# The Invisible Latino: A Study of the Electoral Politics of Walla Walla

Kramer Phillips, Whitman College
April 14th, 2008

## I. Introduction

Since its passage in 1965 the federal Voting Rights Act has been fundamental in ensuring that minorities are able to represent themselves in the democratic electoral process. Oftentimes, the most contentious battles for fair and equal minority representation are fought on the local level as electoral systems have in the past been used to either significantly diminish or virtually null the election of any minority officials. This research project aims to analyze the local electoral system of Walla Walla County in Washington State and to ascertain whether structural electoral practices exist that dilute minority-voting power. In addition, this project aims to gauge voter participation among Latinos, the prevalence of racially polarized voting, and to attempt at least a draft answer to the "whys" of each question. Finding answers to these questions are especially important because they have a direct impact on whether or not the Latino community in Walla Walla County is receiving equal and fair access to the political process – their very enfranchisement – and could potentially lead to further measures to further promote Latino empowerment.

In order to make this project possible, I gathered complete election records from the county auditor's office for the past eight years. Once elections had been identified where a Latino candidate ran against a non-Latino, I coded the voters' list for each election for Hispanic surnames based on a list from the Department of Justice. I subsequently analyzed two elections in 2007 for city council and school board positions respectively, and a third election for district court judge in 2002. The results were analyzed for racially polarized voting, where members of one race vote for a candidate of their own race as a bloc, and vote dilution. Per my findings, racially polarized voting is not much of a concern in Walla Walla but what is disconcerting is the complete lack of political outreach to the Latino community by the county and political candidates alike. Latinos also make up a disproportionably low percentage of the electorate in Walla Walla averaging at 2.5% at each election when they make up a total of 17.2% of the county's population (Census Bureau 2007). Based upon these findings my most urgent recommendation is that there be increased outreach to the Latino community both in the form of bilingual voting materials (ballots, instructions, community forums etc) to active campaigning by candidates for the Latino vote. In addition, Walla Walla's current electoral system fails to provide any sort of proportional representation. I recommend a move to limited voting or cumulative voting practices, outlined later, which have proven successful in communities of similar size and electoral makeup. The combination of structural changes to the county's electoral system and active outreach to the Latino community should be able to significantly enfranchise the Latino population and make them fully fledged citizens.

## II. Scholarly Literature Discussion

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is arguably the single most effective piece of legislation for minority enfranchisement ever enacted by the United States. Its origins stem from extremely low African American enfranchisement in the South – in 1940 approximately only 3% of eligible voters were registered (Davidson, 29) – and the relative ineffectiveness of various Civil Rights Acts (1957,1960,1964) with average registration rates for blacks in the south reaching only 22.5% by 1964 (Davidson 1991, 30). Finally, the act was passed in 1965 in response to both a changing political climate, a response to the civil rights movement, and the national attention brought on the South as a result of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference African American voter registration drive in Selma, Alabama (Davidson 1991, 30).

With this in mind, this project examines the current situation of another traditionally disenfranchised minority, Latinos. To better illustrate the situation, according to a 2006 study of the State of Washington conducted by the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), in the November 2006 general elections there were 190,576 Latino voting age citizens but only 92,211 were registered to vote (NALEO 2006). Of the eligible Latino citizen voting population, about 48% is accounted for by the 92,211 whereas statewide as of Jan 2007, 72.8% of all eligible voters were actively registered to vote (State of Washington Office of the Secretary of State). Similarly national figures resemble those of the State of Washington, in the 2004 general elections eligible non-Hispanic whites were registered at a rate of 75% whereas only 58% of eligible Latinos were registered to vote (Census Bureau 2006, 7). Another troubling difference between Latinos and non-Latinos is their respective voter turnout rates. In the State of Washington in the 2006 General Elections, only 40.3% of Latinos turned out compared to 59.6% of the non-Latino vote (NALEO 2006). The study of Walla Walla County was thus undertaken with these figures in mind to determine if a) Registered voters in Walla Walla County fit within national and state trends b) if the VRA needs to be applied in the county to remedy the situation. Clearly, statewide, Latinos suffer similar disparities as did African American voters in the South prior to and immediately following the passage of the VRA. In 1965, 35.5% of eligible African-American voters were registered to vote compared to 73.4% of eligible white voters (Engstrom 1994, 686). However, after the act had been in force for a number of years, the registration rates of African Americans in southern states increased 50% by 1967 and 66.7% by 1992 (Engstrom 1994, 686).

Historically Latinos and other minorities have been disadvantaged by the US electoral system in ways that have served to significantly decrease their voting power. The diminishment of the voting power of minorities is known as vote dilution, "Ethnic or racial vote dilution takes place when a majority of voters, by bloc voting for its candidates in a series of elections, systematically prevents an ethnic minority from electing most or all of its preferred candidates" (Davidson 1991, 23). By "bloc voting," Davidson means that ethnic groups vote along racial lines to elect their candidates with the majority always winning[1]. In essence, if an area such as Walla Walla County, which has a Latino population of 17.2% (US Census Bureau 2000), were to have racially

[1] Voting along racial lines for one's ethnic candidate is also known as racially polarized voting

polarized voting, then a Latino candidate could theoretically never win a general election. Other methods of vote dilution, which this project seeks to analyze, are found within the basic electoral structure of a system. Several questions to ask are:

a) Does the system have an at-large electoral system?

In an at-large electoral system voters from all precincts vote for candidates which, assuming racially polarized voting, would never allow a minority candidate to win, save with a high support rate by the majority population.

b) Are the minorities concentrated in a single district in a proportion far greater than needed to elect a minority candidate?

Concentrating minorities in a single district in such an overwhelming proportion, in case of district elections, allows for majority dominated districts to (don't use dominate twice in a short time period) district elections such as for members of city council and other district elected bodies.

c) Does the jurisdiction have majority runoff elections?

In this system, candidates who have received the plurality of the votes during an election have to have a runoff in which the candidate with the majority of the votes wins. This may create racially polarized voting in a multiple candidate election as other contestants who may have drawn votes away from the winner of the majority vote have been eliminated (Davidson 1991 , 23).

For Latinos in particular, racial polarization seems to be more of the norm than an exception. In his study, entitled "Si se Puede! Latino Candidates and the Mobilization of Latino Voters," Matt E. Barreto analyzes elections in five major US cities: Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, New York, Houston, where a Latino candidate ran against a non-Latino candidate. He first divided the number of registered Latino voters by the total number of registered voters in each precinct in the five cities, and then attempted to determine whether racially polarized voting occurred (precincts with a high Latino turnout voted for the Latino candidate and vice-versa) "across all five elections two trends are observable: first, heavily Latino precincts tend to cluster together, exhibiting very similar patterns for candidate preference, and second, heavily Latino precincts display high rates of support for the Latino candidate, with few exceptions" (Barreto 2007, 431). Hence, racially polarized voting is the norm among Latino candidates as areas with a high number of Latinos vote predominantly for the Latino candidate and areas with high numbers of non-Latinos vote predominantly for the non-Latino candidate. In fact, the draw of a Latino candidate is strong enough to both mobilize Latino voters regardless of party line, "Latinos can be compelled to vote Republican, but only if they are mobilized by Latino Republicans," which was certainly the case in Houston (Barreto 2007, 436). Latinos are thus compelled to turn out if there is a Latino candidate running regardless of the candidate's partisanship. Based upon Barreto's findings from major cities in widely different areas of the country, racial bloc vote is to be expected whenever a Latino runs against a non-Latino.

The purpose of the Voting Rights Act is to take into account the conditions that render minorities unable to elect a candidate of their choice and to remedy the situation through legal means. Some of the conditions found in Washington State rendering the Latino populace generally unlikely to elect a candidate of its choice are: Latinos' low rates of voter registration, low voter turnout, and likelihood to vote along racial lines. Since its passage in 1965, the act has undergone a number of revisions to address these

and other barriers to voting. An overview of some of the major changes of the act particularly applicable to the situation of Latinos is as follows (Davidson 1991, 31): In 1975, section 4 of the act was expanded to include a language minority trigger formula to address the needs of monolingual voters who comprise at least 5% of the voting population and whose turnout was less than 50% in the last presidential election. In Section 5 of the act, a moratorium was placed on all changes to electoral procedures of jurisdictions under section 4 without prior approval by the Department of Justice. Further authority given the federal government by the act included the authority of the department to appoint "registrars" to oversee the registration and voting of legally qualified persons in sections under section 4 and granting the Attorney General authority to appoint election observers.

A number of Supreme Court decisions over the years have also shaped the act. It was declared constitutional in 1966 with the landmark case *South Carolina v. Katzenbach*. Another particularly pertinent decision to the evolution of minority enfranchisement is the 1969 case of *Allen v. State Board of Elections* where the Supreme Court held that the act "gives a broad interpretation to the right to vote, recognizing that voting includes 'all action necessary to make a vote effective'" (Davidson 1991, 32). The decision allowed the Department of Justice to have much greater oversight over cases involving vote dilution. Finally, simultaneously the biggest challenge to the act but also its biggest boost came in 1980 in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's decision in the case of *City of Mobile v. Bolden* which held that "a Fourteenth Amendment violation required a showing of racially invidious purpose in creating or maintaining a dilutionary system such as at-large elections" (Davidson 1991, 34). This placed an inordinate burden of proof on the plaintiffs' side and rendered the application of the VRA onerous. Such a heavy burden of proof led to the act's biggest change in 1982 through a congressional amendment of section 2. As Davidson writes an "…amended section 2 enabled either the Justice Department or private plaintiffs to sue jurisdictions anywhere in the nation without having to prove intent" (Davidson 1991, 35). Thus the greatest challenge to the Voting Rights Act led to its greatest legislative improvement; for an amended section 2 not only lowered the burden of proof on the plaintiff's side, but extended the act's jurisdiction nationally.

