Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2024 / Demographics aren't destiny

[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]

[BILLBOARD]

SCORING IN <Clutch Blackwater - BMC>

SEAN RAMESWARAM (host): If you watch, let’s say, Fox News, there’s this narrative that President Biden let lots of Latinos in through the Southern border to win elections.

*<CLIP> TEXAS ATTORNEY GENERAL KEN PAXTON: The reality is, the plan from the beginning: get these people here as fast as possible, and get them voting…*

SEAN: But if you look at how Latinos are polling, it doesn’t seem like that plan’s working out.

CHRISTIAN PAZ (senior politics reporter, Vox): Well, it turns out many of those immigrants aren't necessarily automatically going to become Democratic voters. Turns out that as they enter the country, settle, start families, have kids, have grandkids, they are becoming just as diverse and complicated as the country they were trying to come be a part of… There's some truth to some of what Reagan and other Republicans used to say about, their line back in the day was “Hispanics are conservatives or Republicans, they just don't know it yet.” Turns out there might be some truth to that.

SEAN: Demographics aren’t destiny on *Today, Explained*.

[THEME]

*BUMPER <Caddyshack and Noam - “2020, 2020 - fore!”>*

SEAN: *Today, Explained*. Sean Rameswaram. Kamala Harris isn’t putting up the numbers she should with a few groups that have historically voted for Democrats. We’re gonna talk about those groups on the program today. And Christian Paz from Vox is here to kick it off with Latino voters.

CHRISTIAN: Correct.

SEAN: How's she doing with the Latino voters?

CHRISTIAN: You know, not as bad as Joe Biden was doing.

SEAN: Ok.

CHRISTIAN: But definitely there are signs there that something is happening with this segment of the electorate.

SEAN: Mm-hm.

CHRISTIAN: And it reminds me a little bit of 2020. And it reminds me a little bit about this general conversation that we started to have after 2020, which was, are Latino voters becoming swing voters?

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_aDSi0UZfw)*> 12NewsNow: Take Zapata county for example. There, the population is 95 percent Hispanic or Latino. Trump won 52 percent of the voters.*

*UT AUSTIN PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROFESSOR SHERRI GREENBERG: Demographics do not vote, right? People either do vote or do not.*

CHRISTIAN: Are they changing? Are they not following the path that we long thought that they would? Which was, they've supported Democrats at pretty high rates and would stick with Democrats in terms of that level of support, contributing to this general idea that has kind of lifted up progressives, liberals for the last 20 years, that as the nation got more diverse, as the nation got more educated, as urban centers grew, that that demographic change would inevitably lead to a rising tide that would lift liberal Democrats into a position of power. And being able to win national elections much more decisively and easier…

SEAN: Mm.

CHRISTIAN: …than in the past. So you might have heard of this idea that demographics are destiny.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTN237vPzTU)*> MICHAEL GAYED: We were talking about demographics which I'm pretty sure are destiny.*

CHRISTIAN: What we're kind of seeing from the last few cycles is, maybe not. Maybe voters can break the patterns, right, that they've followed in the past and behave differently as time goes on.

SEAN: What's going on with Latino voters this time around? How do they feel about Biden? How do they feel now about Harris? How does that compare to how they feel about … Trump?

CHRISTIAN: Yeah. It's interesting here because two things are true at the same time, that there's new excitement for Kamala Harris. People are really fed up with Biden, really did not like him. And Latino support has consolidated to roughly around that 60% mark, high 50s in a lot of these polling averages. Then at the same time, Trump's favorability, including among Latinos, has never been as high as it is now.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zWfa5XenbZk%20Andrea%20Kristinsdottir)*> DONALD TRUMP: Everything is perfecto!*  
  
CHRISTIAN: Meaning that there is either changing perspectives toward Trump and his policies. I think you see that a lot in some of the polling about whose policies were better for you. And Hispanic and Latino voters tend to align more with like white voters in terms of reflecting on the Trump years as being particularly good for them.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=veQFwhYYubI)*> GRISELDA MARTINEZ: I love what Donald Trump did for, for us as an economy while he was in presidency, and I don't know what she has to offer because she's new.*

SEAN: Are there important changes in the electorate that we should know about, Christian?

CHRISTIAN: I think so.

