

Hispanic voting clout a sleeping giant

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This election cycle is a numbers game without any logic, a quagmire of quagmires. The CNN Democratic presidential debates were the party's most-watched ever, with more than 15 million viewers. There was not a lot of "debating" per se, but the candidates were articulate, respectful and even addressed some relevant issues. A bit different than the circus-like Republican debates. Will these 15 million viewers actually vote?

Take Republican candidate Donald Trump, who is balancing his sensationalized commentary and unfiltered behavior with his business success and has alienated an entire population. Wait, I just refreshed my Twitter feed — he has now offended a couple of other groups. Yet he remains the leading Republican candidate. He is extremely well-funded, and as such, will most likely advance to the primaries.

Unlike her campaign in 2008, Democrat Hillary Clinton is emphasizing the unique perspective of being a woman. She's actively courting and raising a lot of money, which isn't abnormal. The anomaly stems from the allocation of funders: 52.6 percent of her funds come from women, according to a recent study from Crowdpac.

Yet women contribute less than men and in smaller amounts than men.

More women vote than men, yet women, at 30 percent, lag way behind as a percentage of political campaign contributors. And in an election cycle costing billions (billions with a "b") this is a gender gap in political influence.

The estimated gap in overall fundraising is even larger. About 76 cents of each dollar come from a man and 24 cents from a woman when measuring contributions flowing into congressional campaigns.

This allocation determines access and political influence to potential future leaders, access that is severely restricted for women and minorities even before the candidate has been elected. Participating in the political system through financial contributions is a tool to further advance access and advocacy. Simply put, without putting our money where our mouths are, our issues are not championed.

With women earning less than men, it's rather evident what causes the disparity in contributions. But wage and wealth inequality are not the sole culprits for minimized

political participation; consider inherent values and philanthropic choices. Women are more likely to give to charitable causes versus donating to a political campaign.

Similarly, Hispanics have yet to wield their political clout effectively despite powerful numbers. With 57 million Hispanics and 3.2 million Hispanic businesses nationally, the lack of Hispanic voter engagement is still a mystery. The diversity of the Hispanic electorate, including the differences in nationalities, culture and customs, make a one-size-fits-all strategy ineffective.

Our cultural competence and communications training fill the void in organizations struggling with reduced productivity tied to employee engagement — and it is geared not just for foreigners or immigrants. The tools and resources are effective across the race and gender spectrum and are relevant for all. And I'm thinking we need to implement similar training, almost a movement, like what's been targeted for women and other minorities. Let's call it: "The Power of Your Vote!"

Déjà vu.

"Get out the vote" and "Voto Latino" are already a thing.

It appears we have the grassroots vehicles and even the celebrity spokespeople. Where we fail is in actual engagement and the delivery of an effective message. Policymakers and political candidates should consider these questions:

- How do you ensure Latinos and women take ownership of their power and influence?
- How do you get Latinos to make and increase campaign contributions, to realize that this an investment into future advocacy and policymaking?

Answer: Develop an engagement strategy centered on consistent and sustained resonating messaging via relevant mediums.

Republican Sen. Ted Cruz was the first presidential candidate, Republican or Democrat, to agree to a Q&A with the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. He has also introduced very innovative technology to engage younger voters: The Cruz Crew App, a video-based app that serves as a fund and friend-raiser platform. Leveraging social media and technology is a very effective tactic to connect with not only millennials but also Latinos, particularly since these voters are not consuming news and content through traditional channels.

Latinos and other minorities have arrived to this political dance a little late. We are still learning the rules and whether there's any real impact to our involvement. Political representation defined by diverse elected officials, campaigns and contributions, are legitimate tools for advocacy and policy making that are not leveraged by minorities and women.

The key is converting a higher portion of these minority populations into active and engaged political participants. Certainly not an easy feat, but a challenge that shall make 2016 a very interesting election year.

Get involved, amigos. Use your voice and vote.

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