



NALEO Educational Fund



LATINO VOTE IN WASHINGTON: A Demographic and Political Profile of Latinos in Washington

Over the past decade, the overall population in the state of Washington has seen significant growth. According to U.S. Census Bureau statistics, there was a 21% population increase during this period, from 4.8 million in 1990 to 5.9 million in 2000. While this growth is impressive, it is not as remarkable as the growth in the Latino population. This particular segment of the population grew by 105% during the same period, from nearly 215,000 in 1990 to more than 440,000 in 2000. This report provides a detailed look at the Latino population in Washington, exploring key demographic and political variables. While Latinos are clearly a driving force in the state's growth, their growth also presents important considerations in terms of the potential impact of Latinos on Washington's political landscape. Has the recent Latino population growth in the state translated to greater representation in the states voter rolls or at the polls? This *Research Brief* considers such questions by conducting the following analyses.

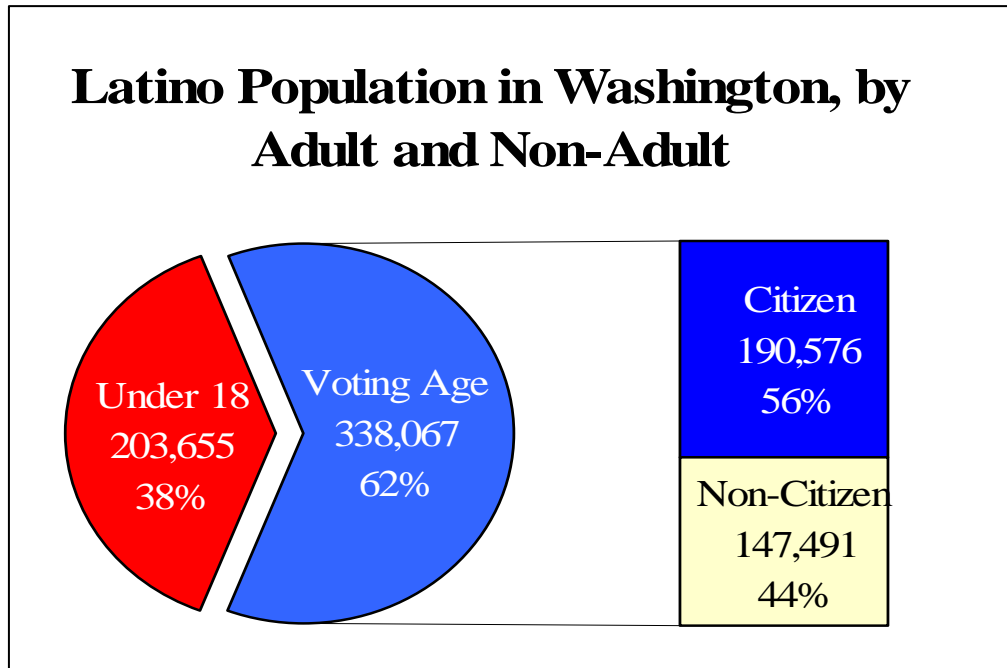
- The size and growth of the Latino population in Washington
- Population demographics and Challenges to Participation
- Voter Registration and Turnout

LATINO POPULATION GROWTH IN WASHINGTON

More recent Census data further underscore the growing presence of Latinos in the state. Census figures from the 2005 American Community Survey (ACS) signal continued Latino population growth.

According to ACS data, Latinos now total more-than half a million (541,722). This accounts for 9% of the state's 6.1 million inhabitants. A straightforward comparison of these estimates to 2000 figures suggests a potential 23% increase in the Latino population at mid decade.