SCORING IN <Loopbox (amber)>

CHRISTIAN: I think two things when talking about Latinos is that the average age tends to be much younger than the average American. And then also that most Latinos living in the US are U.S. born. They don't necessarily have the same kind of memories of an immigrant experience or further removed from the immigrant generation. At the same time, I think there are a few interesting trends about where these communities are growing. Some of the places that have seen the most growth in terms of Latino population aren't in the places you'd expect. It's not like California or Texas. It's places in the Midwest. We're seeing the rise of communities that are geographically diverse and spread across the country. Outside of the Philly suburbs, you have an array of Rust Belt towns that have large growing Latino populations. Same in North Dakota, same in South Dakota. Places that maybe folks went out to work in farms, work in other industrial jobs, and then settled and create communities. And you essentially see the path of assimilation in the US.

SCORING OUT

SEAN: So how is, say, Harris taking that into account?

CHRISTIAN: In some ways, it involves talking less explicitly about race and ethnicity, less about identity politics, less in terms of, this is an ad for you, a Latino person. It's instead prioritizing issues. I think I can remember a few ads that I've seen from the Harris campaign where there's talk about inflation, talk about housing affordability, talk about jobs, and plans to address that with an English-speaking person who has a accent specific to either Mexican-American or Cuban-American or Puerto Rican.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6kbhFyhvpY)*> CAMPAIGN AD “TOGETHER”: With the Biden Harris administration's historic action, working people like us can continue to build a good life and strengthen our economy for generations to come.*

CHRISTIAN: And so there is like a hint, right, an appeal, like, a slight wink at, you know, this is an ad about the economy, but with a little, you know, nod to why it's targeted at you. It's different.

SEAN: Are you saying, like, literally just like put an accent on it? <laughs>

CHRISTIAN: Like, yeah, actually.

SEAN: And that's, like, literally what she's doing?

CHRISTIAN: Yeah.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWEm-Jr212M)*> MARK ANTHONY: This is Mark Anthony. Even though some have forgotten, I remember what it was like when Trump was president. I remember what he did and he said about Puerto Rico. About our people.*

*TRUMP: Puerto Rico.*

CHRISTIAN: You do it in English, you do it in Spanish, you run it in places like Phoenix, in Las Vegas. And that's much more targeted than just saying, ‘Hey, Latinos, I am your Democratic candidate and I love you and the other guy is bad.’

SEAN: Mm.

CHRISTIAN: ‘He hates immigrants.’ And, the school of thought for a while over the last decade was: prioritize immigration, prioritize appeal to identity and solidarity. Like center the fact that one side is fighting for you, the disadvantaged or marginalized person. And that's the way that we'll be able to win more of these voters and complete that ‘demographics is destiny’ vision.

SEAN: Mm.

CHRISTIAN: And what we've seen is that in many cases, this category of people we call Latinos and Hispanics don't necessarily identify as people of color or don't necessarily identify with that kind of, like an overcoming message, like you're marginalized and we will help you achieve more. And so one thing that has been very true for the last few cycles is the reason that there's so much interest and care about the economy is because of this kind of aspirational mindset within these communities. That part of the reason that they even immigrated to the U.S. if they did was in search of a better life. So if you want to appeal to them, you should talk about small business opportunities, about how to facilitate access to college, how to facilitate access to other trades, and present what now Harris is calling, which I find really interesting because it's almost like following that counter playbook to a T, when she talks about the opportunity economy, her opportunity agenda.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPwZXHPXOpQ)*> VP KAMALA HARRIS: Together we will build in that future what I call an opportunity economy, which is where every American has an opportunity to own a home, to start a business, to build wealth.*

SEAN: How's her opponent doing? Is he also just putting an accent on it there?

CHRISTIAN: It's a little bit different.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.nbcnews.com/video/trump-says-black-latino-voters-who-back-harris-need-their-head-examined-221847109812)*> DONALD TRUMP: And I’ll tell you what. Any African-American or Hispanic, and you know how well I’m doing there, that votes for Kamala, you gotta have your head examined, because they, they are really screwing you. They are really screwing you.*

CHRISTIAN: You have a little less sophistication and you're just running essentially like ads about immigration, about mismanagement of the southern border, about essentially almost like creating a bit of a dichotomy between those Hispanic and Latino Americans, because this is a key thing that the Trump campaign has laid out is you back in 2020, you had Latinos for Trump. In 2024, it's Latino Americans for Trump.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykIcVVxB9A4)*> LATINO AMERICANS FOR TRUMP SPOKESMAN JESUS MARQUEZ: You know, when you have millions of millions of undocumented people coming across the border, taking the jobs of all the Latinos. That's another thing. You know these people are competing with Hispanics, not with other groups, so definitely not, not good for the Latino community.*

CHRISTIAN: And it's kind of trying to create some distance between folks who are immigrating to the U.S. more recently and those who have been here for some time and might be distraught at signs or images of disorder, or overwhelmed borders, essentially. And so there's a degree there of, essentially, telling these voters in TV ads and in digital ads that you are one of us, you're an American. We are the party that will protect that sense of American identity.

