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“Latinos will vote for programs, not for Hispanic last names”

Miami, Apr 14 (EFE).- Latinos who go to the polls in the 2016 elections will cast their ballots for programs and proposals that will help them, not for Hispanic last names, political experts told Efe on Tuesday.

The disputed Latino vote, decisive in Barack Obama's victories in the 2008 and 2012 elections, will again be crucial in 2016, with two candidates of Hispanic descent in the running, Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz, as well as the "honorary Latino," former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who is expected to announce his candidacy soon.

"These will be the most exciting U.S. elections in a long time in terms of the Hispanic vote," Adam Segal, director of the Hispanic Voter Project at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, told Efe.

Segal based his statement on the "unprecedented number of Latino voters and candidates with Hispanic backgrounds in the United States," as is the case of Jeb Bush, a fluent Spanish speaker who is married to a Mexican and whose children "identify with the Latino culture."

Furthermore, he said, Sens. Rubio and Cruz are "Latinos who come from different social spheres and represent the diversity of this community."

Similarly, Luis Fleischman, professor of sociology and political science at Florida Atlantic University, said the next vote will show a qualitative leap forward in Hispanics' power to decide elections.

Fleischman said that many Latinos will vote for the first time and will do it with an awareness of growing public approval of comprehensive immigration reform, the only long-term solution for millions of undocumented immigrants living in this country, but who have faced furious opposition from the Republican Party.

The battle between Republicans and Democrats for the Hispanic vote promises to be tense, long and hard-fought, with the former trying to shrink the enormous distance they opened between themselves and Latino voters in the last two presidential elections.

While much of the 2008 and 2012 elections were based on the influence of the Latino vote, 75 percent of which backed Obama for reelection, Republicans are not about to make the same mistakes in 2016.

At the same time, Democrat Hillary Clinton, who has great hopes of being her party's nominee, has for years tried to appeal to the interests of the Latino community in the United States.

"Clinton has the backing of some important individuals and organizations that have played a huge role in attracting Hispanics over the past 20 years," and she herself, Segal said, "has

effectively connected with Hispanics, to the point that many members of her campaign team" are of that descent.

Republican and Democratic candidates know that, with a record number of 11.2 million Latino voters in the 2012 presidential elections, this community is "even more decisive."

That is the opinion of Jorge Luis Lopez, one of the chief donors and campaign advisors of 43-year-old Miami native Marco Rubio and who points to the bicultural character of the young politician, who, he says "does not represent the real world of Hispanics, but rather reflects it."

But, according to Fernand Amandi of the public opinion poll Bandixen & Amandi International, the Latino community will pay more attention to programs and proposals that will benefit them than they will to Hispanic last names.

In that context, Rubio like Bush and Cruz - all Republicans - promote political positions that "put them outside the general current of opinion" of this community, so they'll have to make a great effort to win the Latino vote.

"Hispanics will definitely support those who help them," Amandi told Efe, "before they'll vote for someone just because they have a Hispanic last name."

A revealing statistic of Hispanics' explosive political integration is to be seen in statistics of the Pew Research Center, which has recorded a hike in the number of Latinos eligible to vote from 19.5 million in 2009 to 23.3 million in 2012, an increase of 19 percent.