CHART 1

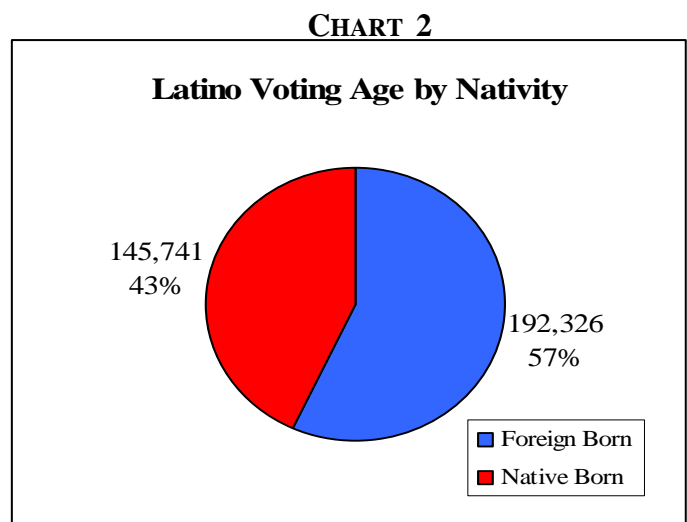


The Latino population in Washington has a significantly large voting age pool. Nearly two-thirds of the state's Latino population is 18 years of age or older (338,067). The remaining 38% of the population is comprised of youth under the age of 18. Additionally, voting-age citizens among this population represent a potential political force in the state. The activation and mobilization of this electorate may help significantly shape the future of the state. Among Latino adults, 190,576 are U.S. Citizens, potentially eligible to participate in the electoral process.

Chart 2 further breaks down the Latino adult population in terms of their place of birth (Native Born or Foreign Born). The breakdown shows that there is a near even split between the native born and foreign born (43 versus 57 percent). These data are indicative of the complex demographics of Latinos in the state, where the Latino adult population is a multigenerational amalgam.

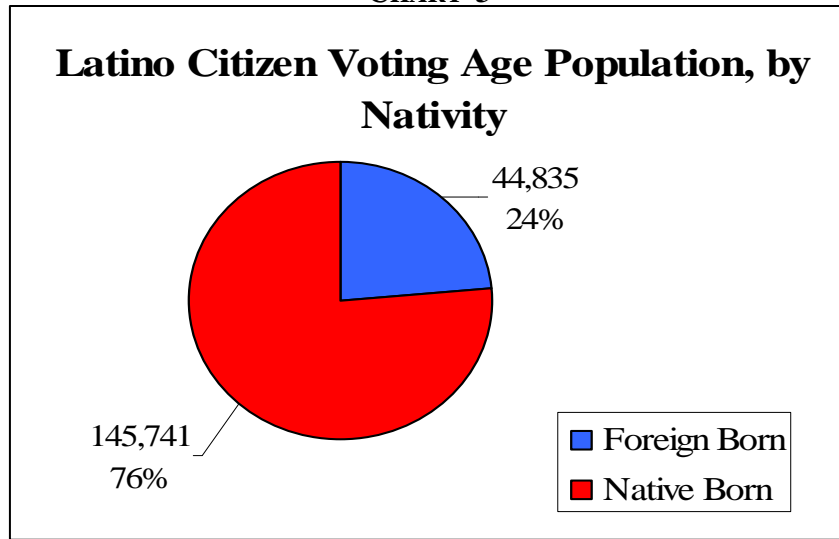
As displayed in Chart 1 above, nearly six out of every ten Latino adults in the state are citizens (56%). The rate of citizenship among the Latino adult population in Washington is comparable to that of other western states. As an example, in California, about 59% of the Latino adult population is comprised of citizens.

Returning to place of birth, now among the adult citizen population we find that the potentially eligible Latino population is overwhelming comprised of the native born. The following chart (Chart 3) shows that of the nearly 200,000 Latino voting-age citizens, three quarters (145,741) are native born citizens, while the foreign born



naturalized comprise one-quarter (44,835). This, again, suggests an adult population that includes second, third, and later generations of Latinos, which comprise a large share of the Latino citizen population.

CHART 3



THE LATINO ELECTORATE IN WASHINGTON

While examining population figures provides a glimpse at the electoral potential of Latinos in Washington, an analysis of official voter registration records affords a more accurate assessment of the current state of the Latino electorate. This section will provide an analysis of Latino voter registration and turnout, using official voter file records obtained from the office of the Washington Secretary of State.¹

According to our analysis there are currently 92,211 Latino registered voters in the state of Washington. Based on these figures, Latino registered voters account for 3% of the 3,278, 225 registered voters in the state.

