



# SEATTLE VOTES



**2016 SURVEY RESULTS**

**LATINO  
COMMUNITY**

## About Seattle Votes

In 2015, the Seattle Immigrant Voting Rights Task Force released a report with recommendations for city and regional governments. One of the recommendations was to collect better quality data about immigrant and refugee voters. In response, the City of Seattle Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs undertook a community-based approach to research.

The result was the Seattle Votes Survey. This paper and electronic formatted survey was a research tool to help the City understand barriers to civic engagement (e.g., naturalization, voter registration, and voting) for immigrant and refugee residents. It was originally offered in 10 languages: Amharic, Arabic, Traditional Chinese, English, Korean, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese. Later, paper surveys in Filipino/Tagalog, Indonesian, and Khmer/Cambodian were available thanks to community support. In 2016, the City worked with more than 100 partner organizations to gather responses from 5,566 immigrant and refugee residents on civic engagement, the first such dataset for any city in the U.S. and one of the largest in the country.

We have consolidated the results from respondents who identified themselves as being born in a Latin American country, (which for the purposes of this report includes the country of Mexico and the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking regions of Central and South America and the Caribbean). This report presents several highlights from the data, as well as recommendations to help increase civic engagement in this community.

You can see the original English-version of the Seattle Votes Survey at: [www.bit.ly/SV\\_English](http://www.bit.ly/SV_English).

You can see the translated versions of the Seattle Votes Survey at: [www.seattle.gov/SeattleVotes](http://www.seattle.gov/SeattleVotes).

## Latinos in Seattle and Washington

While the Latino community in the Seattle area is made up of peoples from all over Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean, the largest group are those from Mexico. Mexicans in the Pacific Northwest date back to well before the founding of the United States, with Spanish expeditions, supported by Mexican labor, sailing up the west coast and into what would become Puget Sound. A few permanent settlements were established by Mexicans, but territorial claims in the Pacific Northwest by Spain were ceded to the United States in 1819.

The need for agricultural labor in Central and Eastern Washington, as well as large government reclamation and construction projects in the 1930s, led to the first major influx of Spanish-speaking migrants to Washington State. Many of these were Mexican Americans from the Southwest, but also included migrant workers brought into the U.S. through a special guest worker or “bracero” program. The need for these workers increased during World War II, and more guest workers came and settled in Washington, primarily in the Yakima Valley in Central Washington as well as the Skagit Valley in Western Washington.

Following World War II, while most of the workers that had come on guest visas returned to Mexico, many of these rural Latino families moved to the Puget Sound region in search of jobs in the booming post-war economy. The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act eliminated racial quotas, which led to changes in Latino immigration to Washington state. Whereas they had previously been primarily Latinos from the Southwest, now the Latino immigrants were mostly from Mexico itself. As part of the Civil Rights Movement, activism in the Latino community in the U.S. also spread to Seattle. In 1968, Latino students at the University of Washington established Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan (MEChA), and in 1972, educator Roberto Maestas and other activists created the community and social service organization El Centro de la Raza on Beacon Hill after the more than three-month-long occupation of the abandoned Beacon Hill School.

Increased political instability in Central and South America, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, led to an influx in non-Mexican Latino settlement in Seattle. These new immigrants came from countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador, Chile, and Nicaragua. Further, the lack of economic opportunities in Mexico ensured a steady stream of immigrants from Mexico, either directly, or via elsewhere in the U.S.

