

# Casting Ballots, Remembering Revolutions: A Generational Study of the Effects of Communism on the Voting Choices of Cuban Americans



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## Introduction

The Cuban American political landscape reflects the community's unique experience with immigration and integration because of their long history with communism against the backdrop of Cold War politics and the Cuban revolution. Understanding the historical legacies, generational perspectives, and the electoral choices of Cuban Americans in the United States requires an understanding of not only their unrestrained access to legal immigration, but also the legacy of communism in relation to their political participation. In 1959, Fidel Castro led the Cuban revolution. Castro expropriated all American industries from the island, creating hostility between US Cuban relations. The political unrest, and the subsequently suffering economy eventually led to the mass exodus of Cubans to the United States from the mid 20th century to the present.

## Background

### The Revolution

In 1959, Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara led the Cuban revolution. Together they seized control and toppled the current dictatorship. After overthrowing Bautista, Castro set up a one-party authority and state and shifted the country towards communism.

### The Golden Age of Cuban Immigration

In comparison to other Hispanic communities the Cuban experience was drastically different. From 1959 to 1964, Cubans had relatively free entry to the United States. Congress passed the Migration Refugee Assistance Act in 1962, which provided Cubans with a special immigration program that included financial aid. The Golden Age of Cuban immigration was characterized by a liberal interpretation of US immigration laws and procedures, coupled with generous accommodations through programs such as the Cuban Refugee Program (CRP), which facilitated settlement agencies' active assistance to the initial wave of Cuban immigrants in securing housing and employment in Miami and other cities (Henken, 2005).

### Cuban Americans and the GOP

Cuban American preference for the Republican party is multifaceted. Due to their opposition to the Castro regime, Cuban Americans continue their anti-communist views, and are fueled by Republican rhetoric. Cuban American support stems from the historical events of significance that exacerbated it further. There was a chain of events that directly tied to the partisanship that further cemented the Cuban American support for the Republican party. The events including the Mariel Exodus, the Bay of Pigs and Wet Foot/Dry Foot.

## Theoretical Approach

- ❖ My research focuses on the exploration of how the political attitude and vote choices change across Cuban American generations. In my research, I focus on three generational cohorts, and how each of their experiences shapes their partisanship, ideology, and presidential choice.
- ❖ I approach my research through Beck's theory of Partisan Realignment to understand partisanship and ideological change (Beck, 1978).
  - ❖ Beck argues that the first generation of realignment has the strongest intellectual underpinnings when it comes to partisanship.
  - ❖ The second generation lacking the direct exposure to the pivotal events that affect the prior generations partisanship will be more likely to receive much of their ideology from their parents "across the dinner table" (Beck, 1978). This generation will carry on the partisan ideals, instilled on them from their parents.
  - ❖ The third generation, however, grow up, by comparison, in an era of "normal politics," and historically much farther away from the initial event that drove their familial unit towards one side of the political system (Beck, 1978).

## Preliminary Results

Percentages of Cuban American Vote Choices in the 2016 Election

	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation
Donald J. Trump	42.55	37.14	43.75
Hillary Clinton	50.64	51.43	56.25
Other	6.81	11.43	0

Percentages of Cuban American Vote Choices in the 2020 Election

	First Generation	Second Generation	Third Generation
Donald J. Trump	53.78	43.86	26.32
Joe Biden	42.86	51.75	63.16
Other	3.36	4.39	10.53

## Methods

- ❖ **Data:** The Cooperative Election Study 2016 - 2020.
- ❖ **Method:** Data will be examined using t-tabs cross-sections and models.
- ❖ **Outcome Variables:** Vote Choice, Strength of Partisanship, and Strength of Ideology.
- ❖ **Primary Independent Variable:** Generations

## Hypotheses

- ❖ **H1:** First generation Cubans should be stronger partisans, more ideologically conservative, and more likely to vote for the Republican candidate than second or third generation Cubans.
- ❖ **H2:** Second generation Cubans should be stronger partisans, more ideologically conservative, and more likely to vote for the Republican candidate than third generation Cubans.
- ❖ **H3:** Third generation Cubans should be lesser partisans, more ideologically liberal, and more likely to for the Democratic candidate than first- or second-generation Cubans.

## Preliminary Conclusions

The data shows mixed results because the first and third generations in 2016 have the same percentage. This indicates no difference between the first and third generations. There is a decline for the second generation in 2016, but in 2020 the results favor my hypothesis because there is a decline in generational support for the Republican candidate.



Bibliography