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National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey

Latino Opinion Leaders on U.S.-Latin American Relations

The NiLP Latino Policy & Politics Report (April 17, 2015)
This is part 3 of a 5-part series on the results of this survey

To explore Latino views on U.S.-Latin American relations, Latino opinion leaders provided their views on a number of select issues. These include relations with Cuba, the fiscal crisis and political status of Puerto Rico and the U.S. role in Venezuela and Mexico.

These findings are from the results of the National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey conducted by the National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP) over the Internet during the period April 6-13, 2015. It is a survey of 345 of the subscribers to *The NiLP Latino Policy & Politics Report*. The responses to this poll were all anonymous.

Cuba. Latino opinion leaders are overwhelmingly support of President Obama's initiative to normalize relations with Cuba. Most (89 percent) support this Obama initiative, particularly those who identified as Democrats (97 percent) as well as the independents (86 percent). A majority (54 percent) of the Republicans opposed the U.S. normalization with Cuba, although a significant 39 percent supported normalization.

Do you approve or disapprove of reestablishing diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba?

	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
Approve	96.8%	39.4%	85.7%	89.0%
Disapprove	0.5%	54.5%	5.7%	6.8%
Unsure	2.8%	6.1%	8.6%	4.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NiLP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

All major Latino national-origin groups strongly support the U.S. normalization of relations with Cuba, except for Cubans. However, the majority (54 percent) of Cuban opinion leaders also support normalization, with 35 percent disapproving.

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Do you approve or disapprove of reestablishing diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba?						
	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	CenSo Amer	Total
Approve	89.0%	92.7%	58.8%	87.5%	83.3%	88.6%
Disapprove	6.1%	4.5%	35.3%	0.0%	10.4%	7.2%
Unsure	4.9%	2.8%	5.9%	12.5%	6.3%	4.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

The next step in the Cuban normalization process is the question of the future of the U.S. embargo. Most Democrats (95 percent) and independents (84 percent) support ending the trade embargo while a majority (57 percent) of Republicans wishes to continue it.

Would you favor or oppose the U.S. ending its trade embargo against Cuba, which would allow U.S. companies to do business in Cuba and Cuban companies to do business in the U.S.?				
	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
Favor	94.5%	42.4%	84.3%	87.6%
Oppose	1.4%	57.6%	8.6%	8.3%
Unsure	4.1%	0.0%	7.1%	4.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13

The Latino opinion leaders are positive about the future of democracy in Cuba as a result of normalization, with 53 percent feeling it would become more democratic. However, the Latino opinion leaders were more mixed on Cuba's democratic prospects: 73 percent of Republicans believe it will become less democratic or remain the same, compared to 31 percent of Democrats and 51 percent of independents.

Over the next several years, do you think Cuba will become more democratic, less democratic, or will it be about the same as it is now?				
	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
More democratic	59.8%	24.2%	47.1%	53.0%
Less democratic	1.8%	18.2%	1.4%	3.3%
About the same	28.8%	54.5%	44.3%	35.5%
Unsure	9.6%	3.0%	7.1%	8.3%
Total	9.6%	3.0%	7.1%	8.3%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

The Latino opinion leaders of all the major Latino subgroups, except Cubans, were positive about the future of democracy in Cuba, with majorities feeling it would become more democratic. The Cuban opinion leaders were more divided, with 47 percent feeling that the Cuban political system would remain the same and another 12 percent feeling it would become less democratic.

Over the next several years, do you think Cuba will become more democratic, less democratic, or be about the same as it is now?						
	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	CenSo Amer	Total
More democratic	54.2%	53.1%	35.3%	50.0%	60.0%	51.0%
Less democratic	2.4%	1.1%	11.8%	12.5%	10.0%	7.2%
About the same	39.8%	36.6%	47.1%	25.0%	24.0%	31.8%
Unsure	3.6%	9.1%	5.9%	12.5%	6.0%	8.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

Puerto Rico. The United States territory of Puerto Rico is currently facing a major fiscal crisis. Not being a state this Commonwealth is not covered by American bankruptcy protections and if unable to repay its public debt it would have to default financially. There is currently legislation being considered by the U.S. Congress that would bring Puerto Rico's public authorities to fall under U.S. bankruptcy protection. The Latino opinion leaders were asked in which way they think the United States should assist Puerto Rico during this crisis.

