

A Case Study of Municipal Elections and Latino Voter Behavior in Yakima, Washington

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Abstract:

The purpose of this case study examines the aftereffects of the *Montes v. City of Yakima* ruling that led to Latinx political representation on the Yakima City Council. The study will look at the quick growth of Latinx representation on the City Council and the withdrawal of representation on the City Council as it currently stands. I will be examining the obstacles and barriers that Latinx candidates face both running and serving on the City Council and why even after this historic court ruling Latinx residents in Yakima don't have much political representation in city where they make up 45% of the population.

Part 1: Introduction

In 2012, the ACLU filed a lawsuit (*Montes v. Yakima*) on behalf of Yakima residents Mateo Arteaga and Rogelio Montes in the U.S. District Court for Eastern Washington, charging that Yakima's at-large City Council election system violated Section 2 of the federal Voting Rights Act. This suit said that Yakima's election system consistently allowed the majority population to defeat the candidates preferred by Latino voters and deprived Latinos of an equal opportunity to elect representatives of their choice. The seven-seat council was a hybrid, with three citywide seats and four representing specific districts, although all seven districts were elected by a citywide vote in the general election (Faulk 2019). In 2014, the District Court ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, finding that Yakima's election system decreases Latino votes and that "City Council elections are not 'equally open to participation' by members of the Latino minority."

The following year, the Court issued an order requiring Yakima to create seven single-member districts for City Council elections that was submitted by the ACLU. These seven single member districts for City Council gave Latinos a better opportunity to have representation on the City Council. Districts 1 & 2 which encompass most of the eastside of the City are where the majority of the Latino population reside in Yakima. The remaining districts the population are more mixed. A record number of Latinos ran for city council in the 2015 election, where “no previous Yakima City Council election had seen more than two Latino candidates dating back to 1975, the oldest elections record available on the Yakima’s Auditor’s website” (Faulk 2015). Ultimately, in the August primary, eight Latino candidates ran for City Council seats – a record number for Yakima. Additionally, voter turnout in two new, majority Latino districts cast more ballots than they did in the 2013 primary according to a study of voting records by the Yakima Herald-Republic. On a historic election night, three Latinas were elected to the City Council bringing diversity and voice for the Latino population that comprises 46% of the population. But just six years later following this historic victory for the Latino community in Yakima, the city council now only has one Latino representative on the council. What happened?

Historical Context

Washington State’s two biggest demographics are Whites which make up 78.5% of the overall state’s population, and the second biggest demographic group following Whites in the state are those who identify as Hispanic or Latino (13%). The majority of the Latino population in the state reside in cities and small towns in Eastern Washington. Most of the Latino population in Eastern Washington primarily identify themselves as Mexican/Hispanic. Mexican communities began to emerge in the Eastern Washington and other parts of the Pacific Northwest in the 1920s, “when agricultural production expanded and recruitment of Mexican labor

intensified” (Garcia, 2005). But like many minority groups in America, Mexican laborers faced racism and prejudice from white farmers, where “many Mexicans in the region were encouraged to leave and a policy of “whites only apply” developed because of the scarcity of work.” The Mexican population would rise in the 1940s during and after World War II. “For instance, as the United States entered World War II the immigration restrictions in place a decade earlier eased as the war caused labor shortages throughout the American West. Thus, the Pacific Northwest became the beneficiary of thousands of imported Mexican braceros from approximately 1943 to 1947” (Garcia, 2005). As the 20th century continued the Mexican population in the Pacific Northwest continued to grow and many of those moving to the area came not from Mexico directly but instead from the American Southwest, in search of a better life. By 1970 the combined Mexican population of Idaho, Oregon, and Washington reached 55,221. As the 20th century came to a close and the 21st century began, the Pacific Northwest was shown to have the highest increases in Mexican population in the country. “According to the 2000 U.S. Census, each of the Northwest states ranked in the top ten in regard to percentage increase of Hispanics and recorded a total Mexican population of 623,920, with the state of Washington, having the tenth largest in the nation” (Garcia, 2005). For one hundred years the Mexican population has grown to become the second biggest demographic group in Washington State and with that most observers would think that would give them substantial political power in Washington State politics, particularly at the municipal level in Eastern Washington where the majority of Mexican Americans live. But until the *Montes* ruling in 2014 that was not the case.

