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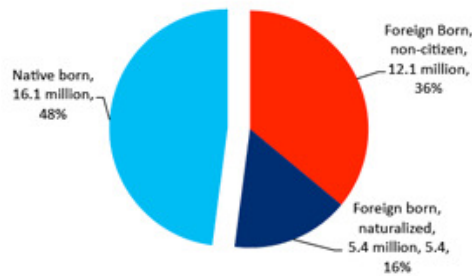
Campaign strategists misfire on reaching Latino voters. [INSIGHT]

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Research for a multicultural America

U.S. Latino Adults by Citizenship Status, 2010



Source: American Community Survey, 2010

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News headlines remind us on a daily basis about the importance of the Latino vote in the upcoming presidential election. The stakes are high for candidates Obama and Romney, who have launched Spanish-language campaigns to capture the affection and support of the Latino voter.

Not everyone agrees, however, that the Latino vote will matter come election day. Why? Because behind their large numbers lurks the nasty fact that many Latinos are ineligible to vote because they are too young or lack citizenship. And let's not

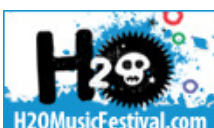
forget the persistent "voter apathy" that many believe is part of the Latino DNA.

Recognizing the potential importance of the Latino vote, it appears to me that the strategists for the Obama and Romney campaigns may have overlooked some fundamental facts about Latinos – the audience, the message, and the medium -- that could cost them the election.

The Audience: The American Community Survey tells us that an estimated 21.5 million Latinos will be eligible to vote on election day, which includes 16.1 million native-born and 5.4 foreign-born naturalized Latinos. A large segment of Latinos (36%), however, will not be eligible to vote because they are not U.S. citizens.

Considering only the 21.5 million Latinos that are eligible to vote, fully three-quarters (75%) are native-born Latinos who are the least likely to benefit from a Spanish language campaign. Why? Because native-born Latinos are generally young, English speakers who are often college-educated, affluent, business owners, executives and board members of large corporations – persons that communicate primarily in English. By the third generation, most U.S. Latinos have become linguistically assimilated.

The Message: Both campaigns do not appear to understand the messages that Latino voters want to hear. Although the immigration issue has been at the forefront of news reports and messaging for both campaigns, polls of likely Latino voters by the Pew Hispanic Center and the Gallup Organization tell us that immigration is among the least important issues of concern to Latinos. This does not mean, of course, that Latinos are indifferent to immigration trends and outcomes. It does mean, however, that eligible Latino voters want the candidates to address issues that more directly impact their quality of life – such as jobs, the economy, health care, education, and business formation. Immigration may be part of the icing, but it is definitely not the



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The Medium: To be effective, the campaign message needs to be delivered in the medium that best reaches the target audience. So why are campaign strategists so focused on launching Spanish-language campaigns that are not likely to reach the majority of eligible Latino voters? Efforts to register Latino voters for the upcoming election may also be thwarted by a similar miscalculation. Consider the fact that Univision, the Spanish-language media giant, recently announced plans to join ABC Television Network to create an English-only network to extend its reach to U.S. Latinos. Get the picture?

Measuring The Outcome: Of course, the most effective campaign strategies will be recognized on election day when the results are tabulated. In the meantime, however, we don't need polling reports on Latinos that distort the true picture more than is necessary. Although the work of reputable polling firms can usually be trusted, don't be surprised to see polls with wide variations that result from questionable practices, such as the use of monolingual interviewers, sampling biases that result from over-reliance on voter registration lists, and outsourcing to shops in foreign countries.

Will Latinos show their political clout on election day? I believe that they will, especially if the campaign strategists re-focus their efforts and recognize that an important part of the Latino electorate is being overlooked.

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