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CUBAN AMERICANS: THE GROWTH OF POLITICAL CLOUT

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The article deals with the growth of Cuban Americans' political clout. Special attention is paid to the role of immigrants from Cuba in Florida's presidential voting in recent decades and the struggle of mainstream U.S. parties for the "Cuban electorate." Analyzed are the results of Donald Trump's victory in Florida in the 2016 presidential election. Made are forecasts for the near future in Florida politics.

Key words: Cuban Americans, Florida, Democrats, Republicans, elections, Donald Trump, Hilary Clinton.

Studying political life of the Latino community in the United States is an important issue for Ukrainians since Ukraine has national minorities that live compactly in certain areas. For example, a Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia lives in adjacent to Hungary territories and comprises 12 percent of the region's population. Latinos in the United States, especially Mexican Americans or Cuban Americans, also tend to live compactly in southern regions of the country. Thus, any experience of relations between governments and national minorities in various countries (including the United States) can be useful for Ukrainian analysts and politicians. Examining such an experience can be helpful for avoiding ethnic tensions and developing a tolerant and prosperous society.

Cuban Americans have been playing a substantial role in the U.S. politics since 1959, when Fidel Castro came to power in Cuba. Their political influence can be felt at state and national levels. Therefore, it is not surprising that the political life of Cuban Americans in the United States draws the attention of many analysts such as Samuel Huntington, Cristina Lopez-Gottardi, Giancarlo Sopo, Jens Manuel Krogstad, Dario Moreno, Humberto Fontova, Patricia Mazzei, Nicholas Nehamas, Antonio Flores, and others who investigate various aspects of Cuban Americans' politics.

The aim of the article is to trace the growth of political clout of the Cuban American community, define its role in American politics and make some forecasts for the future.

The Latino community and its political influence have been growing for decades in the United States. In 2003 the Latino community surpassed the Black community in number and became the largest national minority in the United States. In 2014 its number reached 54 million that comprised 17 percent of the total population [1].

Cuban Americans is the third largest group of Latinos after Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans. Now they make up about 2,300,000 people, 70 percent of whom live in Florida [2]. Cuban Americans are substantially represented in the United States highest political institutions: five congressmen in the House of Representatives and three senators (Marco Rubio of Florida, Ted Cruz of Texas, and Bob Menendez of New Jersey). Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz were serious contenders of Donald Trump for the presidency in 2016. Cuban Americans are also solidly represented in state legislatures. According to Dario Moreno, a Florida International University political science professor, at least two dozen Cuban Americans serve as state legislators nationwide [3].

Florida is the third most populous state in the United States. It has been long noted as an important swing state in presidential elections. It possesses 29 electoral votes and the fight for that state is usually very harsh in all presidential elections. Cuban Americans play a very important role in Florida politics and their influence can be decisive in defining the winner for the state or even the presidency as it happened in 2000. Compared to other Latino communities, Cuban Americans are very active politically; at least two-thirds of them vote regularly while only about 50 percent of the nation's Latinos turn out to vote [3].

The first emigrants from Cuba arrived in Florida as early as the sixteenth century. Emigration continued during next centuries and by 1959 about 125,000 Cubans had lived in the United States [3].

The influx of Cubans rose sharply after 1959 when the Castro regime came to power in Cuba. Hundreds of thousands of upper and middle class Cubans arrived in Florida in the 1960s. This wave had a political character: immigrants were escaping the Communist regime of Fidel Castro. Because of the political character of this second wave of immigration the newcomers were entitled to refugee status. Thus, they got various benefits in the spheres of education, business and health care. In 1966, Congress passed the Cuban Adjustment Act and the Cuban Refugee Program which provided substantial financial support to recently arrived Cuban immigrants. This financial support enabled many Cuban Americans to start up their own businesses and to transform Miami from a sleepy provincial town into a thriving metropolis. Practically the whole of Cuba's political and economic elites immigrated to the United States. Many of them participated in Cuban politics and understood the political mechanism and its importance. Over a quarter of Cuban Americans hold a college degree that is twice the average of all other Latino groups [4].