On a local level, the act has been applied to cities in California to further the enfranchisement of their respective Latino populations. Voting rights activists were able to win a judicial victory in the 9$^{th}$ circuit court against the city of Watsonville where the city's at-large election system was found to be leading to vote dilution (Geron 2005, 77). Watsonville fit the general pattern found by Barreto, when Latino candidates ran against non-Latino candidates, in that in its first district elections, Latinos turned out in very high numbers and elected the third Latino to city council in the city's history. The Watsonville decision in *Gomez v. City of Watsonville* set an important precedent for another California city, Salinas. When city officials were threatened with a lawsuit challenging the city's at-large election system, the city chose to hold new elections to determine whether or not to change to a district system. The city lost the referendum on electoral reform by a small margin spearheaded by mobilized Latino voters. The newly enacted district system ushered into power Salinas' first Latino city council people (Geron 2005, 171). Salinas exemplifies how, when minorities are in power, resources are shifted in favor of the minority group as "Redevelopment, in the hands of a liberal to progressive

Chicano majority city government, has redirected tax increment funds to improve predominantly Latino East Salinas, as well as to more traditional redevelopment projects" (Geron 2005, 183). Government is more responsible to minority concerns, when minorities representing the community are elected to power for they shift resources to their respective communities.

However, having district system does not necessarily guarantee the election of a Latino candidate, especially in areas where Latinos are not the majority. In his book *Latino Political Power,* Kim Geron lays out the ways in which the campaigns and portrayals of Latino candidates vary depending on what the percentage Latino population is in a certain area. For the purposes of this project, I will focus on the type of Latino candidate who runs in a jurisdiction with less than a 25% Latino population. In places where Latinos are the minority, "Latino candidates will seek to cross over and be acceptable to other communities of interest, which requires downplaying one's ethnic heritage and ethnic community support so as not to be perceived as a 'Latino' candidate but as a candidate who happens to be Latino" (Geron 2005, 126). These candidates, whose very election is largely dependent upon votes from the majority, feel they need to downplay their race so to garner support from individuals outside of their racial group. The concept of downplaying one's race in elections, known as *deracialization*, was used by Antonio Villaraigosa, current mayor of Los Angeles, in both his 2001 and 2005 campaigns. In his 2001 campaign "he [Villaraigosa] addressed issues which appealed to a broad array of voters, promoted a 'nonthreatening' image, and aggressively mobilized potential supporters" (Austin & Wright 2004, 287). Villaraigosa's electoral loss in 2001 was attributed to his relatively unknown status in the African American community as well as to some racially polarized voting (Austin & Wright 2004, 290). However, through the same tactics employed in 2001 and through securing powerful endorsements from the African American community in 2005, Villaraigosa was able to become LA's first Latino mayor since 1837 (Sonenshein & Pinkus 2005). This type of campaigning is particularly relevant for Walla Walla, as will be shown in section IV, as Latinos comprise a very small minority of the eligible voting population in the county and an even smaller minority of individuals who actually vote.

A crucial factor to any election, regardless of the candidate's campaign or the type of ballot the voter will cast, is voter turnout. As mentioned earlier, Latinos both nationally and in Washington State have significantly lower turnout figures than their non-Latino counterparts (NALEO 2006). The Voting Rights Act attempts to make the ballot box accessible by including language provisions through section 203 which calls for bilingual voting materials to be made available in jurisdictions with at least 10,000 members of a voting minority with little to no English proficiency (Jones-Correa 2005). Section 203 has indeed led to increased voter turnout in some instances, "…respondents residing in areas that offer voting and registration materials in respondents' respective languages of origin are 5% more likely to have voted in 1996 and 2000 presidential elections than those without the option of receiving those language materials" (Jones-Correa 2005). A 5% increase in turnout is indeed significant in closing the gap between Latino and non-Latino voter turnout, were that to happen to Washington State overnight, turnout in the last presidential election would have increased from 40.3-45.3%. However, a 5% increase in turnout, though sizeable, is not enough to fully bridge the gap between

Latinos and non-Latinos, for a host of other factors unique to the Latino community come into play.

Perhaps the most significant factor to affect turnout among Latino voters is the relative inclusiveness of the Latino population in greater American society. By "relative inclusiveness," I mean various socioeconomic factors that scholars have found to affect voter turnout such as education, wealth, age, and residential stability (Highton & Burris 2002, 294). In fact, once these socioeconomic factors have been taken into account the gap between Latinos and non-Latinos in turnout drops significantly "virtually all Latino group differences disappear when socioeconomic variables are taken into account…Puerto Rican turnout increases about 19 percentage points…the same pattern is evident for Mexican Americans" (Highton & Burris 2002, 295). Another extremely influential factor found by several scholars to affect voter turnout is length of stay in the United States (Highton & Burris 2002, Johnson et al. 2003). Highton and Burris found through their national survey of Latino voter participation that "Naturalized Mexican American citizens who have lived in the United States for the greatest amount of time have turnout that is slightly more than 13 percentage points higher than that of native-born Mexican Americans…"(Highton & Burris 2002).

Since the length of stay of Latinos in the United States falls outside the realm of government influence and remediability, we are left with the question about what could be done by society to increase turnout. Group consciousness among Latinos could be a salient concept with which to play on to increase involvement. By group consciousness, I take into account the definition provided by Sanchez that "group consciousness is based on a notion of collective action directed toward improving the status of one's group" (Sanchez 2006, 445). From a survey conducted by Sanchez which takes various socioeconomic factors, political orientation, cultural factors, and political knowledge into account, he found that "individuals who have a strong sense of group consciousness are more likely to attend meetings or demonstrations based on Latino issues and donate money to and work on campaigns of Latinos running for office" (Sanchez 2006, 445). This is consistent with Barreto's findings after analyzing Latino during the elections of Latinos in five major cities: Houston, San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Denver, he found that "Although Latino candidates may have either mobilizing or demobilizing effects for other groups of voters, these data reveal that shared ethnicity had a strong mobilizing effect for Latino voters" (Barreto 2007, 437). Thus outreach for Latinos by Latino candidates may serve to foster a sense of Latino group consciousness by offering the Latino community a greater sense of control over their political destinies.

Finally, we come to the question of how proportional representation could be achieved for a minority group without significant political clout. In the past, representation has been achieved through a switch from an at-large system to district elections. In an at-large system, all districts could vote for all candidates during elections, whereas district elections made it a requirement for candidates to run for a particular district and only members of that district could vote for them. These single-member voting districts are comprised of a majority and a minority racial population with the majority in some districts being members of a racial group (i.e. Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans, etc). These districts are established in order to enable minorities to elect candidates of their choice, as was the case for the California cities of Watsonville and Salinas (Geron 2007). Both of those cities, however, had majority Latino

populations whose city governments were dominated by a powerful white minority but whose demographic makeup changed following the switch in electoral systems.

Merely electing someone who shares one's skin tone to a position of power does not necessarily guarantee that they will be able to effectively represent the interests of the minority group if a white majority is opposed. In her article *The Triumph of Tokenism*, Lani Guinier lays out a case for places where a racial group may comprise a substantial minority, but are far from the majority. She argues that "a system that given an equal change of having their [minority] political preferences *physically represented* is inadequate. A fair system of political representation would provide mechanism to ensure that disadvantaged and stigmatized minority groups also have a fair chance to have their policy preferences *satisfied*" (Guinier 1991, 1136). It is not enough to have the physical presence of someone whose skin tone is darker if their advocacy for minority groups will be undermined at every instance. Barring the physical impossibility of establishing majority-minority districts for most of Walla Walla County (Census Bureau), it is feasible that once positions of power are acquired by minorities, the white majority may not be willing to work with them; "Prejudice against minority group members inhibits admission to the governing majority, ensuring a strategically weak position as a permanent loser" (Guinier 1991, 1123). If the governing majority refuses to work with elected members of minority groups, then the minority establishes the image of tokenism by being physically present but unable to effect change.

A possible solution to both achieve proportionality of representation and tangible improvements for minority groups would be a switch from at-large to cumulative voting or limited voting systems. The contributing authors to the article *Minority Representation Under Cumulative and Limited Voting* lay out the premise for both systems:

> Under LV [limited voting], voters are restricted to fewer votes than seats up for election. Candidates are elected by plurality, and candidates with the most votes win until sears are filled…Cumulative voting modifies at-large plans by allowing voters to cast as many votes as seats being elected, with the additional option of clustering votes among any combination of candidates…candidates are elected by plurality, and candidates with the most votes win until seats are filled (Brockington et al 1998, 1110).

By changing the system from one where candidates are required to receive 50 + 1% of the votes to one where candidates win by plurality allows for places with sizeable minority populations to truly elect candidates of their choice. Depending on the size of the minority populations, members of the majority will be required to compromise and work with minority members of government to pass legislation. Guinier lays out an example of how this system, which she terms "proportionate interest representation", would work: "Once elected minority representatives would be more responsive to their constituents because individual incumbents would not be assure of reelections. Effective representatives would be continuously engaged in issue identification and articulation" (Guinier 1991, 1149). Since they would have to be constantly aware of the impermanence of their seats, candidates would be required to respond, as the election threshold would be significantly lower. The proportional election of minority candidates to political office has, in fact, been the case in places that have adopted cumulative or limited voting and that "a Latino candidate was elected in 70% of the contests where a Latino candidate sought office under CV. Further, in 96% of CV/LV elections where an African-American

sought office, at least one African-American was elected" (Brockington et al. 1998, 1115). Such favorable election statistics are a major breakthrough in minority representation, for this study focused on areas where the predominant minority made up less than 50% of the population. In the case of district elections, these minorities would remain permanent minorities and the majority constituency would not have to represent their interests. Furthermore, these two systems are particularly valuable for a county like Walla Walla, whose population is small (the mean population of the jurisdictions examined in the study was 10,311) and whose minority population even smaller (at 17.2%).

In 1965, the voting rights act opened up new avenues to effect minority representation in jurisdictions where they had been excluded from power or unable to cast an effective vote. With the implementation of the VRA, there arose various means through which to achieve minority representation such as district elections and language provisions. But even through the language provisions and modified electoral systems, the minority vote could be rendered ineffective in the face of institutionalized racism, requiring further changes to electoral practices to achieve proportional representation. My study of Walla Walla County will attempt to gauge Latino political participation and enfranchisement, propose solutions in light of other scholarly works, and further the cause of voting rights and minority empowerment for Latinos in Washington State.

