

HISPANIC LEADERSHIP AFTER THE ELECTION

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New York City, NY - As the Hispanic population has grown, interest has also grown in its clout, particularly in politics. There was speculation about a Clinton Latino vice presidential nominee. Every day we read news and analyses about Hispanic votes in key states and regions. Donald Trump proclaimed how much Hispanics love him. And Bernie Sanders attracted many Latinos among his youthful supporters.

At the same time, however, the influential Pew Hispanic Center, the National Institute of Latino Policy (NILP) and other Hispanic organizations issue studies about the Hispanic electorate and its inclinations. Insightful opinion pieces in the Wall Street Journal by entrepreneurs Henry Cisneros (former Mayor of San Antonio) and Solomon Trujillo (veteran telecommunications CEO) and television interviews inform Americans about key economic political, demographic and realities.

Notwithstanding the many analyses, surveys and news reports, Americans seem as confused as never before about Hispanics. A recent article reported that a majority of Americans are unaware that residents of Puerto Rico are U.S. citizens. And many well-educated people believe that the 11 million undocumented immigrants here are all Hispanics (about 8 million are). Some Americans inquire about visas to visit New Mexico! These are but a few examples.

Hispanic “leaders,” too, miss the mark. Some refer to 50 million Hispanics (data from the 2010 census), or 55 million in 2004, instead of using today’s number (close to 58 million). And how many know that if Hispanics were a nation, in GDP terms they would outstrip Canada?

With this backdrop, what is in store for Latino leadership after the November election? Can Latino leaders exploit the numbers, the media attention, the media clout, the \$1.5 trillion – yes, with a “T” – in purchasing power, the recognition of gaps in social, economic and political equity? These and related questions await the outcome of the November election and the inauguration of a new president.

Mexican Americans are nearly two-thirds of the Hispanic population. Puerto Ricans, centered on the Eastern seaboard, but also widely dispersed, are about 9.2 percent, Cubans are 3.5 percent, Dominicans are 2.8 percent and Central and South Americans make up the rest. Regional, sub-ethnic factors are at work, and prove that generalizations about Hispanics are not justified – although we see them daily.

Latinos also vary widely in political ideology. Although most Mexican Americans identify with the Democratic party, many are conservative and Republican. Cuban Americans are divided. Those who fled Castro’s Cuba remain largely conservative and Republican. Their children and those who came later lean Democratic. The “other” category, including immigrants from Latin America and Spain, are found across the political spectrum.

The long-expressed view is that Hispanics comprise so many sub-ethnicities that they will not soon be able to unite behind a single leader. How strange! Do whites and blacks and Asian Americans unite behind a single leader? No! It is unrealistic – should we say absurd? – to expect that Latinos can and should unite behind a single leader. Sorry. It ain’t gonna happen.

The key post-election questions are these: 1) How can Latino leaders translate the population numbers and the \$1.5 trillion in purchasing power into political and economic power? 2) How can Latino leaders coalesce on vital issues of interest to Latinos like jobs, greater educational opportunity and immigration reform? and 3) What voices, whether individual or institutional, can emerge as credible articulators of Latino aspirations and realities?

To whom will Hispanics turn for national leadership after November? The question, as in all politics, is highly speculative. But there is no dearth of leaders. They abound. A major problem is that media and others neglect them. Thank God for those few Latino voices who appear – María Teresa Kumar of Voto Latino is one – and add perspective to the discourse. When are the major media going to get it? For the post-election period, they will have to do a better job – a much better job – in being inclusive not only in public affairs programming but also in news coverage.

Besides Voto Latino, other organizations that can provide or recommend interview subjects are the National Association of Latino Elected Officials, the National Hispanic Leadership Agenda, the United States Hispanic Leadership Institute, the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute, the League of United Latin American Citizens, the National Council of La Raza, The Latino Coalition, the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and many more.

Some leaders are veterans, while some are new faces who are still on a pathway to primetime. But leaders, they are. How their fates play out in the unpredictable electoral scenario is highly speculative. They are faces to watch – mainstream media willing. Time and circumstances will tell whether they can survive the test of the national spotlight. We like to think that they will.

Our earlier research on Latino leaders' views has been "spot on." What they think, how they act, how they coalesce and how their views get the media and political attention they deserve are key questions. We would like to think that things will change for the better.

Despite the outstanding leadership in the Hispanic community, their qualities and concerns remain in the background while the "pols" talk in their absence about the communities they represent. At close to 58 million and growing rapidly, Latinos deserve a bigger piece of the pie and the media spotlight.

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