

AWAKENING THE HISPANIC VOTING BLOC: STRATEGIES FOR STATE AND LOCAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

This paper delves into the contrasting dynamics of Hispanic voter engagement in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, during the 2016 presidential election and the 2017 local council bid. In 2016, a significant number of Hispanic voters turned out to support Hillary Rodham Clinton, a political insider with little in common with this voting bloc other than party affiliation. However, in the subsequent year, a young Hispanic female candidate running for a local council position failed to garner the same enthusiasm from Hazleton's Hispanic community. This study seeks to understand the factors behind this paradoxical behavior. While the paper does not aim to revisit Secretary Clinton's defeat, it utilizes the 2016 election as a backdrop to explore why Hazleton's Hispanic voters identified with a national figure like Clinton but remained apathetic toward a local candidate from their own community.

Introduction

In 2016, between one and two thousand Hispanic voters in the city of Hazleton came to the polls to vote for a woman regarded as a traditional insider. From 1991 to 2016, Hillary Rodham Clinton, from every vantage point politically was considered a political insider. As First Lady, Senator, Secretary of State, world traveler for the Clinton Foundation, and a multimillionaire, Secretary Clinton had very little in common with this voting bloc. (Galski, 2016) The only element that connected her with Hispanic voters was that she was a —Democrata

ll. The purpose of this paper is not to revisit the defeat of Secretary Clinton, rather this paper considers the election used as a backdrop in seeking to juxtapose the enthusiasm witnessed among many Hispanic voters for Secretary Clinton and their apathy for a young female Hispanic candidate in a local council bid in the 2017 election. Why could Hazleton Hispanic voters identify with Secretary Clinton and turn out for her in significant numbers, but not a twenty-nine-year-old Hispanic female from their own city?

Hazleton, Pennsylvania is a small city with a rapidly growing Hispanic population of nearly 60% (Lussenhop, 2016). A young woman of Dominican background, Nicol Soto, worked tirelessly to win a primary nomination for a city council seat. She could not mobilize the same Hispanic wave that six months earlier led to Secretary Clinton defeating Donald Trump in the city of Hazleton.(Politico Podcast: Live Presidential Election Results,

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2016). A favorite son, Congressman Lou Barletta, a strong Republican Trump supporter, also showed weakness in his home town because of the Hispanic voters who turned out. While the Congressman easily won re-election, he only narrowly won his hometown by 36 votes (Galski, 2016).

This paper is concerned with voting trends of Hazleton's Hispanic community. This community produced a blue spot in what became an overwhelming red county and state in the national election of 2016. Democrats both Native and Hispanic coordinated an effort of campaigning for Secretary Clinton that has not been seen in quite a while in that region. Yet, when a Hispanic woman ran as a candidate in a local primary election, the community did not come out to support her.

To examine effectively the situation, this author covered the following points in this paper. First, the author considered voting differences in local, state and national primary elections and investigated to identify in which elections Spanish-speakers were most likely to participate and vote. Second, Spanish-speaking voters in Hazleton were compared to communities in which Hispanic residents have lived nearly fifty years longer to investigate whether duration of residency and comfort living there would make a difference in the amount of participation. Third, the author reviewed election results, with an emphasis on primary elections for the last seven years to observe voting trends in the municipality in question.

An investigation of which wards first developed concentrations of Spanish-speakers were compared to increasing number of wards where Spanish-speakers make up significant voting blocks in 2017. Finally, the author identified key characteristics that may identify when and how a significant and at times a majority of a city's population can rise from a sleeping giant to an active one on the local political scene.

Hispanic Voting from National to Local

When investigating the overall participation of Hispanic voters from national, statewide and, local level, this author found continuing reasons why voter turnout remained limited. From research by Valarie Metla, *What Part Will Hispanic Voters Play in the 2016 Elections*, she states:

...., Hispanic Americans are less likely to be registered to vote than white or black Americans. According to 2013 data from Gallup, only 51 percent of all eligible Hispanic residents were registered to vote in the 2012 federal elections Similar numbers held for the 2014 mid-term elections: 25.2 million Hispanics were eligible to vote but the number of Hispanics voters was even lower than the already nationwide turnout of 37 percent (Metla, 2015).

