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Cubans in the Political Arena: Engagement and Influence of Expatriates in the United States

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Abstract

For decades, the United States government has imposed travel and trade restrictions on Cuba. However, it is possible that representatives support these policies as they are meeting the demands of the Cuban-American expatriates (ex-pats). The Cuban expatriate community has become a politically organized group that has been able to persuade U.S. policy for years. How did this come to be? This essay recognizes not only the political influence of the community but also their ways of political mobilization. Additionally, this essay acknowledges how the younger generations stray away from the hardline perspective of their Cuban elders. To conduct this research, examinations of exit polls and political participation surveys are given as well as examinations of campaign contributions from Cuban lobbyist groups. It is evident that Cuban-American ex-pats maintain much of their conservative political influence through campaign contributions and strategic voting. In turn, this research gives a deeper analysis of U.S. diplomacy and what really drives it.

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Abstract

For decades, the United States government has imposed travel and trade restrictions on Cuba. However, it is possible that representatives support these policies as they are meeting the demands of the Cuban-American expatriates (ex-pats). The Cuban expatriate community has become a politically organized group that has been able to persuade U.S. policymakers for years. How did this come to be? This essay recognizes not only the political influence of the community but also their ways of political mobilization. Additionally, this essay acknowledges how the younger generations stray away from the hardline perspective of their Cuban elders. To conduct this research, examinations of exit polls and political participation surveys are given as well as examinations of campaign contributions from Cuban lobbyist groups. It is evident that Cuban-American ex-pats maintain much of their conservative political influence through campaign contributions and strategic voting. In turn, this research gives a deeper analysis of U.S. diplomacy and what really drives it.

Introduction

How has the broken relationship between the United States and Cuba for the past 7 decades persisted? One factor is the Cuban-American expatriate (*ex-pat*) community, which has notably become a driving political force in U.S. international policy. The older community who migrated during the Castro regime have experienced privilege politically as they have been able to establish their demands for trade and travel restrictions and keep them in place for many years.

Shifts in the policies that opened up more trade and travel were not long-lasting compared to the duration of the embargos and travel constraints.

Although some studies and surveys examine political attitudes, political activity of migrant groups, and PAC and lobbyist campaign contributions, these studies have yet to synthesize this information in order to understand the bigger picture. Research is lacking on how these factors relate to the political influence and privilege of the Cuban-American *ex-pat* community. This study recognizes the information that these studies have gathered and utilizes them to understand the political power of the community.

Exit polls and surveys speak to the demographics of the group and their political attitudes; however, they do not show the impact of the change in attitudes amongst demographics, including age and nationality. Mentioning these demographics is essential to this study and part of what makes it distinct from other studies. The older generation of Cuban-American expatriates are notably hardline Republicans and do not favor normalized relations between the United States and Cuba. The attitudes of the younger generation on these issues differ from those of the older generation. With attention given to age and generation, this study can be utilized to understand the future of U.S.-Cuban relations.

Comparing the political activity of Cubans and other migrant groups can also help provide context and an explanation of the effect the community has had on international relations. Cubans are mostly just as politically active, and rarely slightly less politically active in some areas of engagement, compared to other migrant groups, yet there is no doubt they have been able to maintain the broken relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. It is integral to understand what other scholars have said about the power of the Cuban-American expatriate community and how they gained political influence.

Literature Review

Authors have looked at several reasons to explain a brief dynamic period in Cuban-American relations, as well as the status quo, which includes strict travel restrictions and economic sanctions. Cuban-American expatriates and the previous Fidel Castro government have been influential drivers of the relations.

Since the 1960s, trade and travel restrictions have been in place, established by the United States against Cuba. There was a brief shift in these relations under the Obama administration and they became more reconnected. The embargo and travel restrictions were eased and the remittance allowance was increased (*Legislative Background on the Cuba Embargo*, 2016). This was supported by even Cuban-Americans who typically throughout history have been identified as strict conservatives. During this time, Cuba was facing the detrimental effects of the 2008 economic crisis. Cuban Americans seemed to support this reconnection as it meant sending aid to their family members back in Cuba (Leogrande, 2015, p. 479). After the crisis, the Trump administration reversed the majority of President Obama's efforts with the support of the Cuban-American expatriate community (*Legislative Background on the Cuba Embargo*, 2016). With the relations both before and after the period, it seems that the political force of the community has had a great effect on international policies in the United States.

