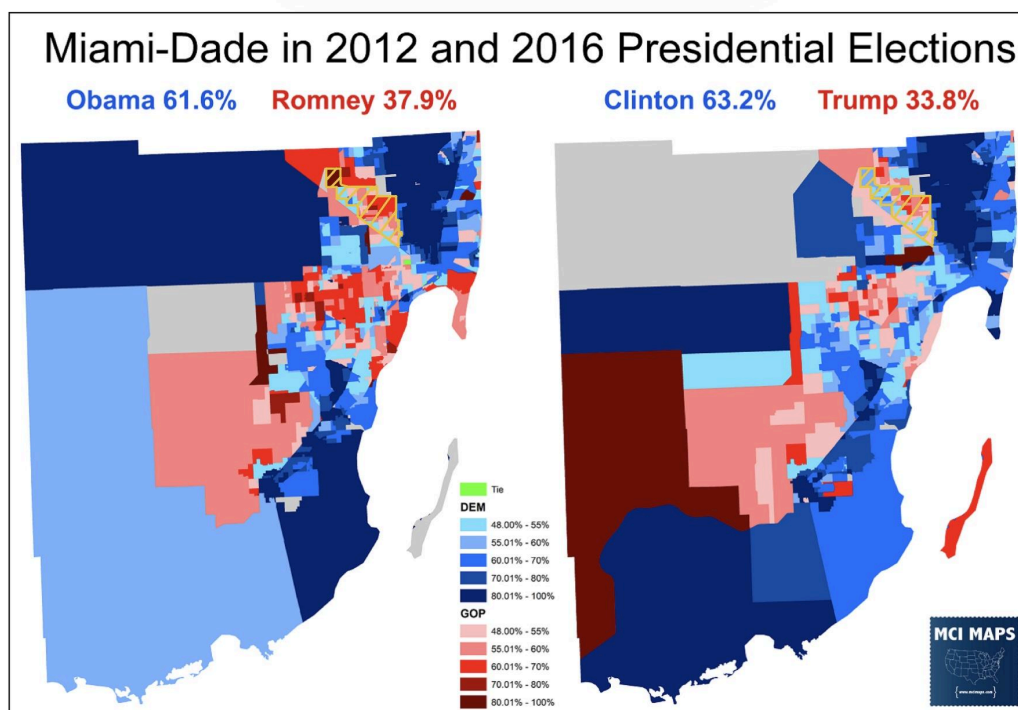


Figure 25: Maps illustrating the percentages received by the winning candidate of each precinct of Miami-Dade County in 2012 (left) and 2016 (right), with the municipal borders of the City of Hialeah outlined in yellow. The results indicate significant gains for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton from President Obama in both Hialeah and La Sagüesera, winning Little Havana and even being 93 votes short of winning Hialeah. With data evidence to support the argument that she won the Cuban American vote in Miami-Dade County, 2016 marks the best performance for a Democratic Presidential candidate amongst Cuban Americans 21st century.¹⁸³

As such, this section focuses on campaign strategies designed to regain the electoral trust of Cuban Americans. Each of the three proposed strategies utilizes the constructed historical narrative as a framework to apply data on contemporary public opinion acquired from both the Survey Questionnaire and the interviews with some respondents and public figures. Wherever applicable, a commentary on the potential generality of these strategies and their respective implementations to other Latino electorates across the United States will also be included.

¹⁸³ Isbell, Matthew (2024)

A. *Patria y Vida*: Internalize Cuban Affairs as a *Domestic* Policy Priority

*“A communist revolution won’t just happen to a place falling apart.
If it can happen [in Cuba], why can’t it happen here?”*
–Jesus Tundidor, Deputy Mayor and Councilman of the City of Hialeah, 2025

After evaluating the electoral history of the Democratic Party in Hialeah and in Miami-Dade through the last 50 years, the cliché that Democratic incumbents can never seem to be their own greatest advocates rings true now even more than it did previously. Between President Eisenhower’s approval of Operation Pedro Pan to the start of President Trump’s second term, only the Democrats have used the policy-making pen to address U.S.-Cuba relations and immigration every time that they have held possession of it, for better or for worse.

President Kennedy authorized the ongoing embargo after the failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs. President Lyndon Johnson passed the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966, the cornerstone piece of legislation that gave Cuban nationals the most favorable path to naturalization seen for any people group in the post-war era. President Carter restored travel to the island and approved the first wave of relatives to join their counterparts in the United States. President Clinton prevented further mass migration crises through the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” interpretation of the CAA. President Obama normalized diplomatic relations with the island, and President Biden reopened a legal path for the newest Cuban exiles via the CHNV Parole Program. Meanwhile, the only Republican President to substantively change U.S. immigration law with respect to Cuba is President Trump in his current (second) term. As of March 25, 2025, President Trump’s Administration has taken executive action to terminate CHNV. Although this action was designed to take full effect on April 24, 2025, a federal judge has since blocked its anticipated enforcement.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Weaver, Jay (2025)



Figure 26: June 2024 image of a billboard overlooking the Palmetto Expressway, just north of Hialeah's city limits. The billboard's message translates to, "No to dictators. No to Trump," drawing a direct comparison between Fidel Castro and Donald Trump. The billboard was met with outrage from Cuban Americans county-wide for the "offensive" message.¹⁸⁵

With this unbalanced executive record between the Republican and Democratic Parties, one must ask why is the Democratic apparatus so hesitant to boast their achievements in the same way that the GOP gleefully spreads their talking points on the airwaves of Cuban talk radio? The Democrats have the evidence to message their work for Cuban Americans in the affirmative, not needing to rely on the historical idleness of GOP administrations to proactively legislate and implement their agenda. Instead, the political left has chosen to link the MAGA Movement to authoritarianism and – at times – facism. While these arguments certainly have some merit, Democrats have yet to win a national election in the post-war era primarily with a message of fear for some other segment of the American population. In doing so, the historical fact that it was actually a Democratic President who signed the very bill granting Cuban

¹⁸⁵ Trujillo, Briana (2024)

Americans expedited citizenship has been largely forgotten in the communities who directly benefited from it most. Among those who forgot were all of the interviewed respondents, aside from the two Democrats in the sample. The only way this can be rectified is by messaging boldly and clearly the party's successes against the regime *for* the diaspora.

When you think of Fidel Castro's impact on your life, what best describes the first thing that comes to mind?

14 responses

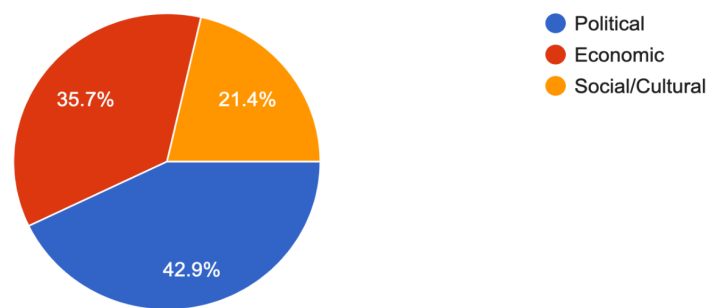


Figure 27: Results of Question 3.13 on the Survey Questionnaire. Respondents appear split on the primary dimension of the Cuban nation that Fidel's regime caused the most damage to.

Furthermore, as Figure 27 above suggests, Cuban Americans do not remember Fidel for just the politically-driven atrocities he committed. Rather, even this Republican-skewed sample recognizes the multi-dimensional damage the regime inflicted on the island, on its institutions, and on its inhabitants. This recognition is why The Cuban was built in the first place: to allocate a space for residents and visitors alike to internalize the breadth to which Fidel and his regime destroyed the canon of freedoms Cubans once had during the 1940s, a decade where Cuba was more prosperous and more secure than the United States. Even when naturalized in another country, it is a collective understanding that the diaspora must continue to be invested in the affairs of the island as if they were still living on it.

Therefore, presenting any agenda related to Cuban Affairs as some foreign relations matter inherently excludes Cuban American voices from the discussion of American politics. Every time that the Democratic Party draws a connection between Trumpism and authoritarian regimes outside of the United States, rather than highlighting their work for Cuban Americans and freedom-loving Cubans alike, the diaspora will reject their message on the grounds that the United States has not yet reached such a level of democratic instability. As is the case for many other Latino demographics in the U.S., particularly amongst those communities which are predominantly working class, they have definitely seen worse.¹⁸⁶

B. “*El que no la debe, no la teme:*” Smart Governance and Steadfast Messaging

“If I get five non-Cuban liberals in a room and I ask them, ‘What do you know about Cuba?’ Some will probably say, ‘Oh, their healthcare!’ And if you go ask a Cuban about healthcare, they’re like, ‘¿Qué?’ It’s always seen as taking away their political rights; it’s being weaponized.”
—Ana Sofía Peláez, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Miami Freedom Project, 2025

It is unfortunate that the very demographic the modern Democratic Party was built on, working class families “of color,” is among the most untrusting of the party today. Nonetheless, regaining the trust of this electorate – not just for working-class Cuban Americans – ultimately returns to a matter of catering the outreach strategy to fit the sensitivities of the target audience. More specifically, recent history has shown that Cuban Americans can and do approve of what would be considered *progressive* or even *socialist* policies, from Obamacare to the liberalization of abortion statutes.¹⁸⁷

That being said, supporting progressive policies does not guarantee the support of candidates or officials who identify under such a label. Moreover, recent election cycles have

¹⁸⁶ Dixon, Matt, and Gary Fineout (2020)

¹⁸⁷ Gouin, Kelly (2021, 3)

seen the Florida Democratic apparatus almost pretend that the Progressive and Democratic Socialist wings of the party are not present in the national discourse. The problem is that Cubans have seen this rhetoric used before.¹⁸⁸ While Fidel was in the Sierra Maestra throughout the mid-1950s, he would repeatedly assure the Cuban people that he was not a communist in any way. When asked about the scheduling of national elections in May 1960, he responded, “¿...elecciones? ...no nos interesa estarnos entreteniendo en esas cosas.”¹⁸⁹¹⁹⁰

Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement: Fidel Castro and the Democratic Party are one and the same.