Why Hispanic voters do not turnout in other research include a variety of scenarios that respectively have explained numbers in Congressional, state and local elections. Obviously, many Spanish-speakers are new arrivals to the U.S. and are therefore ineligible to vote until they gain citizenship. —Only six of ten [Hispanic] citizens born outside the U, S, registered as voter in U.S. elections!.(Metla, 2015). When one investigates newcomer's children who were born within the U.S. the percentage of those registering to vote climbs to approximately 75%. In still other circumstances, the candidates running for office may espouse positions of issues important to Hispanics related to such as health care and immigration, but other policies, which conflict with Hispanic voters' views (Metla, 2015).

This author believes that local and state offices are viewed with a great deal less importance to all voters especially Hispanics and thus, while registered, they fail to take the time and effort to learn about these offices, the candidates, and the direct relationship between public official and the voter's daily life. There is a significant lack of knowledge among many Hispanic voters about the structures of state and local government. This includes the processes of governance, such as government meetings, procedures of agenda setting, budget and the setting of tax rates whether property or other type of taxes (Lara, 2017). The time between elections and the offices

sought by officials in their own country are much different from found in the U.S.(Calderon, 2018). This leads to a lot of apathy in voting at election time.

As one will see in this paper, it is also wrong to consider the Hispanic population as a monolithic bloc.(Rumbaut, 2006)The 23 nationalities differ in many important ways including political party affiliation and voting preferences as well. These 23 nationalities differ in types of Spanish spoken, cultural traits, ideology and even their willingness to cooperate with one another. Anyone who has spent a lot of time among various Hispanic ethnicities and interviewed them can attest to the ethnic, racial and cultural differences among the 23 nationalities (Taylor, Hugo, & Martínez, 012). Mexicans for example resent Puerto Ricans because the latter are born American citizens and therefore can travel much more easily to the U.S. than Mexicans. Ridicule of ethnicities is common because of the gangs and violent crime rates in countries such as Hondurans and Guatemalans. The level of Spanish and quality of life they have are also reasons for their discrimination by other groups. Many believe that the Republican stance on many political issues are more akin to Hispanic Family values than are Democrat positions (Rumbaut, 2006).

The Hispanic population settling within Pennsylvania and parts of New England is largely Dominican. Dominicans who register to vote tend to register overwhelmingly (or —significantly) as Democrats. This characteristic is also common in Hazleton, PA. The Dominican population found in Hazleton is a rapidly growing community that only occurred over the past seventeen years. Some Hispanics migrated from New York, New Jersey, and the Dominican Republic directly. Their resettlement to small towns across Northeastern Pennsylvania has occurred rapidly. From less than a recognizable population in 1990, the Dominican population of the city has risen to approximately 60% in 2016(CensusViewer, 2012). Like many Hispanic voters, [Dominicans] —tend to be drawn to Democratic Candidates. Hispanic voters' views on major issues such as immigration reform, health care, criminal justice, the economy, and education tend to line up more closely with Democratic platforms (Metla, 2015).

The Vicini family, a sugar baron family, led by Grupo Vicini, and other Dominican business leaders were expected to invest \$3.5 million through 2016 in the effort, called —Dominicanos USA. The effort came at a time when Dominicans were running for high office in New York and Rhode Island as well as trying to take a prominent political role elsewhere, for example Eastern Pennsylvania. The effort took root and became a well-funded and laborintensive plan within the state as later indicated (Tanzina Vega, 2014). Within the Hazleton area, volunteers from New York City, Lancaster, and Reading played a vital role in registering Hispanic voters and get out the vote for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 primary and general elections (Narrow, 2017).