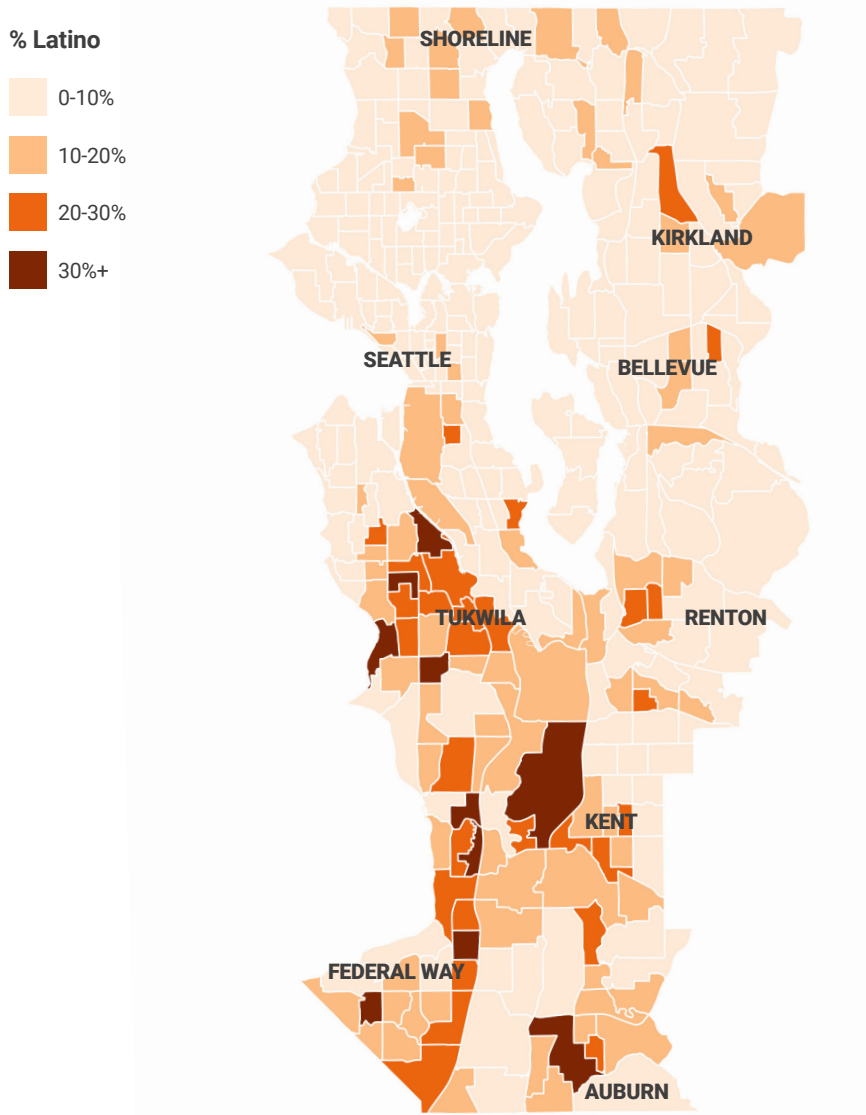
# At-a-Glance

## PLACE OF BIRTH FOR FOREIGN BORN POPULATIONS: 2012-2016

	SEATTLE	KING COUNTY	WASHINGTON
MEXICO	8,377	52,542	234,345
EL SALVADOR	1,157	4,489	10,579
GUATEMALA	679	4,655	10,958

Source: US Census, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Table B05006: Place of Birth for Foreign Born Population in the United States.

## LATINOS IN THE SEATTLE REGION BY CENSUS TRACTS (% OF TOTAL POPULATION)



Source: US Census, 2012-2016 American Community Survey, Table B05006: Place of Birth for Foreign Born Population in the United States.

## Interview with Tania Hino

Parent Educator Instructor, North Seattle College  
at Phinney Cooperativa Preescolar en Español



**What is your migration story?** I was born in Mexico. My mom was a single mom and a union organizer. She came to Texas first, so I stayed behind and lived with my godmother. She applied to get a visa. It wasn't coming fast enough, so she brought us over without one. We crossed the Rio Grande. In 1991, after a year of trying to find work in Texas, my mom brought us to Seattle. We had a Conoco gas card and \$20. But we got help from the YMCA and El Centro de la Raza.

After a while, my mom got into the University of Washington School of Social Work. Back then, there was a program to care for seniors. Basically, you

helped an elderly person live independently and, in exchange, you get housing covered. We lived with a woman who had Alzheimer's Disease for two to three years during high school. It was not so easy.

We got called for our immigration interviews in my last year in high school. They denied us. We had good grades, no criminal record. But, we had to leave the country. A supervisor at the border told us to go to U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, write her a letter, and request a letter of support. They gave us a temporary visa for three months in order to reach out to our elected officials. We were thrilled that Sen. Murray did write a letter for us. After a few months, we had to go back to Mexico for another interview. They approved us for our green card! I finally got it when I was 18. And after another five years, I became a citizen!

**What does participating in our democracy mean to you?** Right now, it is really hard. We have to be more united than ever. Just because the administration is not the best right now, particularly for Mexicans. I really like to get involved. If we stay quiet, nothing happens. We have to get involved in politics. We cannot ignore what is going on.

We need to educate people so that their voices count. When people are just focusing on survival, they aren't thinking about improving systems. Other people don't think immigrants care, but they are just surviving. But it is a little bit of a chicken and egg problem. If we get organized, we can change the systems that create barriers to participation.

**What was it like the first time you voted?** It was incredible! I felt like I was helping elect someone who was going to make change.