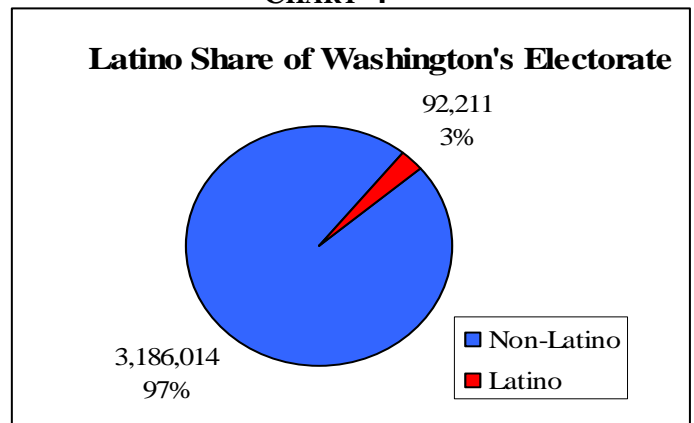
Beyond the total number of Latinos registered to vote, the eligible pool of unregistered and eligible Latinos represents tremendous potential for expanding the Latino electorate in the state. As we reported above there are about 190,576 Latino voting-age citizens. If one compares reported citizen

TABLE 1

Washington Latino Population and Electorate: June 2006

Voting Age Citizens	190,576
Registered Voters	92,211
Latino Share of All Registered Voters	3%

CHART 4



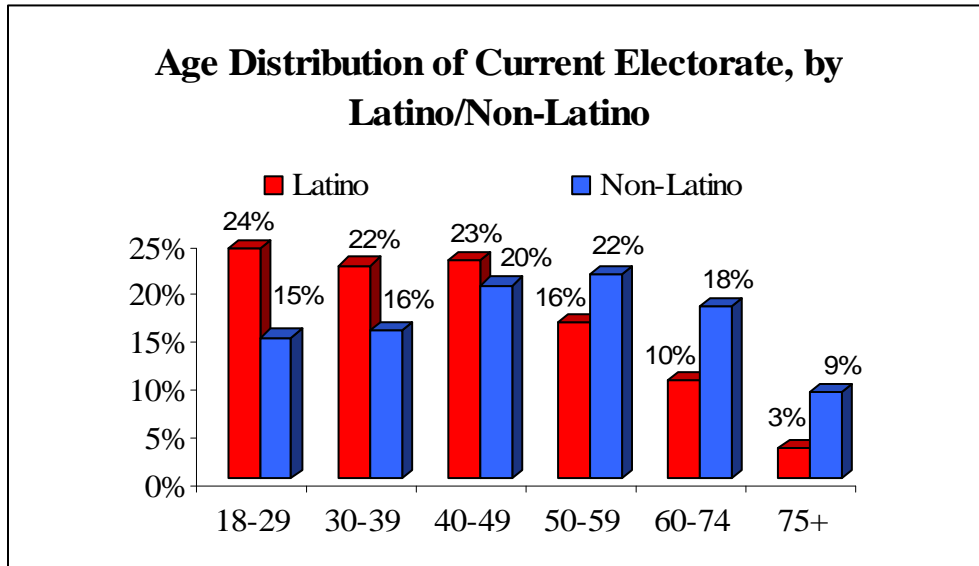
¹ The Secretary of State's office does not collect race or ethnicity information when individuals register to vote. Latino registered voters, then, are identified through surname analysis. It is through this method that we are able to conduct analyses on the Latino voter population.

voting-age figures to the number of actual registered voters, there are 98,365 potential eligible Latinos who remain unregistered to vote. Intensive and comprehensive efforts to register the large number of eligible unregistered Latinos could more than double the number of Latinos registered to vote in the state.

