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DISCUSSION GROUP OUTLINE

LATIN AMERICA AND THE HISPANIC (LATINO) COMMUNITY IN THE UNITED STATES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Discussion Group Synopsis
Analyze and discuss the behavior of the Hispanic vote in the United States’ 2016 presidential campaign in the context of issues relating to U.S.-Latin America relations, and the relevance of Latin America in the presidential debate.

The Hispanic community is the largest minority group in the United States. It is estimated that by 2016, there will be more than 58 million Latinos in this country, making up 17.4% of the total population. This group will represent 13% of all eligible voters, but in some states the percentage is much higher. This is the case of Florida, for example, where the Latino vote will reach 20.2% of eligible voters. These numbers reflect the increasing power of the Latino vote and the importance for candidates and elected officials to understand its impact.

At the same time, there is an agenda of relevant issues regarding Latin America’s relations with the United States, such as immigration, trade and investment, organized crime, and other critical bilateral issues like the cases of Cuba and Venezuela. However, these topics are addressed differently by each presidential candidate, and in some cases, they are ignored. The way the candidates approach some of these issues may have an impact on the Latino vote preferences, and would configure different policy scenarios depending on who wins the election.

Finally, it is remarkable that the 2016 presidential campaign is the first with two candidates that were born to immigrants from Latin America, and another candidate that has very close familial ties to the Hispanic community. The situation poses the question, how will Latino voters respond to these candidates?

Session 1 – The Latino vote and the 2016 presidential campaign
This session will address the importance of the Hispanic vote in the 2016 presidential election of the United States, the political preferences of these voters, and the policy issues that define those preferences. The behavior that this vote has had in past presidential elections will also be considered, including levels of participation. The session will also analyze the relevance of candidates’ personal ties to Latin America on Hispanics’ electoral preferences. Will nominating a Republican candidate with close personal ties to the Latin American community upset the traditional electoral partisan dynamic? In other words, can a Republican’s personal ties to Latin America blunt the historical rift between the party and the Latino community, on which Democrats have historically had a stronger hold? What will prevail, party or personal relationship?

Session 2 – Latin America and the presidential campaign
In this session we will go over two issues: first, how much importance the presidential campaign is assigning to Latin America, and on which specific topics; secondly, the influence that the relationship between the United States and Latin America has on the electoral decisions of Hispanics.

Session 3 – United States immigration policy towards Latin America and its impact on the Latino vote
The current debate on United States immigration policy towards Latin America will be analyzed, as well as its importance within the 2016 presidential campaign. At the same time, we will discuss Hispanics’ attitudes toward immigration and how they affect their electoral preferences.

Session 4 – United States trade policy with Latin America: a relevant issue to the presidential campaign?
We will discuss the trade and investment agenda between Latin America and United States, in light of three aspects: first, the importance of this topic for Latin America; second, the presidential campaign debate on the issues of free trade and employment; and its relevance to the Hispanic voters.

Session 5 – The impact of organized crime and drug trafficking from Latin America on U.S. drug and criminal justice policies
Latin America is the chief supplier and the United States remains a leading consumer of drugs, from marijuana to cocaine to heroine. The illegal drug trade between Latin America and the U.S. – linked to organized crime, violence, and corruption – has led to a “war on drugs.” What have been the consequences of the war on drugs, both for Latin America and in the United States? And what would legalization of marijuana or decriminalization of certain substances in the U.S. do for drug trafficking and organized crime in Latin America? What are the implications for the U.S. criminal justice system? We will explore the leading presidential candidates’ positions on marijuana legalization and analyze both the political motivations and policy impacts of their positions.

Session 6 – The U.S. presidential candidates and future implications for the U.S.–L.A. agenda
Using the presidential candidates’ proposals and positions on issues that most impact the relationship between the U.S. and Latin America as a starting point, we will discuss possible scenarios for future bilateral and multilateral relations. We will analyze this in the context of the leading presidential candidates and their electoral prospects.