The Cuban immigrants of the 1960s were usually well educated professional people whose ancestors descended mostly from Europe in contrast to other Latino communities, whose descendants had predominantly local roots or mixed ancestry. Also in contrast to other Latino communities, Cuban Americans did not need to send remittances to their mother country. Instead, they invested in the United States, predominantly in Florida. Thanks to their activity, Florida, especially its southern counties and Miami, acquired a unique Hispanic character. Spanish replaced English as the principal language in the economic, cultural, and political life. According to Harvard political science professor Samuel Huntington, this Hispanic character forced about 140,000 Anglos to flee Miami between 1983 and 1993 [5, p. 250].

Huntington in his book *Who We Are? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, published in 2004, severely criticized Washington's policy toward national minorities, especially, Hispanics. He claimed that rejection of assimilation policy in the 1960s led to creation of ethnic enclaves in southern states. He feared that due to such a policy the United States could be transformed into "a country of two languages, two cultures, and two peoples" [5, p. 256].

Similar ideas were expressed by the noted conservative writer, Patrick J. Buchanan, in his book *The Death of the West* (2001). He saw a serious threat in Latino immigrants (including Cuban Americans) and their ethnic enclaves to the integrity of the United States.

Conversely, Latino authors predominantly reject such ideas. They believe that the ideas of Huntington and Buchanan concerning the Latino threat are highly exaggerated. In their numerous publications they claim that, in contrast to their parents, many young Latinos, especially Cuban Americans, who were born and raised in the United States, prefer using English everywhere, including home and are ready to assimilate (at least one-third of Latinos married outside of their ethnic group).

It seems that they are right. Compared to the influx of Muslim refugees who flooded Europe in the last decades, the Latinos look much less problematic politically. They are Christian

and many of their values have a European background. As to Cuban Americans, they pose even lesser political threat to the integrity of the United States since, in contrast to Puerto Ricans and other Latinos, over 85 percent of them are white [6].

In 1980, during the third wave of immigration, about 125,000 Cubans migrated to Florida [7]. In contrast to the previous wave, these immigrants were predominantly poor with little education, and their skin tended to be black. In addition, Castro also included into this wave about 20,000 criminals and mentally retarded people. It took the U.S. government a lot of efforts to send most of those twenty thousand back to Cuba.

The fourth major wave of immigration occurred in the 1990s and brought hundreds of thousands to Florida (over 50 percent of its original Cuban population). In contrast to previous years the U.S. government was often reluctant to accept new immigrants from Cuba. Many of those intercepted at sea were sent back. Thus, those predominantly white and well educated Cubans who arrived for political reasons in the 1960s received a warm welcome and got numerous benefits; those who arrived later did not find life in the United States as good as they hoped for. Many of them got engaged in criminal activities and contributed to the growth of the crime rate in Miami [5, p. 250–251].

The United States – Cuban Thaw introduced by the Obama administration in 2014 is expected to lead to further growth of immigration from the island. New immigrants will be poor and thus in need of social programs. Consequently, they will back the Democratic Party.

Both Democratic and Republican parties have been vying for Cuban American votes. Traditionally, the majority of Cuban Americans, especially older generation, vote for the Republican Party. George W. Bush, for example, won Florida in 2000 and 2004 collecting there both times over 70 percent of the Cuban vote [2]. The situation started to change in 2008 when more Latinos in Florida were registered as Democrats than Republicans. Barack Obama managed to win Florida and the Latino vote in 2008 and 2012. Thanks to his winning personality Obama also managed to increase the number of his Cuban supporters. Thirty-five percent of them voted for him in 2008 and forty-eight in 2012 [8]. The Cuban support looked modest compared with 71 percent of the Latino vote Obama managed to receive nationwide; his Republican opponent Mitt Romney received only 27 percent.

After Obama's victories, Hilary Clinton's pundits looked at Florida optimistically. Polls also showed favorable predictions for Democrats. The 2016 election results in Florida, however, turned out to be shocking for Clinton – only 41 percent of Cubans voted for her compared with the 71 percent of non-Cuban Latinos who cast their votes for her [9].