**III. Discussion of Research Methods**

To begin an analysis of the political conditions present in Walla Walla County, it was necessary to examine election results for the county available through the auditor's office for the past 20 years. The first step in obtaining this data was contacting the county auditor's office through a number of phone calls and e-mail messages. Eventually, after meeting with the auditor in person, I was able to sift through election results and by looking at all the races available in the office, which ranged from 2000 to 2007, a few were found that possessed Latino surnamed candidates. With these races in mind, I further narrowed down my election choices by the data needed to conduct a full election analysis. I coded all the registered voters in Walla Walla County based on whether or not they possessed a Latino surname and whether or not they voted in the election being analyzed. The list of Latino surnames was obtained from the Department of Justice through Yakima County, for it had been given it to fulfill a consent decree it signed concerning the accessibility of the franchise to Spanish-speaking voters. A complete voters' list was required in order to determine the presence of Latino voters, turnout figures for the Latino and general populations, and the percentage of Latino voters in each voting precinct. Due to these requirements, the elections I could analyze were substantially narrowed down as the county regularly disposes of voters who have become invalidated for certain reasons every two years (such as voters who moved away, who died, who committed crimes, etc)[2]. Due to these constraints, I was only able to obtain complete data for elections conducted in 2007. In 2007, there were Latino surnamed candidates who ran in both the primary, for city council, and general elections, for a

[2] One election deviates from this norm, the 2002 general elections. Although I lacked the complete voters' list I could still determine the number of Latinos who voted and their proportion in the electorate based upon a list of people who voted during that election.

school director position. I then requested the complete voters' lists and precinct-by-precinct elections results for the county. From the data, I was able to determine the number of registered Latino voters, calculate the overall Latino turnout for the elections, and the proportion of registered Latino voters by precinct in relation to all registered voters.

From 2003 to 2006 in the election records, there was an absence of Latino-surnamed candidates running against non-Latino candidates as all Latino officials in that time interval were either appointed or ran unopposed. The other contested election I found was the 2002 general elections. However, since the county purges from its lists the names of voters who have become invalidated over the past two years, I could only procure the lists of voters who voted. Unlike in the 2007 election, I could not calculate the Latino proportion of registered voters in comparison to all registered voters, but I could still calculate their make-up of the electorate through dividing the number of Latinos who voted by the total number of voters in each precinct. I also obtained, from the auditor's election manual, a complete list of all elected positions in the county and the types of elections held for each position. It is worth noting that the County Auditor Karen Martin, and her Elections Supervisor, Katrina Manning were extremely helpful in the data gathering process and are available to answer all questions.

For each election obtained, I ran a bivariate ecological regression analysis. A regression analysis facilitates the determination of racially polarized voting in a given election. For each election, the number of Latino voters were coded and the Latino turnout determined. Then the percentage of votes in favor of the Latino candidate was compared to the proportion of the electorate that was Latino for each voting precinct and vice-versa for the turnout of non-Latino voters and the percentage of votes in favor of the non-Latino candidate. Once the data had been gathered, regression analyses were run for each election and based upon the coefficient of $R^2$ which could theoretically range from anywhere close to zero (0) to one (1). An election was deemed to be polarized along racial lines if it had a coefficient 0.5 or greater, meaning there is more than a 50% correlation for votes for a candidate with turnout of a certain group, and not polarized if the coefficient was lower than 0.5. It was important to determine the presence of racially polarized voting, for racial bloc voting along with at-large elections have historically represented instances in which the Voting Rights Act could be applied.

In order to set the data I gathered in the greater political context of the state and the nation, I gathered statistical data from the Secretary of State of Washington, the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), and the US Census Bureau. For the data sets concerning Washington, I first obtained statistics from the Office of the Secretary of State concerning the number of eligible voters in the state compared to the number of registered voters. I then obtained a second data set from the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) which included the percentage of registered Latino voters in proportion to all eligible Latino voters in the state of Washington. Finally I put the data in a national perspective by using a US Census report on the 2004 Presidential elections which detailed the percentage of registered non-Latino voters compared to the number of eligible non-Latinos and repeated the process for Latinos (percentage of registered Latino voters compared to the number of eligible Latinos nationwide).

For the second part of the data gathering process, I interviewed the auditor and two Latino political candidates. The auditor interview was instrumental to my project; for through her insight, I gained a better perspective on the political culture of Walla Walla, the political process, what her office does in general and in terms of outreach, her office's bilingual ability, and the provenance of bilingual voting materials. These questions were based upon the Yakima Consent Decree, a document, given to Yakima by the Department of Justice (DOJ) to avoid federal litigation, which outlines the duties of Yakima County towards its Spanish speaking population who had been suffering disenfranchisement. All of these questions were aimed to determine how the voting process works and its accessibility to the general voting population and for Latino voters. In short, my questions to the auditor were aimed upon determining, as is written in the 1982 amendment of the Voting Rights Act, whether minorities have "less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and elect representatives of their choice" (cited in Davidson 1991, 35). This interview lasted roughly one hour, the language used was mostly casual and the questions provided an overall framework for discussion. The interview was recorded.

For the two political candidates I interviewed, I chose to interview Gabriel Acosta, who ran for District Judge in 2002 and Conrado Cavazos who ran in the 2007 primary for a position in city council. The reason these two candidates were chosen were, as mentioned above, their elections represented some of the few for which I could conduct an analysis satisfactory to the purposes of determining vote dilution and racially polarized voting. Interviewing these candidates only proved a natural step towards enriching my knowledge of the political process in Walla Walla. The first question I asked of candidates concerned why they chose to run and what their personal backgrounds were. Of interest here was whether or not these Latino candidates fit within the general Latino demographics for the county (in terms of education, income, etc). I also asked candidates how they ran their individual campaigns, to determine whether or not any outreach was done to the Latino community. I also wanted to know whether these candidates fit within the pattern of "deracialization" mentioned earlier (Austin & Wright 2004, Sonenshein & Pinkus 2005). Did they try to make themselves seem non-threatening in order to be eligible by a wide swath of the electorate? I then inquired about what specific campaign issues candidates ran on. My concern about issues falls into the general category of the way in which the campaign was run. As in, were the issues the candidates ran on Latino-specific or did they have universal appeal? I also tried to address the structural aspect of running by asking candidates about their experience with the county auditor's office. Through asking about the auditor's office, I wanted to know whether or not candidates experienced any formal barriers to running or whether the experience with the county was a positive one. These questions fall into the general context of the Voting Rights Act through a determination of the political system of the county, as well as, in gauging the overall amount of outreach done to the Latino community by the candidates . The interview with Conrado Cavazos lasted about 2 hours, the language used was casual, and the interview took place at a local café. The interview with Gabriel Acosta lasted roughly 45 minutes, the language used was also casual, taking place in Mr. Acosta's office in the Public Safety Building. Both interviews were recorded.

Finally, the background conditions and contextually specific factors were determined following elections analyses and interviews. I did not feel I could make a guess as to the factors affecting the county without having my questions grounded on the results of my election analyses and conversations with the people directly involved with and affected by the county's electoral system. Factors that are of importance in the context of Walla Walla are the small Latino turnout, the lack of racially polarized voting, the complete lack of outreach by candidates and the county alike, and the extremely small proportion of the electorate comprised of Latino voters. Following the determination of these factors, I then searched for articles that spoke to some of the conditions of Walla Walla such as the types of political campaigns carried out in small jurisdictions, what systems have been used to ensure proportional representation, the effects of outreach by candidates and the accessibility of bilingual voting materials on turnout.

**IV. Voting Rights Assessment**

This research has several constructive aims:

- To analyze the local electoral system of Walla Walla County in Washington State
- To determine whether institutional electoral practices have been put in place to dilute minority-voting power.
- To discern whether there is lower voter participation among Latinos
- To ascertain prevalence of racially polarized voting

An overview of each election that was analyzed will be provided followed by a more detailed assessment of the background conditions and the contextually specific factors for the overall results. The analyses will begin on the following page.

Election # 1
2007 College Place School District Elections, Position# 5

The 2007 College Place School District election was one of only two elections for which I could procure a complete voters' list from the auditor's office. This voters' list enabled me to determine the number of Latino voters in College Place, the number of Latinos who voted in the election, and the prevalence of racially polarized voting. It was also an election where a Latino, Vincent Jimenez, ran against a non-Latina candidate Marci Knauft, conditions that could potentially lead to racially polarized voting. Lastly, the electoral procedure for this election could have led to vote dilution in that it was an at-large position and citizens living anywhere in the jurisdiction could vote for the candidate.

