

**LATINO VOTING IN WASHINGTON STATE**

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## **Introduction**

I have been researching voter registration and turnout among Latinos in Washington State as well as voter mobilization for Latinos. The question guiding my research is this: Among Latinos in Washington State, Yakima, and Walla Walla, who is voting, how, and why? My research has focused on gathering data on the population of the United States, Washington State, Walla Walla County, and Yakima County. My research has also examined literature regarding voting behavior, turnout, and mobilization for Latinos. For my data, I relied primarily on the U.S. Census, Walla Walla County Courthouse voting records, and Yakima County Courthouse voting records. For my literature research, I have relied primarily on Latino advocacy organizations, political abstracts, and newspaper articles. My project partner, Lázaro Carrión came into this project knowing a great deal more about Latino culture than I, and it has been a privilege getting to know him and learn from him this semester. Kathy Fisher and Delia P. Chavez of the Yakima County Auditor's office took a great deal of time in helping us with our project and getting us to the information we needed.

The main findings of this project are that the Latino population is under-represented at the voting booth, both nationally and in Washington State. There are many factors that contribute to this low turnout, including but not limited to, lack of citizenship, population age, education, income, and language barriers. For long term policy goals, I feel it is important to create a fair immigration and naturalization process in which people that have been working in the United States and will likely do so until death should have a guaranteed path to citizenship. For short term policy, I would recommend increasing the scope of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and removing the clause regarding literacy rates, which would have the effect of vastly increasing Bilingual Election Programs around the country. Additionally, my review of the research regarding voter mobilization indicates that seriously targeting Latinos through media campaigns and canvassing could have potentially significant political rewards.

### **Literature Discussion: Latino Population and Turnout**

The Latino population in the United States and Washington State is a rapidly growing one, with the potential to be a political force capable of deciding elections, particularly at the state and local level. Latinos make up nearly 10% of Washington State's population (United States 2). Considering the narrow Gubernatorial election in Washington State in 2004, such a large portion of the population should not be dismissed. Additionally, Latinos are a recently immigrated population relative to other races in the United States (Cafferty, 318). The socio-demographic characteristics of the Latino population, combined with their turnout rates for elections indicate that Latinos as a whole have yet to be fully incorporated into the U.S. political system. Aside from structural and demographic limitations to Latino turnout, the evidence indicates that Latinos have yet to be pursued on a comprehensive and national level as a serious voting population. This claim is supported by evidence showing that voter mobilization efforts targeted toward Latinos are highly effective, and when Latinos are seriously pursued as voters, they turnout in serious numbers.

For the past couple decades, there have been predictions that the increased Latino population would translate into a massive Latino turnout (de la Garza 2000, 338). Yet the Latino population has votes at rates below the general population, both in Washington State and nationally. In the 1992 election, among residents 18 years and older, “70 percent of Whites, 64 percent of Blacks, and 35 percent of Hispanics registered to vote” (Cafferty, 327). Despite increases in population, actual voting rates for Latinos *declined* between the 1992 and 1996 elections (Cafferty, 329). No single factor explains this trend. Rather, in order to fully understand the reasons for depressed Latino voting turnout, one must examine the historical and demographic characteristics of the United States Latino population.

Historically, Latino integration into the United States political system has been met with resistance. Latinos faced many of the same voter-dilution tactics used against blacks prior to 1965, especially in the Southwest and Texas (de la Garza 1993, 74-75). Tactics included “educational segregation, at-large elections, anti-minority gerrymanders, and stringent third-party ballot access requirements” (de la Garza 1993, 75). The 1975 extension of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) added protections for language minorities (de la Garza 1993, 74). Bilingual election materials were required for jurisdictions in which a single language minority constituted more than 5% of the voting-age population and in which the literacy rate among the language minority was higher than the national English illiteracy rate (de la Garza 1993, 74). During hearings for the 1982 extension of the VRA, Joaquin Avila testified that voter discrimination efforts persisted and necessitated continued protection for Latinos (\*Avila, 930). Among the tactics used were deliberate attempts to gerrymander Chicano communities, malapportionment of precincts with heavy minority concentrations, at-large elections, English language registration, as well as non-structural discrimination, such as threats and intimidation (Avila, 930-931; de la Garza 1993, 82).

The necessity of VRA protection for Latinos is testament to the structural and habitual discrimination that the United States has historically greeted the recent Latino presence. Yet the success of the VRA in eliminating structural barriers is only half of the solution, and has not closed the voting turnout gap between Latinos and the rest of the U.S. population (de la Garza 1993, 83- 85).

Significant factors in predicting a person’s participation in politics are income, age, education, and citizenship (\*Cafferty, 324). Generally speaking, higher income, education, and age correspond to increased voting and political participation (Cafferty, 328). The Latino population is at disadvantage on all three accounts; Latinos are demographically younger, have less formal education, and have lower incomes than the general U.S. population (Cafferty, 328). Other factors that apply particularly to Latinos are citizenship and language barriers (Cafferty, 330). For example, once citizenship is taken into account, the registration numbers cited above for Hispanics in the 1992 election jump from 35 percent to the low 60’s (Cafferty, 328).

The scholarly literature on Latino voting participation, particularly the emphasis on low turnout rates and demographic factors contributing to such rates, has guided my research. I have sought to confirm whether low voting rates were in fact statistically true nationwide and how the national numbers compared to Washington State. I sought to confirm and account for demographic characteristics deterring voting, such as citizenship and age disparities. The literature has also guided my research to heavily examine remedies to low turnout rates, particularly voter mobilization efforts targeted at Latinos. A discussion of voter mobilization fits more appropriately as part of a policy recommendation, and has been accordingly placed at the end of this paper.

## **Methods**

The U.S. Census Bureau website provided a plethora of information regarding national statistics on voting. I was seeking information regarding the Latino population in the U.S., how many Latinos were of voting age, how many of the voting age Latinos were citizens, how many were registered, how many voted, and how this compared to all races nationally. I was able to find data for all of these subjects. The limiting factor was that the Census Bureau did not provide the same information statewide or county-wide. Additionally, a mystery of this data is exactly how the Census Bureau produced it, since voting records do not indicate the race of registered voters. I have concluded that the information presented by the Census is based on self-reporting by respondents. This fact may help to explain the vast discrepancy for voter turnout between my Washington State data and the national data from the Census Bureau.

