

Republicans have a hard time figuring out how to get the Latino vote

Mario T. García | Dec. 5, 2012 NCR Today

A month after the election, Republicans are still trying to figure out how and why they lost.

To their credit, many seem to recognize that their poor performance with Latinos was a key reason they lost major battleground states like Nevada, Colorado and Florida. They seem to suggest that they need to do more to attract Latinos. But what?

Some foolishly believe that perhaps by running more Latino candidates, possibly for vice president, next time, they can carve in to the 71 percent Latino vote that President Barack Obama received. The problem with this strategy is that it is based on the false notion that Latinos are predisposed to support any Latino candidate. That is simply and historically wrong.

The fact of the matter is that there have been many cases where Latinos have been faced with voting for either a white Democrat or a Latino Republican, and in most such cases have voted for the Democrat. One such example was here in the Santa Barbara, Calif., area, where Republican Abel Maldonado challenged Democrat Lois Capps, the longtime congressional representative from this district. Many believed it would be a close election; however, Capps won by about 10 points and received a majority of the Latino vote. The idea that Latinos will vote just on ethnic lines does not hold up, and Republicans will be pursuing a bad strategy.

But the most faulty idea to attract Latino voters Republicans are floating is that Latinos are closet Republicans and all that is needed is for Republicans to tap into this. The argument goes as follows: Latinos are very close to Republicans' values, such as believing in strong families; being very religious: They are mostly Catholics, and hence, oppose birth control and abortion; and that Latinos believe in personal initiative, as do Republicans.

The conclusion, then, is that based on similarities with Republican values, Latino are just waiting to come out of the closet and vote Republican. Wrong. Latinos, or at least most of them, are not closet Republicans. Since the 1930s and 1940s, they have been voting for the Democratic Party. Beginning with President Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal, Latinos historically see the Democrats as closer to the interests and needs of Latinos. While Latinos have strong family values, they also have a sense of community and a sense that government is important in helping people where they cannot help themselves or of providing certain opportunities for greater mobility.

While Latinos have strong religious values, especially as Catholics, and many do have serious reservations about the use of birth control and abortion, they don't vote that way, as I've indicated in earlier blogs. For most Latinos, social issues like birth control and abortion are very personal, family issues, not public issues. In fact, many resent politicians who make such private matters into public ones.

Finally, while Latinos accept the capitalist market system, they do not endorse a system based on a support for the very wealthy in the hope that their wealth will trickle down. Most also don't support an unregulated capitalist system or a system where everything is left to the private sector, including health care. Latinos, by and large, support a strong social safety net, including Social Security and Medicare. The basic self-interest of

Latinos seems to be better provided for by the Democrats, and the Republicans are the ones who will have to change in order to have greater appeal for Latinos. Ironically, it is Republicans who will have to become closet Democrats, and that is asking a lot.

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