

## **IMMIGRANTS CONSOLIDATING POWER OF VOTE**

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### **Body**

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THEY ARE **IMMIGRANTS**, and they grew up speaking English, Spanish, Russian, Chinese, Korean, Urdu, you name it.

But come November, thousands of them will speak the one language all politicians understand: the language of the **vote**.

That is the goal of Democracy in Action!, a coalition composed of some of the city's main advocacy groups. They are committed to turning out more than 100,000 **immigrant** citizens to **vote** in the November elections.

And on Thursday, the activists took an action that should serve as an election-year warning to those politicians playing the anti-**immigrant** card: They hand-delivered 2,700 voter registration forms to the head of the New York City Board of Elections in Manhattan.

Allan Kaplan, a member of the New York Immigration Coalition, one of the organizations that created Democracy in Action!, said that he has no doubts that the 100,000-voter objective is well within reach.

"We have registered 240,000 **immigrant** citizens since 1998," Kaplan said. "We think it is entirely possible to turn out 100,000 voters in November."

According to him, the batch of registration forms handed to the Board of Elections Thursday was the product of only one month of work. On July, they had delivered 2,600 more.

One of the group's purposes is to give **immigrants** the chance to have their voices heard and their interests taken seriously. And the way to do this is, of course, by turning them into a **voting** group that politicians will have to deal with seriously.

In the meantime, the pro-immigration groups continue registering thousands of new voters. Their commitment is to make Democracy in Action! the largest campaign of its kind ever.

"There are 22 groups in Democracy in Action!," Kaplan said. "And at least 10 of them are doing extensive voter-registration work."

The latest census figures are another reason that makes it very risky for aspiring politicians to ignore the new citizens' **vote**. After all, two out of three New Yorkers are **immigrants** or the children of **immigrants**. Clearly, they are growing not only in numbers but in political **power**, too.

## IMMIGRANTS CONSOLIDATING POWER OF VOTE

Democracy in Action! also is a plan of action to activate an unprecedented number of immigrants to get involved - and stay involved - in the political process. To do this, they don't have to be citizens or even documented, for that matter.

They are people like Ana Velázquez, 36, an undocumented Mexican immigrant from Puebla who came to New York 13 years ago with her husband.

"Every Saturday for almost a year now, I spend three or four hours knocking on people's doors to motivate them to become voters," said Velázquez, who is a volunteer at the Woodside Latin American Integration Center, one of the groups that is part of Democracy in Action!

Democracy in Action!, like New York City, is a rainbow of ethnicities.

Latinos, Russians, Koreans, Chinese and many others have come together to speak with one language when it comes to building political power, protecting their rights and making sure immigrants are given their due as decent, hardworking and productive members of society.

And now more than ever, they feel an urgency to participate in their new country's political process.

"The hostile environment we have in the nation today has made immigrants eager to register and vote to protect themselves," Kaplan said in what sounds like some strange form of poetic justice.

Smart politicians, no doubt, will take note.

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