14 responses

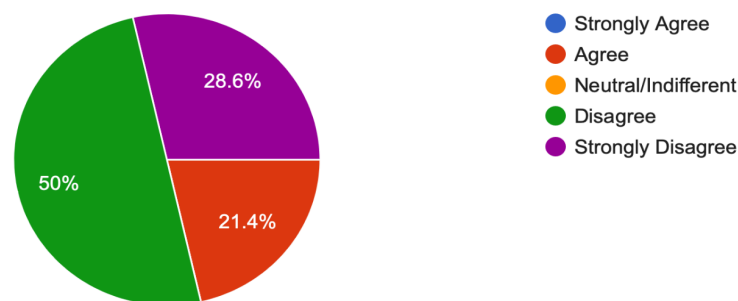


Figure 28: Results from Question 3.7 for the Survey Questionnaire. Contrary to what is projected across local information spaces (especially amongst Cuban talk radio stations), most Cuban Americans are able to identify a clear difference between the left-leaning Democratic Party in the United States and the Communist regime conceived by Fidel in Cuba. These voters, constituting the non-hardliners of the electorate, are not out of reach and can be engaged with.

The result is the reception of a collection of conspiracy theories, among them that Fidel’s Communist regime is making inroads in the American political system by disrupting the establishment of the Democratic Party.¹⁹¹ Given a history of uncertainty and instability on both

¹⁸⁸ Dixon, Matt, and Gary Fineout (2020)

¹⁸⁹ This roughly translates to English as the following: “...elections? ...we are not interested in wasting our time on those things.”

¹⁹⁰ American Museum of the Cuban Diaspora (2024)

¹⁹¹ Ramos, Paola (2024, 123)

the island and on the U.S. mainland, Cuban Americans are attracted to decisive rhetoric and a leader guided by a firm foundation. Ironically, however, the consequences of such a desire from their politicians have led Cuban Americans to support strongmen in large numbers, as shown in part by Figure 29. Both Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro were strongmen in Cuba, and so were Ronald Reagan and Raúl Martínez in the 1980s. Ron DeSantis and Donald Trump, too, present themselves as strongmen under the guise of patriotic individualism,¹⁹² so what part of their personas manage to attract the very demographic who suffered under very similar techniques?

When I presented this apparent contradiction to Hialeah Deputy Mayor Jesus Tundidor, asking for his opinion, he reflected on how the measure of a strongman in the democratic context is one who makes certain points and is *strong* about those points. Tundidor continues, noting how in his first candidacy for the Hialeah City Council in 2019, constituents exclaimed their support for him “...because of all the cr*p that [his opponents] are saying about [him].”

In this respect, President Trump and Governor DeSantis have succeeded to match this description of the democratic strongman through their respective campaigns against “woke” policies in the name of “common sense.” Moreover, their respective political strategies invite a rhetorical backlash from the opposition that prioritizes targeting them over endorsing an alternative policy proposal. Democrats would benefit greatly by reimagining what it means to be a Democrat in the affirmative sense, united by a set of values and policies that one is *for*, not just people that the party is against. Democrats could also moderate their messaging by framing their solutions to the “kitchen table issues” as being “common sense” in nature, not requiring a complex understanding of governmental affairs or private enterprise to communicate and justify to working class voters. Both strategies capitalize on the logistical conveniences of “rib

¹⁹² Kelly, William (2020)

relations” amongst Cuban Americans and Latinos generally, allowing for segments of the diaspora itself to be their own best communicators for, and champions of, the Democratic mission statement and the socially beneficial policies that are proposed to meet its ends.

Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement: I want a strongman in charge.

14 responses

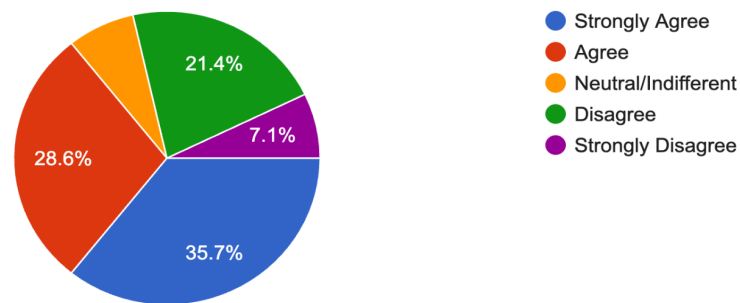


Figure 29: Results from Question 3.4 on the Survey Questionnaire. A majority of respondents indicated their support for a strongman to lead government in all levels, with a third agreeing with the statement almost unconditionally.

Cognizant of the mayorships of Alex Penelas and Raúl Martínez, Democrats can also learn from local officeholders in both parties with respect to building a national brand that is founded on smart and independent local governance. Because of the empowering role institutional completeness has played for the Cuban American way of life, electoral backlash is virtually guaranteed when their fundamentals are tampered with in any way. This was especially true following the initial lockdowns due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Unlike the rest of the country, both Hialeah and Miami-Dade County worked with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis to begin the reopening process in May, just one month after ordering a statewide lockdown.¹⁹³ This risky, yet decisive decision minimized the disturbance of the pandemic on one’s daily social

¹⁹³ Sexton, Christine (2020)

interactions at the *bodega* or the domino table. Moreover, it only took the current Mayor of Miami-Dade County, Daniella Levine Cava, two months to implement a full-scale COVID-19 vaccine operation.¹⁹⁴ Although these elected officials have vastly different ideologies, their successes can be attributed to their ability to independently work and communicate with the diaspora without interference from the national party, even deviating when necessary.

“...the seduction of buying into Whiteness has kept some Hispanic/Latino folks from understanding how much more they have in common with other communities of color. While it has helped some get ahead – Marco Rubio, Ted Cruz – at what cost? Buying into the melting pot of Whiteness means you may have to hide parts of your culture. It also does not protect folks from deportation policies among other issues, as some are learning the hard way right now.”
–Dr. Courtney Joseph, Professor of African American Studies at Lake Forest College, 2025

Finally, it is essential to note that *privilege* is a relative term, especially when used to describe communities “of color.” Hialeah (and much of Miami-Dade) is a place where Cuban Americans live in the majority, a place which they built largely from scratch, a place where non-Spanish speakers are the vulnerable population, and a place where they control a majority of the locality’s levers of municipal, county, state, and federal power. However, crossing the county line into neighboring Collier would place any Cuban American in the clear minority once again. The same is true for every race, ethnicity, and nationality in at least one place in the United States. For example, Christopher Monzon is the grandson of Cuban exiles who fled during the Revolution in the 1950s. Once known as the “Cuban Confederate,” he is a Hialeah native who joined the white supremacist group known as the League of the South in 2014.¹⁹⁵ He remained a member of this organization until 2018, when he became the subject of racially charged comments himself from the League’s leaders in their national conference in Alabama.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴ Batchelor, Amanda, Trent Kelly, and Christina Vazquez (2021)

¹⁹⁵ Ramos, Paola (2024, 196-197)

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. (198)

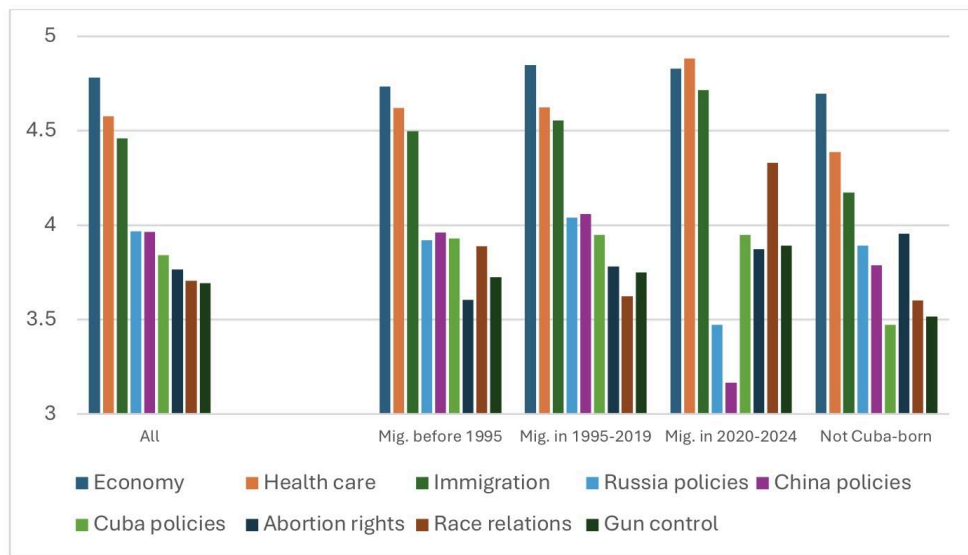


Figure 30: Graph quantifying the importance of identified issues amongst Cuban Americans in Miami-Dade County, according to migration wave. Amongst the most noticeable differences between migration waves is the drop in importance of Cuba policies for Cuban Americans born in the U.S., when compared to the three exile cohorts.