Municipal Elections in Eastern Washington

Following the ruling of *Montes* other cities across Eastern Washington other cities with majority Latino populations saw political representation at their municipal levels. For

example, “Latinos comprise 56 percent of the population of the Tri-Cities community of Pasco, but no Latino had ever won a contested city council election there” (Faulk, 2019). The city was forced to create six district elections and one at-large seat elected citywide following a ruling by a federal judge in 2016 after a lawsuit was filed by the ACLU. Three Latinos won contested elections to the Pasco council later that year. The *Montes* ruling also had an effect on state law as well, where in 2018 after years languishing in the State Legislature, the Washington Voting Rights Acts of 2018 was passed. The act makes it easier for disenfranchised communities to petition local officials for election redistricting before turning to the courts (Faulk, 2019). However, even with these changes through either court decisions or new voting rights laws, Latino candidates have not been able to run competitive races at the local or legislative level in Eastern Washington.

The three Latinas who were first elected in 2015 following *Montes* for various reasons would not be returning to the city council following the 2019 election. Dulce Councilmember C, one of the three Latinas council members was stepping down to attend law school. Councilmember C, 2017 campaign to continue representing Yakima District 2 was a bust after they failed to move past the primary. In a surprise to many, a white male conservative ended up winning the race (Faulk, 2019). The third Latina councilmember Carmen Mendez chose not to run for a second term in 2019 for political and personal reasons. While another Latina who had served on the city’s school board ran for Mendez position, two white candidates advanced to the general election in Mendez’s district. Why is that just a few years after a major victory for Washington’s Latino political movement in Yakima, political representation seems to be lessening instead of expanding? The purpose of this study is to examine why Latino voter turnout continues to remain relatively low in Yakima and why fewer Latinos in Yakima are

running for elected, and why those who do run are losing to White candidates in majority Latino districts.

Yakima Election Results (2015,2017,2019) – Yakima County Election Archives

- **2015 General Election**

Registered Voters - 108,263

Total Ballots Counted – 35,403

Turnout Rate – 32.7%

- **2017 General Election**

Registered Voters – 114,669

Total Ballots Counted – 32,207

Turnout Rate – 28.09%

- **2019 General Election**

Registered Voters – 119,198

Total Ballots Counted – 40,678

Turnout Rate – 34.13%

Part 2: Literature Review

My literature for my capstone focuses largely on reviewing studies done in the past on political mobilization and political representation of Latino and other BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities in elections. Most election studies tend to focus more on state and federal elections and BIPOC representation at those levels as compared to municipal elections that historically tend to have low voter turnout especially amongst those who identify as BIPOC. I narrowed my research on reviewing past studies that looked at specifically either Latino

populations or other BIPOC communities that had similar political mobilization efforts and trying to attain political power at different levels of government. Some of these studies don't just focus on Latino political participation but instead compare different minority groups in different case studies including groups such as African Americans and Asian-Americans. These types of studies reveal the competition within different minority groups of attaining political power and how some of these groups tend to fare better in elections for public office as compared to others. African Americans, a group for over a century through movements such as the Civil Rights Movement and today's Black Lives Matter Movement have built vast political networks with their community of building political power from the municipal level all the way to the federal levels of our government. Other groups such as Latinos and APPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) whose population groups are the fastest growing in the United States, have not been able to build the kind of political networks that African Americans have built in the last century or so. This is key to understand why Latinos have not had as much success as other minority groups in building political representation even in areas where they make up the majority.

Most of the published literature centered on the theory that those who identify as Latino will bring higher turnout amongst Latino residents living in the district the candidate is running for. This can be true whether this be in a majority-minority district or non-majority minority district. These findings from past research have given me insight and background that fit into my project's questions concerning why political representation at the city council level in Yakima has decreased since the *Montes* ruling despite Latino people making up 49% of the overall population of the city.

One 2016 study by Fraga on the links between candidate race, district composition and turnout by leveraging a nationwide database of over 185 million individual registration records, including estimates for the race of every voter ([Fraga 2016](#)). The results of this study found that turnout is not higher in districts with minority candidates after accounting for the relative size of the ethnic group within a district. Instead, Black and Latino citizens are more likely to vote in both primary and general elections as their share of the population increases, regardless of candidate's race ([Fraga 2016](#)). The study focuses on not just general elections but also primary elections as well. Race is likely to be a salient factor when distinguishing candidates, and indeed, studies have shown that voters acknowledge primary candidate race/ethnicity, and often prefer co-ethnic candidates when choosing among co-partisans ([Fraga 2016](#)). Depending on the district and its demographics, minority candidates are also more likely to appear at the primary election stage. This is critical for minority groups because the more candidates that run the more likely at least one will make it on to the general election. This in turn will lead to higher turnout during the general election. Latinos also turn out at significantly higher rates when they make up a larger portion of the district population, where shifting the district from 10% Latino to 50 Latino, in the absence of a Latino result in a 6.4 average increase in Latino turnout ([Fraga 2016](#)). This result the study attains is from a sample size far larger than just one city council race, instead looking at minority voting patterns from a country-wide point of view. I'm focusing on a local municipal government where the population of Latino has increased substantially over the years and yet there still tends to be low voter turnout among the Latino population even whether there is a Latino candidate or not which ties into the reasoning as to why Yakima's Latino population has small political power.