Since the Census Bureau did not provide voting information regarding race on a state level, and since each county is in charge of its own voting, I chose to focus on Walla Walla County and Yakima County, both of which have substantial Latino populations. I initially went to the Walla Walla County Courthouse and asked if they had information on the race of the voters and how they voted in each election. I was told they did not have any of that information, only the names of registered voters and what elections they voted in. I purchased the electronic list of registered active and inactive voters for Walla Walla County, as well as a canvas report for the 2004 election showing how many votes each candidate received in each voting district.

To ascertain the race of each registrant, I relied on Spanish surnames. The U.S. Census Bureau has published a document with a list of Spanish surnames and methods on how to use the list (United States 5). The Spanish surname list only includes 639 “heavily Hispanic” surnames in which more than 75% of respondents identify as Hispanic. The U.S. Census report showed that 94.2% of respondents with surnames matching the list identified as Hispanic in the 1990 Census. Conversely, only 0.7% of respondents with the most frequently occurring “non-Spanish” surnames identified as Hispanic. These results show that using Spanish surnames can give a fairly accurate estimation of the Hispanic population.

I used the U.S. Census document and went through the 37,946 names for Walla Walla County, marking each name that matched the Spanish surname list. Since the list

could not account for all Spanish surnames, it was likely that certain names that belonged to Latinos were not being accounted for. I asked my project partner, Lázaro Carrión, look through the list for any names that he felt, based on first name and surname, were clearly Hispanic. This gave me a range of names between 1,934 (using only the surname list) and 2,126 (using the surname list with Lázaro's additions). For the purposes of data analysis in this paper, the conservative estimate (based only on the Spanish surname list) was used.

For my second case study, I chose to focus on Yakima County. Lázaro, Eleanor Clagett, and I drove to Yakima on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Lázaro and I obtained a canvas report for the 2004 election (as I did with Walla Walla) and requested data for registered voters in Yakima County. Due to the substantially larger Spanish speaking population, in 2002 Yakima County became a jurisdiction subject to the requirements of Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Due to this, the County created a bilingual program. As it turned out, the Bilingual Program Coordinator, Delia P. Chavez, had done the same work in Yakima on the voter registration list as I had for Walla Walla. She used a Spanish surname list provided by the Department of Justice and marked all registrants names that matched the list. She then provided me with all the work she had done on the data. Delia P. Chavez deserves a great deal of credit for the data regarding Yakima County.

The Walla Walla list of registered voters presented several challenges that complicated the data. The list as it was given to me included all current registered voters. Since I obtained the data in October of 2005, a current registrant list would not include all registrants that had voted in 2004 because the list had been updated for people that had died or moved out of Walla Walla County. As a result, I request a list of registrants that included those registered in 2004. Since the list is continuously updated, there was no way to obtain a list of *only* those registered in 2004. In other words, the list I received contained all current registrants as well as all those that had been registered since the 2004 General Election. Fortunately, the list indicated who is currently registered and who is no longer registered. This meant that I could get numbers for who was currently registered. It also meant that I had an accurate list of who voted in 2004 in Walla Walla County. However, there was no way to find out who was registered (and who was not) in 2004. As a result, the data for how many people voted out of how many were registered in 2004 is not completely accurate. The best that can be done is to show how many voted in 2004 out of how many are currently registered in 2005. I am aware of the statistical flaw present. The hope is that the number of registered voters in October 2005 is roughly the same as the number of registered voters in October 2004. If this is true, then dividing the number of people that voted in the 2004 General Election by the list of current registered voters in 2005 should roughly equal the voter turnout rate among registered voters for 2004.

Another challenge was determining population statistics for Walla Walla County. Since in-depth numbers (such as Latinos 18 years and older living in Walla Walla County) are only available for 2000, it is difficult to see how many Latinos are registered out of the current voting-age Latino population. Again, the best that could be done was

to show how many people were registered in 2005 or voted in 2004 out of population estimates for 2000. If I attempted to get an exact percentage for voter turnout, this would be a nightmare. Fortunately, I was merely comparing Latino voter registration and turnout to non-Latino voter registration and turnout. Since data for Latinos and non-Latinos was equally flawed, a comparison between the two could be comfortably made.

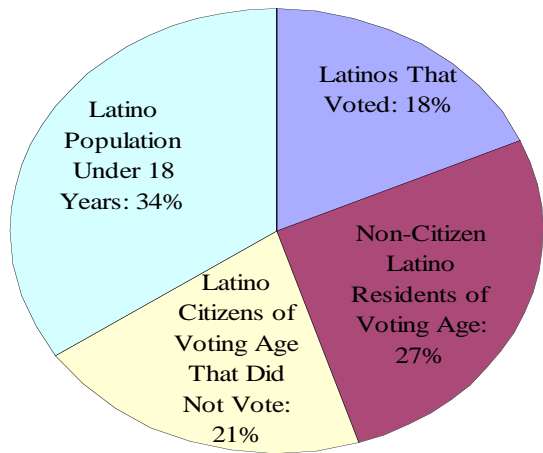
In Yakima, the data Ms. Chavez provided meant that the problem present in the Walla Walla data did not exist with regards to voting in 2004 and registrants in 2005. However, the population data was still from 2000 and thus presents the same statistical flaws.

Lázaro and I decided that a valuable way to go about finding an interview subject would be by going door-to-door in neighborhoods with concentrated Latino populations, informing residents of when the upcoming election was, and providing registration materials for those that had not registered. In the process of doing this, we felt we would have the opportunity to interview Latino community members on their voting practices and beliefs. We ended up conducting five interviews. The first was with a young Mexican-American male and lasted roughly 15 minutes. The Second was with an undocumented resident that did not wish to be tape-recorded and lasted about 10 minutes. The third was with a Mexican-American mother and wife in her front-yard and lasted about 30 minutes. The fourth was more of an impromptu conversation and political rant by the Mexican-American husband and father of the household in the front yard and lasted about 5 minutes. The fifth was with a Mexican-American family friend of the front-yard family and lasted about 10 minutes. We recorded four of the conversations using a tape recorder, and the fifth was not recorded in any way due to the visible discomfort shown by the undocumented resident.