To this end, Democratic messaging to Cuban Americans in Hialeah and in Miami-Dade cannot be framed in such a way as to instill fear or a sense of *otherness* into the minds of those who hear it. This is particularly relevant with respect to the second and third generations of Cuban Americans, who in most cases have never seen the country of their ancestors themselves; they *only* know the United States. Perhaps their first language is more likely than not to be English, their cultural intake reflects the trends of Houston more than Havana, and their understanding on the state of affairs in Cuba is limited at best. Therefore, the priorities of these voters are just not the same as their parents or grandparents, who almost certainly have a stronger interest in America's relations with the island that they fled. It's not just an opposition to *communist* and/or *socialist* rhetoric, but rather a broader economic experience that reflects one of the average American citizen: prices are outpacing wages and higher education is increasingly becoming financially unattainable. Identifying these voters as *Latinos*, as opposed to potentially

more utilitarian indicators such as *students* or *renters*, communicates an unnecessarily exclusionary projection onto how their potential leaders see them and their role in the broader American demographic. Not only is such a label not receptive to the voter's concerns, but it is also not applicable to a city where being *Latino* is not a very distinguishing characteristic.

"The thing is that [the American political left] lump us up with that 'in-a-bubble' mindset, and that's what starts the Culture Wars."

José Suarez, Survey Questionnaire Respondent (Democrat), 2025

Moreover, Democratic interventions must be mindful that, even if they are engaging with a working class Cuban American community, it is very possible that those same voters were once a part of a higher socioeconomic class in Cuba. For example, there could be a businessman amongst the engaged that was successful on the island before the regime nationalized his product, losing his patents and wealth in the process. From this perspective, the hard-working businessman views the government as an unjust redistributor of wealth, so he would likely feel repelled by any messaging that implies a publicly-controlled reallocation of his tax dollars. As Figure 30 illustrates, a majority of the survey's respondents left behind a stable socioeconomic status on the island in favor of the pursuit of freedom. The worldviews of these respondents have been altered by their experiences with political, economic, and personal loss.¹⁹⁷ Therefore, meeting this (and any immigrant) constituency "where they are at" not only necessitates an understanding of their present situation and their aspirations, but also requires a recognition of the impact that their past standing elsewhere in the world has had on their perspectives held today. The trust of Cuban Americans and Latinos nationwide will be regained with an empathetic message that prioritizes their individual achievements in any proposed public intervention.

¹⁹⁷ Duany, Jorge (2014, 522)

How would you have considered your family's/your economic situation to be in Cuba PRIOR to Castro's regime?

14 responses

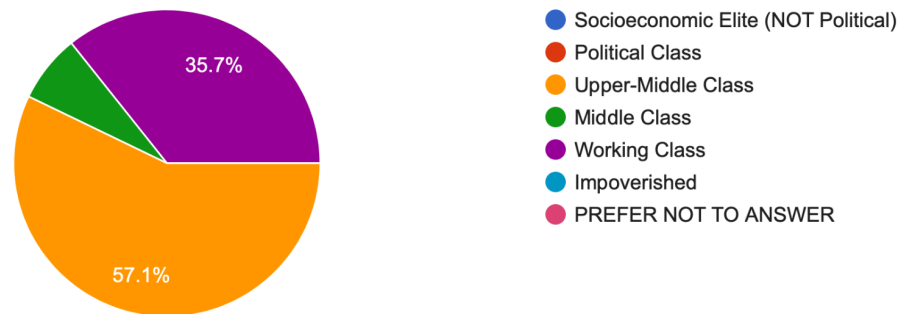


Figure 31: Results of Question 4.8 on the Survey Questionnaire. The purpose of this question was to draw a distinction between one's socioeconomic status in Cuba and their current socioeconomic status in Hialeah. Any distinction between the two suggests an implicit cost of freedom on the part of the respondent or their family.

C. “If You Don’t Ask, Then You Don’t Get:” Invest *Laterally!*

“When we were doing GOTV in 2022, I remember that I asked a large organization like ‘Oh, can you cut us some turf in Hialeah?’ ...But [a junior staffer] said, ‘There is no known voter universe in Hialeah’ ...If you are not talking to the people that are benefiting from the things you are preaching, then the problem is you not them...that person said the quiet part out loud.”
–Ana Sofía Peláez, Co-Founder & Executive Director of the Miami Freedom Project, 2025

One cannot have a strategy if they choose not to invest in it; no vote is given, and every vote is earned; you miss 100% of the shots that you don’t take. No matter how it is communicated by strategists and pundits, it is nearly impossible to win in the competitive battlegrounds of American politics without substantive and continuous investment. To this end, Executive Director Peláez’s comment reflects a reality on-the-ground that is not conducive of a victory for Democrats. Moreover, amongst all of the survey questionnaire respondents I interviewed, not one received any personalized product of political outreach from the Democratic Party in the 2022 or 2024 cycles. When one is not exposed to personalized

interventions by any political candidate and/or organization, the defaults of political ideology¹⁹⁸ and partisan affiliation act as the baseline rationale for how one casts their ballot.¹⁹⁹

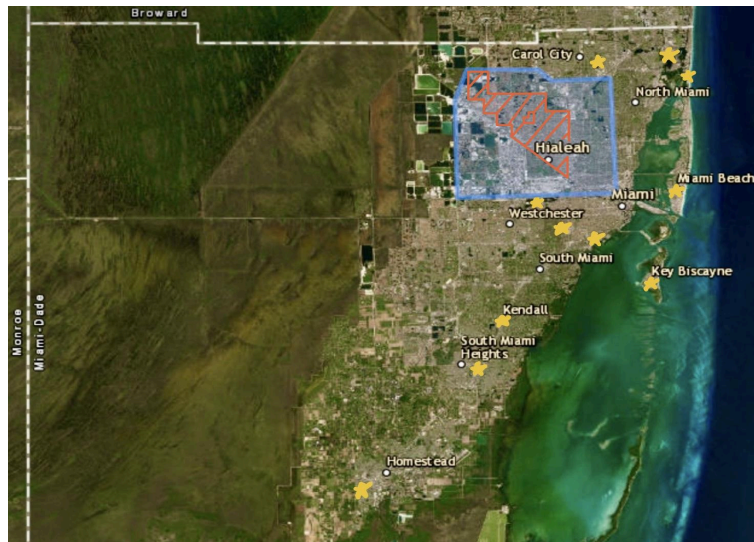


Figure 32: Map marking the localities with a municipal-level Democratic club listed in the official website for the Miami-Dade Democratic Party, each identified with a yellow star. The blue shaded region, with an estimated population of almost 600,000, contains zero municipal Democratic clubs. The City of Hialeah, identified in orange, carries a population of just over 220,000. Its city limits are entirely within the blue shaded region.

However, the answer is not allocating funds for initiatives spearheaded by the national party. Rather, Republicans have found great success in entrusting the county-level parties to use the allocated funds from the RNC as they see fit. Miami-Dade is no exception, as the Republican Party is known for their streamlined and accessible materials year round. For example, the Miami-Dade GOP has an organized calendar on its website, constantly updated according to the needs of the party; Miami-Dade Democrats have an outdated Google Spreadsheet. The Miami-Dade GOP has a down-ballot voter guide that is actively passed out by party volunteers as voters enter the perimeter of the polling place. Meanwhile, Miami-Dade Democrats do not

¹⁹⁸ The analytical grounds for one's political ideology can be found through the Downsian Spatial Model.

¹⁹⁹ Stewart, Charles Haines (2012, 190)

even have a club for any municipality in a nearly 110 square mile segment of land centered around Hialeah, as shown in Figure 32.