Another study argued that increased threats and prejudice following the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016 would lead to increased political mobilization in the 2018 election among Latino across the United States. The study focused on Latino voting in the 2018 midterm using aggregate election data from 2014 and 2018 midterm elections as well as a large 10-week tracking poll of Latinos during the last two months of the 2018 election (Reny et al 2018). The study talks about the two main factors that tell us a lot about whether an adult vote or not. The first is whether the individual was socialized to be politically active by their parents and peers and the second is whether the individual has the requisite resources (money, time, civic education etc.) that facilitate participation. When it comes to these factors, Latinos are at a disadvantage. With respect to socialization, over a third of Latinos in the US were born abroad and therefore learn about the US political system as adults (Reny et al 2018). This study found that even though the Latino community has faced prejudice and racism from the country's national leaders' threats and fearmongering aren't huge driving factors in getting Latino political mobilization but rather a combination of threat and mobilization leads to more Latino people voting. My study will focus on identifying political mobilization on the local level in Yakima that has its roots of fearmongering and segregation when it comes to the Latino population, seeing how the county that Yakima is in tends to vote overwhelmingly Republican over the years. This study does give some insight also into Latino political behavior and how they are at a disadvantage compared to Whites and other minority groups. My interview with participants with backgrounds in Yakima politics will highlight the threats and fearmongering they received while on the city council and why they chose not to continue to serve on the city council following their 1st terms in office.

Another study looked at the growth of the Latino and AAPI populations that are the fastest growing demographics in the U.S and how candidates running for local office must appeal to diverse electorates and the ways that ethnic endorsements from groups can either better or harm minority candidates running for office. While other scholars focus on candidate's racial/ethnic attributes, ethnic group endorsements are understudied. Whether such endorsements induce voters to choose ideologically similar candidates or local settings. The study found that ideology influences voter's choices, but that ethnic group endorsements weaken spatial voting (Bordreau et al 2019). The latter effect among whites is driven by racial/ethnic stereotypes. This study focused on two different cities in San Francisco that has a diverse population of made up of Latino, Chinese, and Whites in particular making the study a good look into how certain minority groups have to weigh the importance of ethnic group endorsements and the backlash it might face from the White population that may have different ideologies than the ethnic group organizations. Yakima and San Francisco are very different cities when it comes to its demographic and region but there seems to be some similarities when it comes to the voting ideology of its white population who have more negative racial/ethnic stereotypes and how the endorsement of certain ethnic group endorsements might hurt potential candidates seeking office. Political activism is also far scarcer in Yakima for potential Latinx candidates compared to a city like San Francisco where millions of dollars are poured into even local campaign races due to the overall wealth of its residents compared to that of Yakima that lies in Eastern Washington with a population of just little over 90,000.

Another study focuses on five case studies and a dataset of candidates to open congressional races with a Latino population plurality from 2004 to 2014. Latino majority districts congressional districts are far more likely to elect Latino representatives to Congress

than majority-white districts. However not all majority-Latino districts do so. This study focuses the level of influence of political parties and interest groups in majority-Latino district races for the U.S House of Representatives. The study argues that variation in organization, involvement, and support from political networks explains why some majority-Latino districts are successful at electing co-ethnic representatives, and others are not (Ocampo 2018). These political networks are very integral and influential in the recruitment and non-recruitment of minority candidates. When it came to the five case studies, the paper found that the electoral success of Latinos is intricately tied to the political networks in their districts and the support from they receive from these networks (Ocampo 2018). Assistant from these political networks can include a vast of campaign resources that are needed for a candidate to win including financial contributions, coordinated expenditures and independent expenditures. Resources from political networks also come in the form of endorsements, door knockers, pollsters, ad makers, and volunteers (Ocampo 2018). One of the questions I plan to ask to the participants in my study will be about the influence of political networks in Yakima and how vital they are in getting Latinos elected to the City Council.

