

In Strategy Shift, Immigration Coalition Targets GOP Lawmakers

By [Laura Meckler](#)

With the prospects of an immigration overhaul dimming, a coalition of immigration rights groups says it is shifting its approach from trying to persuade the GOP to support an immigration overhaul to “electoral punishment for opponents of reform.”

The group said that as long as House GOP leaders keep the legislation bottled up, it will target House Republicans in heavily Latino districts including lawmakers who personally support the immigration legislation.

“They’re obviously not trying hard enough and nobody is off the hook in a party that is so determined not to move forward on immigration reform,” said **Kica Matos**, director for Immigrant Rights & Racial Justice at the Campaign for Community Change. “We’re going to basically throw down and bring the full weight of immigrant and Latino votes to bear.”

The campaign is part of the Fair Immigration Reform Movement, known as FIRM, a coalition of local groups in 30 states, which plans to announce its new strategy on Tuesday. Officials said the shift is a result of House Speaker [John Boehner](#)’s comment last week that it will be difficult to pass immigration legislation this year.

There are a handful of House Republicans with heavily Latino districts whose seats could be in danger. But most Republicans represent overwhelmingly white districts, so it’s unclear how much impact this campaign and others like it will have.

Further, it is in the political interests of most House Republicans to put this issue off. Some fear a primary challenge from the political right if they support the overhaul. Others think the party is better off focused on issues such as health care, where Republicans are united, and fear giving President [Barack Obama](#) and Democrats a win in an election year.

The AFL-CIO, the large labor federation, has made a similar pivot in its stance. Late last year, it ran attack ads in the districts of House Republicans who have heavily Latino constituencies, even if those members supported action on immigration.

The shift for FIRM is more recent. About a week and a half ago, the FIRM executive committee had decided to publicly support Republicans who come out for the overhaul. Now that plan is off the table.

Instead, the coalition plans to target the handful of Republicans who represent heavily Latino districts as well as Republican leaders, no matter what their personal position is on immigration legislation. One of the coalition’s goals is to do damage to the overhaul national Republican brand and to influence elections years into the future as the Latino vote grows in number.

“We decided to pivot from this idea to do everything we could to move legislators forward to do what we can to punish legislators who get in the way,” Ms. Matos said. “We want them (Latino voters) to remember who was in the way of reform.”

Targets have not been selected by they will be based on the demographics of a district and the strength of local immigrant rights groups, she said.

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