SEAN: If this is all going to come down to immigration, the economy, then it feels like maybe Latino voters are even less so of, like, this distinct bloc and more just like the whole American electorate at this point, right?

CHRISTIAN: Yeah, I think of it as like another piece of evidence that some people call this the mainstreaming of Latinos and other folks call it the Latinization of America, where as Latinos become more and more of a integral part of the fabric of the country and of the political, you know, body, that they also lose some of the distinctiveness that made them so, so different back in the day. In that way, you know, I like to think of it as mirroring some of the changes that we saw with immigrant groups in the past – Italian, Irish Americans going from being voting blocs that could reliably be counted on to essentially being 50/50 voters today. That is some of what we've been seeing over the last decades with the way that Latinos have been participating in our elections. And at the same time, there's those political concerns that are front and center that mirror what the rest of the electorate is saying.

SCORING IN <The Graceful Ape Waltz - BMC>

CHRISTIAN: We may be headed for a future where these voters do become even more of a swing group, more of a group that maybe one side can have an advantage in winning a majority, but maybe not necessarily can be counted on to provide significant margins of support for one side or the other in the way that young voters, for example, do for Democrats now, or that Black voters do for Democrats, or that, you know, evangelical voters do for Republicans.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: Christian Paz. Vox dot com. That’s where you can find a whole dang series of stories on the American left.

We’re gonna talk about the other groups that Harris is trying to hold onto when we’re back on *Today, Explained*.

[BREAK]

[BUMPER]

*<CLIP> KERRY WASHINGTON: So how do you pronounce it?*

*GRANDNIECE 1: First you say ‘comma’ like a comma in a sentence.*

*GRANDNIECE 2: Then you say ‘la’ like ‘lalalalala’*

*KERRY WASHINGTON: put it together and it’s 1, 2, 3 —*

SEAN: *Today, Explained* is back. Christian Paz is gone. Amy Walter is here. She’s the editor and publisher of the Cook Political Report. We asked her how Vice-President Harris is doing with some of the other groups that have historically been reliable voters for the Democrats.

AMY WALTER (publisher and editor-in-chief, Cook Political Report): So the Democratic base we think of as voters of color, younger voters and with Black voters, for example. These are voters that in 2020 gave Biden really strong support. So Biden won Black voters by 81 points. Harris is still winning them overwhelmingly, but it's by 64 points. And, you know, if you're talking about a race, which this one is, that is fought on the margins, you know, you'd say, well, she's still winning them overwhelmingly, sure, but ten, 15 point swing or in some of these states, even a 3 or 4 point swing away from Democrats is the difference between a Democrat winning and a Democrat losing. Now, the one bright spot for Harris where she is doing better than Biden did in 2020, she's doing about four points better with white voters who have a college degree or better. And this is really the sort of the core question for this election which is when we see that these demographic shifts voters of color again, not moving to be a majority for Republicans, but many of them moving their allegiance away from. Democrats, voting for a Republican are we going to see some other group of voters flipping from Republican to Democrat? And what we know is that people who show up and vote election after election as a whole, they tend to be older and they are whiter just as a percent than the overall electorate and so there's this trope about who's who's going to you know, ‘it's all about turnout in these last two weeks’ part of the question about turnout is not just which voters are turning out, but how many of those voters are turning out, who aren't traditionally active voters because that's where Trump does best.

SEAN: And it's unclear if they're going to win them back with unions because Harris has struggled to get the endorsement of some key unions, right?

AMY Yeah, but I also think it's important to make the distinction between and we had to learn this lesson in 2016 as well between being a so-called blue collar voter and being a labor union member…

SEAN: Mm.

AMY: …and and what drives those voters. Also, the big difference between being a member. Of a trade that is overwhelmingly male versus being part of a labor union that's overwhelmingly female. If you think about service workers, nurses, teachers, right? Those are also members of labor. And they're bigger in number than the number of firefighters, let's say.

SEAN: Mm.

AMY: But firefighters and teamsters are a stand-in, I think, for white non-college men and their alienation from a party that used to call them the core of their coalition. This is really the interesting question, whether what we're going to see is a real realignment among voters along we call it class so it's not really income, but it's really more along education being much more of a factor than just simply what your gender or race is and we get a Democratic Party now being much more affiliated with that managerial class and a Republican party more affiliated with the working class across ethnicities and across race.

SEAN: Hmm. We've been talking mostly so far about voters who we may have historically thought sort of belonged in the Democratic tent but...

AMY: Right.

