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## **The Politics of Latina/o Faith: Examining Religion as a Political Cleavage Among Latinas/os**

Alicia Reyes-Barriéntez  
Ph.D. Candidate, Duke University  
Latino CLD/SMU Latino Politics Fellow

### Research Implications

In recent years, two trends have emerged that raise questions about Latina/o party affiliation in the future: 1) growing number of Latina/o Protestants and 2) growing number of Latina/o evangelical Catholics. Latina/o Protestants now compose almost a fourth of the Latina/o population overall, and Latina/o evangelical Catholics now compose almost a fourth of the Latina/o Catholic population. This project examines the role of religion as a political cleavage among Latinas/os. Given that Latinas/os are largely affiliated with the Democratic Party, how likely is it that a segment of the Latina/o population—namely, Latina/o evangelical Catholics and Latina/o Protestants—will join the ranks of the Republican Party sometime in the near future? Within the broader U.S. political context, the Latina/o population is evolving as the population diversifies religiously and is recognized by both political parties as numerically essential to their respective survival. Understanding the role of religion in shaping Latina/o political beliefs and behaviors is thus crucial to effectively engaging this population for any type of political support.

Using data from three prominent national surveys—LNS (2006), PEW (2006), and ANES (2012)—the main findings of my research are outlined below:

1. A majority of Latinas/os self-identify as conservative and yet affiliate with and vote for candidates of the Democratic Party.
2. Latina/o evangelical Catholics and Latina/o evangelical Protestants maintain similar religious beliefs and behaviors.

3. Latina/o Catholics are more likely to express a strong sense of group consciousness and more likely to vote for the Democratic Party than Latina/o Protestants.
4. Latina/o evangelical Catholics are more likely to express a strong sense of group consciousness and more likely to identify with the Democratic Party than Latina/o evangelical Protestants.

### How Political Candidates and Officeholders Can Recruit Latina/o Support

Political candidates and officeholders must recognize the changing religious composition of the Latina/o electorate. Understanding how different Latina/o religious groups feel about different issues helps create more effective communication strategies. That is, candidates of varying political orientations might align with Latinas/os on varying dimensions. Not all Latinas/os will respond the same way to political messages, particularly given the diversity of religious beliefs among this population. The following are recommendations on how political candidates and politicians can effectively recruit Latinas/os for political engagement and support based on the type of response the political candidate/officeholder is attempting to solicit.

1. Among Latina/o Protestants, religious issues are salient. Candidates whose views align with the religious views of Latina/o Protestants should stress their stance on such issues (abortion, prayer in schools, traditional family values). Candidates whose views do not align with the religious views of Latina/o Protestants should avoid these issues and focus on issues that affect the Latina/o community at large, such as affirmative action, racial profiling, welfare, education, and housing.
2. While religious issues are also important to the Latina/o Catholic community, group issues take precedence over religious issues. Candidates whose views align with the pro-Latina/o concerns of Latina/o Catholics should stress their stance on such issues—affirmative action, racial profiling, welfare, education, and housing. Candidates whose views do not align with the pro-Latina/o concerns of Latina/o Catholics should focus on religious issues, such as abortion, prayer in schools, and traditional family values.

## Engaging the Religious Diversity of the Latina/o Demographic

Furthermore, political candidates and officeholders should recognize the potential electoral consequences of the changing religious composition of the Latina/o population. While Catholicism has historically united Latinas/os in the struggle for political representation, up to a quarter of the Latina/o population no longer self-identifies as Catholic. Political candidates and officeholders should continue to engage support from Latina/o Catholic churches and Latina/o Catholic priests, while at the same time soliciting support from Latina/o Protestant pastors and leaders and Latina/o Protestant congregations.