Furthermore, the *ex-pat* community of Cuban Americans has notably been politically active since the 1980s. They are a strong force opposing U.S. relations with Cuba. Leogrande (2015) argues that the lobbying of the *ex-pat* community was once a "policy capture" (p. 477). In this context, "policy capture" means they were given unspoken special recognition by politicians. Expatriate interests, such as embargos and travel restrictions, became politically prioritized over any other interest and gained congressional support. Additionally, their interests were put above

the interests of the general public. They were able to push for a continuance of severed relations between Cuba and the United States, and maintain an anti-immigrant migration policy. The public opinion surrounding the embargo exemplifies Leogrande's idea that the expatriates created a "policy capture". Exposing true public opinion, Jonathan Rosen and Hanna Kassab show that Congressional representatives were primarily interested in the attitudes towards Cuban relations by ex-pats. They mention that between 1977 and 1999, the public interest in establishing relations with Cuba moved from 32 to 71% (Rosen & Kassab, 2016). Despite public interest being mostly in favor of relations with Cuba, the opposition of the expatriate community was given particular recognition.

Beyond the expatriate community, it is plausible that the severed relations are due to unresolved tension from the Castro government. Sanctions and travel restrictions were implemented as a punishment for the Cuban government for its previous communist form. After Fidel Castro stepped down in 2008, the shift to more diplomatic U.S.-Cuban policies under the Obama administration demonstrated that it was merely the form of governance that influenced the relationship between the two countries. However, these policies were rolled back under the Trump and Biden administrations. It is not unreasonable to argue that the severance of relations during these administrations was a form of contemporary Cold War politics at play. Cuba's communist past, and Trump and Biden's diplomatic ideologies, have also potentially impacted this rollback. However, the rollbacks alongside the political engagement of the Cuban-American community emphasize the political impact of the Cuban expatriate community. Although it is plausible with the Trump administration's overall conservative positions that the expatriate community played a trivial role in the re-establishment of travel and trade restrictions, the adherence to the interests of the Cuban community and their strong lobbying counter this (Rosen

& Kassab, 2016). This argument challenges the idea that historical context is the reason for bringing back restrictions. The expatriate community plays a role and they have the possibility of determining future U.S.-Cuban relations.

With this in mind, Benjamin Bishin and Casey Klofstad argue that a shift in political affiliations comes from younger generations who are more progressive with their perspectives on relations between the United States and Cuba (Bishin, 2012, p. 590). With it being apparent that the community does have a policy capture, this means that the future of relations can be determined by the younger generations. This will hold true as long as the Cuban-American expatriate community and their interests are given special recognition by Congress members. With the younger generation becoming more interested in expanding relations between the United States and Cuba, it is also possible that there will be little shift. This would direct to a different theory, involving historical context, that would take the political influence of the expatriate community out of the equation.

It is possible that the community does not have as large an influence as Leogrande argues and relations can be explained by the historical context of the sanctions on Cuba. Initially, the sanctions imposed on Cuba were put into place to pressure the Cuban government into adopting “American values” and leaving communism in the past (Sanka, 2021, p. 4). This explains the continuation of the sanction while the Fidel Castro government was in place. However, as mentioned previously, the sanctions and restrictions continued after his resignation and there was only little reform made from the Obama administration that was rolled back. This context, as well as the economic crisis Cuba was facing during President Obama’s first term, emphasizes the role of expatriates in politics in the United States. Otherwise, an explanation for the continuation

of restrictions is for the United States to further its own interests. This argument loses validity when addressing the detrimental effects of the broken relationship.

The effects of the sanctions on Cuba question the motives for their implementation. If the United States were interested in furthering their interests, more restrictions would not necessarily seem to be the answer. Author Savarni Sanka promotes a diplomatic relationship as an alternative to the currently ineffective policies. To establish and grow its “soft-power influence,” the United States should promote more travel to Cuba from Cuban Americans (Sanka, 2021, p. 4). The current relationship between Cuba and the U.S. does not aid the U.S. economically. Sanka argues that with the growth in the private sector in Cuba, U.S. businesses would benefit from equal, bilateral relations (Sanka, 2021, p. 4). Continuing sanctions seem to further the interests of the Cuban-American expatriate community, rather than the American public interest as a whole, especially considering the privileges that they are granted compared to other migrant groups.