One study that correlates a lot with my case study is a study about the continuing question about how electoral structure influences Latino representation. The findings in the study suggest that electoral structure and voting strength are key components in determining the likelihood of Latino representation but specific demographics and institutional contexts determine how this matter: *Ceteris paribus*, ward elections hurt Latino chances of representation, unless they are high levels of segregation within a district (Shah 2009). This would make sense when it comes to Yakima, as my early general research indicates that much of the Latino population in Yakima reside primarily in two districts on the eastside of the city which is due to segregation from past

decades. This study focused on school board elections due to past research that showed school board position as the most often sought-after offices Latinos and African Americans pursue early in their political career. Among the 3,929 Latino elected officials in the United States in 2000, 42.8% (1,682) serve on school boards (Shah 2009). This study offers me insight into my own study in regard to one the level of political and social assimilation of the Latino population in Yakima and how that might yield more or less political representation on the city council.

Another study also focused on school board races but instead assessed the effects of centralized government on political empowerment among black and Latino candidates. At times, the state has prevented racial minorities from achieving political power; and at other times, it has helped in the process of political power. In addition to centralizing governance authority of the school district, state takeovers of school districts disproportionately affect Black and Latino communities. Nearly 85 percent of takeovers occur in districts where blacks and Latinos make up the majority of student population (Morel 2016). The case study the paper focuses on is set in Newark, New Jersey and looked at that city past history of segregation and what led to the state takeover of the school district in 1995. The study found support for the argument that the effects of takeovers are influenced by the level of political empowerment a particular community has at the time of the takeover (Morel 2016). Latinos, who had low levels of political empowerment at the time of the takeover in Newark schools in 1995 did not view the takeover as a threat, and in fact, gained greater representation on the school board as result of the take-over. This study serves as an example of how centralized government can have both positive/negative effects on minority groups, like how Latinos in Yakima acted positively following the ruling in *Montes* which argued that the current election system violated the federal Voting Rights Act.

Finally, one of the last studies I examined was a study done in Yakima that identified Latino political mobilization and civic involvement in Yakima specifically measuring and evaluating the extent to which radio and print media in the area communication relies on the content and language of the stories and messages. The three main newspapers that were examined in the study was *El Sol de Yakima*, *Tu Decides* and *!Viva!* all of which are weekly publications based in eastern Washington and circulated throughout the Yakima area. Through the interview the author did it was quite clear that there is potential for more involvement. When asked how they knew about the caucus, several Latinos I spoke with said they had heard from their friends and family members about it, but there weren't any formal organizations that approached them (Navarro 2008). One of the people the author interviewed was Elizabeth Figueroa who was at the time a deputy director for LULAC (League of Latin American Citizen) and was asked whether or not there was a group or organizations in Yakima that does a really good job the Latino community involved politically, which Figueroa replied, "Unfortunately most of the groups are kind of divided. That seems to be something I've noticed. Rather than getting together, they're kind of just going apart (Navarro 2008). The author concludes with recommendations including more coverage on local issues, more stories written by local reporters staffed by the newspaper itself, more balance between U.S. and Mexican news. This study was very helpful for me in getting me background about the presence of Latinos and more specifically hearing examples from actual activists and residents in Yakima.

What this case study will focus on is I'll be asking participants questions about why they believe Latino representation is currently low on the city council and the different factors that make it hard for Latinos to run and be elected to the city council.

Part 3: Methodology

My primary research began with first doing some reading about Latino participation in Eastern Washington as a whole and then narrowing it down to Yakima, Washington specifically. There I began reading several articles from the *Yakima Herald-Republic*, the primary newspaper in the Yakima area and focused on articles concerning Yakima elections in the years following the *Montes* in 2014. From there I began collecting lists of names of candidates, activists, and interest groups that had been involved in Yakima elections in the years including the three Latinas that won city council seats in 2015. Additionally, I went to the Yakima County Elections website and researched all council elections from 2015 to 2021 and collected the voter data from races that Latinos sought in both the primary and general election. Following this research, I began narrowing my list of potential participants to candidates running for city council with a Latino surname this election cycle, 2021, and also reaching out to the three former Latinas who had served on the City Council following the *Montes* ruling and the only Latino/a currently serving on the city council. I first found the best ways to connect with the potential participants either through the emails they used to file for candidacy on the PDC (Public Disclosure Commission) website or connecting with them through social media platforms (Facebook and LinkedIn). I created an email template that I sent to all potential participants stating who I was and why I was reaching out to them for participation in my case study. I also included a consent form that I created stating the purpose of my research study and included their rights to their privacy and confidentiality. Following initial contact, I sent follow-ups to any participants I hadn't heard from yet to see if they were interested or not in the study. The ones I did get call-backs from, I set up 30-minute interviews that were all taken over the phone and recorded and

also in advance sent to each participant an interview protocol document listing the questions (8 total) that I would be asking during the interview.