Table 1, shown below, contains the overall results of the election:

**Table 1**

| 2007 College Place School District Elections, Position# 5 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non Latinos Registered 8836 | Non Latinos who voted 2868 | Voter Turnout as Percentage of Registered Voters 32.45% | Voter Turnout as Percentage of Electorate 97.65% |
| Latinos Registered 418 | Latinos who voted 69 | Voter Turnout Percentage as percentage of Registered Latino Voters 16.5% | Voter Turnout as Percentage of Electorate 2.35% |

Table 2 lists the overall results of the election with both the numbers of votes and the total percentage of votes received by each candidate:

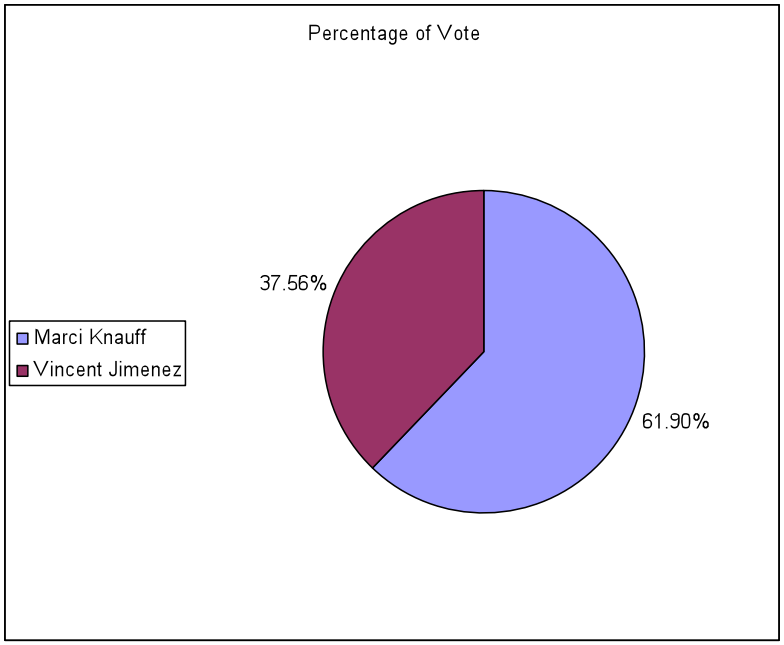
**Table 2**

| Candidate | Votes Received | Percentage of vote |
|---|---|---|
| Marci Knauft | 1373 | 61.9% |
| Vincent Jimenez | 833 | 37.56% |
| Write-in | 12 | 0.54% |
| Vote Totals | 2218 | |

Already from examining the overall results, one can see that the Latino proportion of the electorate was extremely low – only 2.35% for Latinos compared to 97.65% non-Latinos. In addition, even Latino turnout as a percentage of registered voters was about half that of the non-Latino population (16.5% compared to 32.45%). Latinos in this case are following the general trend found both in Washington State and nationally of

considerably lower turnout than their non-Latino counterparts (Office of the Secretary of State 2007, Census Bureau 2000). Table 2 provides the numerological breakdown of the election results. Judging from these numbers, the Latino candidate must have had a wide appeal to non-Latino voters as he received 833 votes whereas only 69 Latinos voted.

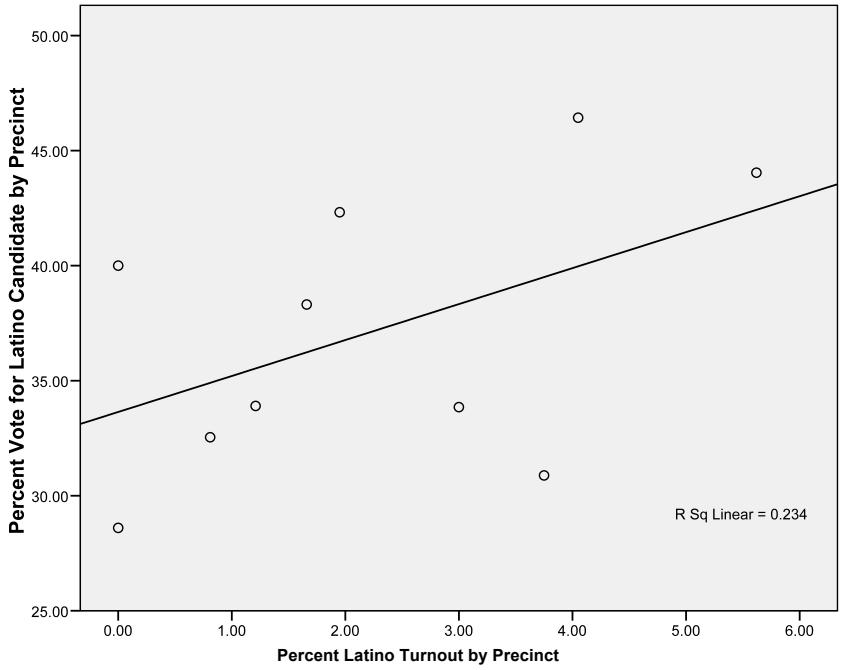
**Graph 1** **2007 College Place School District Elections, Position# 5**




Graph 1 provides a percentage breakdown of the number of votes received by each candidate. Jimenez, the Latino candidate, received 37.56% of the vote whereas Knauft, the non-Latina candidate, garnered 61.90%. Regression Analyses (?)

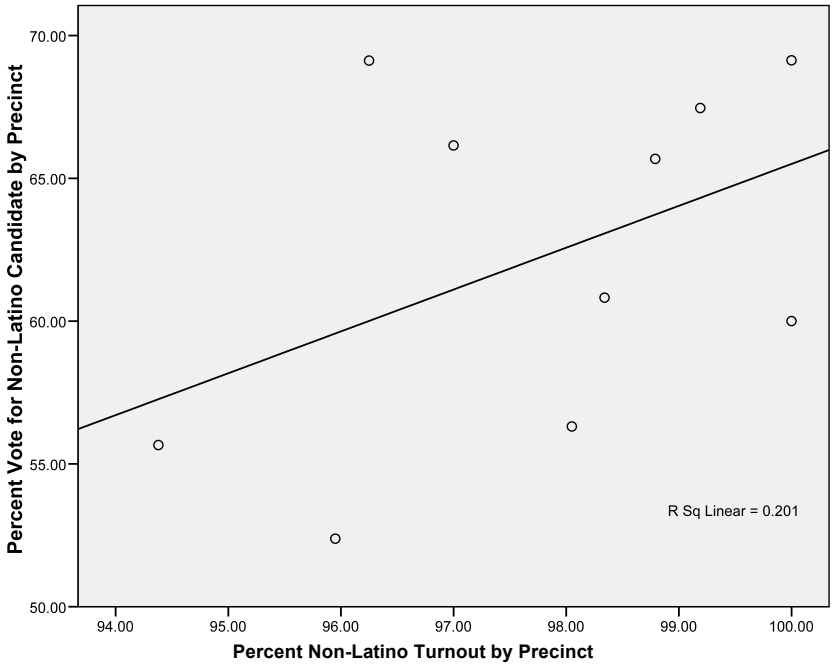
**Regression Analyses:**

**Graph 2** **2007 College Place School District Elections, Position# 5**




The presence of racially polarized voting is determined by ascertaining the percentage of Latino voter turnout in each voting precinct for both Latinos and non-Latinos and then the percentage of votes cast in favor of the Latino and non-Latino candidates respectively. The correlation between these two factors leads to a regression coefficient, where the closer $R^2$ is to one (1) the greater correlation there is between a certain type of voter turnout and votes for a particular candidate. In this case, I analyzed the effect of increasing Latino turnout on the number of votes for the Latino candidate. The $R^2$ coefficient is 0.234, thus there is a 23.4% correlation between votes for the Latino candidate and Latino turnout, which does not indicate the presence of racially polarized voting. In fact, even in areas with no Latino turnout the Latino candidate was able to receive as much as 40% of the vote.

**Graph 3** **2007 College Place School District Elections, Position# 5**




This graph examines the effect of non-Latino turnout on the number of votes for the non-Latino candidate. Through running a linear regression analysis, I found only a 20.1% correlation between non-Latino turnout and votes the for the non-Latino candidate. This indicates that non-Latinos did not vote as a block for their candidate, for increasing the non-Latino turnout does not necessarily guarantee an increase in the number of votes for the non-Latino candidate.

Election # 2
2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1

The Walla Walla primaries in 2007 was an instrumental race to analyze in that the voting area was much bigger than in the previous race, for it involved the 25 precincts within the city of Walla Walla, as opposed to the 10 precincts in College Place. With an increase in the number of precincts also comes an increase in the number of voters. Position #1 in Walla Walla City Council is an at-large position determined by overall election results from the 25 city precincts. The primary election is used as a means to determine the two candidates who will run for the position in the county general elections in November. The two candidates chosen to run are the two biggest vote getters of the primaries.

**Table 3**

| 2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Candidate | Number of Votes | Percentage of Votes |
| Duane Thomson | 696 | 16.69 |
| Conrado Cavazos | 643 | 15.42 |
| Jim Barrow | 780 | 18.70 |
| Robert L. Rehberg | 513 | 12.30 |
| Bobby Hodge | 1518 | 36.39 |
| Write-In | 21 | 0.50 |

Cavazos came in fourth in overall elections results and thus was not allowed to run in the November general elections.

**Table 4**

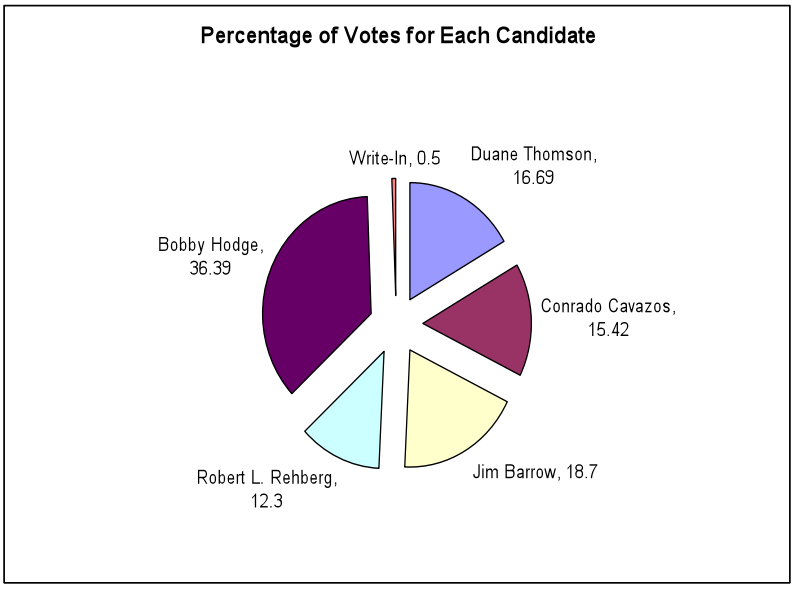
| | Number of Votes Cast | Number of Registered Voters | Percentage of Registered Voters who voted | Percentage of Voter Turnout during election |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Non-Latino voters | 4057 | 20120 | 20.16% | 97.26% |
| Latino voters | 114 | 1459 | 7.81% | 2.74% |
| Total number of votes | 4171 | 21579 | | |

Table 4 represents turnout for both the Latino and non-Latino populations of the city of Walla Walla, the racial composition of the electorate, and overall turnout. As we can see, the turnout Latino percentage of the electorate (2.74%) is as negligible in this election as in College Place race between Vincent Jimenez and Marci Knauft where they comprised an even lower percentage of the electorate at 2.35%. In addition, Latino registered voter turnout is less than half that of the non-Latino turnout (7.81% Latino turnout compared to 20.16% non-Latino turnout).

