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# Congressman warns of 'civil war' among Democrats unless Obama acts on immigration

Luis Gutiérrez, a key figure in the push for immigration reform, said president's decision to delay action has sapped enthusiasm among Hispanic voters

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Gutiérrez, speaking on the eve of the elections, gave a dire warning about the consequences for Democrats should Obama not act swiftly and in broad terms on immigration. Photograph: Brennan Linsley/AP

**Paul Lewis in Denver**

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A Democratic congressman who has led the drive for immigration reform said Monday that Latino voters could punish the party's candidates in the midterm elections and warned of a "civil war" among Democrats unless Barack Obama uses his executive authority to [suspend deportations of undocumented migrants](#).

Speaking on the campaign trail in Colorado on the eve of the elections, Representative Luis Gutiérrez, a key figure in the push for immigration reform on Capitol Hill, said the president's decision to delay action on immigration has sapped enthusiasm among Hispanic voters.

Gutiérrez, who represents Illinois' 4th congressional district, said he believed the president would deliver a promised executive order "before Christmas". But he gave a dire warning about the consequences for [Democrats](#) should Obama choose not to act swiftly and in broad terms, saying the costs would be considerably worse than the expected drop in turnout among Latinos and could result in people leaving the party.

"This problem that you see, politically, is nothing in comparison to the civil war that will be created politically in the Democratic party should the president not be broad and generous in his use of prosecutorial discretion," he said. "Because Latinos will not be deciding whether or not they vote, but whether or not they are in the Democratic party?"

Gutiérrez made the remarks in an interview with the Guardian, just after appearing at a Latino rally alongside Democratic senator Mark Udall, whose campaign for re-election in Colorado has been complicated by Obama's postponement of the executive order.

Gutiérrez is known as a passionate campaigner for immigration reform and this is not the first time he has [criticised Obama's immigration policies](#). Last week Gutierrez co-authored an op-ed [published on Spanish-language television Univision](#), with the House minority leader, Nancy Pelosi, and California Democrat Zoe Lofgren, urging the president to use his powers to take "broad and meaningful" action on the immigration front.

But the strength of his warning, delivered on the eve of midterm elections that could result in the Democrats losing control of the Senate to [Republicans](#), may alarm White House officials, who are under growing pressure to see through the president's promises.

Pressed on the issue on Monday, White House press secretary Josh Earnest

declined to say when Obama would take action.

Obama's popularity among Hispanics has plunged in recent months, and both he and Hillary Clinton, a likely Democratic presidential candidate in 2016, have been followed on the campaign trail by immigration reform protesters who have heckled them at political rallies across the country.

Two months ago, Obama broke his pledge to use his executive powers to fix the broken immigration system before the end of summer, [bowing to pressure from candidates](#) in some Senate races who believed unilateral action by the president, enacted in the lead-up to the midterms, would hurt their campaigns. Earnest said on Monday that the postponement "had less to do with trying to dictate the outcome of specific elections and more with trying to deflect the political heat".

Yet even without Obama's intervention on immigration, several Democratic Senate incumbents look set to lose their seats in Tuesday's elections. In Colorado, Obama's delay is widely believed to have hurt the Democratic candidate. Udall is locked in a tight Senate race against Republican congressman Cory Gardner and is banking on a strong turnout from Latinos, who comprise 15.4% of the eligible electorate.



'I made it very clear I was disappointed in his decision to not use his executive order,' Udall said at a rally on Monday.  
Photograph: Brennan Linsley/AP

Asked whether Obama's delay would impact turnout in Colorado, Gutiérrez

replied: “It has not made the road toward electoral victory easier.”

The congressman added that the Obama had created a “self-inflicted” obstacle by breaking his promise. “It just makes you less enthusiastic and diminishes your passion for voting,” he said.

At the Latino rally, Udall was asked by reporters whether Obama’s delay had hurt his chances. “I made it very clear I was disappointed in his decision to not use his executive order,” he said. “I’m going to hold him to his word, when we go back to Washington next week, that he uses his executive authority by Christmas, as congressman Gutiérrez said, to keep families together.”

Speaking to the Guardian after the Udall rally, at Metro State University, Gutiérrez explained his concerns about the electoral repercussions of the president’s decision not to act, which, he said, had placed “political, partisan considerations ahead of good public policy”.

Gutiérrez said the postponement of executive action had been based upon a mistaken focus on the potential impact on “conservative voters and conservative states”.

“For me, personally, it has already been shown to be a miscalculation,” he said. “I have my governor [Pat] Quinn in my own state in a tight race and Latinos are less than enthusiastic.”

“Unfortunately people are going to punish their very friends and their very allies who had nothing to do with the president’s decision.”

He added: “Do I think it would be ironic that his delay cost us electorally? Yeah, I think it would be.”

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