

MAPPING THE VOTE: EXPANDING THE MINORITY YOUNG ADULT ELECTORATE

Iska Nardie-Warner, James Morris-Lent, & Michael Augustine, Whitman College
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TOPIC: This study examines the current situation of young adult (18-29) minority political participation in the state and identifies regions throughout the state in relation to the higher education, occupation, and criminal justice social environments where an increase in this political participation can most impact elections and the community. We conducted this research in partnership with Laura Flores Cantrell, Executive Director of the Latino Community Fund of Washington.

METHODS: We downloaded U.S. Census Bureau data, requested voter registration lists from county auditors, and received state voter turnout data from Washington's Secretary of State for a spatial analysis of current registration and voting trends among minority populations, particularly Hispanics, using Geographical Information Systems (GIS). Additionally, we collected racial/ethnic and age-categorized enrollment, employment, and criminal justice data from the National Center of Education Statistics, the Washington Employment Security Department, and Washington's Department of Corrections, respectively, as well as insights on voting behavior within these social environments from organizers, members, and officials of various affiliations.

FINDINGS:

- Across 12 studied counties, 38% of Hispanic adults are registered to vote, while 84% of Non-Hispanics are registered; Across the state, about 50 and 10 percent of *registered* Hispanic young adults voted in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Across the board, young Hispanic voters are realizing only a distressingly small fraction of their potential political power.
- Yakima, Grant, Franklin, and Adams show the highest Hispanic 18-29 population proportions, as well as some of the lowest Hispanic registration rates and Hispanic 18-29 turnout rates.
- Cong. Dist. 4 and State Dist. 13, 14, 16, and, particularly, 15 have high Hispanic 18-29 population proportions. Additionally, Cong. Dist. 9 and State Dist. 33, 37, 11, 29, 43, 16, 14, 30, and 48 have high minority 18-29 population proportions.
- Heritage U., Yakima Valley C.C., Big Bend C.C., Columbia Basin C.C, Wenatchee Valley C. (51, 39, 32, 25, and 25 percent, respectively) have high Hispanic enrollment proportions and are located in communities with a high Hispanic population proportion.
- The Retail and Accommodation & Food Services sectors employ many young workers in all counties; in rural, largely Hispanic counties, agriculture employed many young workers. Hispanics work across all occupations but concentrate towards agriculture in rural areas.
- Minorities and young adults are disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system. Our interviews suggest that voting rights are not a top priority for re-entry programs and participants; this is compounded by a lack of clear communication of ex-felons' voting rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- We encourage community organizations to target registration and mobilization efforts in areas with high population proportions of minority young adults, low Hispanic registration rates, and/or low Hispanic 18-29 turnout rates. See areas referred to in findings above.
- We suggest that organizations target efforts toward the specific social environments of higher education, criminal justice, and employment, and seek to foster relationships between young minorities, communities, and institutions in these sectors.
- We urge state and local government to facilitate and support, via funding and/or capacity-lending, efforts by community organizations to register and mobilize young adults of color.
- We call for continued research exploring the relationship between political engagement and specific groups, programs, institutions, and firms within the studied social environments.

Full report online at www.walatinos.org

Contact: Prof. Paul Apostolidis apostopc@whitman.edu, James Morris-Lent
morrisja@whitman.edu