Acknowledging the privileges of Cubans in the United States is integral to understanding the role they play politically. Cubans, since the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s, have been understood by the U.S. government as “imagined refugees”, meaning that Cubans were permitted admission into the U.S. without question while typically, with other refugee groups, there is a more strict process to seeking asylum in the United States (Eckstein, 2022, p. 45). In addition, they were granted special assistance for their needs, such as food, housing, and medical care from the Cuban Refugee Emergency Center, which was funded by the government (Eckstein, 2022, p. 45). Assistance for Cubans was formalized under the Kennedy administration with the Cuban Refugee Program and Migration and Refugee Assistance Act (Eckstein, 2022, p. 45). The Cuban Refugee Program gave Cubans more assistance from the government to allow them to adapt to America and was used as a tool to bring more Cubans over to the States.

Notably, the Cuban Adjustment Act in 1967 understood Cubans as refugees and gave permanent residency, or green cards, to Cubans quickly compared to other legislation and Latino migrant groups (Eckstein, 2022, p. 45). Cubans were able to receive a green card after a year of working and living in the States and they did not need to apply for residency from Cuba, they could after they moved to the U.S. (Eckstein, 2022, p. 55). Other entitlements a part of this act include exemptions of certifications from the labor department regarding the ability of U.S. citizens to complete the job and exclusion from adjustment of status if they become dependent on government assistance (Eckstein, 2022, p. 55). These rights were particular to Cubans and demonstrate the priority the community has been receiving from early on. This helps explain the special recognition of the interests of the Cuban-American expatriates.

Focusing on current relations between the United States and Cuba, there are two main possibilities to explain the continuance of the restrictions. One emphasizes the role of the Cuban-American expatriate community in American politics, while the other centers the historical context of Cuba's government. This debate raises the question of whether policy prioritizes the interests of the U.S. government or the interests of the Cuban community living in the U.S. It has become clear that the community is a political power that does not stray away from pushing for its own interests and has been receiving special priority compared to other migrant groups and the public interest since the 1960s.

Question, Hypothesis, and Design

This paper will aim to answer the following questions: How did the Cuban-American expatriate community gain political force as a migrant group? How do they organize politically and how does it differ among demographics? While answering these questions, my hypothesis is that the community gained its political power through lobbying and campaign involvement.

Secondly, the older expatriate community is more likely to be engaged in Republican national politics and conservative in their stances regarding travel and trade with Cuba than younger generations.

These hypotheses are based on the theory that lobbying and campaign contributions influence politicians at a national level to support embargos and travel restrictions. Furthermore, this assumes that older-generation expatriates are more supportive of these policies than the younger generations.

This study requires different kinds of data, both qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative data examines shifts in national policy regarding embargos and travel restrictions. The quantitative data documents the campaign contributions by Cuban political action committees (PACs) and lobby groups. Additionally, the quantitative aspect involves the political participation, affiliations, and demographics (age/year of migration, party, ideology) of Cuban-American expatriates. All of these forms of data are an essential part of the design of this study.

The unit of analysis is the Cuban-American expatriate population. In this study, the independent variables include lobbying and political activity by the Cuban-American expatriate community. The dependent variable utilized alongside this variable is the political influence of the community. This is mostly measured through amendments and the United States' international relations policy with Cuba. Another independent variable in this study is the age and demographics of the community. The corresponding dependent variable is political engagement and affiliation.

Methods and Measures

Methods utilized in researching the shift in Cuban expatriate political influence include statistical and policy analyses. Statistical analyses consider the political participation of Cuban expatriates and exit poll voting patterns. Alongside this is an analysis of the shift in United States policy regarding relations with Cuba since the 1980s. There are two approaches to the methodology of this data: statistical analysis software and qualitative research of the expatriate community and policy.

The quantitative aspect of this research is mostly found in exit polls and surveys involving Latino migrant groups and Cuban political participation. The data specifically includes the exit poll percentages for Florida's 2022 midterm elections. The quantitative data utilized from the poll includes the age of respondents, party affiliation, Cuban descent, position on immigration, and the most important issues to vote on. Correlations between age and descent and party, position, and most important issue to vote are essential in determining the attitudes of Cuban-American expatriates. These attitudes give insight into who in the partisan community is politically involved and what policy they push for. Data important to this study includes how old the expatriates were when they moved to the United States, what year they moved to the United States, what generation of expatriates they are, whether they identify as Democrat or Republican, and their opinions on travel and trade policy. With this, it can be determined how important relations between the U.S. and Cuba are for expatriates. Besides this set of data, there is a qualitative aspect of this research that must be analyzed to understand the political influence of expatriates.