A slim majority (51 percent) of the Latino opinion leaders feel that the United States should assist Puerto Rico with bankruptcy protections and financial assistance to address this problem. This was the case with those identifying as Democrats and independents (54 percent each) while only 21 percent of the Republicans support such U.S. intervention. The largest percentage of Republicans (33 percent) feel that the United States should play no role and that Puerto Rican should resolve this crisis on its own. Overall, there was little support for the United States taking direct control of Puerto Rico's economy during the crisis, except for a significant 21 percent of the Republicans.

Puerto Rico is currently experiencing a major fiscal crisis, with a debt of \$73 billion. What role should the United States federal government play in helping Puerto Rico to resolve this problem?				
	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
The United States should play no role; Puerto Rico should resolve this problem on its own	15.1%	33.3%	14.3%	17.2%
The United States should allow Puerto Rico to declare bankruptcy and provide other financial assistance	54.6%	21.2%	54.3%	50.9%
The United States should take full direct control of Puerto Rico's economy and make all necessary cuts in government services and spending	6.0%	21.2%	8.6%	8.3%
I don't know enough to make an opinion	16.1%	18.2%	15.7%	15.7%
Unsure	8.3%	6.1%	7.1%	8.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NiLP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

The position that the United States should provide bankruptcy and other assistance to Puerto Rico is held by almost two-thirds (65 percent) of the Puerto Rican opinion leaders.

The other Latino subgroups also support this position, but not by majorities: Mexicans (36 percent), Cubans (29 percent), Dominicans (38 percent) and Central/South Americans (36 percent).

Puerto Rico is currently experiencing a major fiscal crisis, with a debt of \$73 billion. What role should the United States federal government play in helping Puerto Rico to resolve this problem?						
	Mexican	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	CenSo Amer	Total
The United States should play no role; Puerto Rico should resolve this problem on its own	20.5%	14.3%	23.5%	12.5%	18.0%	16.8%
The United States should allow Puerto Rico to declare bankruptcy and provide other financial assistance	36.1%	64.6%	29.4%	37.5%	36.0%	50.8%
The United States should take full direct control of Puerto Rico's economy and make all necessary cuts in government services and spending	10.8%	5.1%	29.4%	25.0%	8.0%	8.7%
I don't know enough to make an opinion	26.5%	7.4%	17.6%	12.5%	28.0%	15.9%
Unsure	6.0%	8.6%		12.5%	10.0%	7.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

Some argue that the main problem facing Puerto Rico is the unresolved issue of its future political status. The Latino opinion leaders were asked what they feel that status should be with the largest, but no majority, percentages, despite party affiliation and national-origin, supporting the position that the decision should be up to the people of Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican opinion leaders indicated the greatest support for independence (27 percent), while statehood seemed the second-highest preference of Dominicans (13 percent), Mexicans (10 percent) and Central/South Americans (16 percent), while Cubans equally support statehood and independence (23 percent each). The Puerto Ricans also stood out in the highest percentage (15 percent) feeling that the United Nations needed to decolonize Puerto Rico first.

Which do you feel should be the future political status of Puerto Rico?						
	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	Mexican	CenSo Amer	Total
Remain a commonwealth of the United States	5.6%	23.5%	0.0%	6.0%	12.0%	7.5%
Become a state of the United States	16.4%	23.5%	25.0%	13.3%	22.0%	17.0%
Become an independent nation	27.1%	23.5%	12.5%	9.6%	16.0%	20.6%
Decision should be up to the people of Puerto Rico	32.2%	29.4%	62.5%	59.0%	40.0%	40.6%
The United Nations should decolonize Puerto Rico first	14.7%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%	6.0%	9.0%
Not sure	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	6.0%	2.0%	2.7%
I need more information before giving an opinion	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	2.0%	2.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

There is currently a major campaign within the Puerto Rican community to petition President Obama to pardon the Puerto Rican nationalist activist Oscar Lopez Rivera. A majority (56 percent) of the Latino opinion leaders support the freeing of this political prisoner. However, while most (73 percent) of the Puerto Rican opinion leaders support Lopez' release, there was less support for this among the other Latino subgroup leaders. A significant percent of non-Puerto Rican Latino opinion leaders indicated they didn't know enough about this case to offer an opinion. It is also interesting that almost none of the Latino opinion leaders felt that the United States did not have political prisoners.