Instead, Democrats should utilize the sociological institutions of Hialeah to their advantage, as opposed to shying away from it. For this reason, I believe it is *lateral* – not vertical – investment that will mobilize Cuban Americans in favor of the Democratic cause. For example, “rib relations” – when used right – can become the best free source of political advertising one could ask for. Rather than investing millions of dollars into traditional TV ads, one can direct those funds to impromptu voter registration drives at the local *ventanita* or to a consistent stream of town halls, both aimed at organically boosting awareness of and confidence in the Democratic apparatus. After their happenings travel by word of mouth from family to family, the news of these events will eventually be covered by the hyper-partisan Cuban talk radio stations that have long been extensions of one’s interpersonal network, with 94% of all U.S. Latinos engaging with these information spaces at least once a month.²⁰⁰ And today, most Cuban Americans are active users of Facebook and Instagram, two platforms which only President Trump has truly maximized as places of self-validation for the whereabouts of both himself and his supporters.²⁰¹

Moreover, merely *owning* these talk radio stations or platforms is far from enough, as that is inherently a vertical investment that is detached from the sentiments of the communities with which such investments seek to affect. In the Cuban case, the acquisition of *Radio Mambí* by the Democratic-leaning Latino Media Network did nothing to change the hostility of the station towards the party and its platforms. If anything, *Radio Mambí* has only shifted further to the right in the years since. With an attentive audience and steadfast staff, only an organic shift in the local narrative would be able to influence the institution without risking the party’s image.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Cobo, Leila (2023)

²⁰¹ Cottom, Tressie McMillan (2024)

²⁰² Blanco, Ali (2024)

Hispanic/Latino Partisan Voter Registrations in Hialeah, 2008-2024

Source: Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections Office

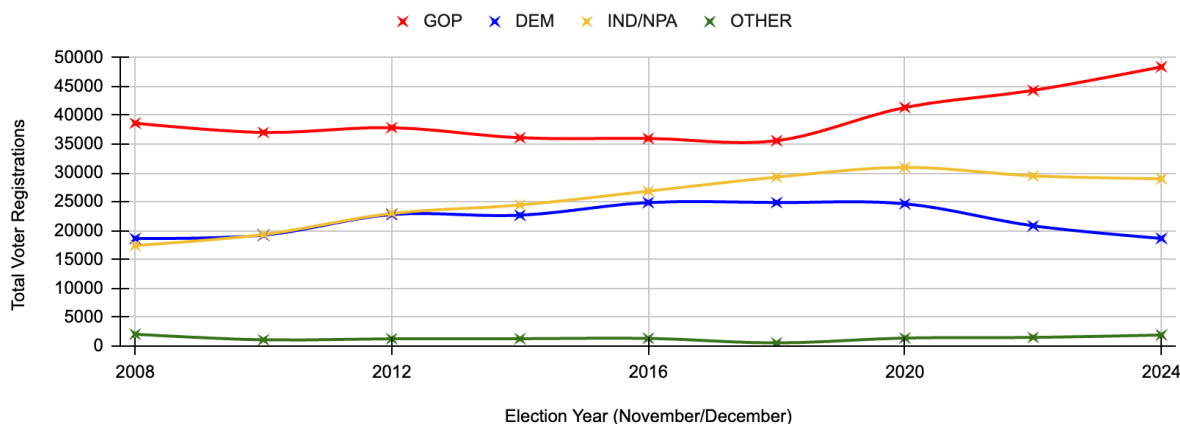


Figure 33.1: Graph depicting the total number of registrations amongst Hispanic/Latino eligible voters in Hialeah, FL from 2008-2024. As of 2024, there is a 30,000 vote advantage for the Republican Party over the Democrats, representing the largest difference between the two major parties in the 21st century. There are 97,943 Hispanic/Latino voters in Hialeah as of 2024, an increase of 21,211 voters from 2008.²⁰³

Partisan Voter Registration Totals in Hialeah Amongst 18-30 Year Olds, 2008-2024

Source: Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections Office

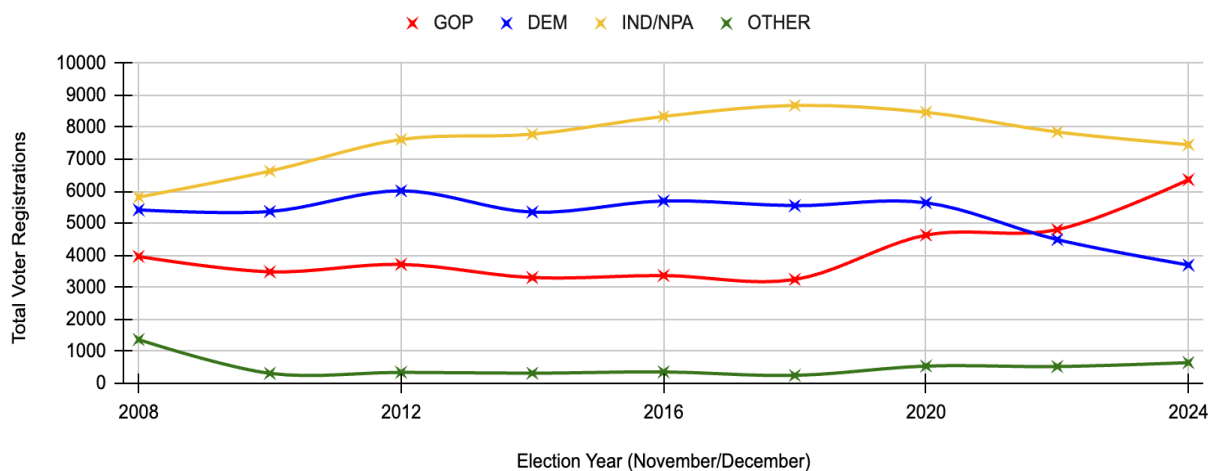


Figure 33.2: Graph depicting the total number of registrations amongst eligible voters aged 18-30 in Hialeah, FL from 2008-2024. As of 2024, there is a 2,666 vote advantage for the Republican Party over the Democrats. 2022 marked the first year that GOP voters aged 30 and under outnumbered Democrats of the same demographic, representing the broader rightward trend observed amongst Latino voters under 30 nationwide.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ The voter registration and demographic data used to create the graph and caption attached was sourced entirely from the Voter Registration Statistics page in the Miami-Dade County public website.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

X. Conclusion

Since their formalization into an organized electoral bloc in U.S. elections, Cuban Americans have always been a predominantly conservative-leaning demographic. However, this ideological harmony with the Republican Party has not always translated to political support, particularly when the Democratic apparatus is centered on their “kitchen table issues,” domestic items that generally appeal to broader audiences of American voters. Moreover, since the Cuban Revolution and until President Trump’s second term, Democratic incumbents in the federal executive have largely maintained the role of “First Mover” in the perpetual policy game against the GOP. As such, it has been the Democrats who have made it their prerogative to drive the affairs of the United States with respect to Cuba and its people. The result is an electorate that is always oscillating between the moderate wing of the Democratic Party and the more conservative wing of the Republican Party, contingent on how the undecided third votes.

This electoral oscillation modestly favored the Republican direction following President Eisenhower’s Operation *Pedro Pan* and the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961. The successes of LBJ’s Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 swung this metaphorical pendulum to the Democrats, only to be reversed following the electoral organization of Cuban Americans under the GOP banner in 1980. President Clinton proved that smart economic governance and a more responsive immigration policy works in securing at least 38% of the Cuban American vote in 1996. He validated his strategy when his administration governed in the exact *opposite* manner with respect to the custody crisis of Elián González in 2000. President Obama reintroduced smart Democratic governance on America’s “kitchen table issues,” with its electoral payoffs extending through 2016 with former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s convincing victory over President

Trump by 29% county-wide and a near tie in the otherwise very GOP-friendly Hialeah. Today, Trumpism has returned the electorate back into the firm control of the Republican Party.

The new sets of qualitative and quantitative data acquired highlights three conclusions that can be drawn from this historical narrative. First, there is the continuous failure of the Democratic Party's office holders to actively act against Fidel's regime at electorally critical moments. Furthermore, in recent years, there has been an active willingness by local and, to a lesser extent, state GOP incumbents to selectively break from the national party's line on what national Democrats perceive as "kitchen table issues." Finally, the sociological consequences of Hialeah (and, by extension, Miami-Dade County) transforming into the flagship institutionally-complete ethnic enclave for the Cuban diaspora in the United States cannot be understated. It is because of institutional completeness that the Catholic Church continues to act as a multi-faceted institutional body, one that carries a definitive presence in the cultural mindset of the Cuban American communities of Hialeah and Miami-Dade County. It is because of institutional completeness that Cuban Americans no longer see themselves as exiles from communism, but rather immigrants to the Land of Opportunity that they have actively capitalized on to its maximum extent through the exponential growth of the Miami MSA. It is because of institutional completeness that Cuban Americans need not be burdened by outside terms that identify them as the *other* before all else. Without the circumstances that made possible a reimagining of the physical and societal foundations through the lens of the first Cuban exiles, Miami would have never become the antithesis of Fidel's regime that it is known for today.

Reflecting on the academic progress made through this historical narrative on an evolving and maturing electorate, I cannot help but to begin to ponder a collection of more abstract questions in the American Experiment as realized by Latinos nationwide. Principal among them,

what does it mean to *assimilate* in America? By extension, what are the standards that society has set that constitute a *satisfactory* assimilation into the United States, and which *society* gets to set those standards? While the answers to these questions may seem clearly defined for the Honduran immigrant to Baton Rouge, Hialeah blurs the line between assimilation and resistance for the Cuban exile. Nowhere else in the United States can an urban municipality of this size effectively conduct its business entirely in a *foreign* language, except this language is not *foreign* within its city limits. With our own linguistically-recognized Miamian dialect, nowhere else in the United States has English been the language that needed to adapt to the norms of the community it serves. Nowhere else in the United States has international affairs been internalized into deciding local elections, and so on and so forth. So, does one really assimilate if there isn't much to assimilate *into*? I will allow further discourse to take it from here.