Qualitative research is also useful for analyzing the Cuban-American expatriate shift in political power. This research should consider relations between the United States and Cuba

since the 1980s. One focus of the qualitative aspect of the study shall explore each U.S. policy with Cuba for the past four decades. Policies are defined by travel and trade (such as sanctions), as those are the common issues where policy has changed over the past seven presidencies and administrations. These policies can be analyzed in two ways: chronologically and based on leniency. The position of the United States government at various points in time is one aspect of qualitative data required for this study, but it is also beneficial to consider other data, such as the force of Cuban political groups through campaign contributions and politicians' votes on Cuban embargo policy.

Another factor included in the qualitative research is the formation of advocacy groups. Cuban lobbying groups and Political Action Committees work with campaigns to make their demands met, so gathering data on these organizations is essential to analyze Cuban-American political influence. The data gathered should consider the contributions from Cuban advocacy groups during election cycles and where they were distributed. Specifically, it is crucial to analyze PAC contributions in 2005 as two amendments regarding relations with Cuba were proposed. In this year, Cuban-American PAC contributions to politicians can be observed as well as how those politicians ended up voting on the amendment regarding the embargo. Seeing whether there was a positive or negative correlation between contributions and support from politicians on the policy is useful. Campaign contributions show just one method in which the Cuban community organizes and contributes political influence. Once this information is gathered, it is used to measure how influential this aspect is for the community and hold the policies they support in place. Comparing these contributions with recipients' stance on U.S.-Cuban relations must be analyzed as well as this speaks to the influence that the contributions had.

In addition to advocacy groups, it is important to include other Latino migrant groups in qualitative data research. Comparing Latino migrant groups qualitatively will emphasize how distinct the Cuban-American expatriate community is politically. Other Latino migrant groups besides the Cubans engage in different methods of political involvement and have a different amount of engagement. The main Latino migrant groups analyzed will be Mexicans and Puerto Ricans because they have the highest populations of Latino migrant groups in the United States. A chart organizing information regarding Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican political mobilization allows for a more straightforward comparison. This chart includes other qualitative data as well such as campaign contributions from advocacy groups. Comparing this chart with one regarding shifts in U.S. policy and line graphs will portray the influence of Cuban-American expatriates in U.S. politics since the 1980s.

To further measure the comparison between Latino migrant groups, there must be a baseline for their political activity. Metrics for political participation are voting, canvassing, rallying, and lobbying. If people vote and how often they vote is compared between Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans. If they engage in rallies or canvas and how often they do so is also included. In addition, if they lobby or give some sort of funding to campaigns is also analyzed. All of these methods of political participation provide a way to measure how politically involved Latino migrant groups are, and which methods of political activity they rely on to influence national policy changes.

Analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data regarding the shifts in political influence by the Cuban-American expatriate community in the most effective manner is essential to discovering the most accurate correlations and making conclusions. Analysis can be done in a variety of ways, such as graphs of exit polls and surveys regarding demographics and political

affiliations of Latino migrant groups and tables organizing the shifts in foreign policy and political involvement of the expatriate community. Comparing these findings with one another allows for proper conclusions to be made.

Data and Evidence Analysis

Before delving into the political participation of the Cuban-American expatriate community and their organization tactics compared to other Latino migrant groups, their political affiliations must be recognized. The Bendixen and Amandi International exit poll from March 2021 recognizes the political affiliations of the 400 Cuban-Americans surveyed and the demographics behind these affiliations (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 3). This poll is specific to the participation in the 2020 election and it shows that there has been a majority support for Republican Presidents throughout the past five elections. In the 2020 election, 62% responded that they voted for Donald Trump. In 2016, 54% voted for Mitt Romney and, in the 2008 election, 62% voted for John McCain. Finally, in the 2004 election, 71% responded that they voted for George W. Bush (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 14). This information shows that Cubans are typically more supportive of Republican candidates. A similar trend is shown with policy views overall.

