Biden Takes Satirical Path in Quest for Latino Votes

By Gregory Korte and Bill Allison
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Joe Biden’s latest Spanish-language television ad is deliberately unlike any his campaign has produced, a vivid departure from the traditional formula of simply translating English ads.

The ads mock President Donald Trump with a satirical twist not seen in Biden’s slow-moving, dramatic English-language ads, targeting a crucial voting bloc in must-win Florida.

The Biden campaign has employed native Spanish speakers to craft their own ads steeped in cultural references and even the regional accents that resonate with diverse Hispanic audiences. Different ads are targeted to Cuban Americans in South Florida, Puerto Ricans in North Florida, and Mexican Americans in Arizona and Nevada.

“I have never seen an ad like this,” said Alejandro Flores, a University of Chicago researcher who studies non-English ads in U.S. political campaigns. “It stands out. As of this moment there’s been no other Biden ad to come close to that level of satire.”

Biden’s most recent ad, which launched Saturday and is running in Tampa and Orlando, counters in style and substance a Spanish-language Trump ad saying Biden would raise taxes and devastate the economy.

As both campaigns fight over the Hispanic voters that make up a significant share of the electorate in four key battleground states, they’re pushing the envelope of what Spanish-language political advertising looks and sounds like.

Trump’s ads are more traditional, but he too is honing his message to Florida Latinos. Instead of warning that Biden is a socialist in the Bernie Sanders mode, the commercials warn that the former vice president is as much a threat to democracy as the socialist dictators in Cuba and Venezuela.

The result is a parallel campaign-within-a-campaign, where candidates trade jabs in a completely different conversation often outside the view of English-speaking audiences.
“This is new," Flores said. “Usually candidates and their teams take their talking points and translate them into Spanish, thinking that their effects will hold. Now what we’re seeing is the reverse. In some of these ads I’ve seen some colloquial terms that would only have meaning to native Spanish speakers.”

Nowhere is the battle harder fought than in Florida, where Biden and Trump are trading Spanish-language insults in a state where 18% of the electorate is Hispanic. The two are virtually tied among the general voting population, according to the RealClearPolitics average of polls.

**$1.3 Million a Week**

The campaigns are spending $1.3 million a week on Spanish-language television ads alone, with 70% of that going to Florida, according to Advertising Analytics data reviewed by Bloomberg.

The candidates’ support among Latino voters in the Sunshine State is unclear. A Monmouth poll released Tuesday showed Biden leading Trump among Florida Hispanics, 58% to 32%, but the poll had a 9.4 point margin of error. And an NBC News/Marist poll released Monday showed Trump slightly ahead.

“Trump loves to claim how much he’s done for Latinos, but we’re really fully calling him out on it,” said Jennifer Molina, Biden’s Latino media director. “Joe Biden has a track record to help the Hispanic community. Trump does not.”

The fast-moving Biden ad flashes the words “blah blah blah” over video of Trump speaking and puts dollar signs in the eyes of his wealthy Cabinet members.

“Dicen mucho, hacen poco” the ad concludes, which in English means, “They say a lot, but do little.”

“It’s all about cultural competence and knowing how you’re reaching people,” Molina said.

**Biden Shows Softer Tone on Policing as Trump Attacks: Ad Wars**

“Joe Biden’s campaign got caught taking Hispanic Americans for granted and now they’re taking a gamble that Biden can win those voters over solely through TV ads,” said Trump campaign spokeswoman Samantha Zager. “No amount of ads can replace direct voter contact or erase Biden’s 50-year record of failure and embrace of socialist policies.”
But though the language may be different, the issues are not. Biden’s Spanish-language ads are focused on the coronavirus, the economy, and Trump’s leadership — the same issues that dominate his English ads. Only about a quarter of his Spanish-language ads mention immigration.

Biden is also running Spanish-language ads in other states with smaller Hispanic communities — places like Philadelphia, Raleigh, North Carolina, and Madison, Wisconsin.

Trump’s Latino outreach is largely focused on just two states, Florida and Arizona, where Biden leads by nearly 5 points. Nearly half of Trump’s Spanish-language ads are appearing in Miami, where more than 60% of the population is Hispanic. One describes Biden’s mental capacity as “deteriorado,” or deteriorating, a claim he frequently makes in English.

Yet there’s a risk. Flores said his research with Yale professor Alexander Coppock shows that English-only speakers are turned off by Spanish-language ads, which could hurt the candidates in a razor-thin election. That’s why the ads tend to run only on Spanish-language television and radio stations, out of sight of native English speakers.

“When campaigns speak Spanish, it works,” he said. “The question is, how do they minimize that conflict?”

— With assistance by Andrew Rosati