The United States is set to become a majority-minority country by 2045.²⁰⁵ While I am unable to generalize my recurrent sentiments on this process that defines the American Dream for every person who enters its gates, I firmly believe that Hialeah and Miami-Dade County have provided foresight into what this new era of America could look like. The history of South Florida is one of reimagining, as groups of a people constantly jockey for their catalog of labels to be the vernacular for the whole. However, as these groups become more similar than different in appearance, language, and class, there will always be one label that continues to capture these groups of a people in their summation. That label is *American*.

²⁰⁵ Ramos, Paola (2024, 185)

XI. Appendices

A. Hialeah Survey Questionnaire (English)

>>>NOTE: Please note that this appendix has been attached to this document directly as it was originally written and implemented, with adjusted spacing and each section's target word.

UChicago BA Thesis Survey Questionnaire

I appreciate your time in providing a moment of your time and attention to help me conduct this valuable research on the city and community we both call home. With you completing this survey, not only am I one step closer to graduating from the University of Chicago, but the Cuban American base in Miami can release one of its first homegrown messages on our culture, politics, and people to the American political, academic, and polling systems that have failed to “get us right” in their data analyses. As a Miami-born, Cuban American, Belen Jesuit alumnus who has traveled the country and world extensively over the last four years, I firmly believe that such a project is long overdue.

THIS SURVEY HAS 4 SECTIONS, WITH SECTION 4 ASKING RELEVANT BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION FOR DATA ANALYSIS. Please note that all of your responses are kept confidential and will only be used to present that data as one summary once dozens of people complete the survey. **YOU ARE NOT REQUIRED TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU ARE NOT COMFORTABLE ANSWERING. PLEASE UTILIZE THE “PREFER NOT TO ANSWER” OPTION IF THIS IS THE CASE.** If you would prefer a PDF version of this survey, or have any questions regarding this survey questionnaire, please email me at avizoso@uchicago.edu.

Furthermore, please note that all of your responses are kept anonymous **UNLESS** you are willing to be interviewed by myself (Alec) on why and how you answered the following questions the way you did.

Sincerely, thank you!
Alec Vizoso

IF YOU ARE WILLING/ABLE TO DISCUSS YOUR RESPONSES IN MORE DETAIL THROUGH A 15-30 MINUTE INTERVIEW, PLEASE WRITE YOUR NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION BELOW:

SECTION 1 (RELIGIOUS)

*Please answer the following questions **ONLY** according to what you believe and how you see yourself. **There is no right or wrong answer.***

1.) Do you consider yourself a “practicing” Christian?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not a Christian.

2.) How often do you attend Mass, Church service, Bible study, or any other formal Church event?

- ☐ At least daily
- ☐ Multiple times per week
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Once per month
- ☐ A few times per year
- ☐ Once per year
- ☐ Rarely/Never

3.) Did you attend a Catholic school at any point in your life?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

4.) Which of the following applies to you? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY:**

- ☐ You have a statue (perhaps of a Saint or the Virgin Mary) at your house or some other private place.
- ☐ You regularly donate to your local parish or charity.
- ☐ You regularly organize/participate in spiritually-motivated community service projects and events.
- ☐ You regularly carry/wear a rosary, cross, or some other spiritual item with you.
- ☐ You journal your thoughts for spiritual reasons.
- ☐ You regularly pray outside of formal settings (for example, prior to a meal).
- ☐ Your career path is/was partially because of a spiritual reason.
- ☐ NONE OF THE ABOVE

5.) Looking back at your answers to the previous four questions, why did you answer them the way that you did? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY:**

- ☐ Familial or Personal Responsibilities
- ☐ Work Schedule
- ☐ Personal, Familial, or Financial Challenges and/or Tragedy
- ☐ Community or Social Connections
- ☐ Cultural Tradition
- ☐ NOT CONNECTED TO "THE CHURCH" AS AN INSTITUTION

6.) Think of the times when you say something to the effect of the following, especially in contexts outside of formal spiritual institutions and spaces (ie, outside of Sunday Mass):

- “Oh, my God!” / “¡Ay, Dios mio!”
- “Bless you.” / “Salud.”
- “God bless you.” / “Dios te bendiga.”
- “[God/Lord] save me!” / “¡Sálvame!”
- “[God/Lord] I hope so.” / “Ojalá que sí.”

For these sayings and ones like these, to what extent are your use of the words *God* and *Lord* meant to be taken literally and/or spiritually? Please answer on a scale of 0 to 10.

- ☐ 0 – The word *God/Lord* IS NOT meant to be taken literally and/or spiritually.
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – The word *God/Lord* IS meant to be taken literally and/or spiritually.

7.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Morality comes from a spiritual place.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

8.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
What is right and wrong can be different from person to person (for example, differences in what is right and wrong for the rich and the poor).

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Humans are good.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

10.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
We should prioritize laws that encourage the good, rather than prioritizing those that discourage the bad.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

SECTION 2 (*FOREIGN*)

Please answer the following questions **ONLY** according to what you believe and how you see yourself. **There is no right or wrong answer.**

1.) On a scale of 0 to 10, select that number that you believe best describes your identity/affiliation to the term “Cuban.”

- ☐ 0 – I do not identify/affiliate with the term “Cuban.”
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – “Cuban” perfectly identifies who I am.

2.) On a scale of 0 to 10, select that number that you believe best describes your identity/affiliation to the term “American.”

- ☐ 0 – I do not identify/affiliate with the term “American.”
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – “American” perfectly identifies who I am.

3.) On a scale of 0 to 10, select that number that you believe best describes your identity/affiliation to the term “Cuban American.”

- ☐ 0 – I do not identify/affiliate with the term “Cuban American.”
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – “Cuban American” perfectly identifies who I am.

4.) Regardless of how you answered the previous three questions, would you feel the need to correct someone that identified you by any one of these terms?

MARK ALL THAT APPLY:

- ☐ Cuban
- ☐ American
- ☐ Cuban American
- ☐ NONE OF THE ABOVE

5.) Building off of the previous responses, do you associate yourself more with the typical Cuban living on the island **OR** with the typical American?

- ☐ The typical Cuban living on the island.
- ☐ The typical American.
- ☐ I associate myself equally between the two.

6.) From the previous question, what is the “typical American” to you? Please select only **ONE** answer per category.

- RACE/ETHNICITY

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Asian American/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Hispanic/Latino
- ☐ Middle Eastern/North African
- ☐ American Indian/Native American
- ☐ MIXED
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- AGE

- ☐ 18-29
- ☐ 30-44
- ☐ 45-64
- ☐ 65+
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- SEX/GENDER

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- MILITARY STATUS

- ☐ Active Duty
- ☐ Reserve
- ☐ Veteran
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- REGION

- ☐ New England
- ☐ Mid-Atlantic
- ☐ South
- ☐ Midwest
- ☐ Mountain West
- ☐ West Coast
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- LIFESTYLE

- ☐ Urban
- ☐ Suburban
- ☐ Rural
- ☐ Nomad
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- MARITAL STATUS

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Married (Living Together)
- ☐ Married (Separated)
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- INCOME

- ☐ <\$60,000
- ☐ \$60,000 – \$100,000
- ☐ \$100,000 – \$200,000
- ☐ >\$200,000
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- OCCUPATION
 - ☐ Blue-Collar
 - ☐ White-Collar
 - ☐ Student
 - ☐ Armed Forces
 - ☐ Unemployed
 - ☐ Retired
 - ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- PROPERTY OWNERSHIP
 - ☐ Rent
 - ☐ Own
 - ☐ OTHER
 - ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- SPANISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY
 - ☐ 0 – Non-Speaker
 - ☐ 1
 - ☐ 2
 - ☐ 3
 - ☐ 4
 - ☐ 5 – Intermediate
 - ☐ 6
 - ☐ 7
 - ☐ 8
 - ☐ 9
 - ☐ 10 – Native Speaker
 - ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- PARTISAN AFFILIATION
 - ☐ Republican
 - ☐ Democrat
 - ☐ Independent/Non-Partisan Affiliated (NPA)
 - ☐ OTHER
 - ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- SOCIAL/CULTURAL IDEOLOGY

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- ECONOMIC IDEOLOGY

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

- OPINION OF THE UNITED STATES TODAY

- ☐ Very Positive
- ☐ Positive
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Negative
- ☐ Very Negative
- ☐ NOT RELEVANT

7.) If Cuba were to be re-democratized, would you want to go to the island?

- ☐ Yes, I would move back permanently.
- ☐ Yes, I would live between Cuba and the U.S.
- ☐ Yes, I would visit Cuba.
- ☐ No, I would not under any circumstance.
- ☐ I am unsure.

SECTION 3 (SOCIALISM)

Please answer the following questions **ONLY** according to what you believe and how you see yourself. **There is no right or wrong answer.**

- 1.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
The United States of America is the greatest country in the world.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

- 2.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Racism is built into the history and foundation of the United States.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

- 3.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Government should help the least fortunate and most vulnerable among us.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

4.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
I want a strongman in charge.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

5.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
I do not trust the government, regardless of who is in charge.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

6.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Socialism and communism are the same thing.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

7.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
Fidel Castro and the Democratic Party are one and the same.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

8.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
In general, all Americans have America's best interests at heart.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

9.) Do you approve or disapprove of the word *Latinx/e*?