AGE AND THE LATINO ELECTORATE

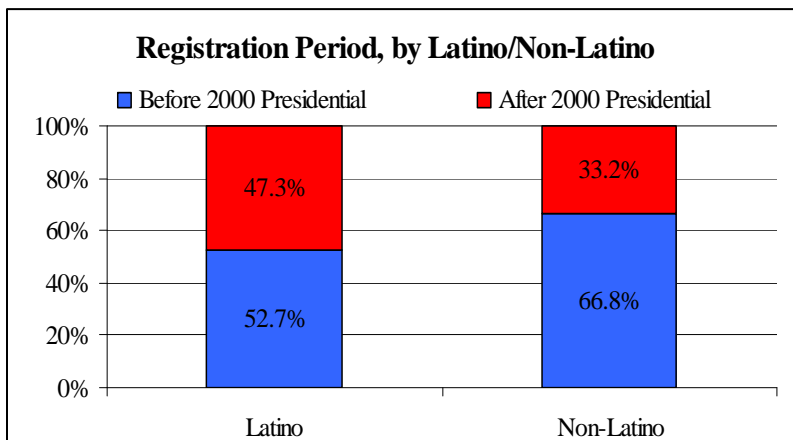
The Latino electorate in Washington is also a youthful electorate. According to voter registration data, Latino registered voters tend to be younger than the non-Latino electorate. Nearly one of every two Latinos, currently registered to vote, is under the age of 40 (46%). Conversely, less than one-third (31%) of the non-Latino electorate is under 40. In contrast, the non-Latino registered voter demographic skews older, as Chart 5 demonstrates. According to these figures, 49%, nearly half, of this electorate is over the age of 50. Additionally, 27% of this electorate is concentrated in the 60 and older age demographic. While a very youthful and less experienced electorate, in time this electorate will mature and comprise a greater share of the state’s registered voters.

CHART 5



PERIOD OF REGISTRATION

CHART 6

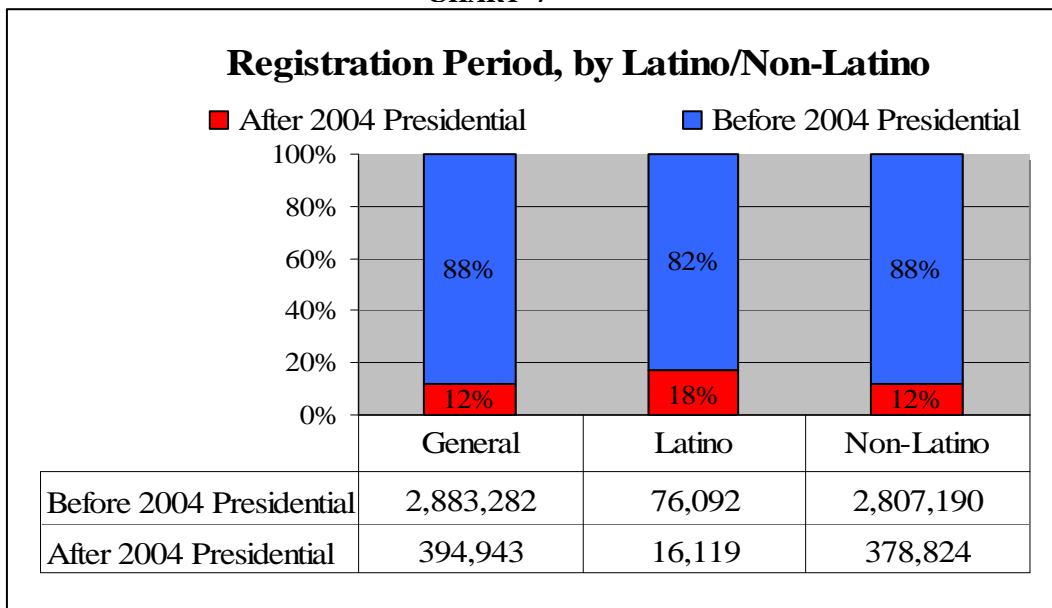


Examining the period of registration among Latino registered voters also allows us to assess the political maturity of the electorate. As with the recent growth of the Latino population, the Latino electorate is a recent electorate and relatively new to the process.

As Chart 6 demonstrates, 47% of the Latino electorate has been registered for less than 7 years. According to the graph, 43,462 Latino registered voters submitted a voter registration affidavit since the close of

registration for the November 2000 Presidential election. In contrast, only 33% of non-Latinos registered to vote registered within the same period. This relatively recent growth in the number of Latinos on the official voter rolls also underscores the growing presence of Latinos in the state’s electoral process.