For the first time, I felt like I wasn't a ghost in the U.S. I didn't have a hard time figuring out who to vote for, because I was eager and read a lot. That wasn't the case for other people.

I remember I-200 (which ended state and local government affirmative action programs). The language was so tricky. I think I voted against affirmative action. I wish there was more information about what that was about. I know so many people that benefited from it. After that, I called people to figure out what was it about.

# Seattle Votes Survey

## About the Respondents

Almost 800 Latinos completed the Seattle Votes Survey. This survey was not a random sample. However, 65% of the Latino respondents were born in Mexico, which is roughly the same proportion for Seattle and King County. The following are additional characteristics of the respondents:

63%

of respondents are women

84%

speak Spanish as a primary language

52%

speak English either "not well" or "not at all"

Most are residents in these three ZIP codes:

98168

SeaTac/Tukwila/Burien

98146

White Center/Burien

98144

Central District/Beacon Hill

60%

have no more than a high school diploma or GED

60%

rent their homes

2/3

arrived in the US in the 1990s and 2000s

40%

of respondents were referred by either Sea Mar (16%), Simposio de Mujeres Latinas (15%), or Highline College (9%)

62%

of households earn less than \$41,000 annually

54%

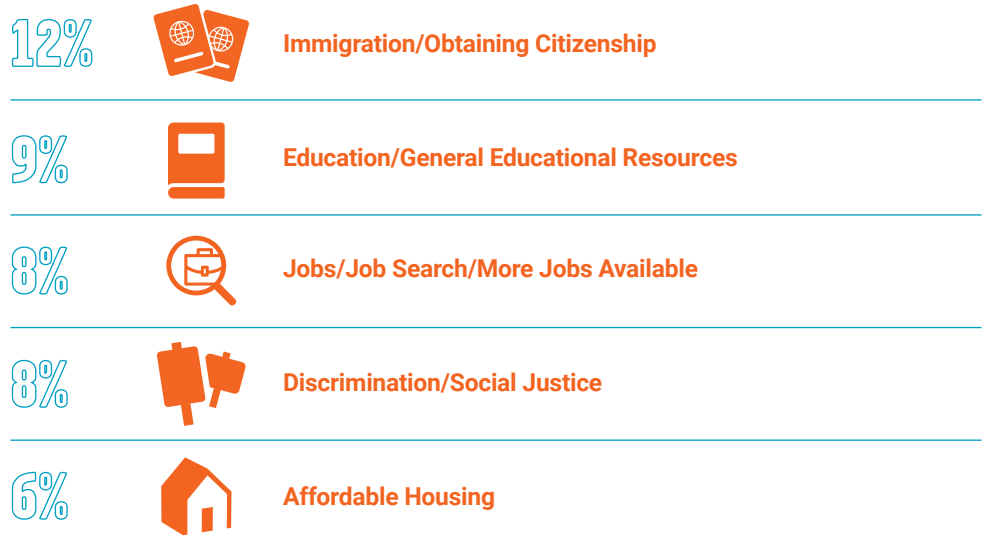
are in their 30s and 40s

# Findings

## 1. Immigration and a pathway to citizenship are top policy concerns.

When asked to prioritize up to three important policy issues, respondents chose immigration/obtaining citizenship most often (12%). Close behind were education (9%), jobs (8%), and discrimination (8%). Surprisingly, affordable housing was only cited by 48 respondents (6%). Taken as a whole, these preferences indicate a community struggling with a broken immigration system and focused on establishing themselves in a new country.

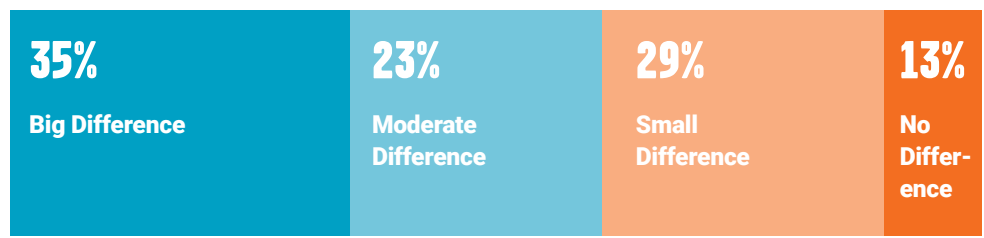
(Q7) What is the most important issue facing your immigrant and refugee community that you think our public officials should address?



