

Latino, Indian voters could count

By [Kristen Schorsch](#)
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With a growth spurt in the Latino population and American Indians hearing the call to vote, their marked ballots could determine the outcome of the Nov. 2 election, officials say.

It is a trend seen nationwide, even though -- unlike in the 2000 presidential campaign -- the candidates are not catering directly to the populations.

Yet with both candidates spending large amounts of time in states with high percentages of Latino and Indian voters, such as New Mexico, "you're starting to see just how important their votes are," said Kate Chapek, communications director for the Moving America Forward Foundation. "Could it come down to the Hispanic vote? Absolutely."

The non-partisan foundation formed in April 2003 to educate and empower Latinos and Indians to vote, Chapek said.

At the University of Iowa on Friday, a two-member panel spoke about the importance of the Latino and Indian vote this election as part of a four-day UI Latino and Native American Alumni Alliance.

This election season, UI associate political science professor Gary Segura said Iowa is one of five states that will determine the outcome of the Nov. 2 election. Other states are Florida, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Ohio. In 2000, 65 percent of all Latinos voted Democrat.

The Latino population also is having a growth spurt. In 2002, the Latino population was 38.8 million, or 13.5 percent of the nation's total population. The population grew 9.8 percent between 2000-02 compared to the 2.5 percent national average. In Johnson County, Latinos make up 2.5 percent of the population; Indians and Alaskan Natives make up .3 percent, according to 2000 census data.

However, Segura said, neither President Bush nor Democratic challenger Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., has catered to the Indian or Latino vote.

"Bush perceived that he could peel the Latino vote away from the Democratic party" in the 2000 presidential election, Segura said. "He believed he had access to the Latino vote."

That included giving speeches in Spanish and heavily advertising in Latino communities. Bush has left all that behind in this campaign, Segura said, adding that the Democratic ticket has not done much either.

Garnering the Indian vote is something Judy Hanks has been working toward. Hanks, a member of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, spearheaded the "Get Out The Native Vote" campaign in Minnesota. The statewide initiative aims to motivate the state's 11 tribes, which equal 33,000 eligible voters. This year also marks the 80th anniversary of when Indians were granted U.S. citizenship, she said.

"We know that if we get our Indian people to the polls, we know we could probably have some influence," Hanks said.

Despite the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that prohibited voting discrimination based on race, color or language, Hanks said, voting continues to be an obstacle for Indians. Living on reservations, many don't have transportation to the polls, authorities question their tribal identification cards and they battle language barriers, Hanks said.

Despite the deterrents, Hanks said, they are hearing the call to mark their ballots.

"We're picking up a lot of lost ground when we didn't have a voice," Hanks said.

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