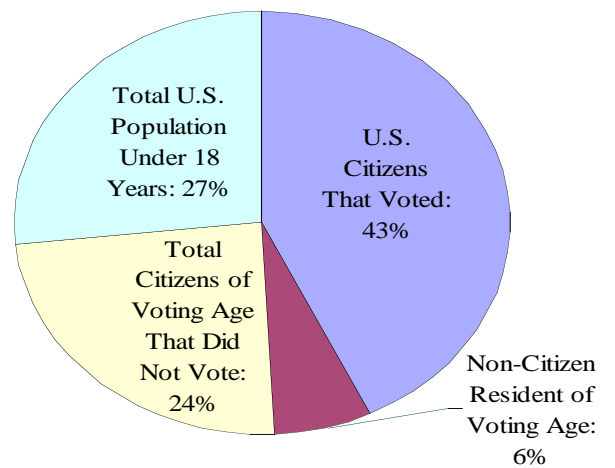
### **Data**

I spent a significant amount of time re-arranging and compiling U.S. Census data in Excel on voting by race and by region. Unfortunately, the Census had no region for the Northwest, only for the Pacific West and Mountain West. The data below is taken and re-organized from multiple Census 2004 tables. Note that the data is only for voting age population. This is significant because 34.3% of the Hispanic population living in the U.S. is under the age of 18 (United States 1 & 2). Comparatively, only 26.5% of the total U.S. population is below the age of 18 (United States 1 & 2). In other words, before analysis of the data even begins, it must be acknowledged that the Hispanic population has significantly less voting power by age differences alone. All told, only 18.4% of the Hispanic population living in the U.S. voted in 2004 (United States 1 & 2). Comparatively, 42.8% of the total U.S. population voted in 2004 (United States 1 & 2).

2004 General Election Population For Latinos in U.S.



2004 General Election Population For All Races in U.S.



The following Data Tables are from the U.S. Census Bureau (United States 1):

Table 1 Census 2004	United States Voter Turnout in 2004 General Election			
	Total Population (in thousands)		Voted	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hispanic	41,322	100%	7,587	18.36%
All Races	293,655	100%	125,736	42.82%

Table 2 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Total Voting Age Population			
	Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	27,129	12.57	215,694	100
West Total	11,420	23.27	49,080	100
West Mountain	2,804	19.63	14,283	100
West Pacific	8,616	24.76	34,797	100

Table 3 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Total Voting Age Population							
	Voted				Did Not Vote			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	7,587	28.0	125,736	58.3	19,542	72.0	89,958	41.7
West Total	3,054	26.7	26,689	54.4	8,366	73.3	22,391	45.6
W. Mountain	864	30.8	8,381	58.7	1,940	69.2	5,902	41.3
West Pacific	2,190	25.4	18,308	52.6	6,426	74.6	16,489	47.4

Table 4 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Total Voting Age Population							
	Registered				Not Registered			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	9,308	34.3	142,070	65.9	17,821	65.7	73,624	34.1
West Total	3,608	31.6	29,486	60.1	7,812	68.4	19,594	39.9
W. Mountain	1,021	36.4	9,280	65.0	1,783	63.6	5,003	35.0
West Pacific	2,588	30.0	20,207	58.1	6,028	70.0	14,591	41.9

One of the things I immediately found after putting the data of the All Races population and the “Hispanic” population together was the stark contrast in percent of Latinos voting compared with the total U.S. voting age population. According to the table below, Hispanics are voting at less than **half** the rate of the rest of the population. The registration statistics were not pretty either. The percentage of Hispanics **not** registered to vote is roughly the same as the total population’s registration percentage. Also of note, the Western United States has a significantly higher concentration of Hispanics than the total U.S. population, yet the Pacific Western Hispanics vote less than the total U.S. Hispanic population. I initially attributed this to Western Hispanics having a higher non-citizen population, however, I later found this was not the case. I recalculated the data to see voting rates only among citizens.

Table 5 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Voting Age U.S. Citizens				Voting Age Not Citizens			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
	United States	16,088	59.3	197,006	91.3	11,041	40.7	18,688
West Total	6,474	56.7	41,707	85.0	4,946	43.3	7,373	15.0
W. Mountain	1,776	63.3	12,908	90.4	1,028	36.7	1,375	9.6
West Pacific	4,699	54.5	28,798	82.3	3,917	45.5	5,999	17.2

As shown in table 5, more than **40% of the Hispanic population is not a U.S. citizen**. This means that a whole 40% of the Hispanic population is not recognized to have any basic rights of citizenship, such as voting.

Table 6 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Voting Age U.S. Citizens							
	Voted				Did Not Vote			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	7,587	47.2	125,736	63.8	8,501	52.8	71,270	36.2

West Total	3,054	47.2	26,689	64.0	3,420	52.8	15,018	36.0
W. Mountain	864	48.6	8,381	64.9	912	51.4	4,527	35.1
West Pacific	2,190	46.6	18,308	63.6	2,509	53.4	10,490	36.4

Table 7 Census 2004 (Pop. in Thousands)	Voting Age U.S. Citizens							
	Registered				Not Registered			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	9,308	57.8	142,070	72.1	6,780	42.1	54,936	27.9
West Total	3,608	55.7	29,486	70.7	2,866	44.3	12,221	29.3
W. Mountain	1,021	57.5	9,280	71.9	755	42.5	3,628	28.1
West Pacific	2,588	55.1	20,207	70.2	2,111	44.9	8,491	29.8

Tables 6 and 7 show that accounting for U.S. citizenship helped close the voting gap from 28% (total Hispanic residents voting) to 47.2% (Hispanic U.S. citizens voting), whereas the All Races rate changed only from 58.3% (total residents voting) to 63.8% (all U.S. citizens voting). Yet, the difference between the 47.2% and 63.8% voting rates is still large. The statistics for the West are similar to the national numbers. Additionally, the Pacific is still a slightly lower voting rate than the national numbers.