**Discussion of Graphs:**

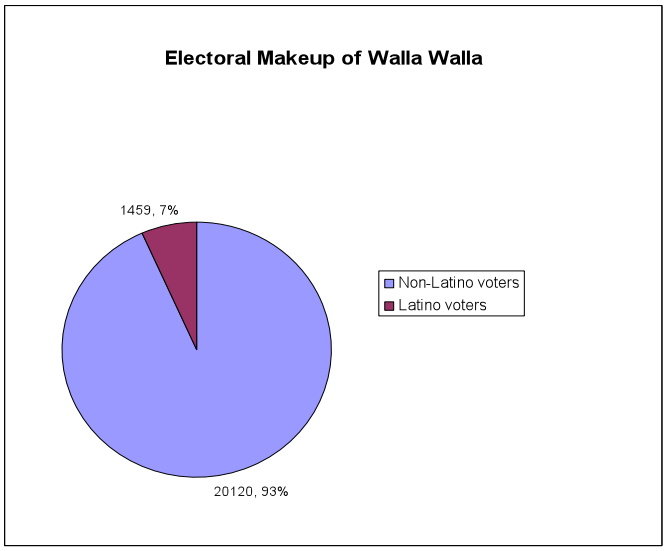
The graphs that follow below provide an overview of the 2007 primary election results:

**Graph 4** **2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1**



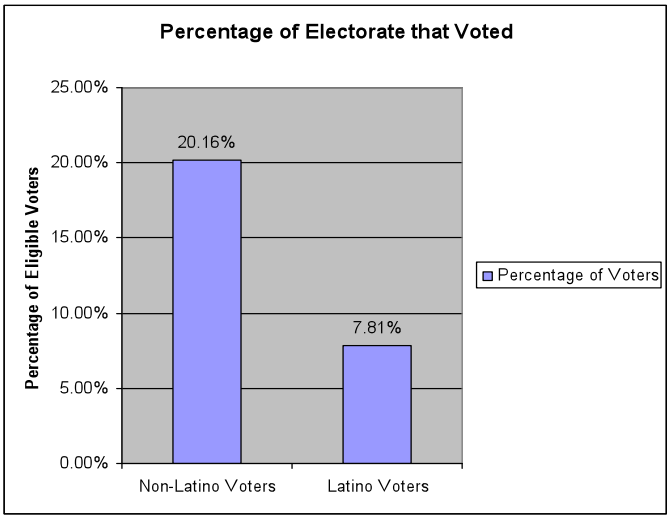

Graph 4 provides a percentage breakdown of votes received by each candidate. From this graph, we see that the Latino candidate, Cavazos, came in fourth place, not enough to continue past the primaries. However, it is important to note that he was not very far behind Duane Thompson, a non-Latino, and 3 percentage points ahead of another non-Latino, Robert L. Rehberg.

**Graph 5**



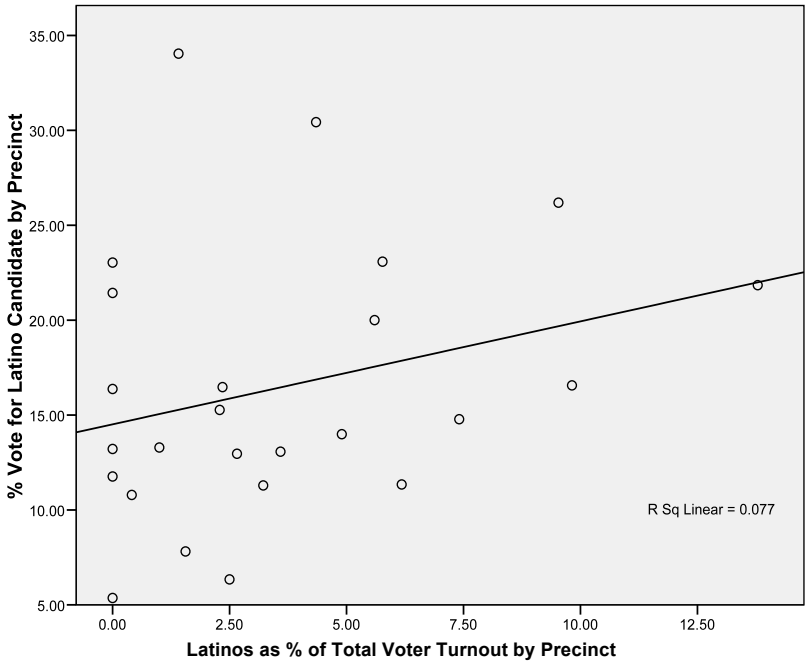

Graph 5 provides a visual breakdown of the Latino and non-Latino proportions of the registered voter population in Walla Walla. Latinos comprise roughly 7% of all registered voters whereas non-Latinos make up the other 93%. Also of note is the fact that Latinos make up 14.1% of Walla Walla's voting age population but only half are registered to vote (Census Bureau 2000).

**Graph 6** 2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1



Graph 6 provides a visual illustration of Latino and non-Latino registered voter turnout. As is evident, Latino turnout is 12.35% lower than non-Latino turnout.

**Graph 7** **2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1**

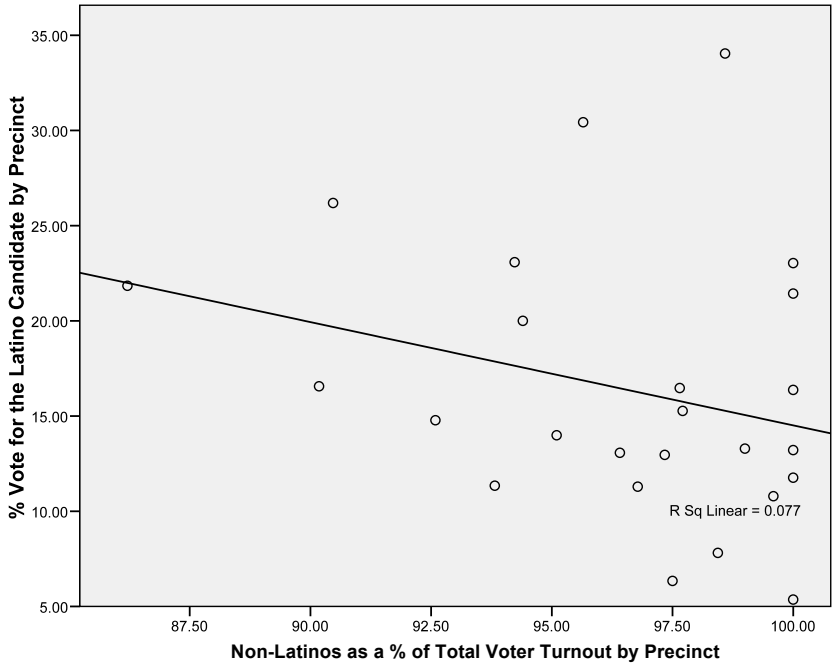



**Discussion of graph**

Two of the primary purposes of this election analysis are to determine whether there was vote dilution and whether or not racially polarized voting occurred. From the scatter plot graphs and subsequent regression analyses, I did not find racially polarized voting.

While looking at the election through Latino participation, there was not a significant correlation between votes cast in favor of the Latino candidate and Latino turnout. In fact, even in areas of low to no Latino turnout, the Latino candidate garnered 20% or more of the vote, with the precinct that granted him the most votes having a Latino turnout of less than 2.5%. The area with the highest Latino turnout also did not give the Latino candidate the most votes (only slightly more than 20% of the votes favored the Latino candidate). Lastly, the strength of the linear regression coefficient is too little, 0.077, whereas an election demonstrating racially polarized voting would have a coefficient of at least 0.5.

**Graph 8** **2007 Primary Elections, City Council Position #1**




**Discussion of Graph:**

This graph is the same as the previous graph except with non-Latinos in the X-axis. The reason being, in a primary election with several non-Latino candidates, it is difficult to gauge whether or not the number of votes for the non-Latino candidate increased with non-Latino turnout, as there were several non-Latinos. In a racially polarized setting, one would expect that the higher the non-Latino turnout, the lower the number of votes cast in favor of the Latino candidate. However, in this graph one is able to ascertain that even in precincts with an extremely high non-Latino turnout, the percentage of votes cast in favor of the Latino candidate is significant (i.e. in precincts with 100% non-Latino turnout the Latino candidate received over 20% of the vote).

Election # 3
2002 Walla Walla District Judge Elections

The 2002 District Judge Elections for Walla Walla County was in a way the most comprehensive, but simultaneously, most limited election to analyze. The limitations came in the form of the availability of data, whereas for both of the 2007 elections, I was able to procure the complete voters lists which included not only the names of those who voted, but also *all* the registered voters in the county regardless of their voting status or whether or not they voted in the last elections. For the 2002 elections, given that the county is not required to keep the names of all registered voters for more than two years, I was only able to find the lists of those who voted. However, this election was the only countywide election involving a Latino candidate running against a non-Latino for which I could do an analysis. Although the turnout figures based upon registration were not calculated, I still calculated the percentage of Latino turnout in each precinct.