CHART 7



Similar to the graph above, Chart 7 also looks at period of voter registration, but uses the 2004 Presidential election as a cut-off point. The chart illustrates a trend that Latinos tend to have been registered for a shorter time than both the general and non-Latino electorate. Nearly one in five registered Latino voters have been on the rolls for less than four years.

CONCENTRATION OF THE LATINO VOTE

A key variable in assessing the potential impact of the Latino vote should also take into account where these registered voters are concentrated. The tables below display counties where Latinos account for a significant share of the electorate and only take into consideration counties with at least 500 Latino registered voters.

Table 2 displays the top ten counties where Latinos account for the largest share of voters. The far right column depicts the share of the state’s total Latino voters residing in each county.

TABLE 2

Top Ten Counties with Largest Latino Share				
County	Registered Voters	Latino Voters	Latino Share	Share of State Latino Registration
Adams	5,932	1,189	20.0%	1.3%
Franklin	20,118	3,394	16.9%	3.7%
Yakima	91,301	13,715	15.0%	14.9%
Grant	29,700	2,453	8.3%	2.7%
Walla Walla	27,333	1,518	5.6%	1.6%
Douglas	17,236	774	4.5%	0.8%
Benton	75,933	3,251	4.3%	3.5%
Chelan	35,541	1,323	3.7%	1.4%
Skagit	59,209	1,930	3.3%	2.1%
Okanogan	19,488	527	2.7%	0.6%

Latinos comprise a significant share of county electorates in three counties, comprising more than one of every ten voters in each of these counties. Latino registered voters in Adams County comprise the largest share of a county’s electorate, with Latinos accounting for one of every five voters. Following closely is Franklin County, where Latinos account for one of six voters. Lastly, Latinos represent more than one of seven voters in Yakima County, where, in addition, one of seven Latino voters in the state reside. It is in these counties where Latinos have the greatest potential to play a significant role in determining elections, particularly at the local level where fewer votes can have a measurable impact on results.

Table 3

Top Ten Counties with Greatest Number of Latino Registered Voters				
County	Registered Voters	Latino Voters	Latino Share	Share of Total Latino Registration
King	992,057	24,129	2.4%	26.2%
Yakima	91,301	13,715	15.0%	14.9%
Pierce	373,958	9,489	2.5%	10.3%
Snohomish	333,645	7,235	2.2%	7.8%
Clark	189,866	3,771	2.0%	4.1%
Franklin	20,118	3,394	16.9%	3.7%
Spokane	235,237	3,353	1.4%	3.6%
Thurston	136,134	3,349	2.5%	3.6%
Benton	75,933	3,251	4.3%	3.5%
Kitsap	133,392	3,204	2.4%	3.5%

Table 3 looks at the concentration of the Latino electorate in counties with the largest number of Latino voter registration. Latino voter registration in three counties accounts for a majority of the Latino electorate. King County is home to the largest number of Latino voters (King County is home to Seattle, the largest city in the state). Once again, Yakima County is at the top of the list, with more than 13,000 Latino voters residing within its boundaries. Additionally, Latino registered voters in Yakima also account for one of the largest Latino shares of a county electorate, comprising 15% of all voter registration.

TABLE 4

Cities with Largest Shares of Latino Registered Voters						
City	County	Congressional District	General	Latino	Non-Latino	Latino Share
Mabton	Yakima	4	1,099	539	560	49.0%
Granger	Yakima	4	1,238	555	683	44.8%
Toppenish	Yakima	4	3,620	1,422	2,198	39.3%
Sunnyside	Yakima, Benton	4	5,570	2,169	3,401	38.9%
Grandview	Yakima, Benton	4	4,130	1,449	2,681	35.1%
Wapato	Yakima	4	4,126	1,285	2,841	31.1%
Othello	Grant, Franklin, Adams	4,5	4,242	1,196	3,046	28.2%
Warden	Adams, Grant	4,5	1,184	264	920	22.3%
Pasco	Walla Walla, Franklin	4,5	17,406	3,035	14,371	17.4%
Connell	Franklin, Adams	4,5	1,142	192	950	16.8%

Table 4 looks at the distribution of Latino voters across cities, and includes counties and congressional districts that encompass these cities. Cities listed in the table only include those with at least 1,000 total registered voters. As the table illustrates, the majority of heavily Latino cities are concentrated in Yakima County. These cities are also concentrated within two congressional districts, the 4th and the 5th. Interestingly, neither of these Congressional districts is regarded as a contested seat. Also, all the counties in the above table are located in the southern area of the state.