I further manipulated the numbers to see if there were voting differences among registered citizens:

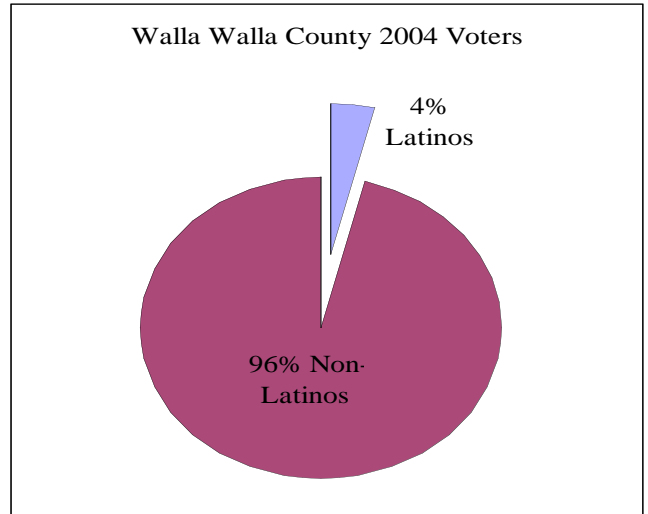
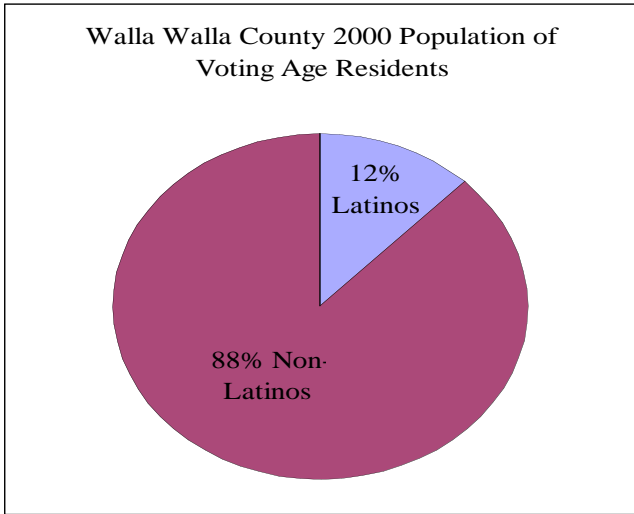
Table 8 Census 2004 Pop. in Thousands	Registered Citizens							
	Voted				Did Not Vote			
	Hispanic		All Races		Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	7,587	81.5	125,736	88.5	1,721	18.5	16,334	11.5
West Total	3,054	84.6	26,689	90.5	554	15.4	2,797	9.5
W. Mountain	864	84.6	8,381	90.3	157	15.4	899	9.7
West Pacific	2,190	84.6	18,308	90.6	398	15.4	1,899	9.4

At this point, the gap was almost closed. Among registered voters, there were still about 6-7 percentage points between Latinos and the total population. This was much better than the 16 point gap among U.S. citizens. One significant detail in Table 8 is that registered citizens in the West (Hispanics and All Races alike) were actually **more likely** to vote than the total U.S. population. As noted above, this was a reversal in the trend of the Western Pacific voters, particularly Hispanics, voting at lower rates. What this may indicate is that voter registration campaigns might have a greater impact in voting behavior in the Pacific Western region than in other areas of the country.

Of particular note in Table 8 was the extremely high voting turnout percentage among both Latinos and All Races. These voting rates are the only ones that significantly disagree with the voting data I gathered for Walla Walla and Yakima Counties. I suspect

that since the Census Bureau data is self-reported, registered voters may say they voted, even when they did not. This suspicion is not unreasonable; a 1992 National Election Study found that overall self-reported turnout was 67%, which was twelve points above the actual rate (de la Garza 2000, 340). Twelve points would roughly account for the discrepancy between the Washington (Yakima and Walla Walla) numbers and the national numbers. The focus of this paper is how Latinos compare to non-Latinos, statewide and nationally. This is by no means a comparison between overall Washington and United States voting turnout, and thus the discrepancy between Washington and U.S. data is of little concern.

**Case Study: Walla Walla County and Yakima County**



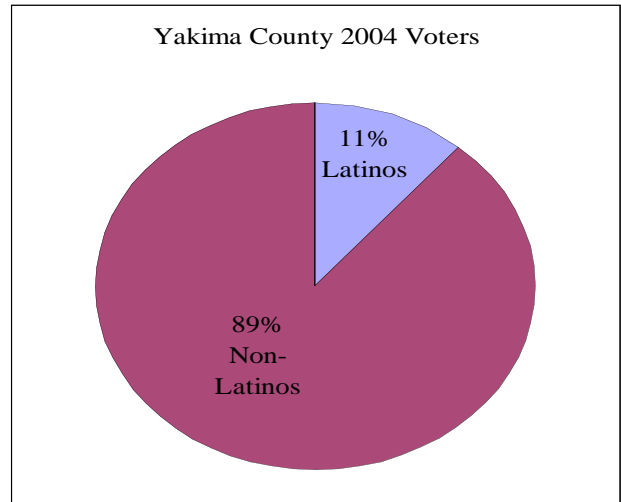
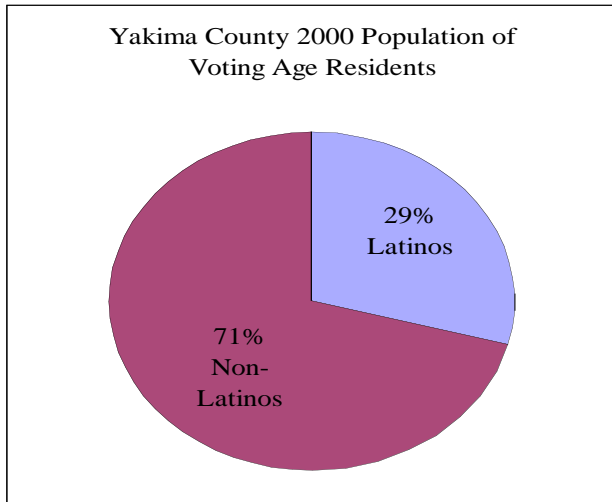
The above pie charts show data from Walla Walla County. The left chart shows that out of the total population residing in Walla Walla County, 12% are Latino. The right chart shows that of the total Walla Walla County voters in 2004, only 4% were Latino. These charts show simply that the voting power of Latinos in Walla Walla County does not match the population percentage of Latino residents.

