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Latino Support for Liberty Defies Stereotype

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Whenever I write about immigration from Latin America, I am deluged with complaints that regardless of the economic or social benefits, Latinos are anti-libertarian “socialists.” But a new Fox News Latino poll shows something else. The libertarian presidential candidate Gary Johnson does nearly twice as well among Latino Americans as among the general public—16 percent compared to 8 percent.

Far from being socialists, a wide range of evidence shows that on average, Latino views track libertarian views as closely as any other demographic. This is not to say that Latinos are libertarians overall, but that they are just as open to the libertarian perspective as anyone else.

As my colleague Emily Ekins has pointed out, libertarians are more racially and ethnically diverse than some people believe. Pew also found in 2014 that just as many Latinos identify as libertarian and understand it as a “belief in limited government” as all Americans (11 percent for both). In 2015, Ekins found that averaging nine polls conducted by Reason-Rupe and Cato-YouGov, Latinos make up 14 percent of self-identified libertarians, while being 13 percent of the U.S. population.

Given that Latinos are already least likely to identify as a Democrat or Republican, Latinos’ disproportionate support for a libertarian option in this election makes sense. Currently, they are stuck between a party led by a president who has deported more of their relatives than any other and one led by a candidate who thinks that wasn’t good enough. By contrast, Johnson has adopted the most pro-immigration position of any in this election—not only favoring legalization for those already here but also open legal immigration in the future with Mexico—and he mentions the issue in every television interview.

But Latinos are open to the libertarian option because they side with libertarians on a variety of other issues as well.

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have both made their opposition to trade a major campaign issue. Yet Latinos are the *most* likely to support freer trade of any ethnic or racial group. According to a March 2016 Pew poll, Latinos are 27 percentage points more likely than whites to consider free trade agreements “a good thing for the United States.” Compared to 51 percent of the public, 72 percent of Latinos supported freer trade. Nearly half of all Latinos told Pew that free trade agreements “helped [their] family’s personal finances.” Only 28 percent disagreed.

Clinton and Trump have both championed an interventionist foreign policy. But last year, Pew found Latinos were the only ethnic or racial group with a majority opposed to “drone strikes

to target extremists.” Latinos were the most opposed to the occupation of Iraq in 2006, according to Pew, as well as its reinvasion in 2014. It’s no wonder that they oppose military conscription.

Clinton and Trump have also defended new surveillance powers for the NSA. Yet in January 2014, a majority of Latinos were against “the government’s collection of telephone and internet data as part of anti-terrorism efforts.” They are also strongly opposed to profiling Muslims.

While Latinos do favor a “bigger government which provides more services to a smaller one providing fewer” two to one, asking about specific policies reveals much less enthusiasm about big government. Latinos are equally split, for example, on the topic of Obamacare, according to a 2014 Pew (47 percent in favor and 47 percent opposed). Kaiser’s tracking poll shows that this split has continued—only 45 percent see the law favorably compared to 40 percent unfavorably in 2016.

On education, a larger majority of Latinos than of whites wants to see more school choice, charter schools, and school vouchers. An American Federation for Children poll found that 78 percent of Latinos support school choice. In a Friedman Foundation poll, they were 10 percentage points more likely than the general public to favor school vouchers.

Other Pew polls show that Latinos support gay marriage and want gays and lesbians to be accepted. They oppose mandatory drug sentences, want marijuana to be legalized, and favor treatment over prosecution for other drug users.

The point is not that most Latinos have embraced across-the-board libertarianism. A majority of Latinos favor, for example, a higher minimum wage and more gun control. But no demographic fully embraces the limited government philosophy. The point is that Latinos do not hold views that widely differ from those of other Americans. Indeed, on many issues, they are more libertarian than other voters, so it’s not shocking that many Latinos are choosing to go for the libertarian option in November.

Let’s put to rest the tired canard that Latino Americans are “socialists.” They are just as interested in liberty as any other Americans.

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