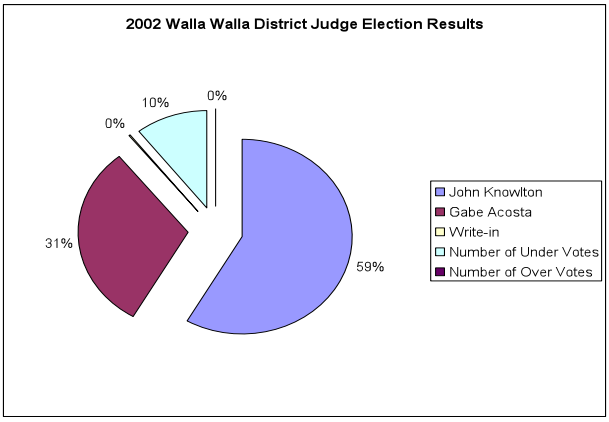
Table 5, below, details the number of votes received by each candidate:

**Table 5**

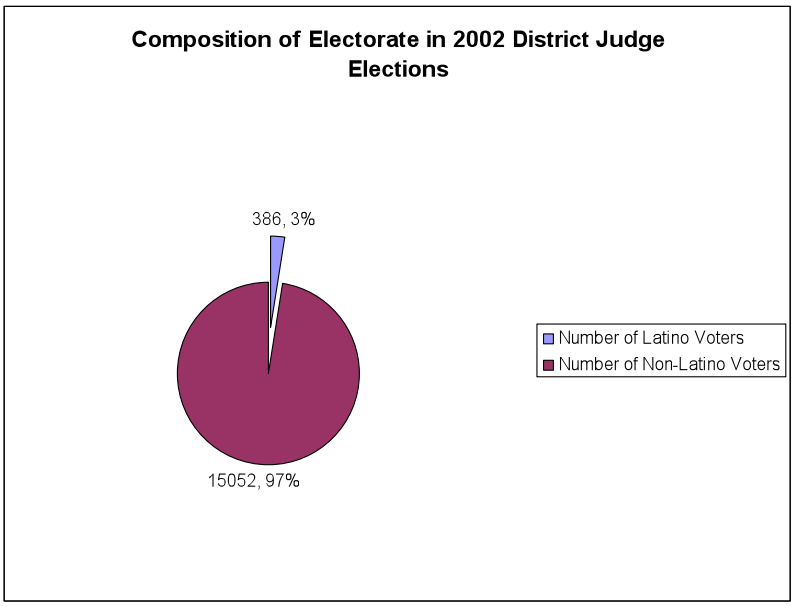
| 2002 Walla Walla District Judge Elections | | |
|---|---|---|
| Candidate | Number of Votes | Percentage of Votes |
| John Knowlton | 8996 | 58.27% |
| Gabe Acosta | 4780 | 30.96% |
| Write-in | 43 | 0.27% |
| Number of Under Votes | 1617 | 10.47% |
| Number of Over Votes | 2 | 0.1% |
| Number of Latino Votes | 386 | 2.5% |
| Number of Non-Latino Votes | 15052 | 97.5% |

From table 5, we can see that the Latino candidate received 30.96% of the vote. In addition, his support came mainly from non-Latinos for only 386 Latinos voted in this election. Even if Latinos had thrown their support completely behind Acosta, it would not have had a significant impact in these circumstances. Graph 9 below offers a visual breakdown of the vote percentages garnered by each candidate:

**Graph 9**

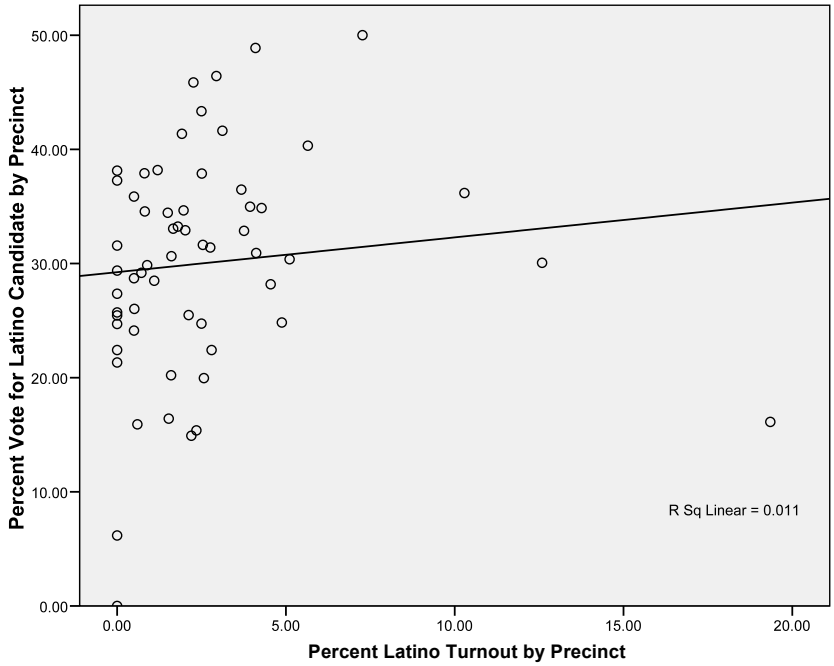


**Graph 10**



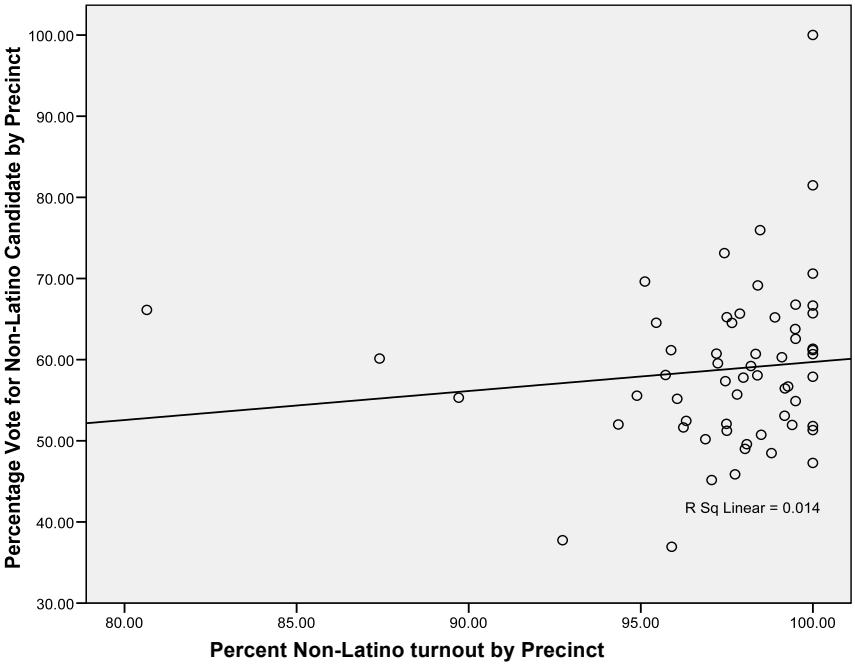

Latino voters made up about 3% of voter turnout on Election Day, which falls in line with both of the other elections analyzed. Latinos, regardless of citizenship status, comprised 12.3% of the voting age population in 2000, a turnout of 3% falls considerably short of proportionality in representation of the population. By taking into account the total number of voters, 1851 Latinos would have needed to vote in order to have proportional representation on election day.

**Graph 11** **2002 Walla Walla District Judge Elections**




While examining the election from the perspective of Latinos, we see that racially polarized voting is virtually nonexistent with the $R^2$ coefficient very much below 0.5 (the threshold for significant correlation) at 0.011. Based upon the figures on Table 5 as well as from this graph, we see that even in precincts with a smaller Latino turnout, the Latino candidate was able to receive quite a bit of the non-Latino vote. Thus the number of votes for the Latino candidate does not necessarily increase with additional Latino turnout.

**Graph 12** **2002 Walla Walla District Judge Elections**




Similarly for the non-Latino candidate, there was no racially polarized voting as is seen by the extremely small $R^2$ coefficient of 0.014, showing little to no correlation between race and votes for the non-Latino candidate. Votes did not necessarily increase for the non-Latino candidate, as one would expect for racially polarized voting along with the percentage of non-Latinos living in a precinct.

## Election Discussion and Interviews

Elections

A trend observed for all three elections is the relatively small share of the electorate that Latinos comprise which hovers at around 2.5% for each election. In other eastern Washington cities, that number has been markedly higher in recent elections; in Wapato for 2007, Latinos comprised 46.5% of the electorate in city council elections (Dollar 2008), in Pasco for the 2005 countywide elections, Latinos comprised 7% of the electorate (Shadix 2008), in Othello for the 2003 countywide elections, Latinos comprised 17.24% of the electorate (Phillips 2008). Although these examples are widely ranging in Latino electoral makeup, overall Latino turnout was markedly higher. In fact, given how Latinos comprise 17.4% of the city's population and 17.2% of the county's population, the fact that the electorate is only 3% Latino exemplifies their gross under representation at the ballots. This might be due to the fact that Latinos also comprise a very socially disadvantaged group in the county.

For the 2007 elections, where I could determine the turnout of voters based upon registration, for both elections I found markedly lower Latino turnout than non-Latino turnout. The primaries, in turnout figures for Latinos, were 7.81%, whereas for non-Latinos they were 20.16%. In the general elections in College Place turnout was 16.5% for Latinos and 32.45% for non-Latinos respectively. Overall the general trend is that Latinos turn out much less at the polls than do their non-Latino counterparts, which is consistent with the findings of both the NALEO report on the state of Washington and with figures from the US Bureau of the Census for the 2004 Presidential elections.

Low voter turnout in Walla Walla then could be largely taken into account by a number of factors some of the most prominent being socioeconomic. The 2000 census found that in the county only 44% (81.1% for non-Latinos) of Latinos graduated high school, and just 4.8% (23.3% for non-Latinos) possessed a bachelor's degree (Census Bureau 2000). Income for Latinos is also markedly lower in Walla Walla than for the greater population. According to Census figures, the per capita income for Latinos was only $7902 compared to $16509 for non-Latinos. Finally, Latinos in Walla Walla are much younger than their non-Latino counterparts with a median age of 22 compared to the non-Latino median age of 35 (Census Bureau 2000). Highton and Burris' report *New Perspectives on Latino Voter Turnout in the United States* found that once socioeconomic factors had been taken into account such as education, wealth, and age, the differences in turnout between Latinos and non-Latinos virtually vanished (Highton & Burris 2002).

