

Don't Let Trump's Rhetoric Distract Us

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Arlington, VA – It's safe to say that Donald Trump doesn't have many fans in the Hispanic community.

But Hispanics shouldn't take Trump's election as a personal affront — or a signal that they're unwelcome in their own land. In fact, polling data show that the United States remains far more united in its commitment to tolerance, diversity and fair immigration policy than at any time in our history.

Those who value these principles can't afford to be distracted by their private contempt for Trump. On the contrary, now is the time for sober, loyal opposition focused on the legitimate policy threats posed by an erratic president.

That process starts with the recognition that Trump's divisive tenor, particularly on immigration issues, isn't representative of the nation at large. After all, his share of the popular vote was nearly 3 million short of his opponent Hillary Clinton's. The "rigged system" that Trump spent much of the campaign decrying is what installed him in the White House.

If anything, Trump's brand of hateful fear-mongering has helped unify Americans against his most extreme views. Note that a majority opposes Trump's plan to build a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

His commitment to mass deportation is no more popular. According to a new Gallup poll, more Americans are satisfied with current immigration levels than at any time since the organization began monitoring the issue. A separate survey finds that support for offering a "path to citizenship" for illegal immigrants has hit a new high of 60 percent.

In other words, Trump was elected despite his attitudes toward Hispanics — not because of them.

The economy played a far more decisive role in the most recent presidential election than immigration. In November's exit polls, more than half of voters ranked the economy as the top national issue.

For Americans that feel left behind by current economic trends — including many blacks and Hispanics — Trump represented a distinct break from the status quo. Asked which of Trump's qualities mattered most to his voters, 82 percent pointed to his potential to "bring change."

In return for that change, many of these voters were willing to overlook the president's profound character flaws. Twenty percent of his voters disapproved of his temperament, according to the exit polls. The same share judged him dishonest and untrustworthy.

Latinos should therefore refuse to be distracted by Trump's rhetoric — and should train their critique on his policies and the threat he poses to the values and institutions on which our republic rests.

It's essential that the Hispanic community — and all those who support the ideals of pluralism, equality, individual liberty, and the rule of law — commit to forcefully and vigilantly opposing the president whenever his policies violate these principles.

A "loyal opposition" is loyal to these constitutional principles, not to the occupant of the Oval Office. Hispanics must therefore resist the temptation to latch onto every breach of civility and tasteless comment Trump generates — and reserve their energies for the genuine policy battles that lie ahead.

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This Op Ed has also been published in the Las Vegas Sun.