

# The Hispanic Factor

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President Obama's inability to pass much-needed comprehensive immigration reform could cost him the 2012 election. Though recent news of a rebounding economy, coupled with Republican Party infighting, suggests an alternate narrative, the Hispanic vote is neither uniform nor clearly aligned with the Democratic Party. If Hispanics fail to show up in support of the president in four key swing states — Florida, New Mexico, Nevada, and Colorado — the election could go to the Republican candidate, likely to be former Governor Mitt Romney.

Time magazine kicked off the topic of Hispanic electoral power with its March 5th cover story, "Yo Decido," written by journalist Michael Scherer. The author noted demographic trends that favor Hispanic predominance in certain places in the nation, and last week, it was widely reported in the U.S. media that about one in six Americans are Hispanic. Additionally, one in six workers in the U.S. is Hispanic, and most Hispanics live in the U.S. legally. They are fully integrated into communities. There is a prevailing assumption that, because a majority of Hispanics are Catholic, they should be naturally allied with more conservative candidates — particularly the two Roman Catholics still in the Republican race as of this writing, Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich.

While the Republicans appear to have learned from some earlier egregious mistakes, like former candidate Herman Cain's jocular comment about electrifying the fence between the U.S. and Mexico, they seem to have a collective tin ear when it comes to Hispanic culture, issues, voting patterns, and history. They don't seem to understand the importance of Hispanics among us, and, surprisingly, they don't seem to really care.

Romney is hardly progressive or nuanced when it comes to Hispanic issues. He does not support the critically important Dream Act — which would allow young people who arrived in the U.S. as children (generally in the arms of their parents) to earn an education in America beyond high school. Common sense would suggest that we support a policy whereby our nation, struggling to compete in an increasingly technical, global environment, would support the education of young people who want to stay in the U.S., study, and contribute to the social and economic development of the nation.

Romney wants to talk economics while ignoring the politically complicated and nuanced issue of immigration reform. So recently he began reaching out to Hispanics by telling them that overall economic recovery is their best hope and that his policies — not President Obama's — are most likely to improve the economy, a claim based on political rhetoric more than measurable reality.

But recently released data undermines Romney's claims. According to data from the American Immigration Council, if the United States government passed comprehensive immigration reform (something Romney rejects), an estimated \$4.5-to-\$5.4 billion increase in overall tax revenues would accumulate during the first three years, as workers moved out of the shadows and into more reliable, better-paying jobs.

Reform would generate a net growth to GDP of approximately \$1.5 trillion during the first 10 years of implementation (\$1.2 trillion in added consumption, \$256 billion in new investment). Thus, immigration reform may be a key component to lifting our sluggish economy. Nevertheless, an angry, xenophobic fog has settled in over our land, leading to state-supported anti-immigration legislation that has disrupted local economies and has led to great social tensions and an ongoing legal challenge by the federal Department of Justice against the state of Arizona.

President Obama must continue to push for the creation of a pathway to comprehensive immigration reform and for passage of the Dream Act. By investing political capital in this project, the president can work to ensure that his presidency lasts through 2016 while simultaneously making a significant

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contribution to our economic growth and solving one of our most pressing social dilemmas: the plight of the undocumented among us.

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