- ☐ Strongly Approve
- ☐ Approve
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disapprove
- ☐ Strongly Disapprove

10.) Indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement to the following statement:
The United States of America is a Judeo-Christian nation.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

11.) Based on familial knowledge and/or lived experience, what was/would've been your view on Fidel Castro **BEFORE** taking power in 1959?

- ☐ Strongly Support
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Against
- ☐ Strongly Against

12.) Based on familial knowledge and/or lived experience, what was/would've been your view on **Fulgencio Batista** in the 1950s?

- ☐ Strongly Support
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Neutral/Indifferent
- ☐ Against
- ☐ Strongly Against

13.) When you think of Fidel Castro's impact on your life, what best describes the first thing that comes to mind? Please mark only **ONE** response.

- ☐ Political
- ☐ Economic
- ☐ Social/Cultural

SECTION 4: GENERAL BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1.) Birthplace (If you were born in Miami-Dade County, BE SPECIFIC!)

2.) Date of Birth (Your birth year is enough!)

3.) Sex/Gender

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

4.) Race **INDEPENDENT** of Hispanic/Latino. **MARK ALL THAT APPLY:**

- ☐ White
- ☐ Black/African American
- ☐ Asian American/Pacific Islander
- ☐ Middle Eastern/North African
- ☐ American Indian/Native American
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

5.) Generations Removed from Cuban Ancestry (If you are **NOT** an immigrant, answer based on the relative with whom you have the closest relationship with.)

- ☐ 0 (The respondent IS the immigrant.)
- ☐ 1 (First Generation, Child of Cuban Immigrant(s))
- ☐ 2 (Second Generation, Grandchild of Cuban Immigrant(s))
- ☐ 3 (Third Generation, Great-Grandchild of Cuban Immigrant(s))
- ☐ More than 3 generations removed...

6.) When did you (or the relative used in the previous question) leave Cuba?

7.) Did you live elsewhere in the United States before Hialeah?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

8.) How would you have considered your family's/your economic situation to be in Cuba **PRIOR** to Castro's regime?

- ☐ Socioeconomic Elite (NOT Political)
- ☐ Political Class
- ☐ Upper-Middle Class
- ☐ Middle Class
- ☐ Working Class
- ☐ Impoverished
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

9.) Are you fully of Cuban descent? **(NOTE: If you were not born in Cuba, are both of your parents **OR** all of your grandparents born in Cuba?)**

☐ Yes

☐ No

10.) How do you communicate with Cubans on the island? **MARK ALL THAT APPLY:**

☐ Facebook

☐ Call/Text/Whatsapp

☐ Email

☐ Letters

☐ Financial Transfers (ie, Sending Money, etc.)

☐ Volunteer/Vocational Service

☐ OTHER

☐ NO COMMUNICATION

11.) Educational Attainment

☐ Some High School

☐ High School Diploma or Equivalent

☐ Some College, AA, or Equivalent

☐ BA or Equivalent

☐ MA or Equivalent

☐ PhD

☐ Professional Degree (MD/JD)

☐ N/A

☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

12.) Marital Status

☐ Single

☐ Married (Living Together)

☐ Married (Separated)

☐ Divorced

☐ Widowed

☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

13.) Are you enrolled in any need-based government assistance programs?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

14.) Partisan Affiliation

- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Democrat
- ☐ Independent/Non-Partisan Affiliated (NPA)
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

15.) Have you ever changed your partisan affiliation? If so, when/why?

- ☐ Yes:

-
- ☐ No, I have never changed my partisan affiliation.
 - ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

16.) Political Ideology **INDEPENDENT** of Partisan Affiliation

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

17.) Social/Cultural Ideology **INDEPENDENT** of Partisan Affiliation

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

18.) Economic Ideology **INDEPENDENT** of Partisan Affiliation

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderate
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservative
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

19.) Who did you vote for President in 1976?

- ☐ Gerald Ford
- ☐ Jimmy Carter
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

20.) Who did you vote for President in 1980?

- ☐ Ronald Reagan
- ☐ Jimmy Carter
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

21.) Who did you vote for President in 1996?

- ☐ Bob Dole
- ☐ Bill Clinton
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

22.) Who did you vote for President in 2000?

- ☐ George W. Bush (Bush 43)
- ☐ Al Gore
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

23.) Who did you vote for President in 2012?

- ☐ Mitt Romney
- ☐ Barack Obama
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

24.) Who did you vote for President in 2016?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Hillary Clinton
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

25.) Who did you vote for President in 2020?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Joe Biden
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

26.) Who did you vote for President in 2024?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Kamala Harris
- ☐ OTHER
- ☐ DID NOT VOTE
- ☐ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

27.) Do you listen to the radio? If so, which stations?

☐ Yes:

☐ No, I do not listen to the radio.

28.) Do you use social media as a source of information? If so, which platforms and people?

☐ Yes:

☐ No, I do not use social media as a source of information.

29.) Do you listen to any podcasts? If so, which ones?

☐ Yes:

☐ No, I do not listen to any podcasts.

30.) Who/what has had the greatest impact on your beliefs as they are today?

B. Hialeah Survey Questionnaire (Spanish)

****NOTE: Please note that this appendix has been attached to this document directly as it was originally written and implemented, with adjusted spacing and each section's target word.*

Encuesta de Hialeah para la tesis de UChicago

Yo agradezco su tiempo y su atención para ayudarme a realizar esta valiosa investigación sobre la ciudad y la comunidad que llamamos nuestro hogar. Al completar esta encuesta, no solamente estoy un paso más cerca de graduarme de la Universidad de Chicago, pero también la base cubanoamericana en Miami podría publicar uno de sus primeros mensajes locales sobre nuestra cultura, política y historia a los sistemas políticos y académicos estadounidenses que no han logrado entendernos bien en sus estudios. Como un cubanoamericano de Miami, que es un exalumno de Belén y que ha viajado por el país y por todo el mundo durante los últimos cuatro años, creo firmemente que este trabajo debería ser hecho.

ESTA ENCUESTA TIENE 4 SECCIONES, CON LA CUARTA PREGUNTANDO POR LA INFORMACIÓN BIOGRÁFICA RELEVANTE PARA HACER EL ANÁLISIS DE DATOS. Por favor, tenga en cuenta que todas sus respuestas se mantienen confidenciales y sólo se utilizarán para presentar los datos como un resumen de la muestra entera cuando docenas de personas completen la encuesta. **USTED NO ESTÁ OBLIGADO A RESPONDER A CUALQUIER PREGUNTA QUE NO SE SIENTA CÓMODO A CONTESTAR. SI ESTE ES EL CASO, POR FAVOR UTILICE LA OPCIÓN “PREFIERO NO RESPONDER.”** Si usted prefiere la versión PDF de esta encuesta o si tiene cualquier pregunta sobre la encuesta, por favor mándame un correo electrónico a avizoso@uchicago.edu.

Además, por favor tenga en cuenta que todas sus respuestas se mantienen anónimas **A MENOS QUE** usted esté dispuesto a ser entrevistado por mí mismo (Alec) sobre los porqués y cómo respondió a las siguientes preguntas de la manera en que lo hizo.

Sinceramente, ¡muchísimas gracias!
Alec Vizoso

SI USTED ESTARÍA DISPUESTO PARA HABLAR SOBRE SUS RESPUESTAS CON MÁS DETALLE A TRAVÉS DE UNA ENTREVISTA DE 15-30 MINUTOS, POR FAVOR ESCRIBE SU NOMBRE Y INFORMACIÓN DE CONTACTO ABAJO:

SECCIÓN 1 (RELIGIOSO/A)

*Por favor, responda las siguientes preguntas **SOLAMENTE** según lo que usted cree y cómo se ve a sí mismo. **No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas.***

1.) ¿Se considera un cristiano "practicante"?

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No
- ☐ No soy cristiano.

2.) ¿Con qué frecuencia asiste a la misa, al servicio de la iglesia, al estudio de la Biblia u otro evento formal de la iglesia?

- ☐ Al menos diariamente
- ☐ Varias veces por semana
- ☐ Semanalmente
- ☐ Una vez por mes
- ☐ Algunas veces al año
- ☐ Una vez al año
- ☐ Rara vez/Nunca

3.) ¿Asistió a una escuela católica en algún momento de su vida?

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No
- ☐ No estoy seguro.