Part 4: Results and Discussion Themes

After reaching out to potential participants for my case study, I interviewed three individuals who had experience in Yakima local elections. Each interview lasted around 30-45 minutes long. My first interview was with candidate Candidate A who is running to represent District 2 on the city council. This is their first time running for office, but they currently work for the Yakima County Elections Department in their bilingual program. They decided to run for City Council because they believe that the Latino community needs who understand how municipal elections work and want to have representation and see real change in Yakima. My second interview was with candidate Candidate B who is running to represent District 4. Candidate B had run for city council on three occasions in previous elections and is now running for a fourth time for District 4 which has been his home district for the past 20 years. They had also previously run for WA 4th Congressional District in 2014 but was unsuccessful. They'd considers himself not an activist but a volunteer and has been involved in civic engagement in the Yakima area all his life starting in his early 20s when they were elected Chair of Yakima County Democrats. Having been involved in local politics for so long they continue to run for public office because they understand policy and want to make a difference in his community. The final participant I was able to interview was one of the Latinas that served on the City Council following the *Montes* ruling; Councilmember C. Councilmember C had never run for public office before, but they family had been heavily involved in politics including during the Chicano movement in Texas. They mother as well was the founder of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce in Yakima and also runs a non-

profit that has been there since the 90s. Following graduating high school in 1997, they went on to have a career in politics and policy in Texas and Arizona, where they worked in the Texas Legislature for a Democratic State Senator who represented the El Paso area. They had worked in prior campaigns in the Southwest as well. They hadn't lived in Yakima since they were in high school and only had returned to Yakima a few years prior to the *Montes* ruling but they did believe they had something to offer and wanted to find new ways to get involved in the community. They also brought up some of the upbringings in Yakima in particular when they first moved with the family to Yakima when they were nine years old and the school put, they in an ESL class even though they could fully read English, but because they are having a Spanish surname, they were put into the class at first. Reviewing all three of these interviews I identified major and minor obstacles and barriers Latino's face running and serving on the city council, and why there continues to be little Latino political representation in Yakima.

Voter – Turnout

The most frequent reasoning behind there being a lack of Latino political representation that all the participants mentioned in their interviews was the lack of Latino voter – turnout in elections. Candidate A who is running for District 1, which is heavily Latino (75%), is currently being held by a white male who won the seat back in 2017, defeating another Latino candidate who was running for the seat by 339 votes according to the Yakima Elections Board results. They mentioned that the reasoning behind the current councilmember being a white person is due primarily to the still very low-voter turnout in both primary and general elections. The population of District 2 is roughly 13,500 but only 447 people voted in the Primary, and only 807 voted in the general election back in 2017. They do mention that there is a lack of voter outreach within the Latino community even with “ads, Spanish radio, billboards etc.” Candidate B who is

running for District 4 in which the population is more mixed went further explaining the low voter-turnout among Latinos. “The community as a whole is not voting”. Latinos in the community don’t like to donate mainly due to the fact they don’t have the extra money to donate unlike White residents [they mention that they were able to get a donation from an Attorney for \$250]. Many of these council races they note that they’d run for they’d lost only by a few hundred votes in District 4. They mention also that they think younger voter are in their own world and that is very hard for name recognition. They also mention that the State Democratic Party only seems to be interested in GOTV (get out the vote) efforts during statewide races and not the municipal level in Eastern Washington. They believe they should be doing these kinds of voter outreach year-round in order for there to be meaningful and lasting change in the community. Candidate B also says that “Turnout is very low whether it’s in the majority Latinos districts or in the more mixed districts. There are efforts every election cycle to get people to come out and vote, but turnout rates overall barely hit 30% and that’s even lower when you focus on those with Latino surnames.” Candidate B gave me the results of the election with those who have Latino surnames in the 2015 and 2017 in District 4. In 2015, they made it to the general election but lost and out of the 1,356 people with Latino surnames that registered to vote, only 167 people vote in the general. They lost by 271 votes (Yakima County Elections Archives). In 2017, they ran again but did not advance in the primary and in that election, of the 1,550 people with Latino surnames that registered to vote, only 218 actually voted. They received 146 votes in that election and the candidate that did have the most votes in the primary received 322 votes. Should be mentioned that they were one of 6 candidates running for District 4 in the primary (Yakima County Election Archives). Former Councilmember Councilmember C who represented District 2 which is also heavily Latino, the turnout rate was still very low in the first special