SEAN: Harris more so than I think in any candidate in recent memory from the Democratic Party has been making a real play for Republicans:

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/08/29/politics/video/republican-cabinet-presidency-kamala-harris-intv-preview-sot-bash-digvid)*> KAMALA HARRIS: And I think it would be a benefit to the American public to have a member of my cabinet who is a Republican.*

SEAN: … campaigning with Liz Cheney …

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.texastribune.org/2024/09/06/dick-cheney-kamala-harris-liz-cheney-colin-allred/)*> LIZ CHENEY: Dick Cheney will be voting for Kamala Harris.*

SEAN: … talking about Dick Cheney…

AMY: Right.

SEAN: …of all people, is that working?

AMY: Right? Like, you know, the 2004, you, comes back and says, by the way, 20 years from now, Dick Cheney is going to endorse a Democrat. You'd be like, that will never happen, ever…

SEAN: How big can the tent get?

AMY: Yeah.  
  
SEAN: <chuckles>  
  
AMY: This is really the the absolute question of the hour, which is if you are losing or not doing as well with your traditional core voters, voters of color, can you make that up with white voters who have traditionally been Republican? And there are some signs, when I look at this white college number, I say ‘okay, so those are clearly people who, you know, since 2020 maybe are feeling a little less keyed in to Donald Trump or maybe more willing to show up for a Democrat this time around.’ But it is a small percent of the electorate. And part of the reason Harris is doing better in those whiter states like Michigan and Wisconsin and Pennsylvania than she is in states that have a higher percentage of voters of color like Georgia or Arizona and Nevada is that again, in the polling she's not doing any worse with white non-college voters. Right? She's holding her own there. Now if that is the case, that's like a best case scenario for Harris. Right? Voters of color are catching up with where those white non-college voters have been for a long time. And so it makes some sense that the shift. Is really happening in places where people are more open to movement, that white voters are pretty set and they're pretty stable as voters. It's voters of color, especially Latino voters who just are not as aligned with party who may be new voters who just don't have the same history with voting behavior that many of these white voters do. So maybe it's realistic that she doesn't lose any more ground with white non-college voters, even as she's losing ground with Latinos and Black voters who fit into that same category.  
  
SEAN: Mm-hm.   
  
AMY: But it's also possible that she does do worse with this group of voters. And in that case all three of those things together. Black, Latino, white non-college, moving away from her you can't make that up just by doing a little bit better with women or doing a little bit better with those Liz Cheney, Dick Cheney, Nikki Haley voters.

SEAN: Mm. Besides like one of the candidates being a felon, another of the candidates dropping out, two assassination attempts and that one time, like, one of the candidates just stood up on a stage and danced for 30 minutes …

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?539179-1/president-trump-hosts-town-hall-oaks-pennsylvania)*> TRUMP: So play YMCA, go ahead, let’s go, nice and loud.  
 KRISTI NOEM: Here we go, everybody.  
 MUSIC*

AMY: <laughs>

SEAN: What has surprised you most about this, this campaign season?

AMY: But this is the, Sean, that’s the answer, is after all of that the polls have moved like two points.  
  
SEAN: <laughs>   
  
AMY: Either way! You just said a whole bunch of crazy stuff that in any other era we would say, ‘Oh gosh! That's going to have a big impact.” Everybody keeps asking me about the October Surprise. We've had an October Surprise. We've had an October surprise every week.  
  
SEAN: Yeah. <laughs>   
  
AMY: Since July!

SCORING OUT <YMCA>  
  
AMY: And also, Sean, think about what, what's happened since 2020. We've had January 6th. We've had indictments. We've had the Dobbs decision. And yet if you look at people who said they voted in 2020 and who you're voting for now, 95% of people voted for Trump in 2020, voting for him now. 95% of those people who voted for Biden are voting for Harris now. In other words, even after all this craziness of the last four years and the craziness of the last six months, 90-plus percent of people are sticking with the candidate they had in 2020.  
  
SEAN: Mmm.  
  
AMY: And that is, in essence, our politics right now.

SCORING IN <8bit adventure - BMC>

AMY: It takes a lot to move anybody off of their partisanship. And so we are now fighting over a very small slice – the candidates are fighting over a very small slice of the electorate: 4 or 5%. And a tiny sliver of them moving is the difference between one candidate winning or one candidate losing.

SEAN: Always good to remember that a very small number of people will decide this election.

AMY: Yes.

SCORING BUMP

SEAN: Amy Walter! Cook Political dot com. Avishay Artsy and Eliza Dennis were in the kitchen making this show. Amina Al-Sadi, Laura Bullard, Andrea Kristinsdottir and Patrick Boyd were the sous chefs. This is *Today, Explained*.

[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]