

## **Russian roulette and the Hispanic Vote. Immigration Reform and the future of Political Parties.**

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### **Abstract**

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No other time our country's great history has a debate on immigration divided the nation on its true values and rich tradition in welcoming immigrants with open arms. The recent immigration laws in Arizona, Texas, Alabama and other states have raised several important questions regarding to the role of the federal government's policies, policy decision making process and more so the role of race in many of the decision making processes. The Hispanic debate goes far beyond the typical immigration debates on loss of jobs, drain on our social system, criminals etc., it has now vested in the "*Browning of America.*" The economic, political and social clout of current immigrants is far more beneficial to the nation than our media critics point them out to be. The Immigration debate has now generated so many divisions in our society that it has become the "*Civil rights debate of 21st century*"; never in American history has immigration become such a decisive issue where policymaking and the electoral process goes hand in hand. Whatever the arguments are, many Americans have suffered from amnesia; they have forgotten their commitment to the watch words of this great nation "*Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.*" Immigration reforms laws will have a long term effect on the political process and our political parties; how we court the Hispanic vote is clearly tied to the current immigration reforms laws. How we approach these laws and the Hispanic vote must be a cautious but sensitive approach, after all Hispanic vote will determine the future of the White House.

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The political debacle of the current immigration debate has left the United States of America divided along racial, ethnic and political lines, never seen before in our great country.

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Not only has the debate gone beyond the boundaries of our political spectrum, it has left the American people and its political parties scrambling to maintain a sense of what true democracy can and cannot be. Discussions on the current immigration crisis have disregarded the fact that we are a "Land of Immigrants." As America delves into the murky depths of the immigration debate, it has ignored who we are as Americans as well as the "Browning of America." Immigration has always been the basic DNA of America and it has taken away the best of who we are and what we can become as a nation. Immigration reform has more implications on America's future than many of us can foresee; not only socially, culturally and economically, but Hispanic political presence, is already shaping and defining a new America.

The Comprehensive Immigration Reform policies are directly related to the future of America, both to the American people as to who we are and what we stand for, but more so to the political parties as they try to court America's greatest asset. The Hispanic Vote. The Immigration debate has now generated so many divisions in our society that it has become the "*civil rights debate of 21<sup>st</sup> Century*." Never in American history has immigration been such a decisive issue where policymaking and the electoral process go hand in hand.

As both political parties implement their political agendas, they are facing an increasingly tough decision whether or not to support a Comprehensive Immigration Reform Bill. The decision will ultimately lead to a backlash from their own constituents and those of favor or impede efforts to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants living in America. This decision will ultimately define the future of the political landscape in America. The political importance of the Hispanic vote is closely tied to Immigration reform and, whether or not we admit it, **the American Presidency will be dictated by the Hispanic vote**. This vote, which can be utilized by both political parties, will now define the American political process and who or which party controls the future political structure of America.

The growth of the Hispanic electorate is an important factor in the increasing number of congressional races across the country. Both our political parties have redefined their political agenda to cater to the Hispanics' ever growing presence. Politically their votes remain hugely important for both Democratic and Republican campaigns.

Both the Democrats and Republicans have agreed that the Hispanic Immigration agenda must be dealt in a very sensitive but cautious way, their votes will define America's political landscape.

According to Senator Lindsey Graham (R) "*If we don't pass immigration reform, if we don't get it off the table in a reasonable, practical way, it doesn't matter who you run in 2016. We're in a demographic death spiral as a party, and the only way we can get back in good graces with the Hispanic community, in my view, is pass comprehensive immigration reform.*"<sup>i</sup>The Democratic Party argues, "*Hispanics are a swing vote; they are no longer a base vote of our party. Though we can all agree that it is the democratic agenda that will help Hispanics live a better life, we need to tell them in a compelling way. When we speak to them we can move them our way; they can break the Republican Party.*"<sup>ii</sup>The Republican Party acknowledges, "*given the size, growth rate and the distribution of Hispanics, it is safe to say that if we do not respect their voting power, they can change the future of elections.*"<sup>iii</sup>

In fact, according to Janet Murguia, President of the National Council of La Raza, "*The road to the White House runs right through the Hispanic community, and you will not see a Republican become president without it.*"<sup>iv</sup>As the debates over immigration reform continue to evolve, the reform bill focuses mostly on three issues: the economic effects of legalizing millions of currently illegal immigrants as well as all future immigration; the possibility of achieving real border security; and the ethical question of offering the reward of citizenship to those who have entered the country illegally.

Despite this debacle, the political implication on America's future and the Hispanic vote remains critical to the survival of American Democracy. The underlying truth remains: despite what roles the Democratic and Republican parties play in comprehensive immigration reform, it will have an important future impact on which political party Hispanics, aswing vote demographic, will align themselves with.

The growth of the Hispanic electorate is going to be an important factor in an increasing number of congressional races across the country in upcoming elections and beyond. More numbers mean more votes. Immigration reform will bring more votes to the table and how to attract those voters becomes a political chess game for both parties. Moreover, how both parties handle the issue of comprehensive immigration reform will have a serious impact on Hispanic political voting behavior and future Presidential elections.