election in 2015. They mentioned that also most of the registered voters in the district when they first ran had Caucasian surnames, so the Latino community was already at a disadvantage due to low voter-registration. They mention also the historical factors. “Many Latinos are migrant workers and low incomes and feel they don’t have their voices heard so why participate at all.” I asked they is if there was any difference between the voter participation of Latinos in the Southwest where they worked for a while, and the voter participation of Latinos in Yakima. They said “It’s the same. It’s not any different. A lot of people are intimidated by the process in general. They are ignorant in a way of the process.” With such low voter-participation among Latino voters even in the heavily Latino populated districts, it’s very difficult for Latino candidates to be elected to the city council.

Lack of Political Networks

Along with low voter-turnout among Latinos being a factor in the low political representation of Latinos on the city council, a lack of established and strong political networks was another theme that was brought up by all three participants. Candidate A mentioned that it takes a lot of time and resources to build a campaign. The best way to connect with the voters is through canvassing and doorbelling they mentioned. There are also few political advocacy groups in Eastern Washington they noted and the groups that are out there are small, and their main offices are in Western Washington. Candidate A talks about recruiting volunteers saying “if I was 18 years old out of high school looking to join a campaign, it’s hard to find the information and learn how to join one. One of the few political action committees (PACS) that is out in Yakima, Candidate A mentions is the Washington Builders Home Association but is very dominated by the Republican Party and conservatives according to Candidate A. Candidate A identifies himself as a Democrat, but by doing so they mentions that puts you in a box even

though city council is a non-partisan race where candidates don't need to declare which political party, they identify with. They have had interviews with a few individuals and notes "they ask a few filler questions to see what political party you identify with". Candidate A also mentions the importance of having an individual such as campaign manager or political consultant who "knows a lot of people in these groups or organizations, if even if their private citizens who want to help candidates, it's really hard to get the support of those organizations. There is a County Democratic party in Yakima, but Candidate A has not seen much activism from them. They had connected with a few groups including the Latino Community Fund and its affiliate Progreso Latino and did feel out their candidate questionnaires for endorsement. Candidate A says "they are working to expand in the eastside, they understand the demographics are changing here. Candidate B who had previously been the Chair of the Yakima County Democrats mentioned when they were chair had very little influence and they says it today has grown a little and they have office and raise money but still are at a disadvantage due to the geographics of Yakima County. Most of the Democrats they interacted with when they were Chair were in their 60s and 70s. Candidate B also remarked that when it came to statewide elections such as for Senate or Governor, that was when the political networks that are based in Western Washington would come out to register Latinos to vote, in which the community in Candidate B mind react with "oh here they come again, only when they need something". Candidate B also connects his need to upgrade his technology and how political networks provide those type of devices needed to run a successful campaign. "To get in the game, I had to get a PowerDrive. I had to upgrade my phone. I had to put a camera on my PC so I could do Zoom. I've had to upgrade to a router. A lot of things you have to invest in order to be in the game." They mention that these devices are crucial in recording the data collected from doorbelling and canvassing. My research had shown that

following the *Montes* ruling a lot of political organizations such as the ACLU of Washington and One America did a lot of political networking in getting the three Latinas elected to the city council in 2015, but following that election, these organizations left town without keeping in place the type of political networks Latinos would need to stay in power. Councilmember Councilmember C back up my research saying, “they absolutely did” and it’s all about getting statewide support and there’s a lot of money in non-profit organizations for voter-registrations, but are we results driven or just driven to keep the non-profit money coming in.” The literature I reviewed highlighted the importance and need for strong political networks to aide minority candidates getting elected at the municipal level, and without those networks its increasingly harder for minorities to gain political representation.