4.) ¿Cuál de las siguientes opciones se aplica a usted? **MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA:**

- ☐ Tengo una estatua (tal vez de un santo o la Virgen María) en mi casa u otro lugar privado.
- ☐ Regularmente dono a mi parroquia local o a la caridad.
- ☐ Regularmente organizo/participo en proyectos y eventos de servicio comunitario con motivación espiritual.
- ☐ Regularmente llevo/uso un rosario, cruz u otro objeto espiritual conmigo.
- ☐ Escribo mis pensamientos con motivos espirituales.
- ☐ Rezo regularmente fuera de entornos formales (por ejemplo, antes de una comida).
- ☐ Mi carrera fue/es parcialmente debido a una razón espiritual.
- ☐ NUNCA DE LOS ANTERIORES

5.) Al mirar sus respuestas a las cuatro preguntas anteriores, ¿por qué respondió de esa manera? **MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA:**

- ☐ Responsabilidades familiares o personales
- ☐ Horario de trabajo
- ☐ Fracasos y/o tragedias personales, familiares o financieras
- ☐ Conexiones comunitarias o sociales
- ☐ Tradiciones culturales
- ☐ NO ESTOY CONECTADO CON "LA IGLESIA" COMO UNA INSTITUCIÓN

6.) Piense en las ocasiones en las que dice algo como lo siguiente, especialmente en contextos fuera de instituciones y espacios espirituales formales (por ejemplo, fuera de la misa dominical):

- "Oh, my God!" / "¡Ay, Dios mío!"
- "Bless you." / "Salud."
- "God bless you." / "Dios te bendiga."
- "[God/Lord] save me!" / "¡Sálvame!"
- "[God/Lord] I hope so." / "Ojalá que sí."

Para estas expresiones y otras similares, ¿en qué medida el uso de las palabras *Dios* y *Señor* se debe tomar literalmente y/o espiritualmente? Por favor, responda en una escala del 0 al 10.

- ☐ 0 – La palabra *Dios/Señor* NO debe tomarse literalmente y/o espiritualmente.
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – La palabra *Dios/Señor* debe tomarse literalmente y/o espiritualmente.

7.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Lo que está bien y mal provienen de un lugar espiritual.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

8.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Lo que está bien y mal puede ser diferente de persona a persona (por ejemplo, diferencias en lo que está bien y mal para los ricos y los pobres).

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

9.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Los humanos son buenos.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

10.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Deberíamos priorizar leyes que fomenten el bien, en lugar de priorizar aquellas que desalientan el mal.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

SECCIÓN 2 (EXTRANJERO/A)

Por favor, responda las siguientes preguntas **SOLAMENTE** según lo que usted cree y cómo se ve a sí mismo. **No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas.**

1.) En una escala del 0 al 10, seleccione el número que cree que mejor describe su identidad/afiliación con el término "cubano."

- ☐ 0 – No me identifico/afilio con el término "cubano."
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – "Cubano" identifica perfectamente quién soy.

2.) En una escala del 0 al 10, seleccione el número que cree que mejor describe su identidad/afiliación con el término "americano."

- ☐ 0 – No me identifico/afilio con el término "americano."
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – "Americano" identifica perfectamente quién soy.

3.) En una escala del 0 al 10, seleccione el número que cree que mejor describe su identidad/afiliación con el término "cubanoamericano."

- ☐ 0 – No me identifico/afilio con el término "cubanoamericano."
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – "Cubanoamericano" identifica perfectamente quién soy.

4.) Independientemente de cómo respondió las tres preguntas anteriores, ¿sentiría la necesidad de corregir a alguien que lo identificó con alguno de estos términos? **MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA:**

- ☐ Cubano
- ☐ Americano
- ☐ Cubano-americano
- ☐ NINGUNO DE LOS ANTERIORES

5.) Basado en las respuestas anteriores, ¿se asocia más con el típico cubano que vive en la isla **O** con el típico americano?

- ☐ El típico cubano que vive en la isla.
- ☐ El típico americano.
- ☐ Me asocio por igual entre los dos.

6.) Según la pregunta anterior, ¿qué es para usted el "típico americano?" Por favor, seleccione solo **UNA** respuesta por categoría.

- RAZA/ETNICIDAD

- ☐ Blanco
- ☐ Negro/ Afroamericano
- ☐ Asiático americano / Isleño del Pacífico
- ☐ Hispano / Latino
- ☐ Medio Oriente / África del Norte
- ☐ Indio (Nativo Americano) / Indígena
- ☐ MEZCLA
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- EDAD

- ☐ 18-29
- ☐ 30-44
- ☐ 45-64
- ☐ 65+
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- SEXO/GÉNERO

- ☐ Masculino
- ☐ Femenino
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- ESTATUS MILITAR

- ☐ En servicio activo
- ☐ Reserva
- ☐ Veterano
- ☐ Familiar
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- REGIÓN
 - ☐ Nueva Inglaterra
 - ☐ Medio Atlántico
 - ☐ Sur
 - ☐ Medio Oeste
 - ☐ Oeste de las Montañas
 - ☐ Costa Oeste
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- ESTILO DE VIDA
 - ☐ Urbano
 - ☐ Suburbano
 - ☐ Rural
 - ☐ Nómada
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- ESTADO CIVIL
 - ☐ Soltero
 - ☐ Casado (viviendo juntos)
 - ☐ Casado (separado)
 - ☐ Divorciado
 - ☐ Viudo
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- INGRESOS
 - ☐ <\$60,000
 - ☐ \$60,000 – \$100,000
 - ☐ \$100,000 – \$200,000
 - ☐ >\$200,000
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- OCUPACIÓN
 - ☐ Trabajo manual
 - ☐ Trabajo de oficina
 - ☐ Estudiante
 - ☐ Fuerzas armadas
 - ☐ Desempleado
 - ☐ Jubilado
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- PROPIEDAD
 - ☐ Alquiler
 - ☐ Propiedad
 - ☐ OTRO
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- DOMINIO DEL IDIOMA ESPAÑOL
 - ☐ 0 – No hablante
 - ☐ 1
 - ☐ 2
 - ☐ 3
 - ☐ 4
 - ☐ 5 – Intermedio
 - ☐ 6
 - ☐ 7
 - ☐ 8
 - ☐ 9
 - ☐ 10 – Hablante nativo

- AFILIACIÓN PARTIDISTA
 - ☐ Republicano
 - ☐ Demócrata
 - ☐ Independiente/No Afiliado (NPA)
 - ☐ OTRO
 - ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- IDEOLOGÍA SOCIAL/CULTURAL

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderado
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservador
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- IDEOLOGÍA POLÍTICA

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderado
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservador
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- IDEOLOGÍA ECONÓMICA

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderado
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservador
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

- OPINIÓN DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS HOY

- ☐ Muy Positiva
- ☐ Positiva
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ Negativa
- ☐ Muy Negativa
- ☐ NO RELEVANTE

7.) Si Cuba fuera redemocratizada, ¿te gustaría ir a la isla?

- ☐ Sí, me mudaría de vuelta permanentemente.
- ☐ Sí, viviría entre Cuba y los Estados Unidos.
- ☐ Sí, visitaría Cuba.
- ☐ No, no iría bajo ninguna circunstancia.
- ☐ No estoy seguro.

SECCIÓN 3 (SOCIALISMO)

Por favor, responda a las siguientes preguntas **SOLAMENTE** de acuerdo a lo que usted cree y cómo se ve a sí mismo. **No hay una respuesta correcta o incorrecta.**

1.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Los Estados Unidos de América es el mejor país del mundo.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

2.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

El racismo está incrustado en la historia y fundación de los Estados Unidos.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

3.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

El gobierno debería ayudar a los menos afortunados y a los más vulnerables entre nosotros.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

4.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:
Quiero a un “hombre fuerte” a cargo.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

5.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:
No confío en el gobierno, independientemente de quién esté a cargo.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

6.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:
El socialismo y el comunismo son la misma cosa.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

7.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:
Fidel Castro y el Partido Demócrata son lo mismo.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

8.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

En general, todos los estadounidenses tienen los mejores intereses de América en el corazón.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

9.) ¿Aprueba o desaprueba la palabra *Latinx/e*?

- ☐ Totalmente aprueba
- ☐ Aprueba
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ Desaprueba
- ☐ Totalmente desaprueba

10.) Indique su grado de acuerdo o desacuerdo con la siguiente afirmación:

Los Estados Unidos de América es una nación judeocristiana.

- ☐ Totalmente de acuerdo
- ☐ De acuerdo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En desacuerdo
- ☐ Totalmente en desacuerdo

11.) Basado en el conocimiento familiar y/o experiencia vivida, ¿cuál era/sería su opinión sobre Fidel Castro **ANTES** de tomar el poder en 1959?

- ☐ Apoyo total
- ☐ Apoyo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En contra
- ☐ Totalmente en contra

12.) Basado en el conocimiento familiar y/o experiencia vivida, ¿cuál era/sería su opinión sobre **Fulgencio Batista** en los años '50?

- ☐ Apoyo total
- ☐ Apoyo
- ☐ Neutral/Indiferente
- ☐ En contra
- ☐ Totalmente en contra

13.) Cuando piensas en el impacto de Fidel Castro en tu vida, ¿qué describe mejor lo primero que te viene a la mente?

- ☐ Político
- ☐ Económico
- ☐ Social/Cultural

SECCIÓN 4: INFORMACIÓN BIOGRÁFICA GENERAL

1.) Lugar de nacimiento (Si naciste en el Condado de Miami-Dade, ¡SE ESPECÍFICO!)

2.) Fecha de nacimiento (¡El año de nacimiento es suficiente!)

3.) Sexo/Género

- ☐ Masculino
- ☐ Femenino
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

4.) Raza **INDEPENDIENTE** de hispano/latino. **MARQUE TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA:**

- ☐ Blanco
- ☐ Negro / Afroamericano
- ☐ Asiático / Isleño del Pacífico
- ☐ Medio Oriente / África del Norte
- ☐ Indio (Nativo Americano) / Indígena
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

5.) Generaciones alejadas de la ascendencia cubana (Si **NO** eres inmigrante, responde en función del pariente con el que tienes la relación más cercana).

