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Conservatives ponder the future of the GOP under Trump

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Donald Trump's victory may lead Republicans to embrace the mogul's policies and rhetoric. But that's a terrible idea, for two reasons.

First, Trump did not win the election; Hillary Clinton lost it. The latest data suggest that 2016 was a low turnout year, with about 3 million fewer Democrats and half a million fewer Republicans casting a ballot than in 2012. Clinton underperformed in nearly every demographic group except for women.

Second, in the long run, Trump is toxic to the Republican brand. Fully 70% of Latinos — the fastest growing voter bloc — believe that he has made the Republican Party “more hostile” to them. Nearly half of Americans believe that Trump won't treat Muslims fairly in the country, and 54% of Americans believe that Trump is prejudiced.

In some respects, we're witnessing a national-level repeat of the California Republican Party's self-destruction in the early 1990s, when GOP Gov. Pete Wilson pushed Proposition 187 to prohibit unauthorized immigrants from accessing state services.

Wilson and others argued that California could not afford the added tax burden. But many felt that Prop. 187 supporters were motivated by anti-Latino sentiments. As one Latino Republican put it, “He was saying we don't work hard.” Wilson made Prop. 187 the centerpiece in a tough reelection campaign that he ultimately won. The state party, however, never recovered its reputation.

Before Prop. 187, almost half of California Latinos voted for Republicans; in the years since, Latinos have voted 2-to-1 Democratic.

In contrast, the Texas Republican Party in the 1990s took a more inclusive, pro-immigration approach, eschewing “show me your papers” type policies. George W. Bush, for instance, called Prop. 187 a “catastrophic position” and actively sought the support of Texas Latinos in his campaign for governor by emphasizing economic opportunity and education.

These efforts worked: Texas Latinos went from voting Republican at a rate of about 30% to nearly 50%.

And contrary to some Republicans' fears, Latino outreach did not lead to creeping liberalism or come at the expense of the Texas' economy. Texas remains one of the most economically free states and a leader in job creation.

The national GOP shouldn't lull itself into thinking it's in good shape; the 2016 election did a great deal of damage. Going forward, it's obvious that Texas-style outreach is the better strategy.

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