Rise in voter turnout and victories in both primary and the general election for Hillary Clinton over Bernie Sanders and later Donald Trump in Hazleton proved the importance of the Dominican vote. Overall tallies confirm the success of the Vicini initiative locally within the city of Hazleton (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2016). The Hispanic and particularly Dominican population, registered and voted in the primary and general election for the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton.

Two national elections show the power of the new Hispanic voter in American national elections. First, the election of Barack Obama was driven by a very large Hispanic voter turnout ...[A] few that break down Latino voters by national heritage show a little-noticed trend – Dominicans are Obama's most loyal and enthusiastic supporters among this increasingly important voting bloc... Slightly more than 78 percent of Dominicans nationwide said in a recent poll by Florida International University and El Nuevo Herald that they planned to vote for Obama – far above the 69 percent of Latinos in general who said they would (Lorene, 2012).

Traditional party leadership in the state that identified with its endorsed candidate led the Dominican voter.

In the primary election of 2008, even though Barack Obama had all but certainly secured the Democratic nomination, Hillary Clinton won the primary election in the state of Pennsylvania, largely based on a large turnout by the Hispanic voter (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2016)(Torres, 2018). In the general election in November, this same group continued to vote —Democratically by casting their vote in a majority for Barack Obama. Similarly, in 2016, as with other states the Presidential Primary in most states, including Pennsylvania, Democrats split significantly between Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton. The general election suggested that Hispanic voters voted heavily for Hillary Clinton. While not enough to win the state and the electoral votes, the Hispanic voter added significant strength in areas which they lived in strong numbers to vote for Secretary Clinton (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2016)(Torres, 2018). In Pennsylvania, which saw many Democrats cross over to vote for Donald Trump, Hispanic voters in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, voted a strong straight Democratic Party ticket. This demonstrated itself in the fact that Hillary Clinton lost in a sea of red throughout much of the state but won the vote in Hazleton. Republican House of Representative member Lou Barletta, who was an early supporter of Donald Trump and locally responsible for the (unconstitutional) Illegal Relief Immigration Relief Ordinance, was victorious in his own home town of Hazleton by a mere 36 votes. Certainly, the Dominican voting block had become a significant segment of voters in the Northeastern segments of the county (Hazleton Standard Speaker Staff Reporter, 2016).

Hispanic voter turnout across the nation (less Dominican and more —other Spanish-speaking voters) increased in number voting Republican in the 2002 and 2012 elections (Tanzina Vega, 2014). However, initiatives such as Dominican-USA and other Democratic sponsored voter efforts, registration and get-out-the-vote drives, the Democratic Party has developed a faithful and supportive body in the Dominican population. Such is the point expressed by Teresa Wiltz in her study of Dominican voters in the Northeast U.S.:

As suggested by Teresa Wiltz in her study of Dominican voters: As In the not so distant past, Dominican immigrants channeled their political energy into the happenings back home, political scientists say. However, as their numbers have grown to nearly a million, they are increasingly turning their focus to political empowerment in the U.S.

(Wiltz, 2015).

In other studies, researchers found there were specific causes that news media and campaign staffers provided Dominicans with reasons to cast their first ballot:

This is an extremely important point to remember. Dominican voters will vote and in large numbers if there is a specific reason that affects them in a special manner – immigration rights, education, health care and others (Lara, 2017). In years of Congressional elections, state office elections and local elections, Dominicans as well as other Spanish-speaking voters do not often represent significant numbers of voters (Torres, 2018). An example of this view displays itself in a study conducted by the Dominican-USA initiative (DUSA): For one, Lomi Kriel in her article, *Latino Voters Surge to Polls: Didn't Help Clinton*, —they [Hispanic voters] need a reason to vote. A July study commissioned by DUSA found that 79 percent of registered Dominican-American voters said they would be more likely to vote if they had a chance to elect the first Dominican-American to the U.S. Congress (Kriel, 2016).