In response to being asked about their political views, 46% claimed they were conservative, whereas 34% responded moderate and 15% responded liberal (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 59). The political party follows this pattern as 60% of the Cuban-Americans responded that they identify as Republican (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 62). Some of the key information that comes out of this exit poll is the views of Cuban-Americans on relations between the United States and Cuba. Concerning relations between the United States and Cuba, 66% believe the embargo on Cuba

should continue (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 42). Additionally, 56% somewhat or strongly oppose easing travel restrictions between the two countries, and 66% believe that the Biden administration should not return to having normalized relations with Cuba, similar to Obama-era policies (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 35). Although the embargo has received support from both liberal and conservative ideologies, severed relations with former socialist countries have been greatly championed by conservatives. With these statistics provided, it can be understood that a majority of Cuban *ex-pats* are against having political relations with Cuba and are more conservative, taking a more hardline stance on policy that implicates Cuba. A survey of voters conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2020 shows that the majority of Cuban Americans leaned Republican (Manuel Krogstad, 2021). However, with questions that bring generation into the frame, it is shown that generation and age have a role in these political stances.

According to the same Bendixen and Amandi poll, the majority of those who oppose easing travel restrictions are of older generations. Specifically for respondents 60 years and older, 62% oppose travel restrictions (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 40). For the participants aged 18 through 59, 41% support easing travel, and 48% oppose it. Although the majority of the respondents younger than 60 oppose travel, the majority is very slight (*Survey of Florida Cuban-American Voters*, 2021, p. 40). Without knowing the exact age of the respondents, it is impossible to tell which generations specifically are supporting relations. However, data that focuses more specifically on first versus second-generation responses, proves that younger generations are more open to relations with Cuba.

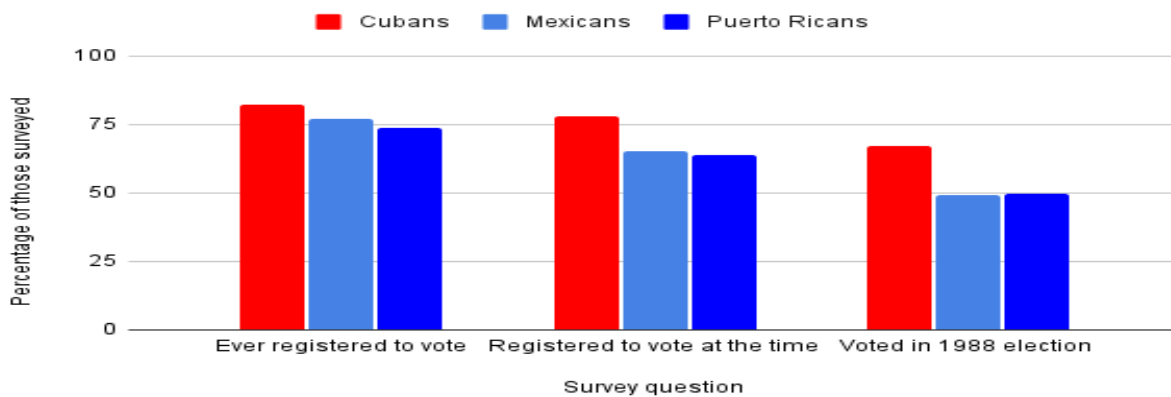
In 2008, an exit poll from Miami Dade County took into account the attitudes of Cuban Americans, as well as the generations and time of arrival of the expatriates. A portion of the

survey that indicated generation shows that 19% of first-generation Cuban Americans favored eliminating the trade sanctions, but the percentage was 25% amongst second-generation or greater Cuban Americans (Bishin, 2012, p. 591). Taking into account the year of arrival in the United States, 7.4% of expatriates who arrived before 1980 favored eliminating travel sanctions. For expatriates who arrived after 1980, the percentage was 43.5% (Bishin, 2012, p. 591). Out of those favoring the elimination of travel bans, 24.4% were first-generation Cuban-American, 32.9% were second or more generation, 11.9% arrived before 1980, and 50.6% arrived after 1980 (Bishin, 2012, p. 591). Of first-generation Cuban-Americans 62.5% identified as Republican, and 54.9% for the second or newer generation. Of those who arrived in the United States before 1980, 73% identify as Republican and 40.2% who arrived after 1980 also claim to be Republicans (Bishin, 2012, p. 591). This data shows that there is a generational impact on how hardline Republican Cuban-American expatriates are in their views. Younger generations are more likely to support Democrats and relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Although this shift is apparent with this data, research on Cuban voter registration brings a new perspective and demonstrates the political participation of the younger generation.