Usually not very well off Latinos support the Democratic Party because of its social policy. However, in recent elections quite many poor and lower middle class Cuban Americans supported Donald Trump despite his humiliating anti-Latino rhetoric and the proposed harsh measures aimed at curtailing Latino immigration. That probably happened because they saw in new immigrants, even in their compatriots, a threat to their jobs and stability. But they did not tell this to pollsters on the eve of election, trying to avoid being labeled as politically incorrect. According to CNN and Latino Decisions exit polls, Trump received from 52 to 54 percent of the Florida Cuban American vote, much more than Mitt Romney, the Republican contestant for the presidency in 2012. Romney who tried, in contrast to Trump, to be politically correct got only 47 percent of the Cuban votes [10].

The Cuban community has been switching to Democrats for the last decade. Many of the political immigrants of the 1960s, who traditionally supported Republicans, have died and their children tend to be more integrated than their parents into the mainstream American culture and switch their allegiance to Democrats. But it was not the Latino factor, however, that decided the vote of Florida in 2016.

Since all Latinos in Florida, including the Cuban ones, comprise only 18 percent of the state's population their support for Clinton or Trump could not have been critical for winning the state. Even if all Florida's Latinos, for example, had voted for Clinton, she would not have won since they comprise a minority in Florida. The role of Latinos, especially of Cuban Americans, in Florida is often exaggerated by local politicians of Latino origin. Trump won mostly because of the support of white non-Hispanic communities from northern Florida which make up the overwhelming majority of the state's population. Sixty-four percent of Florida's non-Hispanic whites cast their votes for him while only thirty-two percent of them voted for Clinton [8]. Trump got substantial support of Cuban Americans as well, but it was not crucial for the victory. As to the general public in Florida, Donald Trump received 4,615,910 votes while his opponent Hilary Clinton received 4,501,455. Thus, the difference between the two contestants for the presidency was 114,455 votes [8]. That is substantially bigger than the narrow gap of 980 votes between George W. Bush and Al Gore in the 2000 presidential election, which led to the recounting of votes in Florida. Only by a narrow 5-4 margin the U.S. Supreme Court stopped the recounting and brought victory to Bush [11, p. 445].

Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election has demonstrated that the Latino factor is not yet decisive in the American electoral politics; that the population got tired of political correctness and lost trust in the elite and the mass media (the overwhelming majority of the major media supported Hilary Clinton). In the next presidential election both parties will have approximately equal chances to win Florida. It can be partially explained by the tendency among the young Cubans (even among the children of the second wave of political immigrants) to lean toward the Democratic Party. Democrats are also popular with newly arrived Latinos from Cuba and other Latin American countries, especially those who depend on social programs. The growing Latino immigration to Florida gradually pushes the state into the embrace of the Democratic Party. The Cuban share of Florida's Latino eligible voter population has been gradually declining while the Puerto Rican share of Florida's Latino population has been increasing. There is only two percent difference now in favor of Cubans. Almost all Puerto Ricans are strictly Democratic. It is quite possible that in perspective, in case of a rising economy, more and more people in Florida will enter the middle class and thus switch their allegiance to the Republican Party. In the near future, even in case of the continuing growing influx of Hispanic immigrants from Puerto Rico and other Latin areas, the Cuban elite will retain its political domination in Florida.

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АМЕРИКАНЦІ КУБІНСЬКОГО ПОХОДЖЕННЯ: ЗРОСТАННЯ ПОЛІТИЧНОЇ ВАГИ

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У статті розглядається зростання політичної ваги американців кубинського походження. Особлива увага присвячена ролі вихідців із Куби у політиці Флориди під час президентських перегонів протягом останніх десятиліть та боротьбі головних американських партій за «кубинський електорат». Проаналізовано результати перемоги республіканського кандидата Дональда Трампа у Флориді у президентських виборах 2016 р. Зроблені прогнози на найближче майбутнє у політиці Флориди.

Ключові слова: американці кубинського походження, Флорида, Демократична партія, Республіканська партія, вибори, Дональд Трамп, Хіларі Клінтон.