However, socioeconomic factors do not explain the full array of disenfranchisement in Walla Walla. Other factors include, as will be demonstrated by my subsequent interviews, a complete lack of outreach by both the County Auditor's office and Latino political candidates. Latino candidates have in the past proven instrumental in mobilizing Latino voters such as in elections examined by Matt Barreto throughout five urban centers (Barreto 2007). In addition, the county lacks bilingual voting materials, which in one study were found to lead to at least a 5% increase in voter turnout (Jones-Correa 2005). More empirically and in the context of eastern Washington, once Franklin County was found to be in violation of section 203 and implemented bilingual voting materials, Latino turnout increased by 7.7%, being 10.0% in the 2001 elections, and increasing to 17.7% in the 2003 elections, post section 203 (Shadix 2008).

Another very important trend to note is the lack of racially polarized voting in all of the elections. This finding implies that non-Latinos and Latinos are not voting as a block for their particular candidate. The lack of racially polarized voting is also consistent with the concept of "deracialization" mentioned earlier where minority candidates deemphasize any sort of ethnic ties in order to appear non-threatening and have a wide appeal to the majority group (Austin & Wright 2004, Sonenshein & Pinkus 2005). Both of the candidates, I interviewed ran on platforms of community issues, not Latino issues. Neither candidate did significant and visible outreach to the Latino community and both thought their viability as candidates could disappear by mentioning race at the elections. Based upon my analyses, these candidates were at least partly successful in acquiring votes from the majority, but Latino turnout remained marginal at best.

## Interviews

In order to better evaluate the situation of voting rights in Walla Walla and to place it in greater context, I conducted three interviews one with the County Auditor and the two others with former Latino candidates. By "greater context," I mean placing Walla Walla within state and national trends by examining what is being done on a county level and by political candidates to mobilize voters, how inclusive the electoral system of Walla Walla really is, and whether or not there are any formal barriers in place to prevent the Latino vote.

### County Auditor interview

Interviewing the County Auditor was an obvious choice for she is the county official responsible for overseeing and administering all elections in the county yearlong. Thus as one who works directly with the system, she provided me with information concerning general election procedures in the county as well as information specific to the Latino community. Through our hour and a half of interview time, the Auditor painted a picture of an office that is cash strapped and generally overworked with the number of functions it is expected to carry out. In addition to elections, they are responsible record-keeping for the entire county. Thus the office does not carry out much voter outreach other than what is required by law which includes printing two newspaper ads, one the day before elections, one during the week leading to it, and making the forms available to any and all who wish to register. The auditor made it very clear that her office does not have the staffing which would allow her to conduct outreach to the Latino community and with her current budget, it will not happen. As she says during the interview, "As far as voter outreach there's not that much there, we would like to get some more done but we need to get some more staffing and people that can do some of that" (auditor interview 2008). The auditor sees her office understaffed as it is and conducts outreach only as it is mandated by law for, they are constantly working on elections – now up to 52 days ahead of time. When asked more specifically about voter outreach in Spanish newsmedia, the auditor replied "No…no, no. Unless the feds come down and say 'you have to do it,' no we're not required to do it" (auditor interview 2008). As mentioned earlier, she attributes the primary cause of a lack of outreach to be a lack of staffing and resources to do the outreach.

In addition to a lack of outreach to the Latino community, there is a near-complete lack of bilingual voting materials. Since the county is vote-by-mail and polling places have been eliminated, monolingual Spanish speakers may receive a ballot but due to the language barrier may not know how to fill it out. The only form in the office to be in Spanish is the voter registration form already translated by the State. The office also lacks certified bilingual staff and bilingual programs. Instead, when questions arise in Spanish, there are several staff members who are employed both by the county and are available in other offices, who can speak Spanish. However, these staff members have limited Spanish proficiency, "they [the staff] can read it [Spanish] a little bit…so that makes…we have that obstacle we have to deal with if we are told that we have to do it [outreach] that way" (auditor interview 2008).

When asked about the political culture of Walla Walla, the Auditor made it seem that those who do run, are well known in the county, and that many of the lower profile positions are uncontested because the populace just wants those certain positions to be filled without the need for competition. There is then a general consensus among the community and those in power concerning appointments and uncontested positions for those who do receive such positions are well-known members of the community and are generally believed to be capable of doing a "good job." The consensus accounts for the fact that the few Latinos, I found through the election records, in power in Walla Walla were appointed or ran unopposed.

*Discussion of Interview*

Although Walla Walla County possesses no *formal* barriers to Latino enfranchisement, they nonetheless have to surmount sizeable obstacles to voting if they are monolingual or if they wish to run for a political position. As mentioned by Jones-Correa in his *article Language Provisions under the Voting Rights Act: How Effective Are They?* Latino turnout has been shown to increase by at least 5% in counties that use bilingual voting materials (Jones-Correa 2005). The at-large system itself is also stacked against the Latino community for even if they were to vote as a bloc and possessed 100% turnout, if the Latino candidate was not acceptable to the non-Latino majority, they could not win. Whoever runs in the county is heavily dependent on the non-Latino vote. Latinos, as found through my election analyses, make up an extremely small portion of the Walla Walla electorate (around 2.5% each election). If there is no outreach done by formal government entities such as the Auditor's office, that number is unlikely to increase especially since the county lacks bilingual ballots. Although it is difficult to gauge the exact impact bilingual voting materials would have in the county, US Census data seems to indicate that it would be substantial; Spanish speakers who speak English less than very well comprise 41.4% (3582) of the County's Latino population and 72% (6233) speak Spanish rather than English at home.

Finally, based upon elections results Latinos running in contested races have been unable to win over the past 8 years and Latinos who are represented in the city council or other branches of local government have either ran unopposed or been appointed. This is reflective of the "general consensus" the auditor mentioned in that those who do receive these positions are already well-known in the county. In other words, Latinos who are in power are those who are acceptable to the county.

Gabe Acosta interview

I chose to interview Mr. Gabriel Acosta because his race for district judge was the only one to be county wide and as a candidate who campaigned throughout the county, I thought he would be able to provide me with valuable insights about campaigning in Walla Walla.

Choosing to run based upon his experience as district prosecuting attorney and due to his belief that he could do a good job, Mr. Acosta tried to reach out to as much of the community as possible. Overall, Mr. Acosta presented himself as one whose campaign focused upon issues of general concern to the community and not as a "Latino" candidate, "I am Hispanic and the people who know me well, know I am Hispanic. There's also people who don't know I am Hispanic, I don't associate with a Hispanic organization. I just never have. I tried to just be kinda of a regular person, I suppose, for lack of a better term. You know 'non race'" (Acosta interview 2008). In fact, he chose not to do any outreach specific to the Latino community for fear that too much outreach to the community might lead him to be identified as a "Latino" candidate and hurt his chances for election, "Because of my perspective that this is a conservative county or a conservative base, that running distinctly as a minority, would cause them to have second thoughts about my candidacy as a person as opposed to as a minority" (Acosta interview 2008). Mr. Acosta did not want to be pegged as a "minority" candidate, but as a candidate who happens to be a minority, if the minority issue were brought up at all. Mr. Acosta characterized one of his experiences with a key member of the political parties in Walla Walla as telling of the mindset of the political establishment, "I had one individual who is a – keep in mind that in this state judges are non-partisan and I have never been partisan, that could have been a downfall in my election campaign – but a key person in the political parties regarding my campaign he told me flat out 'I don't think this town is ready for a Hispanic judge'" (Acosta interview 2008).

As far as his experience with the County Auditor and the community in general, Mr. Acosta characterized them as very positive and that he was well received in homes while campaigning door to door, "I don't feel like I was ever discriminated against while running or received any criticism or any negative impact while running. So I have no idea what impact that had" (Acosta interview 2008). He also received much community support for his candidacy especially from law enforcement, jurors, and victims with whom he had worked in the past.

Mr. Acosta attributed his losses mainly to his opponent's greater judicial experience and political connections, "The reason I lost is because I didn't have the judicial experience and the political connections the other candidate had. But other than that who knows?"(Acosta interview 2008). He also said that the political climate in Walla Walla has changed over the years, whereas before it was more characterized by an "ol' boys" system now, with the retiring of former officials, it is becoming more open and accessible to those who have typically not held power in the system.

*Discussion of Interview*

Mr. Acosta's electoral experience closely resembles the political climate described by the County Auditor. He chose to disassociate himself from any racial ties in order to increase his appeal to the town's conservative base and to keep the viability of his political candidacy. As he phrased it, running as a minority would, "cause them [the county] to have second thoughts about my candidacy as a person as opposed to as a minority." Acosta did not play up his Hispanic roots or do any outreach to the Hispanic community because he believed that could potentially be viewed as threatening by the non-Latino majority. Acosta ran under the same premise as LA's Antonio Villaraigosa through the concept of "deracialization." In an article that examines deracialization in LA's mayoral race of 2001, authors Wright and Middleton characterize deracialization by three elements: "promoting 'nonthreatening' images, purposely avoiding racially divisive issues, and carrying out aggressive grassroots mobilizing efforts" (Austin & Middleton 2004, 284). By disassociating himself from any racial label, campaigning on issues of wide appeal, and doing a door-to-door campaign, Acosta ran a classical deracialized campaign. Those efforts did in fact lead to the vast majority of his supporters being non-Latino as he garnered 4780 votes (30.96% of the total) with only 386 Latinos voting.

Acosta experienced no formal barriers to running and had a very friendly and cordial relationship with the Auditor's office. However, his failure to actively campaign for the Latino vote only further disenfranchised a community who does not receive any formal outreach from the Auditor's office. His convictions that running as a Latino would have hurt his political base, also leads one to wonder whether the few Latinos who have been appointed in the county can or even want to represent Latino issues for fear of their own positions.

Conrado Cavazos

Finally I chose to interview Mr. Conrado Cavazos both to provide further perspective on the electoral system in Walla Walla and because his campaign was recent and city-wide.

