

Four in 10 Hispanics favor ending U.S. trade embargo against Cuba, new FAU poll shows

By **Anthony Man**
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More than four in 10 Hispanic Americans favor lifting the U.S. trade embargo against Cuba and more than seven in 10 support re-establishing diplomatic relations, according to a new poll aimed at gauging reaction to President Barack Obama's upending of five decades of U.S. policy toward the island nation.

The numbers show nuances in just how much of a thaw Hispanics would like to see.

More than 73 percent favor diplomatic relations and 68 percent favor expanding trade. But a much smaller 43 percent oppose the embargo, which is the obstacle to trade.

"I think what that illustrates is that there's a large portion of the Hispanic community that's open to starting to fix the relations. Diplomatic relations is sort of a first step," said Kevin Wagner, a Florida Atlantic University political scientist who reviewed the data. "I think they just want to take it one step at a time."

The Florida Atlantic University Business and Economics Polling Initiative, which conducted the survey in January, plans to release it Tuesday.

In mid-December, Obama announced a new U.S. relationship with Cuba, with the objective of normalization of relations between the two countries.

FAU surveyed 500 Hispanics in English and Spanish using a combination of automated telephone calls and online surveys to produce a survey it said has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points.

Monica Escaleras, director of the polling initiative, said wished she had enough data to allow analysts to extensively slice and dice the data. But the survey was conducted nationwide and Escaleras said it doesn't have enough responses to assess how Hispanics living in Florida feel compared with the rest of the nation or to examine differences among Cuban-Americans, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and others.

Available breakdowns showed:

- On several questions, Hispanics in the South, which includes Florida, were generally more skeptical of the benefits of improving relations with Cuba than the nation as a whole.

In the South, 32 percent said lifting the U.S. embargo would lead to regime change in Cuba, 22 percent said it wouldn't and 46 percent said it might. Nationwide, 37 percent said it would lead to regime change, 18 percent said it wouldn't and 45 percent said it

might.

In the South, 60 percent favored expanding trade with Cuba, 32 percent said trade should remain the same, and 8 percent said trade should be stopped. Nationwide, 68 percent favored expanding trade with Cuba, 27 percent said it should be kept the same, and 5 percent said it should be stopped.

- Republican Hispanics are much more likely to indicate a willingness to visit Cuba than Democrats. Among Republicans, 57 percent said they would visit the island; 39 percent of Democrats said they'd likely visit.

Overall, 49 percent of Hispanics said they'd visit Cuba. Many more — 61 percent — said they favor unrestricted travel to Cuba.

There's also a regional difference on willingness to travel to Cuba. Among Hispanics in southern states, 37 percent said they might visit Cuba, 43 percent said they wouldn't and 21 percent weren't sure. Nationwide, 49 percent said they'd be open to visiting Cuba, 28 percent said they wouldn't, and 23 percent weren't sure.

- Hispanics with lower incomes most likely to favor the embargo and those with the highest incomes are least likely to support it.

Among Hispanics earning more than \$75,000, the embargo is opposed by 68 percent. For people earning \$25,000 to \$75,000, 42 percent oppose the embargo. Among those with incomes less than \$25,000, just 24 percent oppose the embargo.

Escaleras said she suspects people with higher incomes may be more interested in the economic opportunities that could come from lifting the embargo. She thinks they see "a huge, huge opportunity for business."

FAU's Business and Economic Polling Institute started monthly surveys in August to produce a Hispanic version of the widely respected Thompson Reuters University of Michigan survey of consumer confidence that's been conducted with the general population since 1946.

The survey found consumer optimism among Hispanics surged to 100.7 in January, up from 86.4 in December. In August, the Hispanic "index of consumer sentiment" was 68.3. A higher score shows greater optimism.

aman@sunsentinel.com, 954-356-4550

Poll: Hispanic attitudes toward Cuba policy

Will lifting the embargo lead to regime change? Yes, 37 percent; no, 18 percent, maybe 45 percent.

Favor or oppose the U.S. embargo? Favor, 24 percent; oppose, 43 percent; not sure, 33 percent.

Favor or oppose re-establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba? Favor diplomatic relations, 73 percent; oppose, 12 percent; not sure 15 percent.

Allow unrestricted travel to Cuba? Allow, 61 percent; oppose, 12 percent; not sure, 27 percent.

Expand trade with Cuba? Favor, 68 percent; keep same, 27 percent; stop trade, 5 percent.

Would you visit Cuba: Yes, 49 percent; no 28 percent; not sure, 23 percent.

Note: Numbers do not always add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Source: Florida Atlantic University Business and Economic Polling Institute, nationwide survey of Hispanics, set for release Feb. 17, 2015.

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