For comparison and context of registration numbers nationally, here is a compressed form of Table 4:

<b>Table 4 Compressed Census 2004</b> (Pop. in Thousands)	Total Voting Age Population			
	Registered			
	Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
United States	9,308	34.3	142,070	65.9

<b>Table 8 Walla Walla County</b>	Total Voting Age Population			
	Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population in 2000	5,134	100%	41,618	100%
Registered 2005	1,544	30.1%*	29,991	72.1%*
Voted 2004	876	56.7%**	23,271	77.6%**
* Percent of 2005 registrants out of 2000 population estimates				
** Percent of voter turnout in 2004 out of registrants from 2005				

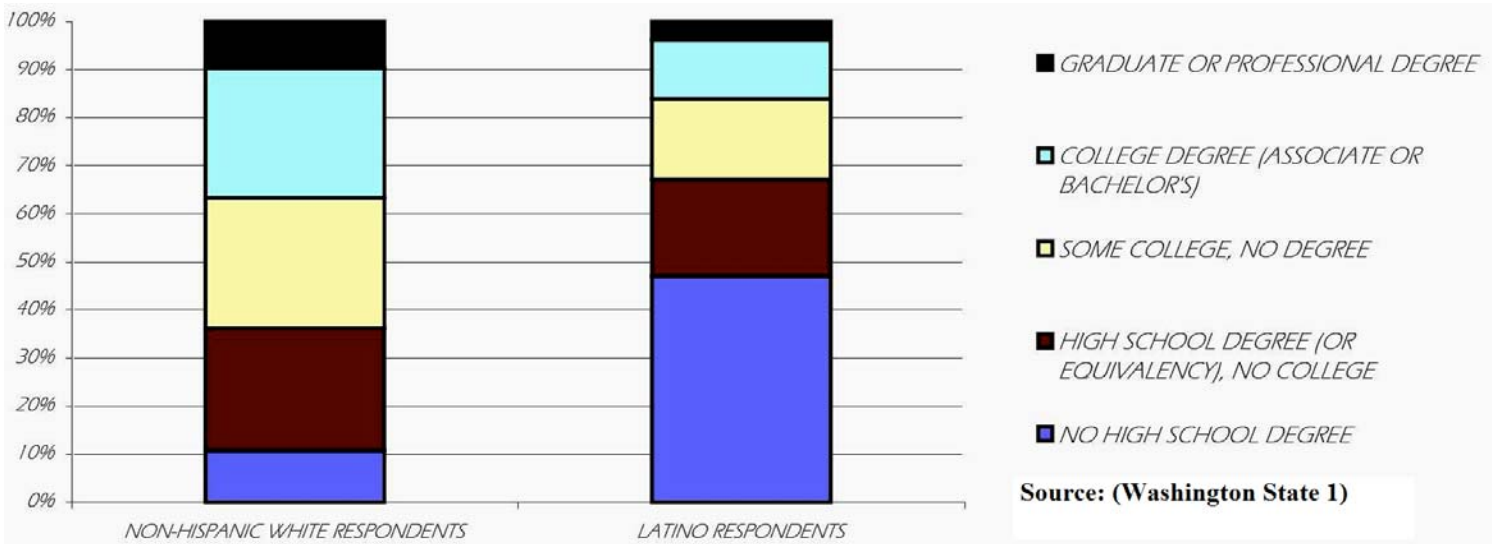
The Walla Walla County data is crude because I was forced to use numbers from different years to get percentages of total population and voter turnout from registered voters. Regardless, the data clearly shows that Latinos in Walla Walla are registered at roughly half the rate that All Races are. This corresponds to the national numbers in Table 4. Further, Table 8 shows that among registrants, Latinos voted at a significantly lower rate than did All Races.



<b>Table 9 Yakima County</b>	Total Voting Age Population			
	Hispanic		All Races	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Population in 2000	44,373	100%	151,830	100%
Registered Jan 2005	15,062	33.9%*	97,052	63.9%*
Voted 2004	8,379	55.6%**	73,649	75.9%**
* Percent of Jan 2005 registrants out of 2000 population estimates				
** Percent of voter turnout in 2004 out of registrants from Jan 2005				

The Yakima County data is slightly better because voter turnout in 2004 is based on of registrants from January of 2005, merely two months after the election. The data for registration rates are similar to Walla Walla County and to the national numbers.

As noted above, education is a key indicator of voting turnout. The Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs shows in the below graph that vast education discrepancies between Latinos and non-Hispanic whites.



### Interview Discussion

Our first interview was with a young Mexican-American man in his early 20's in a local park. It was clear from our conversation with him that he felt voting was important and that his vote did matter, but he also articulated voting as strongly connected to the community. The young man also felt there was a strong need for more Latino candidates and that the main factor lowering Latino voter turnout was the focus on providing for one's family before thinking about things like voting.

*“I don't think its right for me to vote because I just got here [Walla Walla]. I don't know the ways of here and what they [the community] want... I heard it's a good community, but I don't know what they want, their needs, and what they want me to vote for.” -Young Mexican-American Male in Walla Walla, Washington.*

Of particular interest is that his decision to *not* vote was based primarily on not knowing whether or not his vote was wanted, and how he should use it. In other words, it seems highly likely that if he had been contacted by a fellow Mexican-American community member and asked to vote, he would have done so.

In our second interview, we found a Mexican-American mother walking out the door to take her two daughters somewhere. She initially told us she was busy, but then asked what we were doing. Upon explanation, the mother became very interested and spoke to us for nearly half an hour. Once again, there is indication that the mere act of caring about whether this woman voted and what her views were had a positive effect on her behavior. In other words, had we asked the woman to buy something from us, she may have continued to act busy. But when instead we asked her to vote, whether she had voted, and what her opinions on voting were, she was willing to take a significant portion of time out of her day to speak with us.

*“I think [my vote] matters because if we, those who do not vote, one day got up and decided to vote, the candidate we voted for would win. But we don’t vote because they don’t take into account our vote. But I feel like if we all voted, our vote would matter.”*  
-Mexican-American Mother in Walla Walla, Washington.