## 2. Most Latinos queried feel a sense of agency.

A majority (58%) of those surveyed (750) thought that they could make a big or moderate difference in improving their neighborhood. This is a hopeful sign that Latinos in Seattle feel taking action can help solve problems in their respective communities.

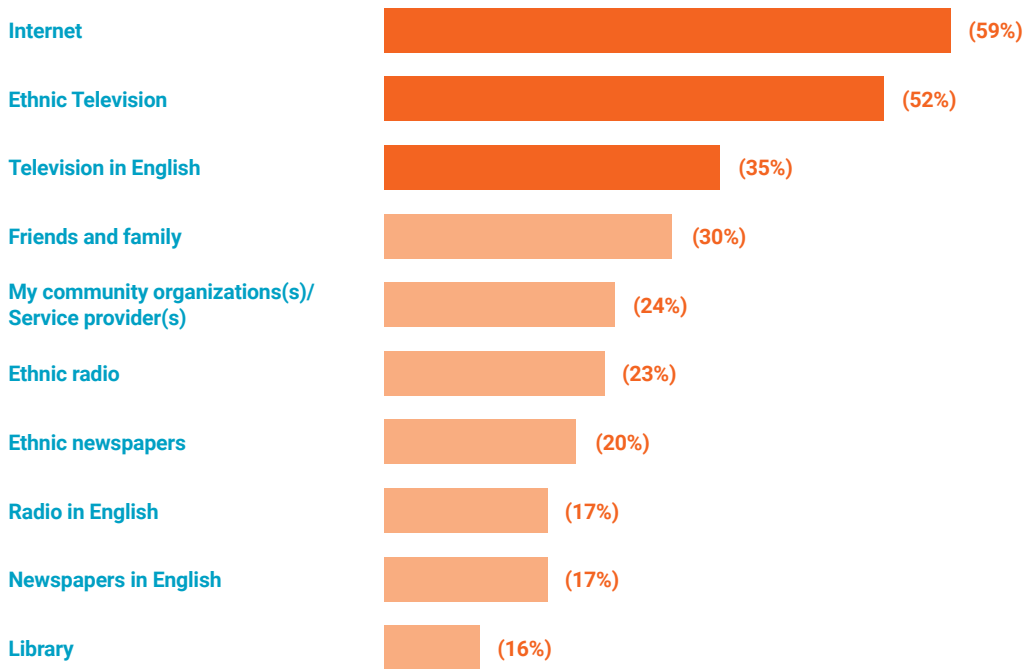
(Q8) Overall, how much of a difference do you think you can have in making your neighborhood a better place to live?



### 3. The internet and television (both ethnic and English) are the top sources of information on politics.

A majority of respondents got their information about elections, issues, and candidates from the internet (59%) and “Ethnic television” (52%). “Television in English” was a distant third at about a third of those surveyed, followed by social networks (30%) and community organizations (24%). These data suggest the combination of cell phone, both to send/ receive electronic information and connect with friends and family, and television as the most impactful way to communicate to the region’s Latino community.

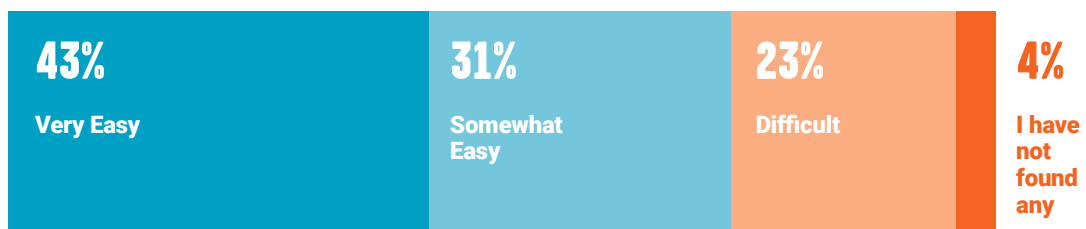
(Q10) If you wanted to find information about elections, issues, and candidates, which of the following would you most likely use?



### 4. Respondents can easily access information about elections in their preferred language.

Latino respondents, by a wide margin, did not have significant difficulty attaining linguistically accessible information about elections, with 74% finding it either “very easy” or “somewhat easy”. This is in contrast to East Africans and Asian Americans, who come from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds, some of whom depend more heavily on oral traditions of communicating.

(Q11) How easy is it to find information about elections and candidates in your preferred language?





## 5. Engaging in a child's education is a primary focus for civic engagement.

Attending PTA meetings or otherwise volunteering at a child's school was the most common (28%) civic engagement activity for the respondents. This trend matches up with prioritization of education. Additionally, more than 20% took direct action through demonstrations, protests, marches, or rallies.

