

Searching for New York City's first Latino Mayor

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It might baffle outsiders that New York City has yet to elect a Latino mayor, but New Yorkers argue it's less about symbolism and more about results. Council member Melissa Mark-Viverito, right, march in the National Puerto Rican Day Parade on New York's Fifth Ave., Sunday, June 10, 2012.

It might baffle outsiders that [New York City](#) has yet to elect a Latino Mayor, but some New Yorkers would argue it's less about symbolism and more about results.

The reasons are numerous. Analysts say the city's political power structure hasn't lend itself to cater a Latino candidate and many are also questioning the viability of any promising contender.

Others contest that it's part of a national dilemma because political parties have not invested time in grooming Latinos to run on the local and city level. In fact, there are only a few recognizable Latino Mayors who include Antonio Villaraigosa of Los Angeles and Julian Castro of San Antonio.

"We're talking about Latino politics in New York City. We're talking about a lot of people – more than 2.3 million people – one of the most diverse Latino cities in the world," said Angelo Falcon, president and founder of the National Institute of Latino Policy (NILP), while referring to the case in New York City. "Each neighborhood is like its own city."

Falcon explained that the city's diverse history, demographics and political power structure plays a role in understanding why the circumstances have not become ripe for a Latino to become the Mayor of New York City.

A "viable" Latino Mayor would need to transcend ethnic divisions

Ed Morales, adjunct professor at Columbia University of the Center for the Study of Ethnicity and Race, went in search for an answer. Through a series of five stories published in *City limits* titled, "[Searching for El Primero: Latinos and the Mayoralty](#)" he delved into what it would mean for Latinos to have a "viable" candidate.

"The idea was that Puerto Ricans or Latinos in New York would eventually get the Mayoral seat because all these other groups took their turn, like there's an Irish Mayor, there's a Jewish Mayor, and there's an Italian Mayor," said Morales.

There have only been two most promising contenders of Puerto Rican descent including Congressman Herman Badillo, who ran for Mayor in several attempts during the 1960s and 70s, and Bronx Borough president Fernando Ferrer. Badillo conciliated the African American and Latino base, but could not gain the appeal of the African American constituency in Harlem when he last ran in 1985.

Ferrer, who ran on the Democratic ticket, did not overcome the scrutiny that came during his first bid with the African American community. A New York Post cartoon depicted him as kissing the backside of renowned advocate Rev. Al Sharpton pushing into the question of "race-baiting" as Morales describes it. The 9-11 attacks also elevated his contender, former Mayor Rudolph Guiliani.

In his second run, New York Michael Bloomberg had more cash on hand and was more well known. Ethnicity also plays a factor in running for office considering that the city boasts an expansive number of different Latino ethnicities including a growing Mexican American community.

And while an estimated 29 percent of Latinos reside in New York City, they're still not a majority.

"When I was doing the piece, it was really kind of unanimous that everyone felt that there was really nobody who seriously had a chance," said Morales.

He indicated that aside from Adolfo Carrión who is deciding to run, "there is no serious candidate for this coming cycle in 2013." Moreno said the chances fare worse if you're a Democratic party loyalist.

“If a Democrat wins, there is probably not going to be a Latino candidate until eight years from now,” he said. “People in their own party usually don’t run against an incumbent.”

Is having a Latino Mayor synonymous with political clout?

Lucia Gomez Jimenez, executive director of La Fuente, a Tri-state worker and community fund, questioned whether having a Latino Mayor should really be synonymous with the political empowerment of Latinos.

“Even if we have a Latino Mayor, does that mean that Latino issues are being addressed?” said Jimenez.

She said as someone who has worked in advocacy she knows that having many Latino representatives doesn’t necessarily mean they have clout. On her end, she said New Yorkers need a Latino Mayoral candidate that has vision and that can energize the base. The problem is that she doesn’t believe a viable candidate has surfaced.

“I don’t want a symbolic Mayor,” she said. “I want real issues addressed and if we can have both that’s what I want. For the symbolism of saying we elected our first Latino Mayor is good enough of a reason to rally behind any Latino candidate.”

So far, there are some possible contenders: Bronx Borough president Ruben Diaz, J.r., former Obama administration member Adolfo Carrión. Carrión is running as a Republican in what some question is a strategy considering that he might be less fortunate if he ran as a Democrat. Melissa Mark-Viverito is a [New York City](#) councilwoman from East Harlem.

Possibly within the next four years, Jimenez believes they can see a viable candidate, although she clarified she isn’t disqualifying the present contenders. Still, virtually all of them agree any candidate would have to appeal to a broader electorate.

New York: Not a Latino city

The impact this will have if New York elects its first Latino candidate is politically symbolical Morales believes and more so for the party that helps elect the candidate. That’s possibly why Carrión, who is of Puerto Rican background, might have a chance, if he’s appealing as a moderate.

“The idea of running a Latino candidate seems like a risk they can’t afford to take because a Latino candidate has never won,” said Morales, while explaining that it’s been years, 1993, since they last had a Democratic Mayor.

He agrees it would send a different message, particularly in light of the nationwide surge of the Latino vote, if the Republican party were to create a high-profile Latino in New York City or were to embrace Carrión. Yet, analysts would argue there needs to be cohesion first before they start to develop political empowerment or leadership for the Latino community to surge.

Morales equally argues the perception that New York is a Latino city is still questionable.

“Demographically, New York is not really a Latino city. You compare that to Miami, Los Angeles and Houston, those are Latino cities,” said Morales. “There’s a lot of Latinos here, but there’s still not really a perception that New York is a Latino city.”

“What does it say that we don’t have a Latino Mayor? I don’t know it’s a competitive city.”