Coming from a migrant background, Mr. Cavazos was able to gain a degree from Whitman College and go on to law school. He has made it part of his life goal to run in elections in order to stimulate Latino voter turnout. During the interview, he mentioned running for a position in the city of Walla Walla for city council in 1991[3]. In that campaign, Mr. Cavazos claims to have won 49% of the popular vote, whereas his non-Latino opponent won with 51% through absentee ballots. For both that campaign and the campaign he ran in 2007, Cavazos portrayed himself with as much community appeal as possible. However, unlike Mr. Acosta, he did some outreach to the Latino community by running call-in campaigns, focusing his efforts on Latino voters. However, he failed to publicly identify as a "Latino" candidate because that would signify a loss of electoral support, especially since he was dependent primarily on white voters for his election. In addition, his financial support for his campaigns either came out of pocket, as in the case of the 2007 primaries, or through a "Korean storeowner, and some white guy" in 1991 (Cavazos interview 2008). Mr. Cavazos characterized the Latino community as one that

[3] The auditor's office did not have data available for that election

is uneducated about the US voting process. Oftentimes while he was running, Latino individuals would ask him questions such as "What is a council? What do they do?" He feels that money should be spent not on just registering voters but also on voter education through the Spanish newsmedia, radio, flyers, and classes.

When elaborating further on the political culture of Walla Walla, Cavazos characterized the Latinos in power as "anglicized." By that term, Cavazos meant Latinos who had grown up in Walla Walla with the non-Latino establishment whose only ethnic connection were their names.

Like Acosta, Cavazos experienced no formal barriers to running and characterized his relationship with the Auditor's office as a very good one. When asked about what he would do in terms of increasing Latino turnout if he had the money and resources, Cavazos said he would like to have classes in the various schools, hold community forums, and heavily advertise in the Spanish media in order to educate Latinos about voting.

*Discussion of Interview*

The Cavazos interview both continued the trends found in the auditor and Acosta interviews and added a new dimension to the discussion. The trends found in this interview were that only Latinos who were accepted by the political establishment were appointed to positions of power and that Cavazos, like Acosta, also ran a deracialized campaign (not much ethnic identification, mainstream issues, and grassroots mobilization of voters). The picture painted of the county is one that is dominated by a non-Latino majority who admits to its ranks only Latinos who will promulgate the status quo. The new dimension Cavazos added to the discussion on Latino turnout was that of education. He emphasized again and again that voter registration is not enough, but that actually educating Latino voters about the voting process is how Latino turnout can be increased.

**V. Synthetic Discussion of Findings**

From a political standpoint, the Latinos in Walla Walla County are invisible. They not only make up a disproportionately small percentage of the electorate at each election (roughly 2.5%) while comprising 17.4% of the county's population (Census Bureau 2000), but they are also mostly ignored by county officials and candidates alike. Under their current level of participation, it is highly unlikely that Latinos in the county could effect substantial political change or shift resources in favor of minority concerns. From my interviews with the Auditor, Gabriel Acosta, and Conrado Cavazos, it seems that even the appointed Latinos will have a difficult time representing minority issues, for by their very appointment, they are not seen as threatening to the majority and are not very "Latino" identified. The Latinos in Walla Walla are in dire need of ethnically identified candidates, outreach by the Auditor, and bilingual voting materials in order to address at least part of the concerns which keep them from casting votes on election day.

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We are then left with the question of what could be done to ameliorate the desperate situation of Latino disenfranchisement in Walla Walla. My immediate recommendations are that the County should begin providing bilingual voting materials (ballots, instructions, certified bilingual staff in the auditor's office) these changes have been shown in the past to increase voter turnout by 5 percent (Jones-Correa 2005). If

Latino turnout were to increase in Walla Walla by 5%, although far from ideal, effective Latino enfranchisement would be closer to reality. In the past, for minorities as disenfranchised as Walla Walla's Latino community, the Voting Rights Act has been applied to create single-member voting districts with a racial majority (Geron 2005). However, that solution is inapplicable to Walla Walla County simply because even if all Latinos were to become citizens overnight, they do not comprise a large enough portion of voting precincts to elect a candidate of their choice (Census Bureau 2000). Even if district elections were to be established, and Latinos concentrated in a few districts, Latinos could elect only one perhaps two of their preferred candidates to the 7-member city council. Even if these candidates were elected, it is likely, judging from the reluctance of candidates to identify as minorities, that they would be prevented by the non-Latino majority from implementing Latino-focused policies.

Solving the institutional problem of effective electoral representation for Latinos will require more than the *physical* presence of Latinos in city council. I would argue that the very structure of Walla Walla's electoral system would need to be changed into one of either cumulative voting or limited voting. If the city of Walla Walla were to change its electoral system to one of limited voting by decreasing the number of seats in city council to 5, and electing candidates by plurality with a voting threshold of 17 percent for winning, then the total minority population of Walla Walla (33.6% of the total population according to the 2000 US Census) could have a coalition candidate represent their interests. The city of Walla Walla also has a segment of the majority population that has consistently voted for the Latino candidate, roughly 30%; this "liberal" non-Latino segment would elect a second candidate of its choice. A third candidate would be comprised of spillover voters from the "liberal" non-Latino segment, minority voters, and majority-aligned voters. The other two candidates would represent majority interests. However, with this set-up in mind, the majority could no longer merely gloss over minority concerns, but would have to address them directly, or at least compromise, with the third swing candidate holding the keys to the passage of measures. The process just described closely mirrors a hypothetical scenario proposed by Guinier in "The Triumph of Tokenism" (Guinier 1991, 1138-1139). In fact, with limited voting and cumulative voting in jurisdictions whose minority population numbered less than 50 percent of the general population, Latino candidates were elected 70 percent of the time they ran and African American candidates were elected 96 percent of the time (Brockington et al. 1998, 1115).

If increasing outreach, providing bilingual voting materials, and changing the elections system of Walla Walla were to be implemented, I firmly believe Latino turnout and proportional Latino representation would become a reality.

Other data that would have greatly added to this project, but that I was unable to procure, would be studies of rural jurisdictions and political cronyism or collusion. Through my research, I found that Walla Walla does have a political establishment that is not usually challenged, it would be interesting to read other scholarship on this very pertinent area. In addition, counties should be required to maintain their complete past voters' lists in addition to current voters' lists in electronic format. Having this information would have greatly enriched this project, but I was limited to both the elections available in the office and could only calculate voter turnout for elections for which I possessed full voters' lists.

In conclusion for Walla Walla's Latino population and for Latinos both in Washington State as well as nationally, the new focus of voting rights litigation should not be in establishing more district elections but for LV or CV voting practices. Given the demonstrated success of these systems in achieving proportional minority representation and their adherence to the concept of one-person one vote, I firmly believe they are the best way to achieve minority enfranchisement in areas where they do not comprise a numerical majority. I would also urge Latinos who are already accustomed to the US political system to be more proactive in holding political candidates and counties accountable to them and to exercise their citizenship by both educating other Latinos on voting procedures and actively doing outreach within their own communities. Latinos have the potential to be a crucial constituency in any election where they comprise a sizeable portion of the voting population; it is time for them to exercise that power.

## Appendices
## Interview Question List

### Questions for Walla Walla County Auditor

1. Can you provide me of a general overview of how elections occur in Walla Walla County? Such as when voters need to register by and how people file for political office?
2. Based on the 2000 US Census, Walla Walla County had about 7000 Spanish speakers and about 2200 inhabitants who either did not speak English well or not at all. I am wondering then, based on the high number of Latinos in the county, if your office provides any bilingual (Spanish) voting materials, including ballots, instructions for filling those ballots, etc?
3. What about voting information such as how to register to voter and when to vote and how to vote? Is any of this information made available in Spanish?
4. What kind of outreach does your office do to encourage the Latino population to vote? By that I mean, are there any advertisements placed in Spanish-language newspapers, radio, and other media sources? Are there any mailings targeted at the Latino population?
5. Is there any Spanish language assistance in your office such as a person who is bilingually trained to answer questions by phone in Spanish during regular business hours?
6. When the ballots are mailed out to each voter are there any Spanish-language voting instructions?
7. Based upon my election analyses of the 2007 primary as well as the general elections, Latino turnout was considerably lower than the turnout for the general population (20.9% gen and 7.81% Lat & 32.45% to 16.5%) why do you think that is?
8. Based upon my findings, the Latinos holding political office in Walla Walla County have either ran unopposed or been appointed, are you aware of any election in which a Latino candidate ran against a non-Latino candidate and won?

### Questions for Chief Deputy Prosecutor Gabriel Acosta

1. Can you tell me a little about your personal and professional backgrounds and what prompted you to run for district judge in the 2002 general elections?

2. Did you have much support behind you for the position before you decided to run? Who were your supporters?

3. How did you present yourself as a candidate? Were you seen as the “Latino” candidate or did you try to portray yourself in a way to have as wide appeal as possible?

4. How did you conduct your campaign? Where did you advertise (newspapers, radio, TV ads)?

- Did you do any outreach specific to the Latino community?

5. What were your interactions with the county auditor's office like?

6. While looking at the election results for the 2002 general elections, I found that in precincts in College Place (CP1, CP2, CP4, also Paine) you received either close to the majority or the majority of votes. Can you recall anything you did specifically in College Place that was not done elsewhere?

7. How would you characterize your overall experience as a candidate?

8. Has your Latino background ever come into play as a public official?

9. Is there anything you'd like to add about your experiences as a candidate and now as a public official?

**Questions for Conrado Cavazos**

1. Can you tell me a little about your personal and professional backgrounds and what prompted you to run for Walla Walla city council last year?

2. Did you have much support behind you for the position before you decided to run? Who were your supporters?

3. How did you present yourself as a candidate? Were you seen as the "Latino" candidate or did you try to portray yourself in a way to have as wide appeal as possible?

4. How did you conduct your campaign? Where did you advertise (newspapers, radio, TV ads)?
- Did you do any outreach specific to the Latino community?

5. What were your interactions with the county auditor's office like?

6. How would you characterize the accessibility of the political environment in Walla Walla to Latinos?

7. How would you characterize your overall experience as a candidate?

8. In the precincts of Alder, Birch, and Green Park, you either came in second or had the majority of the votes, can you tell me a little about what you may have done differently in those areas than in other precincts where you did not get the majority?

9. With your experience with the Latino community, both as the son of farmworkers and through your various political campaigns, what would you say needs to be done to increase Latino voter turnout?

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