- ☐ 0 (El encuestado ES el/la inmigrante.)
- ☐ 1 (Primera Generación, Hijo/a de Inmigrante(s) Cubano(s))
- ☐ 2 (Segunda Generación, Nieto/a de Inmigrante(s) Cubano(s))
- ☐ 3 (Tercera Generación, Bisnieto/a de Inmigrante(s) Cubano(s))
- ☐ Más de 3 generaciones alejadas...

6.) ¿Cuándo dejaste (o el pariente utilizado en la pregunta anterior) Cuba?

7.) Has vivido en otro lugar en los EE.UU. antes que Hialeah?

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No

8.) ¿Cómo considerarías la situación económica de tu familia/tuya en Cuba **ANTES** del régimen de Castro?

- ☐ Elite Socioeconómica (NO Política)
- ☐ Clase Política
- ☐ Clase Media Alta
- ☐ Clase Media
- ☐ Clase Trabajadora
- ☐ Empobrecido
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

9.) ¿Eres completamente de ascendencia cubana? **(NOTA: Si no naciste en Cuba, ¿ambos de tus padres O todos tus abuelos nacieron en Cuba?)**

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No

10.) ¿Cómo te comunicas con los cubanos en la isla? **MARCA TODO LO QUE CORRESPONDA:**

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Llamada/Texto/Whatsapp
- ☐ Correo Electrónico
- ☐ Cartas
- ☐ Transferencias Financieras (Es decir, enviar dinero, etc.)
- ☐ Servicio Voluntario/Vocacional
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO HAY COMUNICACIÓN

11.) Logro Educativo

- ☐ Algo de Secundaria
- ☐ Diploma de Secundaria o Equivalente
- ☐ Algo de Universidad, AA o Equivalente
- ☐ Licenciatura (BA) o Equivalente
- ☐ Maestría (BA) o Equivalente
- ☐ Doctorado (PhD)
- ☐ Grado Profesional (MD/JD)
- ☐ N/A
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

12.) Estado Civil

- ☐ Soltero/a
- ☐ Casado/a (Viviendo Juntos)
- ☐ Casado/a (Separados)
- ☐ Divorciado/a
- ☐ Viudo/a
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

13.) ¿Estás inscrito en algún programa de asistencia gubernamental basado en necesidades?

- ☐ Sí
- ☐ No
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

14.) Afiliación Partidista

- ☐ Republicano/a
- ☐ Demócrata
- ☐ Independiente / No Afiliado/a (NPA)
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

15.) ¿Ha cambiado su afiliación partidista? Si es el caso, ¿por qué y cuándo?

☐ Sí:

☐ No, nunca he cambiado mi afiliación partidista.

☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

16.) Ideología Política **INDEPENDIENTE** de Afiliación Partidista

☐ 0 – Liberal

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5 – Moderado

☐ 6

☐ 7

☐ 8

☐ 9

☐ 10 – Conservador

☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

17.) Ideología Social/Cultural **INDEPENDIENTE** de Afiliación Partidista

☐ 0 – Liberal

☐ 1

☐ 2

☐ 3

☐ 4

☐ 5 – Moderado

☐ 6

☐ 7

☐ 8

☐ 9

☐ 10 – Conservador

☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

18.) Ideología Económica **INDEPENDIENTE** de Afiliación Partidista

- ☐ 0 – Liberal
- ☐ 1
- ☐ 2
- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5 – Moderado
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 9
- ☐ 10 – Conservador
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

19.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 1976?

- ☐ Gerald Ford
- ☐ Jimmy Carter
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

20.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 1980?

- ☐ Ronald Reagan
- ☐ Jimmy Carter
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

21.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 1996?

- ☐ Bob Dole
- ☐ Bill Clinton
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

22.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 2000?

- ☐ George W. Bush (Bush 43)
- ☐ Al Gore
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

23.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 2012?

- ☐ Mitt Romney
- ☐ Barack Obama
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

24.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 2016?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Hillary Clinton
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

25.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 2020?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Joe Biden
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

26.) ¿Por quién votaste para Presidente en 2024?

- ☐ Donald Trump
- ☐ Kamala Harris
- ☐ OTRO
- ☐ NO VOTÉ
- ☐ PREFIERO NO RESPONDER

27.) ¿Escuchas la radio? Si es así, ¿cuáles estaciones?

☐ Sí:

☐ No, no escucho la radio.

28.) ¿Utilizas redes sociales como fuente de información? Si es así, ¿cuáles plataformas y personas?

☐ Sí:

☐ No, no utilizo redes sociales como fuente de información.

29.) ¿Escuchas algún podcast? Si es así, ¿cuáles?

☐ Sí:

☐ No, no escucho ningún podcast.

30.) ¿Quién o qué ha tenido el mayor impacto en tus creencias tal como son hoy en día?

C. Survey Questionnaire Demographic Statistics: Comparisons to the City and County

Generally speaking, the Survey Questionnaire did a surprisingly good job at capturing the key electoral and demographic statistics of the overall populations of Hialeah and Miami-Dade, respectively. Because of the small sample size (n=14), I ultimately decided to not weigh the data to rectify any inconsistencies with the population, as to not undercut the value of the data as it stands today. That being said, while the sample does skew moderately in favor of an older, whiter, and more American-born Cuban American electorate, the migration and political data are nonetheless consistent with the broader populations. And although there is a large education gap between the sample and the respective populations, it cannot be concluded if that has been converted into an equally large wealth gap. Critically, with a consistently Republican-leaning record, one can also argue that this sample accurately depicts the sentiments of a pre-Mariel Miami. Based on the historical analysis of this thesis, the already established evidence that pre-Mariel Cuban exiles were wealthier, whiter, older, and more educated than their counterparts endorses such an interpretation of the data set.

>>>NOTE: Please note that certain rows/columns of this chart have been highlighted to emphasize one of three points:

- 1.) Cells highlighted in BEIGE identify the defining characteristics of the sample that will remain skewed given the subject and nature of the survey questionnaire's target audience.
- 2.) Cells highlighted in YELLOW identify the key statistics where the sample is too skewed to accurately reflect the populations of Hialeah and Miami-Dade County, respectively.

3.) Cells highlighted in BLUE identify pending statistics that may become available if the raw data is digitized by and received from the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections Office.

	Sample	Hialeah*	Miami-Dade*
Raw Total (Population / Sample Size)	14	223,109	2,701,767
% Cuban / Cuban American	100%	75.6% ± 1.3%	35.4% ± 1.0%
% Foreign-Born (as a % of Cubans)	50%	76.2% ± 2.4%	71.2% ± 1.1%
% White (Any Combination)	100%	84.2%	69.8%
% Gender Difference***	0%	-3.4%	-2.6%
Median Age	54	46.8 ± 1.2	41.0 ± 0.2
Average Migration Wave to the U.S.	1959-1979	N/A	N/A
Average # of Generations Removed	0.5	N/A	N/A
% GOP (Including IND/NPA)**	85.7%	49.6%	40.1%
% GOP (Excluding IND/NPA)**	85.7%	72.4%	62.6%
% DEM (Including IND/NPA)**	14.3%	18.9%	24.0%
% DEM (Excluding IND/NPA)**	14.3%	27.7%	37.4%
% IND / NPA**	0%	29.6%	33.7%
% w/ College Education****	71.4%	23.8% ± 2.1%	35.9% ± 0.6%
Median Household Income (USD, \$)	N/A	\$55,310 ± \$3,221	\$72,311 ± \$1,475
1976 % Vote Margin, President	N/A	N/A	D +17.6%
1980 % Vote Margin, President	R +100%	N/A	R +10.5%
1996 % Vote Margin, President	R +20%	TBD	D +19.5%
2000 % Vote Margin, President	R +66.7%	TBD	D +6.3%
2012 % Vote Margin, President	R +50%	R +9.2%	D +23.7%
2016 % Vote Margin, President	R +66.7%	R +0.14%	D +29.4%

2020 % Vote Margin, President	R +66.7%	R +34.2%	D +7.3%
2024 % Vote Margin, President	R +69.2%	R +53.4%	R +11.4%

** All data regarding Hialeah and Miami-Dade is sourced from either the U.S. Census' 2020 Decennial Census, the 2021 American Community Survey, or Miami-Dade County's Voter Registration Statistics.*

***These statistical categories are to be interpreted as given that they are Hispanic/Latino.*

****The Percent Gender Difference is calculated by taking the difference between the proportion of the population who identifies as male and the respective proportion who identifies as female. As such data is relying on the U.S. Census Bureau's tallies on Sex, this calculation does not account for those who identify as non-binary, intersex, or the like.*

*****A college education is defined as having at least a BA degree.*

D. Cartographical and Graphical Data Visualization Files

Please find the Google Drive folder [here](#) with all of the spreadsheets and GEO files created and manipulated to produce the visualizations used throughout this work. The Google Drive will be updated as more raw data is digitized by and received from the Miami-Dade County Supervisor of Elections Office.

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