Lack of Voices/Influences

Another factor that all the participants brought up that seems to be a consistent obstacle Latinos face is the lack of voices and influential leaders in the Latino community to step up and be a voice for the community as a whole to participate in the democratic process. Candidate A mentions that the former Latinas who had served on the city council following the 2015 election, while were ground breakers, they weren’t trailblazers and personal circumstances and/or events led to them all serving only one term on the city council. They saw this as discouraging to other candidates to run for city council and also to voters. “It’s been discouraging of what we’ve had hasn’t led to the expectations of the court ruling.” In order to win, a Latino candidate has to be ‘almost perfect’ in his eyes in order to be elected. Wear suits and be the perfect candidate for everyone. They then say the following:

A candidate being elected and understanding how to take this raw data of concerns and opinions from the community and turning it into legitimate policy backed by that data. Once we

get that person, that person is going to be able to leave that lasting impression that brings everyone else up.

Candidate B mentions the lack of leaders within the community and that Latinos are just now making headway in elections even after following the victories in 2015. They put it as “like landing on Plymouth Rock and starting fresh.” Candidate B mentions how the first three Latinas who were elected have “gone under” and that the Latino community doesn’t have that someone with 50 years of experience that can act as the guiding influence in the community. Candidate B believes that the three Latina councilmember were ground breakers and did get some need city investments in Districts 1 & 2 which were largely forgotten about when the City elected city councilmembers at-large. But due to personal events and other factors, these Latinas councilmember in his mind left people dissatisfied in the community, and that is still being felt to this day. Former Councilmember Councilmember C, unlike the others, having served on the council looked at the lack of influence from that perspective as a person on the inside looking out. One of the biggest issues that was being discussed during they time on the council was building a plaza on the Eastside of the city in the district and over how much funding would be put into it. It faced immediate blowback and backlash from the White councilmembers but the three Latinas on the city council fought and succeeded in getting public funds for the city. They did seek reelection in 2017 but was defeated in the primary by another Latino and White candidate. The White candidate would go on to win in the general election by 339 votes. The turnout rate for the County that year was 28.09% according to the Yakima Election Archives. They finished up the interview by also pointing out that city council is part-time position, and they also had another job as they main source of income as the monthly pay for a city councilmember \$1,000 a month. Any political movement needs it leaders and groups that will act

as symbols for their community, and these types of individuals and groups in the community are missing right now in the Latino community in Yakima.

Partisan Politics

Finally, one of the other main hurdles Latinos face while running for city council in Yakima, is the partisan politics that are present between the Republican and Democratic Party's. Candidate A during the interview said, "its' very conservative, very rural, and agriculture." They go on and says, "being an agricultural area, there is a distinct line between those who pick the food (Latinos) vs the who own it (Whites) in which shows where much of the political power lies in Yakima." Most Latinos Candidate A says are conservatives in life but not in politics, in that they are very traditional in their way of life and due to their religion of whom most identify as Catholic. They do however still see the liberal aspect of other issues and that's why many do choose to identify themselves as Democrats. They mention that in his opinion the voting age of Latinos are in the middle when it comes to their political opinions and that in the recent Presidential election, Yakima County as a whole voted for Joe Biden over Donald Trump. Candidate A also sees the demographics changing in Yakima in the next few years and that Latinos are "not going to be in the minority much longer." Candidate B is very familiar with the local politics in Yakima and that the area is very conservative and Republicans are loaded up with candidates and that these groups who are in control don't want to give up their power in the city, even if they also can see the demographics changing in the favor of Latinos and Democrats. They do see Latinos attaining at least one seat this election cycle as there are 4 candidates running for District 2 and they all are Latino. Other districts outside 1 & 2, are harder for Latinos to run and win. They say District 4 is more mixed with "working class people and nice homes" compared to Districts 1 & 2 which they say are the poorest out of all of them. District 3 is

another district they say that could be held by a Latino as it was following the 2015 election, but other Latinos have chosen not to run or those who have run have not made it through the primary. The remaining districts, 5,6, & 7 Candidate B doesn't believe anytime soon there will be a Latino councilmember due the geographics of those areas which are more predominantly white with only small pockets of Latinos living in that area. District 4 again is a unique district in Candidate B eyes cause of the mixture of the people in the area. While they do identify as a Democrat, they nonetheless do reach out to conservative voters cause of the realities of the area they live in and has had some success with some of these voters, even getting one of them to put his campaign sign on a billboard that conservative voter owned. Former Councilmember Councilmember C was astonished when they returned to Yakima before they ran for city council. They attended some council meetings and said, "they felt that I had stepped back in time and issues being discussed were same issues that South Texas in the 60s in like profiling and low graduation rates in the community." While on city council, Councilmember C was also later appointed Mayor of Yakima for a time before stepping down in 2016 and continued the rest of the term on the city council. Many residents had been angry about they being appointed mayor because they didn't vote for, they to be mayor, again as they say an example of how residents in Yakima aren't aware that their city government is a weak-mayor form of government. Councilmember C also said the media portrayed here as representing just the Latino community and that being a woman of color, and a single woman they were going to face scrutiny and blowback by the more conservative Latino community. Partisan politics is prevalent at all levels of our government whether that be at the federal level or the municipal level and can make it harder for candidates to reach out to voters especially if they are minorities seeking office in a conservative area.