In state and local elections, the Hispanic vote and Dominicans remain a sleeping giant still unable to or unwilling to understand their importance in such election contests. In Pennsylvania, Dominican residents and potential voters represent the third largest Spanish-speaking group. From the table below from the Pew Institute 2016 study of electoral activity, Dominicans in Pennsylvania represent a significant percentage of the population.

According to recent Pew Research Institute studies voter trends for Hispanic groups in Pennsylvania are as follows:

Nationality		All		All	
	U.S. Citizen	Hispanic Citizen		PA Citizen	Hispanic Citizen
Mexico	--	59.2%		--	10.8%
Puerto Rico	--	14.1%		--	63.9%
Cuban	--	4.6%		--	3.3%
Salvadorian	--	2.6%		--	0.6%
Dominican	--	3.4%		--	7.5%
Other	--	16.1%		--	13.9%
(Lopez2016)					

While there are larger Hispanic groups residing in Pennsylvania currently, the Northeastern portion of Pennsylvania is strongly represented by the Dominican population as dominant. Approximately 80% of Hazleton Hispanic population is Dominican and in general can locate its past to the same Dominican region of San Jose de Ocoa(Frantz, 2012). Like many of the northeastern Pennsylvania communities, a wave of Dominican residents from New York City and New Jersey are arriving in communities that have not seen such immigration changes in nearly a century.

These residents are arriving and changing the communities in positive and negative manners for a variety of reasons. Amilcar Arroyo, one of the Hispanic community leaders in Hazleton, Pennsylvania suggests that they moved to achieve a better life that they found in New York or on the homeland island.

It's quiet, I said Efrain Aviles, who moved here from Brooklyn in October. —Something better for the kids. The housing is much cheaper. You live in New York in a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,500. Here, you rent the whole house for 700 bucks.....And there are jobs. Meat-packing jobs and jobs in warehouses for Amazon and Michael's that don't require advanced education. (Frantz, 2012)

These new residents however, when they register as with the D-USA initiative, register with strong Democrat Party loyalty. Thus, when minority candidates such as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton ran for President of the U.S., they cast strong votes for those candidates rather than the Republican candidates. One need only look at the voter turnout from the local Luzerne County and Pennsylvania Election Results pages to find a large percentage of Hispanic voters voting for a Black and Female candidate for President, (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2016).

Hazleton's 11 Wards and Their Make-up Anglo vs. Hispanic

To identify wards or precincts in Hazleton, one needs to review two issues. First, population growth, and second, area of residency within the city. The following table indicates the rapid growth of Hispanics in the Hazleton Area from 2000 to 2016: Growth of Hispanic Population in Hazleton, PA

Growth of Hispanic Population in Hazleton, PA			
Date	Population	% of Growth Change	
1990	Not sig.	Not sig.	
2000	1320	Not sig.	
2010	9454	437.31%	
2016	15-16000	62.18%	(U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

(U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

The figures for 2016 are based on the best estimates and this author believes they may even be larger. According to similar statistics from the Pew Research Center, Luzerne County in which Hazleton, PA is located is currently the one of the fastest growing Hispanic Counties in the 1500 counties across the U.S. From 2000 to 2007, it ranked as eighth among all counties in growth and from 2007 to 2014, as the sixth fastest in growth (Stepler, 2016). Hazleton's own population has the past sixteen years been the primary cause of city population growth. In addendum #1, the reader will find a City Map of the voting wards in Hazleton, PA. From 2000 to 2009, the primary location of Hispanic settlement was in Ward 1. It had little effect on elections in the early 2000's because the population was just growing, and city offices were all at-large races rather than ward or a combination of wards. As the population of Hispanics and its voters grew from 2008 on, they spread unevenly but among all the wards of the city. More heavily populated voting wards today in the city seem to fall into Wards 1, 6, 8, 10, and 11. While all wards have seen Hispanic residence rise in their regions of the city, the above wards are where their influence is felt the most (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2006). The fewest Hispanic residents are found in Wards 3 and 5 (commonly referred to as the Terrace and the Heights). In voting history from election results, one will find, wards 3 and 5 usually possess the most consistent voters in the city and control with their votes who gets elected or not. If the number of Hispanic voters from 1, 6, 8, 10, and 11 along with some of the other ward came out to vote, their numbers would far outweigh that of wards 3 and 5. The only time this can be examined would be in the general election of 2016(Director of Elections, 2016).