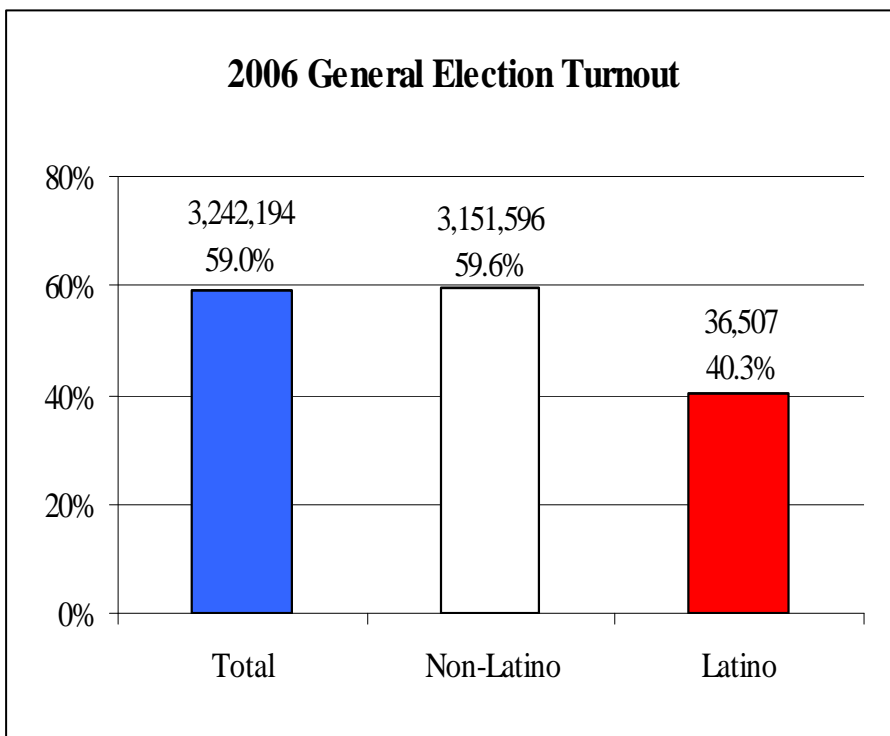
WASHINGTON LATINOS AT THE BALLOT BOX

More important than the number of Latinos registered or the number eligible but not registered is the voting behavior of those registered. According to our findings, Latinos turnout to vote at significantly lower rates than non-Latino registered voters, and the total Washington electorate. While data available from the secretary of state does not report the full voting history for each individual voter, but instead reports the last time each voter cast a ballot, we are able to measure turnout in the most recent election, the 2006 November General Elections². Note that the rates of participation reported in this analysis are based solely on information provided in the statewide voter registration file and are not presented as an unofficial count of votes cast³.

It is difficult not to notice the significant lag in turnout between Latino and non-Latino voters as well as the general electorate. According to our calculations, there is nearly a 19% lag in participation between the Latino electorate and overall turnout.

As previously mentioned, it is important to examine areas where Latino turnout is the highest, as these are places where Latinos conceivably play a key role in elections outcomes. Table 5 below examines counties where Latino turnout was the highest in the November 2006 election⁴. Participation among Latinos was highest in Clallam County, where 55% of Latinos there cast a ballot on Election Day. This rate is still lower than the general turnout across the state. By comparison, 71% of all and non-Latino voters cast a ballot.

CHART 8



² Only those who were registered before the close of registration for the November 2006 Mid-Term Election were included in calculations.

³ Turnout information on the Washington Secretary of State's website indicates that overall participation was 64.55% (2,107,370 of 3,264,511 registered voters).