One survey from 2007 shows that 91.8% of Cuban-American respondents are registered to vote. Many of those are between the ages of 18 and 29. For respondents between these ages, 73% said they were registered. Yet, the percentage of respondents 60 and older is 95.6 percent. The older generation is much more politically active in voting (Kreider et al, 2016). It must still be recognized that both of these percentages are generally impressive. With these statistics in mind, a comparison of Cuban involvement to other Latino migrant groups develops.

Political participation by the Cuban-American expatriate community differs from other Latino migrant groups, such as Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. According to the Pew Research

Center, in 2016, the Cuban voter turnout rate was the highest compared to other Latino migrant groups. For Cubans, the voter turnout rate was 58%, whereas for Puerto Ricans it was 46%, and 44% for Mexicans (Manuel Krogstad, 2021). *The Latino National Political Survey* (NLPS) conducted face-to-face surveys on political activity in the 1990s in areas with substantial Latino populations. In this survey, Cubans only had the lowest participation rate compared to Mexicans and Puerto Ricans attending public meetings, which was 12.4%. Mexicans, on average, were the most involved, but Puerto Ricans on average were the least (De la Garza, 2018, p. 120). Cubans also had the highest percentage of those who have ever registered to vote at 82.3%, while Mexicans have 77.1% and Puerto Ricans have 73.7%. From 1989 to 1990, Cubans also had a higher percentage of registered voters than Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. For Cubans, 78% said they were registered. Mexicans were 65.4% and Puerto Ricans were 64% (De la Garza, 2018, p. 123) In the 1988 election, Cubans, at 67.2%, had the highest percentage of voters when compared to Mexicans (49.3%) and Puerto Ricans (49.9%) (De la Garza, 2018, p. 124). This data shows the political influence of the community compared to other groups and is useful alongside data regarding generational differences, policy changes, and campaign contributions.

*Table 1:***Political Participation by Latino Migrant Group (NLPS 1992)**

Source: NLPS, 1992

There has been a political effort by lobbyists and PACS to encourage the political influence of Cuban-American expatriates and form “policy captures”. It can be theorized that Cuban-Americans organize in this way because of their socioeconomic standing and context of relations. Second-generation Cuban ex-pats have the highest average income when compared to other Latino migrant groups (Reimers, 2006). It can be argued that Cuban ex-pats were able to organize more feasibly because the status quo in relations when they migrated was against relations with Cuba. They did not have to fight to implement this policy, they had to ensure it was rolled back. Author William Leogrande states in his research article that the Free Cuba PAC and Cuban American National Foundation (CANF) “gave the community virtual veto power over U.S. policy from 1981 to 2008” (Leogrande, 2015, p. 476). These groups contributed thousands of dollars to congressional and presidential candidates in elections who agreed with their cause. The organization CANF aided in the installation of policies such as the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992 and the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996. The power of Cuban

lobbying led to many issues Cubans were passionate about, such as migration and trade, to be put into policy (Leongrande, 2015). This is further supported by the correlation between Cuban campaign contributions and the Davis and Rangel Amendments.

Looking specifically at the 2005 Davis and Rangel Amendments, opposition to these amendments and Cuban Political Action Committees (PACs) campaign contributions demonstrate the disproportionate political influence by the Cuban-American expatriate community (Rubenzer, 2011, pp. 111-113). An amendment to the Transportation, Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act was proposed by Representative Davis, known as the Davis Amendment, which would “bar the use of federal funds to enforce the new travel restrictions.” This amendment failed to pass (Rubenzer, 2011, p. 107). The Rangel Amendment (also to the Transportation, Treasury, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act), proposed in 2005 by Representative Rangel, would have cut off funding to any effort that promotes the embargo on Cuba from the United States. Similar to the Davis Amendment, it did not pass with enough votes (Rubenzer, 2011, p. 109). Both of these amendments were opposed by hardline Cuban expatriates as they did not want to further relations with Cuba. They utilized PACs as a way to get their interests across. Trevor Rubenzer studies the impact of campaign contributions on representatives’ votes on these amendments and he acknowledges that “the average increase in pro-embargo PAC contributions among representatives who switched their vote was \$1,138.00” (Rubenzer, 2011, p. 112). This shows that PACs played a role financially in getting representatives to switch their votes to oppose the embargo. Furthermore, the representatives that received the most PAC contributions switched their vote on these newer versions of legislation involving the embargo and travel restrictions. They voted against either one or both of these amendments after receiving more funding from Cubans (Rubenzer, 2011). These are just two

examples of Cuban PACs playing a part in the continuance of restrictive policies between the U.S. and Cuba. Lobbying data also shows similar results.

