

Romney foolish to ignore Latino vote

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Body

Considering his family history, Mitt **Romney** might be expected to have moderate views on immigration. In 1885, **Romney**'s great-grandfather fled Utah for Mexico because of U.S. laws against polygamy. The **Romney** clan lived in Mexico until the revolution forced family members to return to the U.S. in 1912.

Unfortunately, the GOP presidential front-runner has shown little interest in Hispanics — a big mistake. On Super Tuesday, he barely eked out a win in Ohio, where Hispanics represent 3% of the population, by a margin of just 0.8 percentage points. He also lost in Georgia to Newt Gingrich, the only GOP candidate who supports limited amnesty for undocumented workers and where the Hispanic population has soared by more than 90% in the past decade.

Romney opposes "amnesty" and says undocumented immigrants should "self-deport." Though it is normal for candidates to play to the base in primaries, and move to the center later, **Romney** is boxing himself in. His decision to be an immigration hard-liner **ignores** history, demographics and sound strategy.

GOP adviser Mark McKinnon says a successful presidential candidate must win at least 40% of the Hispanic **vote**. George W. Bush, who supported immigration reform, reached this level in 2004 and won. Four years later, Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., who supported reform until he swung right, got 31% of the **Latino vote** and lost.

Romney opposes the DREAM Act, which would allow undocumented youth to legalize their status provided they serve in the military or attend college. This puts him at odds with the 91% of Latinos who support the act, according to the Pew Research Center.

Romney should remember Sharron Angle, Nevada's 2010 GOP Senate candidate, who ran TV ads denounced for their use of anti-Hispanic stereotypes. Her rhetoric mobilized Latinos, and she was defeated.

It's puzzling that **Romney** seems to be conceding Hispanic **votes** because many Latinos are dissatisfied with President Obama. "**Romney** has now thrown Obama a lifesaver (on immigration)," GOP strategist Ana Navarro told Politico. I couldn't agree more. **Romney** has potential appeal to Latinos, but he is pursuing a shortsighted strategy by playing to the anti-immigrant crowd. In the long run, this will only alienate Hispanics — and might even cost him the general election.

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