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## Hispanics are becoming more politically united

### **Our view: Immigration protests appear to have been the catalyst that is bringing them together for a common cause**

The Hispanic potential to become a political powerhouse has yet to be reflected at the ballot box.

However, the days of the barely noticeable Hispanic vote could be numbered due to this year's often acrimonious debate over illegal immigration. It may soon be perilous for politicians and policy-makers to ignore or attempt to marginalize their Hispanic constituents.

A survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, a Washington, D.C.-based research organization, found that Hispanics are becoming more politically united. Pew reported last week that 63 percent of Hispanics surveyed said the immigration-rights marches that took place in the spring were the beginning of a social movement that will last a long time.

The important nugget to come out of the survey is that native-born Hispanics and immigrants agree on this social movement.

The Hispanic voting bloc has always been difficult to define. Unlike blacks, who in 2001 were surpassed by Hispanics as the nation's largest minority group, Latinos don't necessarily share the same culture and values.

While most blacks were born and raised in the United States, many Hispanics don't have deep roots in this country and hail from a plethora of nations — each with its own culture and value system.

There also is friction within the Hispanic community between families that have been here for generations and those that are new.

Established Hispanic families, for instance, might speak mostly English, listen to rap music and have kids on basketball teams. Newer families might speak mostly Spanish, watch Spanish-language television and have kids on soccer teams.

These are generalizations, of course, but they illustrate how Hispanics aren't a homogeneous group.

The Pew survey indicates that the immigration protests were a catalyst to bring Hispanics together for a common cause.

"It is very clear that all these events made a big impression on the native-born," Robert Suro, director of the Pew center, told the Dallas Morning News last week.

It's the native-born who matter to politicians because they are the ones who can cast votes. Illegal immigrants and their children might make a difference in the future, but their influence, for now, doesn't extend to the voting booth.

Hispanics make up more than 14 percent of the U.S. population, but they cast only 6 percent of the vote in the 2004 elections. That is partly due to apathy and partly due to the fact that many Hispanics are too young to vote or are noncitizens.

That will change. Many of the high-schoolers who marched in Tucson and across the country will be able to vote in the 2008 elections. Pew also noted that Hispanics remain the fastest-growing bloc of the electorate.

If the Hispanic social movement maintains its momentum, 2008 could be the year that Hispanics make their big splash in the voting pool.

As the nation's leaders continue to drag their feet on immigration reform, they should keep in mind that a lot of voters are watching.

If the Pew survey is to be believed, Hispanic voters in particular appear more likely to hold politicians accountable for their actions.

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