



## Political participation among Latinos in Washington State in 2013

Two community conversations at a glance

Latino eligible voters in Washington State are voting at lower rates than the general electorate. Two groups, mostly politically active Latino voters, discussed key factors that motivate and discourage Latinos from voting.

### Pilot Project | Explore barriers and catalysts to voting among Latinos

A group of three co-researchers designed and organized two focus groups to explore barriers and catalysts to voting among Latinos in Washington State.

The three collaborators in the design and execution of this project were:

- Laura Flores Cantrell – Executive Director, Latino Community Fund
- Cristina Labra – Voter Education and Outreach Coordinator, Elections Division, Office of the Secretary of State
- Felipe Rodriguez-Flores – Master of Public Policy student, Simon Fraser University.

The goal of the project was to generate dialogue among Latino registered voters to identify important themes related to civic engagement and voting. The information gained in this pilot project may guide future research that could be conducted with a broader base, in greater depth, or in different regions of the state.

After reviewing literature on voting behavior among Latinos in Washington State, the following research question was established: **Why do some registered Latinos vote, while others do not?**

### Analysis | Voter education is necessary

The focus groups took place at restaurants in South Seattle on August 19th, 2013 and in Kent on August 20th, 2013. Twenty-one participants took part in the first group, and seven were part of the second.

Participants in both focus groups described various ways in which political awareness had motivated them to vote. Most of the participants were frequent voters who said that they care strongly about voting and civic participation. They mentioned important sources of electoral information, such as websites, radio, newspapers, political campaigns, and personal acquaintances.

The two focus groups generated insightful conversations about the social, political, and cultural environment for La-

tino eligible voters in Washington State. These discussions illustrated numerous barriers that discourage Latino U.S. citizens from voting. They also identified key factors that motivate participants and their acquaintances to vote. The themes identified in these focus groups are consistent with previous findings and observations from studies of voters of various ethnic communities in Washington State.

Participants in both focus groups agreed that more voter education at various levels is necessary. This includes programs aimed at specific groups of Latinos, including immigrants, older adults, and youth. These discussions provided insight about ways in which education, access and representation influence electoral participation by Latino eligible voters.

## Findings | Why do some registered Latinos vote, while others do not?

### Discouraging factors

Participants discussed several factors that had previously discouraged them and other eligible voters from voting. The themes that emerged are:

- 1 lack of understanding of the elections process
- 2 an intimidating political process
- 3 perceived lack of influence
- 4 cynicism towards politicians
- 5 lack of campaign outreach in Spanish
- 6 lack of civics education
- 7 lack of Latino candidates
- 8 uncompetitive races

### Motivating factors

The focus group conversations also covered factors that had motivated or inspired participants to vote. These included the following themes:

- 1 exercising rights
- 2 the good of the community
- 3 local impact
- 4 inspiring candidates
- 5 important ballot measures
- 6 personal relevance

## Next steps | Outreach to Latino eligible voters is essential

Participants agreed that increasing education and outreach efforts to Latino eligible voters is essential. The conversations in these two focus groups, as well as academic studies in the state and throughout the country, suggest that much work remains to be done to engage and inspire this growing segment of the electorate—particularly monolingual Spanish speakers and youth.

Further research would enable deeper understanding of this complex topic, as well as ways to address it. Some of the individual themes, such as knowledge of the political process or the lack of outreach by political campaigns, could be studied with a narrower focus. Further qualitative research statewide could provide understanding about the particular experiences of voters in Washington outside the research area.

Contacting infrequent or disengaged registered voters to learn about their experiences and perspectives may be particularly helpful. This would allow average citizens to directly express their views about civic engagement. In turn, this could provide government agencies and community groups with valuable information about the most effective policies and programs to encourage potential voters to participate in elections and increase voting rates among Latinos.