

## **U.S. immigrant marches fail to attract large crowds**

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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Low attendance at immigrant rallies in U.S. cities last week showed that a movement which brought huge crowds on to the streets in the spring was unable to repeat its success.

"It's clear from the turnout last week that support in the Hispanic community was tissue paper thin, and they know that the protests as a tactic failed," said Steve Camarota, an analyst with the Center for Immigration Reform, which advocates cracking down on illegal immigration and reducing legal migration to the United States.

Activists had hoped to mobilize hundreds of thousands of marchers to pressure Congress to approve a bill offering many of the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants in the country a path to U.S. citizenship.

But marches in Batavia, Illinois, and Phoenix attracted barely 4,000 protesters between them while rallies in Washington and Los Angeles, billed as the high points of a week of activism, also attracted just a few thousand protesters.

While organizers puzzled over the low turnout, some analysts said it revealed shrinking support for street activism as a tactic.

"Many people feel sympathy for the idea of an amnesty (for illegal immigrants) but they feel that marches aren't the way to go, as the foreign flags were very off putting for a lot of Americans," Camarota added. Many of the marchers last spring carried Mexican and other Latin American flags.

The spring rallies were a response to a get-tough measure passed by the House of Representatives that increased funds for border security and defined all illegal immigrants as felons.

"I think they marched because they felt truly in danger, on a personal level ... they felt discriminated against," said Allert Brown-Gort of the University of Notre Dame's Institute of Latino Studies.

When the Senate later passed a bill backed by President George W. Bush, to create a guest worker program and setting out a path to citizenship for many illegal immigrants, migrants lost some of their fears.

Both bills are effectively dead for this Congress after lawmakers said it would be too difficult to reconcile them. As they died, much of the momentum built up by the immigrant activist movement melted away.

"What we saw last week were leaders trying to mobilize their base," said Demetrios Papademetriou, president of the Washington-based Migration Policy Institute.

"I tend to think that spring was the anomaly, and September feels more like the norm," he said.