Part 5: Policy Implications and Conclusion

From my three interviews with candidates Candidate A, Tony Candidate B, and former councilmember Councilmember C, I've revealed some of the major of factors and obstacles that Latinos face in attaining political representation on the city council in Yakima. While the *Montes* ruling did lay the groundwork and provide a more equal playing field for Latinos to attain seats on the city council, factors such as low voter-turnout, lack of political networks, lack of community leaders, and partisan politics have hindered continued representation of the Latino community on the city council. My review of literature highlighted various different obstacles and factors that determine whether minority candidates are successful at attaining political power and many of those factors were brought up in my interview with the participants.

Voter-Turnout is the biggest factor. If you aren't able to mobilize the voting population that you seek to represent than your chances of attaining public office are slim to none. Candidates must have aggressive campaign strategies that include doorbelling, fundraising, and phone-banking if they hope to win on election day. Much of these GOTV efforts however can't be done without stable and consistent political networks in place in the area you want to represent. Political Networks as mentioned in various reviews of literature, can make or break a campaign. The support of local unions, community organizations, etc. are critical in helping a candidate build a winning coalition of voters. What these networks also provide to candidates is potential volunteers who will be needed to knock on doors, phonebank, host events, and other campaign activities. My interview also revealed the need for more leaders of influence in the Latino community who can help lead and persuade other Latinos to run for office in Yakima. More local leaders in Yakima both elected and unelected can serve as standard bearers to the Latino

community, but it will be on those individuals to stay in Yakima and grow their voting bloc from within. Finally, partisan politics can always be an obstacle for candidates to win office in areas where their politics may not align with the voters. Yakima is a city that is growing more democrat as the demographics continue to grow more Latino, but even Latinos hold some conservative views and candidates will have to find a way to appeal to different type of voters if they want to win.

Recommendations I would consider to Latino candidates in Yakima would be to build a stable and more robust political network in Yakima. Political organizations are scarce in Yakima and the resources they provide are critical in a successful campaign race. Therefore, organizations that are in Western Washington should create satellite offices in Yakima such as the ACLU and OneAmerica. These organizations were a part of the *Montes* ruling and also helped elect the first three Latinas to the city council. But, following the first election under the election process in Yakima many of these organizations left without continuing to build a coalition year-round. Other Latino organizations based in Western Washington such as Progreso & Latino Community Fund should also put more emphasis on building Latino political power in Eastern Washington where the Latino population is much bigger than in the Seattle area, where these organizations are based and where they seem to do most of their political work. What's most important is that these organizations actually have offices in Yakima and people year-round working in those offices to build the Latino voting bloc in Yakima and help identify individuals in the community that should consider running for office. I also recommend that the Washington State Democratic Party increase its efforts also in Yakima and Eastern Washington as a whole in electing Latinos to local offices. From my interviews, the local democratic chapter appear to be very weak in their influence and don't have the kind of membership following the local chapters

have in the Seattle area. If the State Democrats want to expand their representation in the Legislature, they should consider Yakima as a base of their operations in Eastern Washington due to its population size and demographics. Yakima also is in Washington's 4th Congressional District and in the years to come is expected to become even more diverse and could be a potential district to flip blue if Democrats begin now the organization of the Latino communities in the district.

My study did have some limitations primarily due to a lack of more participants. I had reached out to other potential participants including the other two former Latina councilmembers and also the only current Latino/a councilmember but got no response from them. I also had reached out to a few of the other Latino candidates who are currently running for city council in this election cycle but again received no response. I also reached out to the organizations that were mentioned in the interviews such as the Latino Community Fund and Progreso and to speak to their Yakima organizers with no success. While my study would have benefitted from hearing from more individuals, the interviews I was able to have provided substantive information about my research topic. Further research on this subject should involve further evaluation of Latino representation in Yakima following the 2021 municipal elections and examining the voter-turnout of Latinos in election as well.

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