The mother clearly felt that voting was important, but that the Latino vote has been largely ignored as unimportant, both by Latinos and politicians. After talking for some time, the father of the household came outside and also engaged us in conversation. Both mother and father connected voting to the need to remove President Bush from office and the war in Iraq. The mother felt that education was the key to increasing voter turnout as well as the main factor in producing more Latino candidates for office.

### **Literature Discussion: Voter Mobilization**

As noted above, substantial literature indicates that factors determining likelihood of Latino voter turnout include characteristics such as age, education, and income. One factor that is also a strong indicator and can be altered almost immediately is the presence of Latino voter mobilization (de la Garza 2000, 345).

While Latinos may have depressed voting turnout, they have a strong history of civic participation among both men and women. The unionization and picketing efforts of Latino and Latina women in the 1930’s and 1940’s provide a useful case study (\*Ruiz). In particular, the strength of Latina women in the face of extremely poor working conditions and wages in the canning and farming industries shows the resilience and activity the Latino population is capable of (\*Ruiz). One notable example was a strike against Farah Manufacturing that started in 1972 and lasted over a year and a half. The strikers, 85 percent of which were women, faced un-muzzled police dogs, arrest, and harassment by the community (\*Ruiz, 129). Unions such as the United Cannery, Agricultural, Packing, and Allied Workers of America (UCAPAWA-CIO) were very successful in bringing women into activist roles and “capitalized on women’s networks, with organizers holding house meeting to encourage their participation” (Ruiz, 78).

The connection between Latinos and unions and political activity holds relevance today. A study on Latino voter mobilization in 2000 by The Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI) indicated that Labor Unions conducted the most effective Get out the Vote (GOTV) campaigns, with ample funding and strong organization (de la Garza 2002,

6). The unions - such as AFL-CIO- targeted new citizens, emphasized immigrant issues and collaborated with community-based organizations and Catholic parishes (de la Garza 2002, 5). Conversely, community-based organizations such as the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project were less successful than labor unions in their GOTV campaigns, primarily because they relied heavily on volunteers and greatly lacked funding (de la Garza 2002, 6).

A series of studies were done on Latino-targeted canvassing by Melissa R. Michelson at California State University, Fresno (Michelson). Michelson used Latino and non-Latino students to conduct her canvassing and analyzed the effectiveness of each group in contacting Latinos and getting them to vote (Michelson, 85). The results were that canvassing had a significantly positive effect on voter turnout, especially among Democrat Latino voters (Michelson, 87). Another result of the studies was the finding that when canvasser and voter share ethnicity and political partisanship, there is a statistically significant effect on voter turnout (Michelson, 88). Michelson notes that Latinos are often ignored by voter mobilization campaigns because they do not vote. She concludes from her studies however, that Latinos are very receptive to voter mobilization campaigns especially *by* Latinos (Michelson, 98). As Michelson puts it, people like to be asked to vote and “[i]ncreasing the Latino vote is, at the most basic level, a simple matter of asking for it” (Michelson, 98).

Further support for Michelson’s findings are offered in a TRPI study on “Predictors of Latino Turnout” (Abrajan). The authors note that “two factors are most influential on turnout, which are highly related to each other: (1) a voter’s socio-economic status, and (2) whether or not the individual was asked to vote” (Abrajan, 1). Both of these factors have been established above. What this report presents is evidence showing that those most likely to be targeted by voter mobilization efforts are those that are already demographically most likely to vote anyhow (Abrajan, 1). In other words, people with lower income, education, and age are less likely to be asked to vote.

Traditionally, research has shown that foreign-born Latino citizens have lower voting turnout than native-born Latinos (Barreto 2005, 79). The factors contributing to this are the same as those suppressing Latino voting in general, namely lower levels of income, education, and English language skills (Barreto 2005, 79). Due to these trends, foreign-born Latinos have been largely ignored as a potential voting population by candidates (Barreto 2005, 79-80). Although there has been literature suggesting that naturalized voters vote less because they are “new to American politics and less integrated into U.S. institutions and social customs,” Matt Barreto has rejected this argument in favor of a different theory in which naturalized Latino voters potentially vote at *greater* rates than native-born Latino voters (Barreto 2005, 80).

Barreto argues that because the American electorate is in continual decline, the U.S. assimilation process means that “*not voting* has become a learned behavior” (Barreto 2005, 80). In other words, native-born Latino citizens have “been socialized into the process of uncompetitive elections, negative candidate images and low levels of political efficacy” (Barreto 2005, 80). Barreto further argues that the naturalization process

requires immigrants to “become familiar with U.S. institutions, fill out extensive paperwork, pass a basic course on civic responsibility, and gain confidence, as new citizens, in the American political process” (Barreto 2005, 80).

Barreto’s case study was the 2002 California Gubernatorial election between Gray Davis and Bill Simon. The election had extremely negative English campaigns on both sides, yet a great deal of money was spent toward positive advertisements in Spanish directed at Latinos and naturalized Latinos especially. The results were that native Latino voting turnout declined by 5% from the 1998 election, whereas the naturalized Latino voting turnout increased by 16% (Barreto 2005, 80). Barreto acknowledges that these particular results are due to not only the targeted voter mobilization drives in immigrant communities in 2002, but also the “lackluster” nature of the Gubernatorial election (Barreto 2005, 80). Nevertheless, the study provides compelling evidence that, given the right circumstances, the immigrant characteristics of the Latino population can translate into voting strength, not weakness.

Along with targeted mobilization, there is evidence that the presence of a Latino candidate has a significant effect on Latino voter turnout. In the 2000 Houston mayoral elections, Republican Orlando Sanchez ran against incumbent Democrat Lee Brown. Both campaigns poured resources into mobilizing the Latino vote. “Targeted Hispanic voters were bombarded daily with bilingual mailers, Spanish radio spots and TV commercials by both campaigns” (Rodriguez). In the end, Latino voters “accounted for 18 percent of the electorate,” which was double their turnout from the Mayoral election 4 years prior (Rodriguez). The fact that a Latino candidate was running for office clearly helped increase turnout, and it was Sanchez’s presence that caused both campaigns to devote so many resources to Latino voters in the first place.