Hazleton's Hispanic Voters Compared to that of Other Pennsylvania Cities

The activism and voter turnout among Spanish-speaking voters and especially among Dominican voters does not carry over to Congressional, State, and local elections. Among interviews conducted by this author, similar answers appeared as reasons for the lack of voting. In discussions with Vilma Budde and Guilmereo Lara among others, the reasons most often suggested include: (1) a lack of understanding about the actions of elected officials and (2) the need among Hispanic voters to be directly asked and explained what a politician will do for them as individuals. Both interviewees suggested that Hispanics —want to be talked to personally and explained how their vote will benefit themselves and their families (Budde, 2017)(Lara, 2017).

While the reasons Hispanic voters, including Dominicans, may not seem on the surface dissimilar to traditional White Non-Hispanic voters, this author believes there is a great deal more intensity in the Hispanic voter's views. First, Hispanic voters in general along with White, Black and Asian voters feel a relationship with presidential candidates. Everyone can identify major candidates for that office and a support for the candidate's position on important issues or their party's stance on the issues. Each Hispanic nationality will support the presidential candidate of the political party in which they register. For example, many Cuban immigrants until recently registered in the Republican party which was in power as the first professionals left the island nation and Castro assumed power. Conservative by nature, many Cuban immigrants feel comfortable with the family, economic, and political issues and anti-Castro position of the Republicans (Krogstad, After decades of GOP support, Cubans shifting toward the Democratic Party, 2014). Dominicans on the other hand have traditionally registered with the Democratic Party in large majority. They find the Democratic Party positions in line with the own beliefs on political, economic and social issues (Tanzina Vega, 2014).

As a second point, however, Hispanics registering in either party have not produced many elected or appointed officials. 2016 witnessed the first Dominicans with, Adriano Espalier (D - NY) and Franklin Garcia (D – DC Shadow) elected to the U.S. Congress (danr.org, 2016). In Pennsylvania, the first Dominican, Emilio Vazquez, was elected to the Pennsylvania General Assembly in 2016 when (Kopp, 2017). In Cities around Pennsylvania, few Hispanics including Dominicans hold public office whether through the ballot box or

appointment. In one of the earliest and most heavily Hispanic/Latino populated cities, Reading, PA, the problem is quite clear:

Hispanics/Latinos do not have a high percentage of involvement in local government, jobs, or activist groups. According to the Reading Eagle, in 2002, only 2.3% of high administrative positions in Reading belong to Hispanic/Latinos. Only 3.6% of the teachers in the Reading School District are Hispanic/Latino, despite that most students are Hispanic/Latino (Students at Pennsylvania University, 2010)

The above statement also could include, Lancaster, Allentown, Hazleton, and Wilkes-Barre. In grassroots organizations, community centers, and small business organizations, Dominican along with other Hispanic groups have been quite active in their own communities. These same groups have not sought to secure political power through the ballot box or appointed offices. In Reading, Lancaster, and Allentown there has not been a Hispanic elected to the mayoral office yet, although some individuals have tried.

