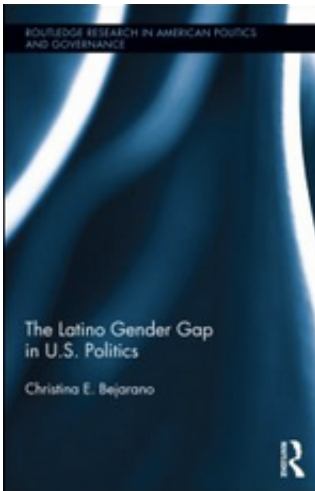


# Book examines 'Latino gender gap,' future of US politics

February 12 2014, by George Diepenbrock

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Political pundits and operatives today spend plenty of time dissecting the modern gender gap, mainly why women vote at higher rates than men and tend to support more liberal policies and Democratic candidates.

But a University of Kansas researcher argues how the parties handle outreach to minority women, particularly Latina voters, could determine the future of U.S. politics—especially with Latino voters having a rapidly growing influence on the American political landscape.

"Both parties are not quite sure how to successfully court the Latino

vote. They just think about it in general, but we need to understand the diversity within Latinos, especially within the women's vote," said Christina Bejarano, associate professor of political science. "We can't just have a general statement of the Latino vote or women's vote without actually trying to figure out what that means."

Bejarano says the gender gap is even more pronounced among minority voters. The U.S. Latino population is now more than 16 percent and expected to increase, and in recent national elections Latino voters have given Democrats a slim majority and a small level of Republican support.

If either party could tip that level of backing within the demographic group even more slightly in its favor, that would produce a leg up. It's a valuable strategy that could influence swing states in 2016.

"That's the important minority women's vote we need to talk about and need to know much more about, if the parties want to be successful in the elections to come," she said.

Bejarano in her new book, *The Latino Gender Gap in U.S. Politics*, points to how in 2012 among white voters women's support for Barack Obama was 7 points higher than men. However, Obama's support was more pronounced among black and Latino women voters, who chose Obama over Mitt Romney by 9 to 11 percentage points more than black and Latino men.

"In the last couple of presidential elections, racial and [ethnic minority women](#) are the ones who are actually showing this modern gender gap," she said. "So it's the racial and ethnic [minority women](#) who are reinforcing this [gender gap](#) in terms of partisan support in U.S. politics."

With the increasing U.S. Latino population giving the group more

political clout, Bejarano says that makes it important to dig deeper and analyze political trends.

"Both parties need to think more about the diversity within the Latino population," she said. "They can't just take for granted that Latinos are going to vote one way or the other, or that women are going to vote one way or the other."

She studied national public opinion and focus group data sets to examine political attitudes among Latino voters—both immigrants and natural-born citizens. Within the partisan gap, Latina voters have been more supportive of Democratic candidates than men, but there's a lesson for both parties. For example, newer immigrants are less likely to identify with a political party.

Bejarano said this means parties should be most cognizant of which policies they support, particularly related to immigration reform, women's health issues and equal pay. Some of these issues are already in play ahead of November's mid-term election, and groups are also forming centered on this type of strategy and outreach to Latina voters.

"Both parties are trying to figure out how they are going to frame their argument," she said.

Mobilizing Latina [voters](#) could give one party a key to capturing large swaths of support among the country's fastest-growing demographic group because they are perceived as the key to mobilizing Latino families and communities, she said.

"The Latinas are the ones who get their families, especially their husbands, to go out and participate," Bejarano said. "It is important to tap the Latina role in the community to also get the whole community to participate in politics."

In recent elections, she said neither party has done enough to benefit from Latino politicians who are already active, she said. For example, New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez was used briefly during the 2012 Republican National Convention. Things seem to be picking up ahead of the 2014 mid-term election, as Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a Cuban-American from Florida, gave a Spanish version of the GOP response to Obama's State of the Union address. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington gave the official GOP response in English.

"You could tell at least there the Republican Party is thinking about how to get the Latinos and how to get the women," Bejarano said.

Routledge released the book in December as part of its Routledge Research in American Politics and Governance series.

Provided by University of Kansas

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