### **Conclusion**

In Washington State, as in the United States as a whole, Latinos are simultaneously the largest minority population and the least likely to vote. The low rates are due to in part to historical political exclusion, language barriers, lower levels of education, younger age, lower income, and vastly lower citizenship rates, among other factors. Ultimately, these demographic figures need to change, both to increase voting turnout and for the well-being of our society. Until then, immediate gains in voter turnout are possible. There is strong evidence indicating that Latinos are very receptive to mobilization efforts when they are specifically targeted. Further, asking someone to vote, even if they are among the *least* likely to do so, has significant positive effects on their likelihood of turning out on election day. Interviews with Latino residents of Walla Walla show political awareness, as well as optimism for the potential of the Latino vote to make a difference. In addition, the interviews seem to indicate and confirm that getting Latinos to vote may actually be as simple as asking them to.

The presence of Latino candidates is shown by the research to have a definite positive effect on turnout. Further, the interviews confirm that Latinos look for and want more Latino candidates. Both Democrats and Republicans stand to gain a very

significant voting population by reaching out to Latinos, both through voter mobilization, and especially through any policies that help Latinos socially, economically, and educationally become more active and empowered citizens.

Policies that help Latinos become naturalized citizens have the dual benefit of winning favor with Latino voters, as well as literally creating new favorable voters. Ultimately, I believe a better process for working immigrants to become citizens is key to the civic health of the Latino community in Washington and the United States. I also feel the Voting Rights Act continues to provide key areas of protection for Latinos and avenues to address voting discrimination. If the VRA is not extended in 2007, it would be a great loss to Latino voting, as well as a political loss for those that did not vote to renew it.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A - Interview Questions:

1. Intro to the person who opens the door. If the person answering the door is not of voting age, ask he/she if we can speak with an adult in the household. Assuming that the adult is there, the following questions will proceed in order:
  - a. Have you ever voted in an election in any country? (if yes, ask what country)
  - b. If yes:
    - i. Were they nationwide or local (district) elections?
    - ii. When you voted, why did you vote?
    - iii. Why does voting matter?
    - iv. How do you think your vote mattered?
    - v. How many times in the past few years have people asked you to vote?
    - vi. When voting, what language do you prefer the ballot to be in?
      1. if Spanish
        - a. did you know that you can get a ballot in Spanish?
  - c. If no:
    - i. What are the reasons for not voting? (obstacles? Lack of interest? Institutional barriers?)
      1. Have you ever registered to vote?
        - a. If yes
          - i. What kept you from voting?
      2. Where would you go to register to vote?
      3. How many times in the past few years have people asked you to register or to vote?
      4. Do you think the government cares if you vote?
      5. When registering, what language do you prefer on the registration?
        - a. If Spanish
          - i. Did you know you could get a Spanish registration?
      6. Do you think that voting matters? why?

For all:

1. What do you think politicians who are elected could do to make things better in this community?
2. Do you think there is enough Latino candidates running for elections these days?
  - a. If no
    - i. Why do you think that is?
3. Do you have children?
  - a. If yes
    - i. Do you want your children to become voters? Why?
4. What is the most important political issue for you today?

Appendix B - Interview Transcript:

**Interview #1 – Young male identifying as Mexican-American**

Interviewer: Have you ever voted in any election?

Community Member: Not here. I'm from California

Interviewer: Have you ever voted in California?

Community Member: Yes. We didn't win though.

Interviewer: Was this a local, county, or federal election?

Community Member: County election

Interviewer: When you voted, why did you vote?

Community Member: Because I wanted to make my community a better place.

Interviewer: Why does voting matter?

Community Member: Because your vote counts. I feel like my vote counts, but in that case [when I voted in California] it didn't count.

Interviewer: How do you think your vote mattered?

Community Member: Community members were going door to door trying to get people to vote.

Interviewer: How many times in the past few years have people asked you to vote?

Community Member: Yeah, I was asked to vote before I was 18. But I couldn't because I wasn't 18 yet. I haven't voted here.

Interviewer: Has anybody asked you to vote here?

Community Member: People called my house to get me to vote, but I haven't. I don't think its right for me to vote because I just got here. I don't know the ways of here and what they want. I plan on going back [to California] though.

Interviewer: So because you're new here, you feel like you don't have enough background to go out and vote?

Community Member: Yeah. I heard it's a good community, but I don't know what they want; their needs and what they want me to vote for.

Interviewer: So your own personal views, whether you're the only one who holds them compared to the rest of the Latino community, are not enough to get you out and vote and make this community better?

Community Member: In respect to the whole community, I don't know enough about it to go out and vote.

Interviewer: You obviously speak English, but do you prefer English on voting ballots?

Community Member: It doesn't matter

Interviewer: Did you know you could get a voting ballot in Spanish?

Community Member: Yea, I knew that. The first time I voted, they told me that I could

Interviewer: Oh they did?

Community Member: Yea and it was a white person so I was like, what are you trying to say, that just because I'm Mexican I can't speak English?

Interviewer: You said you haven't been here long enough, but do you know what politicians could do better in this community in the brief time you've been here?

Community Member: I don't know, everything seems alright. It's a lot better than where I come from

Interviewer: What were some of the things in your past community that you think should have changed?

Community Member: Well, they can't do nothing about it. There's a lot of crime. They try, the cops come, but it's pretty hard and that's just the way it is.

Interviewer: Do you think there are enough Latino or Mexican American candidates running for office or elections these days?

Community Member: No, we need more, a lot more.

Interviewer: What do you think keeps the Latino community from voting? Disregarding the legal issues of undocumented Latinos that can't vote

Community Member: They just wanna be here for the money. They just wanna work. That's what I think, they just wanna get the bread for the family.

Interviewer: Whether it's the elections system here or where you used to live, do you trust the system?

Community Member: Not all the time, because they always make false promises. That's the only thing. It happens a lot. They say they're gonna make a safer community; that never happens.

Interviewer: How does that influence your future voting practices?

Community Member: It makes me not want to vote.

Interviewer: What is the most important political issue for you today? That which has to do with the Latino community? Or what's one of the things that you feel is not being addressed for the Latino community?

Community Member: I have a ton of them.

Interviewer: What's one of them?

Community Member: Um, immigration.

.....

