

# [***Why the Politics of Republican Latinos Suggests They Want To Be White | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BFD-SBY1-DY68-10WD-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Are Latino Republicans ashamed of their ethnic origins and would rather be white? Yes, in an ideological sense.

**Body**

As our country gears up for another racially fraught presidential election, [*many political observers are wondering*](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/11/us/politics/democrats-latinos-biden-trump.html) whether the roughly 30 percent of Latinos who voted for [*Donald Trump*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/donald-trump?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in 2016 and 2020 will once again support a Republican candidate who is openly [*xenophobic and anti-Latino*](https://academic.oup.com/poq/article-abstract/84/4/860/6205964). The answer is very likely "yes" because many of these Latinos want to be white—but not in the way that you're thinking.

To understand this Latino puzzle, we must transform our understanding about whiteness in America. Most people view white people as a group whose membership depends on skin color and other observable traits. But there is a more telling, and perhaps more accurate, way of thinking about this group as one whose membership is based on an ideological way of thinking—a worldview that demands both hierarchy and domination of others. Only with this perspective in mind can we begin to better understand Latino [*Republicans*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/republicans?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in contemporary times.

The conventional view of race in America is that it is a social construction: an [*imagined but meaningful category with real consequences for people's lives*](https://www.routledge.com/Racial-Formation-in-the-United-States/Omi-Winant/p/book/9780415520317). This perspective views white people as being comprised exclusively of individuals whose skin color is relatively light and who find their ancestral origins in Western Europe. But in the current moment, this understanding cannot explain why so many Latinos keep such close political company with a mostly white Republican Party.

Consider Enrique Tarrio, former leader of the white supremacist organization, the [*Proud Boys*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/proud-boys?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), and ally of former President Donald Trump. Enrique is a dark-skinned Cuban man who looks unmistakably Latino. Yet he fundamentally thinks like many Republican white people in ideological terms.

What Enrique Tarrio and other Latino Republicans today have in common is their earnest and devout investment in whiteness as an ideology. If whiteness is an ideology, then your skin color and racial classification do not matter as much as your genuine belief in a subjugating worldview. If whiteness is an ideology, then what earns you your bona fides is your commitment to pushing back, politically, and sometimes violently, against a variety of minoritized groups who "deserve" to be put in their place and kept there.

Does this mean that Latino Republicans are ashamed of their ethnic origins and would rather be white? Yes, in an ideological sense.

What Republican Latinos, today, are reacting to is the prevailing—and accurate—understanding of Latinos as [*a mostly progressive, Democratic-leaning, and genuinely aggrieved group*](https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041322-045828). Latino Republicans aspire to be the kind of Latino who thinks that racial and ethnic minorities—especially Black people—"complain too much;" who think that women should be "seen, not heard;" who believe we are being overrun by "lawbreaking illegal immigrants;" who feel that homosexuals and transgender individuals are "unnatural aberrations," and so on. It is an ideological thread that connects all of these opinions together. Research showed that Latino supporters of nativist candidates like Donald Trump share [*a worldview that—among other things—denies the continued prevalence of racism in the lives of many Latinos and other people of color*](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/du-bois-review-social-science-research-on-race/article/abs/hispanics-para-trump/BF09A48E9470FDFEDBF0C7EA0DBA2696), despite wide evidence to the contrary.

Why are so many Latinos drawn to this ideology?

In a field of race relations where white people are still—even if precariously—the dominant racial group, many Latinos are psychologically compelled to affirm this status quo by ideologically joining in whiteness. Mounting data-driven research showed that for many individuals, [*there is a stronger sense of security in bolstering how things are rather than embracing a highly uncertain future*](https://www.hup.harvard.edu/books/9780674244658)—such as a changing field of relations between white people and people of color.

My own research in this area has examined what belief in this status quo does to some Latinos. [*Our data show*](https://eoperez.com/publications/)ed that when Latinos are reminded about the virtues of the American Dream—the popular but bankrupt idea that one can get ahead by simply working hard—they become more likely to agree with ideas like "society is set up so that people usually get what they deserve."

In turn, the more Latinos agree with these notions, the more supportive they become of harsher policies toward undocumented Latino immigrants, including ending temporary relief from deportation for undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as children. For these Latinos, if the way of doing things seems good and fair, then it is important to protect that system against its alleged enemies—even if some of those enemies are other Latinos. This way of thinking has found fertile ground in the Republican Party.

As these and other examples suggest, it is a shared ideology with Republicans that allows Latinos to access whiteness. This is a key lesson to grasp—and fast.

Public shaming of Republican Latinos as race-traitors, turncoats, or other names that impugn their credentials as "real" ethnics is unproductive and will not work because they are ideologically opposed to thinking of Latinos as a racially aggrieved member of the Democratic coalition, where the grand majority of Latinos exist [*(about 66 percent, actually)*](https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538144053/Latino-Politics-in-America-Community-Culture-and-Interests-Fourth-Edition). In fact, Latino Republicans revel in being a persona non grata among the larger Latino community as currently defined. The sooner we adapt to this reality, the better equipped we'll be to combat it in the marketplace of ideological ideas.

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*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2354781/supporters-president-donald-trump-protest.jpg)

**Graphic**

Supporters of President Donald Trump protest

Ethan Miller/Getty Images

Supporters of former President Donald Trump protest outside the Clark County Election Department on Nov. 7, 2020, in North Las Vegas, Nev.

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