In the past election Hispanics and in the case of Lancaster, a Dominican, Norman Bristol Colon, ran for the office of Mayor only to come in last behind his two opponents in the primary election held May 16, 2017. The results placed Colon 998 votes away from his first-place opponent – Democrat: Danene Sorace, 2,010 votes, Kevin Ressler, 1,256 votes; Norman Bristol Colon, 1,012 votes (Murphy, 2017). Colon had received the endorsement of the Pennsylvania Latino Coalition, the Philadelphia Latino Coalition and his own political action organization, but it did not spur voters in that city to come out and vote. According to the Bureau of Elections in Lancaster County, while they consider all elections important, the voter turnout was 14.23 % in the primary election. This beat the 12.02 % in 2015 and the 7.8 % in 2013 (Marroni, 2017). It is clear to see by the numbers, that not only don't Hispanic voters vote, but also many native residents of city do not see the importance of local elections. Until something breaks or goes terribly wrong with local government such as tax increases, fiscal crises, or scandals, local voters do not connect with local politicians and voting. Often, Hispanic voters often do not participate in local elections because of a lack of understanding of how local government functions or how it connects to their daily lives. Frequently this author in talking to Hispanic voters has heard the question asked as, what local government will do specifically for me. In other cases, the questions pertain to how the local government can help the Hispanic community directly (Lara, 2017) (Budde, 2017).

If one examines the election trends of Hazleton voters across Congressional, state and local elections, and especially within primary elections, one will identify many of the above voting characteristics. In national presidential primary elections, as with the primary elections that preceded them, voter turnout tended to be much higher than other primaries. This was especially true amongst Hispanic voters as indicated by the numbers of Hispanic registered voters in the years 2008 to 2016 (Presidential primary votes prior to 2008 were not readily available for Luzerne County and Hazleton, Pennsylvania). According to numbers indicated by the Bureau of elections in Luzerne County, voter turnout in presidential primary elections since 2002 the present demonstrate the following:

Primary Presidential Election Year	% of Voter Turnout	% of Hispanic Pop. Turnout
2008	51.60%	37.3%
2012	40.0%	22.36%
2016	60.0%	41.05%

(Director of Elections, 2016)

While in a national primary election, the actual influence of Hispanic voters within a small city like Hazleton, Pennsylvania may be more difficult to examine specifics, the trend above portrays certain indicators. First, in a hotly contested presidential race, Hispanics and all voters appear to show up in larger numbers. The 2008 and 2016 presidential Democratic primaries exhibited hotly contested races for president. Many political pundits did not feel the same about the 2012 primary. Both party nominees were settled by the time the Pennsylvania primary was held on (Sakuma, 2016)Obama (RealClearPolitics, 2012).

In contrast, both the 2008 and 2016 presidential primaries provided heated contests in both political parties. The support for Hillary Clinton 2016 was not as strong amongst Hispanic voters as it was for Barack Obama, nonetheless, the Hispanic vote became much more important within the city of Hazleton and was directed towards aiding Secretary Clinton. The overall difference nationally in Hispanic support for Secretary Clinton as compared to President Obama was approximately 11% decline (69% for Obama, 58% for Clinton) (Lopez, 2016). As indicated above these results mirrored the national statistics. While support for Secretary Clinton may happen to have declined, it was certainly much greater than Hispanic support for Donald Trump or any other potential Republican candidate(Director of Elections, 2016) In the national election Donald Trump received a larger percentage of the Hispanic vote then did Mitt Romney(Sakuma, 2016). It is very safe to suggest that the increased Dominican voter turnout in the general election fell heavily in support of Secretary Clinton. —The total votes cast for Secretary Clinton in Hazleton...helped nominate the Democratic candidatell (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2016) and provided a local victory for Secretary Clinton in a state that turned significantly red in the general election.

The Democratic Party —get out the votell effort in the 2016 primary and general election aided by the money from Dominican – USA was effectively used in the city of Hazleton amongst its high number of registered Hispanic/Dominican voters.

One should remember that Hispanic voters and especially Dominicans in Hazleton identified with a Democratic, minority candidate, in contested elections and whose views on the issues coincided with their own (Wiltz, 2015). While this is true in national primary and general elections, the same results do not show in congressional, state and local elections. In fact, quite the opposite results appear.

As is true nationally, and in most municipalities across the state of Pennsylvania, Hispanic voters seldom vote and even to a lesser degree hold any political power through their vote or public offices held. The population of Hazleton (approximately 30,000) as one can see from Census Tables has dramatically risen from the year 2000 to2016 (4.84% in 2000 to 60.0% in 2016) ((CensusViewer, 2012). Yet, the following table indicates the voter turnout for the county of Luzerne in which the city of Hazleton is located. County records do not cover percentage vote of specific communities.

