

How Republicans Can Win Back the Immigrant Vote

Today's immigrant voters are heavily Democratic, but 'twas not always so. As *Open Borders* explains, immigrants were almost evenly split during the Reagan era. It's not hard to see why. At least rhetorically, Reagan nearly endorsed open borders:

I've spoken of the shining city all my political life, but I don't know if I ever quite communicated what I saw when I said it. But in my mind it was a tall, proud city built on rocks stronger than oceans, windswept, God-blessed, and teeming with people of all kinds living in harmony and peace; a city with free ports that hummed with commerce and creativity. And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here. That's how I saw it, and see it still.

What changed? The Republicans I know focus on immigrants' changing national origin. When you look at the data, however, Republicans have lost favor among immigrants *around the world*. European immigrants are Democratic. So are Indian-Americans – the richest and most socially conservative ethnicity in the country.

What gives? I say there's been a vicious feedback loop. Once Reagan left the stage, Republicans started feeling more negative about immigrants, which made immigrants more negative about Republicans, which made Republicans more negative about immigrants, which made immigrants more negative about Republicans. And so on and so on.

You could say, "Tragic, but Republicans are stuck. If they don't keep out immigrants, their party will perish." Yet common decency aside, the path of exclusion has worked poorly. A vocally anti-immigrant Republican president has totally failed to permanently rewrite immigration law. Even if he gets reelected, Trump will soon be a lame duck.

What's the alternative? Lose the *American't* attitude that "Immigrants hate Republicans – and there's nothing Republicans can do about it." Massive partisan realignments really do happen; look what happened to white Catholics over the last fifty years. Or to be more precise, partisan realignments don't "happen"; rather they *come to fruition*. The secret: Far-sighted statesmanship. Start magnanimously showing respect to people who *don't yet vote for you*. Search for common ground, and accentuate the positive. If at first you don't succeed, try try again. And always shuck your tamales.

P.S. Some readers object to the Reagan cartoon's implied comparison between the Berlin Wall and immigration barriers. There's a world of difference between keeping people *in* and keeping people *out*, right? For private property, yes. For countries, however, the distinction between "keeping people in" and "keeping people out" is far more complicated than it looks:

Suppose, for example, that the East German government closed its airspace to Western aviation and used the Berlin Wall to prevent anyone from leaving the surrounded city of West Berlin. Honecker could have even told his citizens, "You're free to move to West Berlin, but since we've got it surrounded, don't expect to enjoy too many Western luxuries." Despite his oppressive intent, Honecker would, grammatically speaking, be keeping West Berliners out of East Germany, not holding East Germans in East Germany.

To make the hypothetical even starker: Imagine the East Germany government legally granted independence to a one-mile strip of land along its entire border. Call it Mauerland. All of the citizens of Mauerland are former officers of the East German border guard; their country is just one big, deadly wall. East Germany then abolishes all laws against emigration; everyone is free to leave. Unfortunately, the sovereign state of Mauerland refuses to grant visas or overflight permission to anyone without the East Germans' approval. When challenged, they say, "Mauerland, like the United States, has every right to keep foreigners out. You keep out Mexicans. We keep out East Germans."

See my dialogue on "The Berlin Cage" for more.