Besides these amendments, it should be noted that one of the main Cuban PACs staunchly supported Republican elections for the past 10 election cycles. Republicans are more in favor of embargos and travel restrictions with Cuba, typically (Rubenzer, 2011). The U.S.-Cuba Democracy PAC is interested in foreign policy and is notably anti-Castro. From 2021 to 2022, 71.8% of their contributions went to Republican federal candidates. In 2022, \$22.5k went to Democrats, whereas \$55.6k was given to Republicans (“PAC Profile”). This pattern of Republican support was broken in 2008 and 2010. It can be theorized that the global economic crisis led Cubans to shift their interests to more open relations in order to send aid to their family members in Cuba. Here, it is shown that political influence by the expatriate community is coming from not just voting, but also campaign contributions as well. These contributions have played a role in getting the interests of the community put through Congress as the United States continues to have embargoes and travel restrictions in place with Cuba today.

Conclusion

Since the waves of migration of Cubans to the United States, the political power of the expatriate community has become apparent. Over the years, policies regarding relations between the United States and Cuba have followed the desires of the older generation of Cuban expatriates.

One key finding of this study is that the community, especially the older generation, is strategic with their voting. It is clear that the older generations of Cuban-American expatriates follow the politics between the United States and Cuba closely. They often support Republican candidates and support policies that further their interests, meaning tougher regulations on trade

and travel. The younger generation often has a less hardline approach and is more supportive of a more open relationship between the United States and Cuba, a perspective also demonstrated in their voting patterns. However, the older generation seems to be the main driver of the U.S. policy when compared to the younger generation. Their voting strategies, in combination with other political involvement, can help explain their impact.

Another key finding involves the dynamics in the political involvement of the Cuban-American expatriate community. Compared to other migrant groups, Cubans had a higher percentage of registered voters in 1992. However, they have less political involvement and are less likely to do something to solve political problems than other Latino migrant groups. This shows the reliance on voting specifically as political participation. It is clear the Cuban-American expatriate community looks to voting when they want to influence the government to have stricter travel and trade policies. However, voting is not the only tactic of political organization. Their community utilizes campaign contributions as well to drive policy change.

Perhaps one of the most profound findings is the significance of the campaign contributions of Cuban-American lobbyists and political action groups, and how the community exercised their political influence through their economic power. There is a correlation between the restrictive U.S.-Cuban relations and campaign contributions. Cuban Political Action Committees have played a major role in getting the interests of the Cuban-American expatriate community into legislation. This is obvious with the Davis and Rangel amendments that restricted travel and trade through an embargo. With regard to these findings, conclusions about how the community gained its political power can be found.

These key findings show that voting and campaign contributions by Cuban Americans have been a strong contributing factor to the continuation of strict travel and trade policies

between the United States and Cuba. The older generation consistently mobilizes in support of Republican candidates and policies that preserve their interests. The hypothesis of this paper, that argued campaign funding and political involvement were the main factors in the political influence of the Cuban-American community is proven true, as long as voting is considered the only form of political involvement. Other forms of political involvement do not have as strong participation from Cubans as they do for other migrant groups. These conclusions play an important role in understanding the circumstances of the restricted relationship between the U.S. and Cuba, as well as political diversity in the Cuban-American community.

The Cuban American community has privilege politically compared to other Latino migrant groups. Although this is not further explored in this essay, it is worth noting and could be an addition to this research moving forward. With the up and coming generations of Cuban youth, there has been a shift in opinion towards opening more doors with Cuba. Additionally, there has been a growing number of reports released on the detrimental effects of the decades-long embargo. Criticism of the relations has gained more attention over the years. Because of this shift and the growing period of time since the Castro government, U.S. travel and trade policy with Cuba has the possibility to change. Going forward, there is the possibility of open relations between the two countries and moving past the strained relationship that has dominated for decades.

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Appendix

Table 1: Political Participation by Latino Migrant Groups

