

# ‘This is f—ing crazy’: Florida Latinos swamped by wild conspiracy theories | POLITICO

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WhatsApp group chats are widely popular among Latin Americans and other immigrant communities in the U.S. because the app doesn’t require a U.S. phone number or specific mobile service provider, making it easy to stay in touch with family abroad via text or voice communication. Group chats within the closed network can easily be created with dozens of people anywhere in the world. Plus, iPhones aren’t as popular in Latin America — meaning iMessage chats are not an option for many.

Political campaigns, social justice movements and support groups have followed along, making WhatsApp a top tool for reaching voters in Latin America and from Latin America.

In South Florida, veteran Latino Democratic strategist Evelyn Pérez-Verdia noticed this summer that the WhatsApp groups dedicated to updates on the pandemic and news for the Colombian and Venezuelan communities became intermittently interspersed with conspiracy theories from videos of far-right commentators or news clips from new Spanish-language sites, like Noticias 24 and PanAm Post, and the YouTube-based Informativo G24 website.

“I’ve never seen this level of disinformation, conspiracy theories and lies,” Pérez-Verdia, who is of Colombian descent, said. “It looks as if it has to be coordinated.”

[...]

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