⁴ Only counties with more than 500 registered Latino voters were included in this analysis

TABLE 5

Ten Counties with Highest Latino Participation in November 2006 Election

County	November 2006 Turnout			Registration			Turnout		
	Total	Latino	Non-Latino	Total	Latino	Non-Latino	Total	Latino	Non-Latino
Clallam	30,746	299	30,447	43,182	542	42,640	71%	55%	71%
Spokane	156,763	1,723	155,040	235,237	3,353	231,884	67%	51%	67%
Clark	116,259	1,770	114,489	189,866	3,771	186,095	61%	47%	62%
Snohomish	206,960	3,308	203,652	333,645	7,235	326,410	62%	46%	62%
Thurston	84,752	1,522	83,230	136,134	3,349	132,785	62%	45%	63%
Cowlitz	31,493	321	31,172	52,711	750	51,961	60%	43%	60%
Whatcom	67,937	892	67,045	101,756	2,118	99,638	67%	42%	67%
Island	30,271	330	29,941	44,220	784	43,436	68%	42%	69%
King	543,371	10,138	533,233	992,057	24,129	967,928	55%	42%	55%
Benton	50,194	1,227	48,967	75,933	3,251	72,682	66%	38%	67%

CONGRESSIONAL ANALYSIS

Table 6 breaks down the Washington electorate by congressional district and includes margin of victory figures for the November 2006 General Election.

Participation rates among Latino voters were the highest in Districts 3 and 5, with 45.7% and 45.8% turnout, respectively. The margin of victory in both districts was well beyond being considered highly competitive- 26.2% in District 3 and 12.8% in District 5.

District 8 was the most competitive race in 2006. Election results reported a margin of victory (MOV) of only 2.9% or 7,341 votes. In this district, the 8,266 Latinos residing there account for 2.0% of the total electorate. However, Latino registered voters also comprise a larger number than the 2006 MOV. Within District 8, the Latino vote can have a significant political role, with the potential to play a decisive role in upcoming congressional contests.

TABLE 6

State Congressional Districts, with Margin of Victory in November 2006 Election

District	General	Latino	Non-Latino	Latino Share	Latino Distribution	Latino Turnout	Latino Turnout %	MOV	MOV %	Party in Office
1	376,368	7,792	368,576	2.1%	8.5%	3,465	44.5%	85,727	35.4%	D
2	380,591	8,458	372,133	2.2%	9.2%	3,496	41.3%	69,334	28.3%	D
3	380,509	7,061	373,448	1.9%	7.7%	3,224	45.7%	61,150	26.2%	D
4	303,946	26,551	277,395	8.7%	28.8%	9,179	34.6%	38,192	19.9%	R
5	360,374	6,248	354,126	1.7%	6.8%	2,861	45.8%	30,610	12.8%	R
6	356,359	7,556	348,803	2.1%	8.2%	2,896	38.3%	92,319	41.2%	D
7	385,342	10,110	375,232	2.6%	11.0%	3,970	39.3%	156,747	63.7%	D
8	408,147	8,266	399,881	2.0%	9.0%	3,581	43.3%	7,341	2.9%	R
9	326,542	10,167	316,375	3.1%	11.0%	3,835	37.7%	56,956	31.4%	D
Total	3,278,178	92,209	3,185,969							

LATINO ELECTED OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON: 1997-2007

According to data available from the National Directory of Latino Elected Officials, a yearly directory compiled by the NALEO Educational Fund, Latinos have comprised a small but steady number among elected office holders since 1998. Latino representation across the state ranges through all levels of elected office, from school board members to state senators and representatives.

TABLE 7
Latino Elected Officials, 1998-2007, by Level

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
State Senators	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
State Representatives	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Municipal/City Officials	2	2	5	5	3	3	6	6	4	4
Judicial/Law Enforcement Officials	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Board Members	5	3	2	3	3	2	5	6	6	6
Special District Officials	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total	12	10	11	12	10	9	15	16	14	14

CONCLUSION

This profile underscores an emerging new demographic within the Washington state electorate. As the number of Latino registered voters and actual voters increases, the incorporation of this growing electorate will be vital to the future of the state.

While the Latino electorate is relatively recent, the growth in the Latino eligible population and potential subsequent growth in voter registration, along with the maturing of this youthful electorate alludes to a promising prospect for increased Latino political participation. However, as with Latino communities across the nation, the political potential of Washington Latinos is stifled by demographic and political variables. Youth, recent registration, and lower rates of participation are key challenges to full participation of Latinos in the state.

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