

The Palm Beach Post

REAL NEWS STARTS HERE

FAU national poll: Hispanics aren't happy with Democrats

By John Lantigua

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Hispanic voters across the country aren't in love with Democrats this election season, but Republicans haven't done enough to woo them away in significant numbers either, according to a national poll conducted by Florida Atlantic University.

The poll found that 50 percent of eligible Hispanic voters said they favored Democrats in the midterm elections compared with 28 percent who said they were more likely to vote Republican. In 2012, President Barack Obama won 71 percent of the Hispanic vote compared with GOP challenger Mitt Romney's 27 percent. Since then, Obama's numbers have dropped precipitously among the largest minority group in the country, with 40 percent approving of his performance and 40 percent disapproving, according to the poll.

That said, the numbers indicate that Republicans haven't been able to capitalize on that erosion of support.

"The Republicans have failed to take advantage of the president's falling popularity in this growing community," said Kevin Wagner, FAU political scientist. "The Hispanic vote could be in play, but the GOP has not made a sufficient effort to attract the voters away from the Democratic Party."

But the fading of Obama's star could affect turnout among Hispanics who normally vote Democrat, which could affect key contests across the nation, including Florida's gubernatorial election.

"Yes, that's a distinct possibility," Wagner said.

Those who took the survey in English said the economy was their main issue and chose Democrats, by a 48-30 margin.

Those who opted to take it in Spanish said immigration was their most important issue and were more likely to vote Democrat than Republican by an even larger margin, 57 -17 percent.

During the 2012 campaign, Obama promised to push immigration reform in his second term and last year the Democrat-controlled Senate passed a bill that would legalize the majority of the 11-12 million undocumented people in the country. But ever since then reform has been blocked by the GOP-controlled House, which has done nothing to endear the GOP to Hispanics.

On the other hand, immigration activists have urged Obama to act by executive order to fix the problem, but with several Democratic Senate candidates currently in tight races, Obama chose not to make a move that might anger more conservative voters, who oppose mass legalization, and drive them to the polls. Obama has said he plans to issue an executive order after the elections, but many Hispanics have tired of what they see as his foot dragging on the issue and that has cost Democrats some of their 2012 advantage among Hispanics.

The question being asked by political observers is, on Tuesday, will some Hispanic voters stay home because they are angry over delays, or will they trust that the executive order is coming and be more likely to go to the polls?

The FAU survey collected responses from 803 Hispanics across the nation, with a margin of error of plus or minus 3.4 percent. The data was collected between Oct. 1 and Oct. 20.