The growing presence of the Hispanic community will have profound political consequences and future immigration policy agenda will play an important part in defining the American political process. If the Immigration Reform Bill were to pass, what would be the implications on our political landscape? The new law will allow unauthorized immigrants to gain eventual citizenship but also carries electoral risks and rewards for the Republican and Democratic Party.

On the one hand, if the bill were passed, it paves the way for new voters but more important which political party will they align themselves with? According to Nate Silver, *“roughly 80 percent of illegal immigrants are Hispanic, and about 10 percent are Asian, both groups that voted heavily Democratic in the last two elections. On the other hand, such legislation could plausibly improve the Republican Party’s brand image among Hispanics and Asian-Americans, perhaps allowing the party to fare better among these voters in future elections.”* <sup>vi</sup> These changes will have a long term effect on our political process: that is, they would affect the status of the 11 million unauthorized immigrants who are already in the United States who will eventually become US Citizens and exercise one of the fundamental rights we have in America: the right to vote. According to the Congressional Budget Office, if the Immigration Reform Bill becomes Law, it will add more than 17 million new potential voting-age citizens by 2036. These potential voters are in addition to the nearly 15 million that the current level of legal immigration will add by 2036. Combined, current immigration would add more than 32 million potential new voting-age citizens by 2036. <sup>vi</sup> These changing political demographics paint an alarming political fiasco that neither political party can afford to underestimate.

If the bill becomes law, Hispanic youths and naturalized immigrants will be 34 percent of newly eligible voters in 2014, 35 percent in 2016, 36 percent in 2018, and 37 percent in 2020.<sup>vii</sup> California will experience the greatest impact of the immigration reform bill, with nearly two-thirds of newly eligible voters belonging to either Hispanic or Asians. The same effect will take place in many other states where the voting power will be held by swing votes in both current and future elections. States like New Mexico, Texas, Florida, Virginia, North Carolina, Colorado, New York, New Jersey and Nevada will now have an important and decisive Hispanic vote that will dictate the future of elections and political parties.

On other hand, if the bill fails, political consequences can undermine the future of both parties and in the long run might be a death sentence for the party that opposes immigration reform.

Political parties may become extinct if they don't cater to the Hispanic needs and concerns. How they attract and court the new Hispanic voters can be a compelling, cautious and sensitive issue. According to the 2013 Gallup Poll, *"Hispanic-Americans favor Democrats over Republicans by a roughly 2-to-1 margin. Second generation Hispanic-Americans were actually more likely to identify with either party than Hispanic immigrants. Sixty-four percent of Hispanics who were born in the U.S. to parents who were also born in the U.S. favor Democrats, while only 30 percent lean Republican. Hispanic immigrants favor Democrats over Republicans by a margin of 57 to 25. And among Hispanics born in the U.S. to at least one immigrant parent, 57 percent lean Democratic, while 34 percent lean Republican."*<sup>viii</sup>

Whatever the debates might be, both political parties cannot afford to play with the Hispanic vote. Immigration reform is a key tool to courting America's greatest political asset. How both political parties resolve the immigration debacle can be an important gauge on the future of American political process. Political activist and businessman Donald Trump remarked, *"Immigration reform is a suicide mission for GOP."*<sup>ix</sup> The courting of the Hispanic, Women, African American votes have never been an important element of the Republican Party. Face the Nations' Bob Schieffer reminded us the Republicans *"are old white men and they are dying."*<sup>x</sup>

How and when both political parties address immigration reform remains a struggle. How they court new voters in an ever changing America rest solely on the embracement of the Hispanic community. Immigration reform can have severe consequences on how American democracy is shaped and defined. We cannot take the Hispanic vote for granted.

Hispanics are fast becoming the new cornerstone of this country's economic, social, cultural and evermore so political future, based on their potential. No other immigrant group in the history of our great nation has had the potential to redefine America's political process. We are still a nation of Immigrants. Live up to your true colors America.

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<sup>i</sup> Senator Lindsey Graham. NBC Meet the Press. June 8<sup>th</sup> 2103.

<sup>ii</sup> 2004 Presidential Race and Democratic Party.

<sup>iii</sup> 2004 Presidential Race and Republican Party.

<sup>iv</sup> National Council of La Raza, Annual Conference, Los Angeles. CA July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014

<sup>v</sup> How Immigration Reform and Demographics Could Change Presidential Math By Nate Silver. April 30. 2013

<sup>vi</sup> Congressional Budget Office Report. S774 Bill. 2013

<sup>vii</sup> Stepping Up: The Impact of the Newest Immigrant, Asian, and Latino Voters by Rob Paral. Immigration Policy Center Report 2013.

<sup>viii</sup> Gallup Poll. Immigrants and US Born Hispanics. August 2013

<sup>ix</sup> Donald Trump. Washington Times. March 15 2013

<sup>x</sup> Bob Schieffer. CBS This Morning June 13<sup>th</sup> 2013.