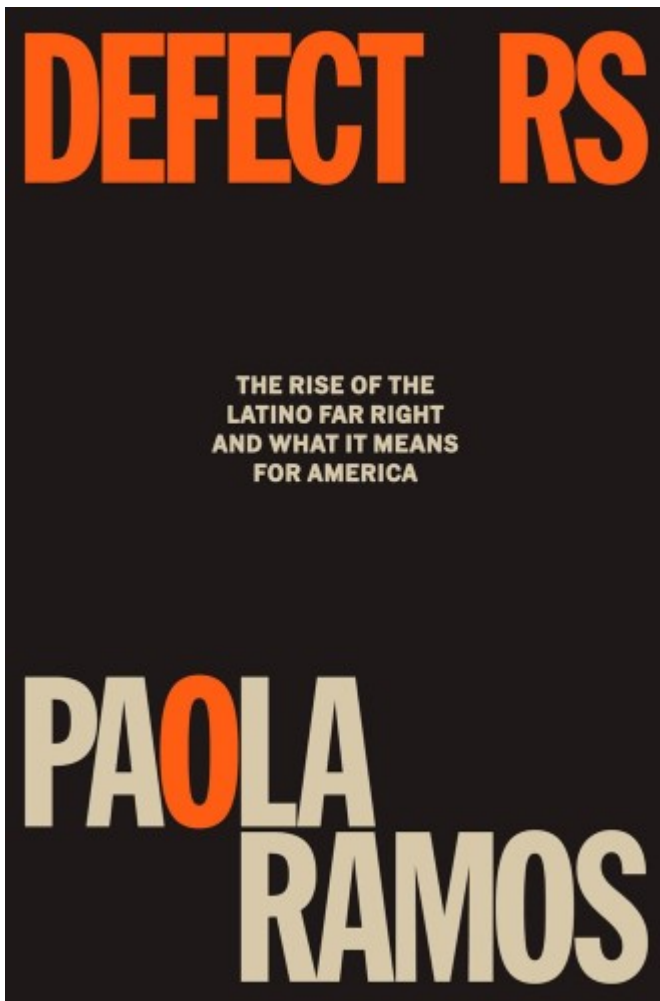White supremacy and the Latino vote

Journalist Paola Ramos takes a nuanced look at the world of right-wing Latinos, revealing the logic behind their ideology.

by [Tony Tian-Ren Lin](#) in the [May 2025](#) issue
Published on April 22, 2025

In Review

Defectors

The Rise of the Latino Far Right and What It Means for America

By Paola Ramos
Pantheon
RW-REPLACE-TOKEN

I was a Spanish interpreter at a poll site in a majority Latino neighborhood during the 2020 presidential election. Throughout the day I helped a wide range of Spanish-speaking citizens exercise their civic duty—Americans of all ages and genders, bearing the full spectrum of skin complexions, living out what it means when we say we are a nation of immigrants. I was surprised both by how smoothly everything went and by how many average citizens it takes to make our democracy work. But I was most surprised by the number of Latinos who asked me to help them vote for Donald Trump. I shouldn't have been, since historically one-third of Latinos have voted Republican. But Trump is not a traditional Republican. At the time, my greatest concern was not the outcome of the election but the reaction of progressives if they found out.

With the 2024 presidential election, the rest of America learned what many Latinos already knew: far-right sympathizers exist in every demographic in this country, including Latinos. In *Defectors*, Paola Ramos offers a deep dive into the world of Latino right-wing sympathizers from across the country. Through interviews and careful reporting, the seasoned journalist reveals the logic behind their ideological affiliation, while also offering nuanced insights as a Latina. Ramos is a member of the "royal family" of Latino journalism. For 38 years, her father, Jorge Ramos, anchored the most-watched Spanish-language evening news in the United States. Her mother, Gina Montaner, is a journalist whose father (to whom Ramos dedicates the book) was Carlos Alberto Montaner, a Cuban journalist exiled in Madrid for his fierce criticism of Fidel Castro.

Defectors divides the logic for Latino far-right affiliation into three categories: tribalism, traditionalism, and trauma. On the surface, some of the people profiled in the book align with popular stereotypes of typical Trump supporters. But Ramos's reporting pushes us to reconsider simplistic narratives, and a careful reading reveals the complexities behind their attraction to right-wing politics.

In the trauma section, we meet migrants who are in the United States as a result of political upheaval. These are individuals whose ideals of the world have been shattered. Their presumptions of progress and freedom were destroyed by dictators

who forced them to leave their countries under extreme oppression. Those experiences pushed some to support a strongman who promises to restore those ideals.

In the traditionalism section, Ramos highlights the role of Christianity in the growth of the Latino far right. She correctly points out that Latinos are the fastest-growing group of American evangelicals, a trend based in immigration, not conversion. Yet she does not point out that evangelical Christianity is in decline even among Latinos and that the surge of immigrants will not reverse that trend. At most, only 15 percent of Latinos identify as evangelicals, and not all of them support a far-right agenda. The traditionalism that pushes Latinos to the far right has to do more with culture than with theology.

The section on tribalism is the most important one. It reveals an uncomfortable truth every Latino lives with: our complicity in upholding White supremacy. For immigrants, this racism is internalized long before we set foot in the United States. From my native Argentina to the Caribbean islands, White supremacy reigns in our cultures. As Ramos points out, Black Americans are a cautionary tale for Latinos. They are, in fact, the cautionary tale for all immigrants, including those from Africa and the Caribbean. Black people are the embodiment of the immigrants' fear that no matter how hard they try, they will never be accepted.

Yet, as Ramos keenly points out, this White supremacy is not about wanting to be White. It is about proximity to the status of Whiteness and distance from Black people. That's why people of color do not mind voting against their self-interest when they vote for White supremacist leaders: they are voting to protect the racial hierarchy they believe in. Latinos who are likely to support right-wing candidates believe that rising tides will lift all boats. As White supremacy rises, the different shades of Brown will go up with it. Unfortunately, however, in the world of the one-drop rule, Whiteness prevails. All races will be equally crushed, some quicker than others. And in the end, Whiteness destroys even itself.

Ramos offers an honest and thoughtful description of how everyone, including herself, falls into the trap of White supremacy. It is what happens when respectability politics is pursued to its inevitable culmination. The socializing forces of culture are too strong for any one individual to pick and choose what they will assimilate into. In the case of these right-wing Latinos, the desire to be accepted by Whiteness leads them to love and hate the way Whiteness prescribes. After all, what

is status without power and what is power if you cannot exert it over others? Even if the others look just like you.

My experience at the polling station was not representative of all Latinos. Though Trump made significant gains with Latino voters between 2020 and 2024, the majority of Latinos did not vote for him. *Defectors* highlights only a small subset of Latinos, and Ramos emphasizes throughout the book that Latinos are not monolithic. This book should not be read as an interrogation of Latino ideological preference but rather as an indictment of the power of White supremacy. Books such as this one should refocus our gaze upon the toxic sea of White supremacy we are steeped in. Some of us are floating; others are drowning. But we all need saving.