**Interview #2 – Father/husband with family in front yard**

Community Member: Why do we as Mexicans not vote? Because nobody pays attention to us. Look, you look at a Mexican and a “gringo” with a tie, then you look at the Mexican in his dirty farm-workers clothes, who are they gonna listen to? At the gringo who's nicely dressed? Or at the Mexican who's dirty, with guaraches? I understand, my parents are farm-workers as well and you do get dirty at the end of the day. Nobody takes us into account, nobody. I mean, the gringo's who have money look at us and they're like, “hmm, today I can get [a Mexican], fire him the next day, and just get another Mexican worker whenever I want. Now if I don't like the way he's working, I'll just fire him. And tomorrow I'll find two more.” We go and look for work in the fields, so the employer looks at us and says he has enough workers. But if he needs two or three workers, [he has them] in an instant. But you will never see an American or another person of another race. However, all of us at the fields are Mexicans. Why, I ask myself? Yea they give us an opportunity, but we don't know how to take advantage of it. So we're recording this? No, it's fine. The more you record the better. At least you'll listen.

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**Interview #3 – Mother/wife with family in front yard**

Interviewer: First question. Have you ever voted in this country or another?

Community Member: Yes. My first time was this year. I didn't want George (Bush) to win. I never agreed with him. I wanted Kerry to win. I registered, because I didn't want Bush to win. Because usually I say to myself, oh, why vote, they never listen to us anyways, but because I didn't want Bush to win, I said, perhaps my vote will count. So I registered and voted. But either way, Bush won.

Interviewer: So you answered my second question. This was a federal election. But have you voted at the local level, the district and county level?

Community Member: No. I haven't voted.

Interviewer: When you voted, why did you vote?

Community Member: Because I wanted Bush to lose. I didn't want him to continue. He promises and never follows through. The first people they send to war are the Mexicans, Latinos.

Interviewer: why do you think your vote matters?

Community Member: I think it matters because if we, those who do not vote, one day got up and decided to vote, the candidate we voted for would win. But we don't vote because they don't take into account our vote. But I feel like if we all voted, our vote would matter.

Interviewer: Have people come to your door to have you register or to inform you when elections are?

Community Member: No, nobody. I hear it on the radio and from the schools my children go to. I think it would be important if they reminded us when elections are, 'cause we as farm workers are gone all day. It would be nice if they would extend the nice gesture of letting us know when elections are.

Interviewer: When you vote, what language do you prefer the material to be in?

Community Member: Well, I prefer it in Spanish because it is my native tongue. But like this last time that I went, I filled it out an English ballot

Interviewer: Did you know you could get a Spanish ballot?

Community Member: No, since it was my first time, I didn't know. They just gave me the ballot, told me where to go and fill it out and that's it.

Interviewer: A few more questions and we'll be done soon. What do you think the already elected officials can do for the Latino community?

Community Member: First of all, no discrimination at work, 'cause there is. When there are Mexican and American workers, they always give preference to the American. Discrimination exists, even if the Mexican is the better worker. But because the American is of their race, they choose the American.

Interviewer: Do you think there are enough Latino candidates running for office?

Community Member: I don't see any. I would love to see some. Study, change this country. Yes we are well in this country, but there is inequality.

Interviewer: So why do you think that is, that there aren't enough Latino candidates?

Community Member: Well, I think it's because the majority of the Latinos don't finish their careers. When's the last time you saw a Mexican doctor or lawyer here? I always see American doctors and lawyers. That's why I think it is, they don't get to the point in their life where they become professionals.

Interviewer: Do you want your children to vote some day?

Community Member: Yes, so they make a difference. Right now there are studying. They are bilingual. They will know their rights. I think things will change if they finish their educational careers, they need to. The country will listen to them more because they will be educated. That's what I think.

Interviewer: To finish this interview, what is the most important political issue for you today?

Community Member: Education. We need more information of the education our children are receiving. I'm sure there are good teachers there, but most of us Mexicans don't know what's going on because we don't speak English. It would be nice if we could get help in Spanish in terms of the education being given at the school. Also, [we need] resources that we as parents could use to help our children, because those who have scholarships have no worries. But if my daughter does not get a scholarship, I don't know who to talk to or where to go to help her in her education.

.....

**Interview #4 – Adult male friend of family in front yard**

Interviewer: Have you ever voted in an election in any country?

Community Member: No.

Interviewer: What were some of your reasons for not voting?

Community Member: Well, I don't think they believe or listen to what we say.

Interviewer: How many times in the past few years have people asked you to vote or said you should vote?

Community Member: they never ask me, they just send papers in the mail, but that's ever it.

Interviewer: Have you ever registered to vote?

Community Member: No

Interviewer: Do you think the government cares if you vote?

Community Member: No, they make their own decisions.

Interviewer: Do you think voting matters?

Community Member: Well, if they would listen, yes, but I don't think they listen.

Interviewer: Do you think in some countries it matters or maybe it doesn't matter here, or in all countries?

Community Member: In other countries, I don't think they care.

Interviewer: Do you think that politicians could make things better if they wanted to?

Community Member: Yea. If they wanted, yes.

Interviewer: Do you think they have the power to make changes

Community Member: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you think there are enough Latino or Mexican candidates running for elections these days?

Community Member: Not in this area, probably in Texas, Florida or California. That's where you hear of most Latino candidates. Because you see, I was born in Texas and there are more Latino candidates.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is? That there aren't enough Latino or Mexican candidates running for office?

Community Member: Here?

Interviewer: In Washington and in Walla Walla.

Community Member: Well, it started pretty slow. The Latino population is growing now.

The Latino population before didn't exist.

Interviewer: Do you think that would be better for making changes, having more Latino candidates?

Community Member: It depends on the [candidate], because, is he gonna work for the Mexican people or American people?

Interviewer: Do you have children?

Community Member: Yes

Interviewer: Do you want your children to vote?

Community Member: If they want to, yes

Interviewer: What's the most important political issue for you today?

Community Member: Education and college entrance and stuff like that.

Appendix C – Walla Walla County Registered Voter List:

\*Please find attached CD with data (a printed version would be over 2,000 pages).

Appendix D – Walla Walla County 2004 General Election Results By Precinct:

\*Please find attached hard copy of election results.

Appendix E – Yakima County Bilingual Election Program Data:

\*Please find attached hard copy of Yakima County Spanish surname Data.