Year	% of Voter Turnout
2009`	35.33%
2010	30.25%
2013	19.81%
2014	18.04%
2015	21.40%
2017	19.00%

(Director of Elections, 2016)

While these figures represent County voter turnouts, Luzerne County, has also seen a dramatic increase in Hispanic and especially Dominican population within the past 10 years. Luzerne County remains one of the fastest growing Hispanic county proportionally speaking in the U.S. with approximately a 457% increase over the past decade (Matza, 2013). With such numbers present, especially in Hazleton, one would expect an increased Dominican interest in elected and appointed government positions. This however is not the case. Supporting this assertion, over the past ten years, approximately four Hispanic residents have vied for a city Council position without success and none has sought the mayoral position. In addition, while a few Hispanics have attempted to run for school board, none has successfully completed the petition signing process let alone winning an election. In the past primary election of 2017, one young woman of Dominican background teamed up with two incumbents seeking the Democratic nomination for city council in Hazleton. One of the two incumbents in this primary was this author. Through discussions with each other, the team developed a strategy of utilizing support from each other's base. The first base was that of the two White Non-Hispanic. A second base identified was to come from the large registered Dominican vote that developed in the 2016 presidential election. The candidates carried out the traditional door-to-door and political rallies. However, in addition to these activities, the candidates worked diligently to promote the young woman among the long-time native residents, and the local Dominican population. Efforts to gain the young woman endorsements from the Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Lancaster Hispanic and Dominican coalitions were successful and used to promote her candidacy along with the other two. All campaign literature the three candidates passed out within the city of included English and Spanish. Interpreters and supporters assisted Spanish-speaking voters at the polls. All these efforts were to no avail. As in several previous local primary elections many voters overall did not go out to vote. What became especially troubling was that Dominican voters did not exercise their voting rights (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2018). The number of Hispanic voters who showed up to vote has been argued by a few of those who watch local elections, but the number seems not to have exceeded 200 (Luzerne County Bureau of Elections, 2018) (Lussenhop, 2016).

With such visibility within the city through door-to-door canvassing, campaign leaflets written in English and Spanish, phone calling directly to Hispanic voters, newspaper ads, and other campaign activities, one may find it difficult to understand the fact that the young woman lost. The young woman came in fourth in the primary vote count, garnering 420 votes, approximately 78 votes less than the third-place finish (Hazleton Standard Speaker Staff Reporter, 2016). It was clear that the Dominican Community had not come out to vote for her.

The lack of support among the community even showed in her inability to receive the single or —bullet votes from the Hispanic community, which may have not viewed the other two candidates favorably.

Conclusions about Hispanic Voting Habits and Some Answers (?)

There are several issues, which one must keep in mind while looking at this election. First, there were seven candidates running on the Democratic side for three nominations. Four of these candidates ran campaigns walking streets and handing out political literature.

The other three relied on their base of friends and local democrat party faithful to support their candidacies (Galski, 2016). Perhaps in a less crowded primary and less confusion, Hispanic voters might see a need to vote for a fellow Dominican.

Second, primary elections traditionally have had lower turnouts than general elections held in November. Whether this be in presidential primaries or in state and local primaries, voter turnout has traditionally been much lower than we would hope to see across many regions such as Berks, Lancaster along with Hazleton. As previously mentioned turnout in Eastern Pennsylvania cities with large Hispanic population ranged from 7.5%

upwards to 35.7% (Torres, 2018). If on the other hand, Hispanic/Dominican voters utilize this situation to their advantage, in such communities as in Hazleton, they may be able to nominate more of their community to offices and thereby guarantee representation and evening of the power structure in such municipalities.

