Growing Hispanic power is not confined to the political arena. Within a few years, Hispanics are projected to control almost 10 percent of buying power, as they become an even bigger part of the American middle class. And their clout is spreading geographically. Mark Strassmann discovered that in Georgia.

MARK STRASSMANN/ECONOMIC POWER

You can wrap the American Dream in anything, even a tortilla. Corn or flour, take your pick.

Ms. VERONICA MORENO: It was very difficult, but we tried to do it as--as best as possible.

STRASSMANN: In 1988, Veronica Moreno bought a tiny tortilla business in Georgia. Now the Morenos, Mexican immigrants, have 450 employees and six distribution centers. They've become America's third largest tortilla makers.

Ms. MORENO: My dream is to be one day in, you know--in servicing all the United States.

STRASSMANN: All 50 states
Ms. MORENO: All of the 50 states

STRASSMANN: They make tortillas, but the Morenos, like many Hispanic Americans, follow a cultural recipe for success: Start a family business, don't borrow, pay cash, and then work around the clock.

They all have to start somewhere. Increasingly, Latinos look to the American South. The top six fastest-growing states for Hispanics are all in Dixie.

Mr. NOBERTO REYES (Restaurant Chain Owner): (Spanish spoken)

STRASSMANN: For Noberto Reyes, the search ended in Dalton, Georgia.

Mr. REYES: I didn't know that I was--I was poor until I came to the US.

STRASSMANN: Reyes isn't poor anymore.

Mr. REYES: Is everything all right, sir?

STRASSMANN: This family of Mexican immigrants owns eight restaurants. They're one more example of why the growth of Hispanic buying power is almost double that of non-Hispanics. Los Reyes has come a long way.
Mr. REYES: I remember my that my sister was running the register. I was running back and forth with dishes and all that. And my mom in the kitchen. And so it--it was--it was quite an experience.

STRASSMANN: Juan Lopez speaks little English, but has 14 painters working for him. Language is just one of his barriers.

Mr. JUAN LOPEZ: (Through Translator) They try to take advantage of you, and they don't trust you as much as they would trust somebody who's American.

STRASSMANN: Like Noberto Reyes and Veronica Moreno, America's newer arrivals work to package a dream of their own.

And they see you as an example of somebody who did it right.

Ms. MORENO: Yes. I tell them then it's always an opportunity.

STRASSMANN: Which is why the new Southern accent is often Hispanic.

Mark Strassmann, CBS News, Gwinnett County, Georgia.

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We end with our poll on Hispanics again. Language is the one thing that binds most Hispanics in America yet separates many from non-Hispanics.

Our CBS News/New York Times poll shows that by a margin of over 2:1, Hispanics favor bilingual education, switching to English after one year.

But in some US communities, knowing English is not a requisite for success. Bobbi Harley explains.

BOBBI HARLEY/A QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

Mr. MANUEL CAPO: (Spanish spoken)

BOBBI HARLEY reporting:

Miami furniture store owner Manuel Capo did more than $120 million in business last year, even though...

You don't speak any English?

Mr. M. CAPO: (Spanish spoken)
Mr. PEDRO CAPO (El Dorado Furniture): (Spanish spoken)

Mr. M. CAPO: No, no.

HARLEY: Nothing?

Mr. M. CAPO: Nothing.

HARLEY: A Cuban immigrant living in south Florida since 1966, Capo tried but was never able to learn English. However, he was able to build a furniture empire that ranks in the country's top 50.

Mr. P. CAPO: If they want to talk to the CEO of the company, we say, `Well, if you have a translator, you're more welcome to, because otherwise you won't be able to communicate.'

HARLEY: Once Capo might have been the exception, but today in some places businesses cater just as much to Spanish speakers, and with good reason. For example, in Miami, three out of four people speak a language other than English at home.

With the recent surge of Hispanics to this country, the language divide in cities like Miami has become part of everyday living. For instance, dial 411 for information.

Unidentified Operator: For assistance in English, press or say 1. (Spanish spoken)

Professor DARIO MORENO (Florida International University): So you can wake up in the morning, go shopping, see a doctor, see a lawyer, buy furniture, do everything you need to do without having to speak a word of English.

HARLEY: Florida International University Professor Dario Moreno says it will take several generations to change that. Critics say that's not good enough.

Mr. MAURO MUJICA (Chairman, US English, Inc.): So we're not talking about talking Farsi in this country or speaking Urdu.

HARLEY: Head of an English language foundation, Mauro Mujica, an immigrant himself, argues there is a danger to not pushing people to learn English.

Mr. MUJICA: But we're not making them part of the American Dream. We--we are creating a second or a third class of citizens that are operating outside of our American group, American way of doing things.

HARLEY: Even so, cases like Manuel Capo's show the American Dream is alive and well, in English or not.
Bobbi Harley, CBS News, Miami.

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August 3, 2003

Our CBS News/New York Times poll of Hispanics in America shows that the views of the country's largest minority group generally mirror non-Hispanics on many issues. In California, Jerry Bowen gives us a taste of how the two cultures are blending.

JERRY BOWEN/CHURRO POWER:

Behold the humble churro; unlikely as it may seem, a sugar and cinnamon-coated symbol of a changing America.

Unidentified Man: I've been eating these since I was a kid. You know, my dad brought me up with these when I--when--in--in Mexico, and I come up here, and...

Unidentified Woman: Here they are.

Unidentified Man: ...and here they are, all the time.

BOWEN: A sweet deep-fried treat that's prevalent at fairs and ballparks in the American Southwest as hotdogs. And something more.

Mr. HARRY PACHON (Tomas Rivera Policy Institute): The thing about America we--being an immigrant-receiving nation, is that immigrants bring over their food customs with them, and they have an impact on the larger society.

Mr. TIM LESLIE (California Assemblyman): Times have changed. California is changing. One out of every three Californians is Hispanic. And we want justice for the churro.

BOWEN: Which brings us to California assemblyman Tim Leslie's campaign to allow vendors to sell fresh, hot churros on city streets, just like hotdog vendors. Only reheated churros are allowed now. The campaign to fill stomachs and feed the American Dream.

Mr. LESLIE: It wouldn't surprise me one iota that there's going to be some person pushing a churro cart and someday turn that into a very, very significant company.

Mr. HENRY ESCOBAR (Restaurant Owner): Welcome to the house that the churros built.

BOWEN: Two thousand churros a day come out of Henry Escobar's south San Francisco cafe. Little more than a decade ago he started out making just 100. He says a change in the street vendor law would be very sweet.
Mr. ESCOBAR: Ah, that would be great. That would definitely give us a chance to expand, and possibly give s— all the people jobs, which is really, really good.

BOWEN: Mexican supermarkets are continuing to move north of the border to grab a share of America's lucrative Latino economy.

Mr. JUSTO FRIAS (Gigante USA): The Latino market is growing; it's growing considerably. Not only is it growing, but the disposable income that that market represents is growing much faster than the non-Latino market does.

BOWEN: So consider the churro, no longer just a high-calorie snack. If the experts are right, it's the nation's newest economic indicator, one more measure of the changing face of America. Jerry Bowen, CBS News, Los Angeles.