Do you support the campaign to have President Obama pardon Puerto Rican political prisoner Oscar						
	Puerto Rican	Cuban	Dominican	Mexican	CenSo Amer	Total
Yes	72.7%	41.2%	50.0%	31.3%	44.0%	56.0%
No	8.0%	35.3%	0.0%	8.4%	12.0%	9.9%
I don't know enough about it to give an opinion	0.0%	17.6%	0.0%	55.4%	36.0%	28.1%
The United States doesn't have political prisoners	2.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.2%
Unsure	4.0%	5.9%		4.8%	8.0%	4.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NILP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

Venezuela. In March, the United States declared Venezuela a national security threat and ordered sanctions against seven of that country's officials. The Latino opinion leaders were asked if they feel this action is justified. The results were mixed, with pluralities of the major Latino subgroups feeling it was not justified, except for Cubans. On the other hand, most (82 percent) of the Cuban Latino opinion leaders agreed with President Obama's sanctions against Venezuela.

Last month, the United States declared Venezuela a national security threat and ordered sanctions against seven of that country's officials. Do you feel this action by President Obama is justified?

	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
Yes	21.8%	81.8%	25.7%	27.9%
No	40.0%	0.0%	42.9%	38.2%
I would need more info	31.4%	18.2%	27.1%	28.2%
Don't know	4.5%	0.0%	1.4%	3.2%
Unsure	2.3%	0.0%	2.9%	2.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NiLP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

Mexico. Another issue in the news is the serious problem of drug violence in Mexico. The Latino opinion leaders were mixed in who is primarily to blame for this situation in Mexico. Regardless of party affiliation and national-origin, large majorities agree that it is the fault of both Mexico and the United States. The Latino opinion leaders who identified themselves as bring Republicans were the group that felt most (33 percent) that Mexico was primarily to blame, while the Democrats (22 percent) and independents (19 percent) tended to blame primarily the United States.

Which comes closest to describing your view? The United States is mostly to blame for the drug violence in Mexico, OR Mexico is mostly to blame for the drug violence, OR both are to blame.

	Democratic	Republican	Independent (no party affiliation)	Total
The U.S. is mostly to blame	21.6%	6.1%	18.6%	21.0%
Mexico is mostly to blame	10.1%	33.3%	5.7%	10.9%
Both are to blame	67.4%	60.6%	75.7%	67.5%
DK	0.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: NiLP National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey - April 6-13, 2015

Discussion

Despite their strong connection to their homelands in Latin America and the Caribbean, Latino views on U.S.-Latin American relations are rarely explored. The Latino opinion leaders were asked their positions on a same of issues facing some of their countries of origins. In these areas, partisanship, although still a factor, was not as strong as it was in determining positions on domestic policy issues.

There was strong support overall for the U.S. normalization of diplomatic and trade relations with Cuba, with weaker but still majority support even from the Cuban opinion leaders. However, on support for ending the Cuban embargo and their view of the future of democracy in Cuba, partisanship differences were significant.

On the fiscal crisis in Puerto Rico, the Latino opinion leaders agreed that the United States needed to provide Puerto Rico with bankruptcy protections and provide financial assistance. There was also broad support for the position that the future political status of Puerto Rico needed to be determined by the people of Puerto Rico.

There was also broad agreement that the drug violence in Mexico has both Mexico and the United States to blame. There was no such agreement on the Latino opinion leaders' views on whether U.S. sanctions against Venezuela are justified.

Although U.S.-Latin American relations was not identified by the Latino opinion leaders as a top problem or issue facing the Latino community, there are areas of concern for Latinos in the definition of these relations. In the issues raised in this survey above, their support for the normalization of relations with Cuba and the need for the United States to actively assist Puerto Rico in resolving its fiscal crisis is apparent. These positions have important legislative implications for the United States that Latino advocates need to pursue.

Methodology

This is based on respondents from the influential online national information network of the National Institute for Latino Policy that represents a broad cross-section of Latino opinion leaders throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, and the US Virgin Islands. These are made up of elected officials, government officials, heads of community-based organizations and national advocacy groups, religious leaders, business leaders, academics and others. Through our National Latino Opinion Leaders Survey, we poll this group from time to time on important issues facing the Latino community given this stratum's important role in Latino agenda-setting and framing.

While the polling that is being conducted on Latino issues by the media and polling organizations is of the broader community, this more select group of opinion leaders has a unique place from which to view these questions within our community. While not a scientifically generated sample of Latino elites, we expect this survey will result in useful insights on the main issues facing the Latino community in New York City today. While the findings of this survey are not generalizable to the community as a whole, they represent the views of an influential set of opinion leaders within this community who help set the framework for its issues and priorities. These findings should be seen more as a heuristic device as one might take the results of a focus group.

***The NiLP Latino Policy & Politics Report** is an online information service provided by the National Institute for Latino Policy (NiLP), edited by Angelo Falcón. For further information, visit www.latinopolicy.org or contact editor@latinopolicy.org.*