Third, many citizens fail to identify with candidates who are running for what residents consider lesser offices. Many voters in primary season are not interested in taking the time to select the candidates who will run for office in November elections (McDonald, 2016)(Desilver, 2016). They seem to be much more willing to vote only in November elections if possible to select the actual officeholder. The average voter does not consider primaries important (Henson Jim, 2018)(Many other websites on states and national elections relate the same material), but subtle changes can affect the actions of every level of government. An example or two may help to explain such changes. Voters may not get a chance to vote for the candidate of their choice and his/her views. A legislative majority may sway in an opposing direction without a specific candidate winning a primary election. Consequently, it may change the course of policy decisions in very important ways.

Fourth, the newly arrived Dominican resident may be an American citizen or a resident working on his or her naturalization process, however, this does not mean that the individual has a clear understanding of government structures and institutions levels and services provided. Speaking with Mr. Lara, after the most recent local primary of 2017, it became very evident there was little understanding what local services provide or how local governments establish the various taxes and rates used (Lara, 2017). While it would be unfair to suggest that long-time or White Non-Hispanic voters understand government systems well, they should be more accustomed to their expectations of government services. This author would suggest that Hispanics in general in Hazleton have had less time and opportunity to learn about levels of government who their elected officials are and what these officials can do to make their life a better one. More importantly, they yet, have not seen local Hispanic faces filling these seats of authority.

Fifth, Hispanics are much more willing to vote for the party, Democrat candidates identifiable with the party. In the 2016 congressional election, Congressman Barletta won a resounding victory throughout his entire congressional district, but as the favorite son in Hazleton, he won by only a close margin (Director of Elections, 2016). The Democratic candidate in that 2016 election was known for his connection to disgraced —Kids for Cash Judge Michael Conahan(Alfred, 2017)(Huesken, 2016). He was politically inactive since 2007 when he lost in a landslide defeat when Barletta won his nomination and the Democratic nomination with a write-in against Marsicano (Huesken, 2016). Extrapolating this further may help indicate why the young Hispanic woman in 2017 was not able to gain sufficient votes to garner a nomination for council. With seven candidates running for office on the Democratic side, Hispanic voters may have been too confused or unwilling to cast a vote in making the selection of their own respective party's candidates. In other words, simply the party remains much more important to the Hispanic voter than anyone candidate does. This may also explain why no Hispanic candidate in Hazleton has made it through a primary election.

While Black and White voters are only less knowledge about government structures and processes than Hispanic voters are, the independence of Non-Hispanic voters in voting style to —vote the person rather than the party, does not seem to have reached Hispanic and especially Dominican voters to the same magnitude.

Unfortunately, this trend will continue to keep the potential of Dominican political power dormant.

Community leaders within the Hispanic community, whether they are Dominican, Puerto Rican, Mexican or any other nationality will have to put their differences aside and educate the entire community of Spanish speakers as a power to be reckoned. Only then will decisions for school districts and local government policies reflect the views of the Hispanic/Dominican community.

The remedy most immediately available is the education and revitalization of the Hispanic/Dominican voter because of previous local committee work. Language is not a difficult obstacle due to the assistance in voting literature put out by the Bureaus of Voting, local campaigns and the translated ballot itself. With more education, Hispanic voters can get an answer at least generally on what state and local politicians are going to do to help the voter. Hispanic voters must learn periods for gaining nomination petitions and periods for elections. They must also develop an understanding of the various offices they can seek. These may include elected or appointed within a municipality. Intense training such as that used in the registration and get-out-the-vote effort is a logical answer. A municipal government need not mirror perfectly the diversity of the community. Incorporating all voices of citizens in the issues of local and state government is a work in progress. The sleeping giant can awaken. With education, appointments to committees, and a sense of making a difference in their community it can happen. Obviously, money will be needed as well as individuals interested in preparing teaching materials and explaining how local governments work and what services they provide. Hispanics/Dominicans must be identified who are solid, honest choices for authorities and board so that they can begin to learn the political process and structure. Among the population of Dominicans, which make up the great majority of Hispanic voters in Hazleton, this effort worked once, and it can do so again in waking up this sleeping giant.

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