(Q12) Please tell us if you have done any of the following activities in the past 2 years. Choose all that apply.

I attended a PTA meeting, or other volunteer group at my child's school	28%
I participated in one or more demonstrations, protests, marches, or rallies	22%
I attended a government or school board meeting in my city	19%
I have signed a letter about a social or political issue	17%
I have worked on a project or attended a meeting in my neighborhood	16%
I sent a message on Facebook or other social media about a social or political issue	15%
I have given money to an organization or candidate	13%
I contacted a public official through a letter, email, phone, or in-person	13%
I volunteered for an election activity such as a phone bank or registering people to vote	7%

## 6. Lack of information is a significant barrier to voter registration.

More than half of those eligible but not registered stated either they did not know how to do it (42%) or could not find information in their preferred language (14%). However, a quarter of respondents were not interested, a moderately high level of apathy.

(Q14) if you are eligible (U.S. citizen over the age of 18), but not yet registered to vote, what is the main reason you have not registered to vote?

I don't know how/where to register/it's too complicated	42%
I am not interested in voting	25%
Voter registration information is not available in my preferred language	14%
I am too busy	13%
I am not interested in voting	4%
Voting is a waste of time/it doesn't make a difference	3%

## 7. Two-thirds state they never vote in state and local elections.

Only 30% stated that they vote in state and local elections either “often” or “sometimes”, while 70% said “rarely” or “never”. This seems generally consistent with lower turnout, particularly among people of color, in odd year elections for municipal races.

(Q18) How often have you voted in state and local elections?

A. Often	20%
B. Sometimes	10%
C. Rarely	4%
D. Never	66%

## 8. A small majority say they have been contacted by a candidate, party, or other organization.

Fifty-three percent of those surveyed recall being contacted and encouraged to vote. This may be a hopeful sign that the electoral system is engaging Latino voters. However, the vast majority of respondents (85%) did not respond to this question.

(Q19) Have you ever been contacted and encouraged to vote by a candidate, political party, or other organization?



## Recommendations

### 1. Launch a Seattle-based full census count campaign.

The City of Seattle should play an aggressive role in promoting a full census count. Even before the 2016 elections, the U.S. Census Bureau was planning for major changes, largely due to significant budget cuts approved by Congress. This included a heavy emphasis on online data collection processes, a drastic cut in door-to-door enumerators, and new questions on race/ethnicity. Under the new administration, the Census seems to be in disarray, as the long-term director abruptly resigned in mid-2017. Recently, the Justice Department requested the Census Bureau to add a question on citizenship status. Experts believe that such a move, on top of the ongoing anti-immigrant rhetoric, may create a chilling effect on participation. Lower participation rates by immigrants and refugees in Seattle mean both fewer federal resources (an estimated \$12,000 per person per decade in Washington for the last Census), and less political representation as district boundaries will be drawn for city, state, and federal legislative districts in 2021.

### 2. Promote civic education, particularly about role of local government.

Increased civic engagement is predicated on a solid understanding of how government works. However, there are few resources in Seattle that provide such foundational knowledge. The City should invest in basic adult civics education that focuses on the role of local government within our system of federalism. This could include the basics of the City charter, who are current City officials and how they are elected, and who to call regarding City services. The format should be available in physical and digital formats, ideally in short, engaging videos that are translated into multiple languages. Such a concerted effort could increase voter participation, as 66% of respondents stated they “never” vote in state/local elections.

### 3. Expand partnerships to promote civic engagement.

The role of government in promoting voter registration has increased over the past three decades. With the passage of the National Voter Registration Act of 1993, government agencies are required to offer voter registration opportunities when individuals apply for or renew their driver’s licenses or apply for public assistance. More recently, the Seattle Foundation and King County Elections partnered to provide about \$700,000 in grants to community-based organizations to promote voter participation in underrepresented communities. Though this effort should be lauded, more support is needed to overcome linguistic barriers and a distrust of government. For its part, the City of Seattle should co-host ballot parties with immigrant and refugee serving organizations and proactively register people to vote who naturalized with support from city-funded programs.

Though the use of direct mail seems promising, the City could pilot other innovative approaches, such as creating a deputy registrar system to identify and train a cohort of Latino individuals. These volunteers, who would be officially recognized by the City, would carry out voter registration drives, inform voters about upcoming elections, and even help with referrals to other City and school district services. This should be part of a long-term relationship building process, and not just a one-time contact. Finally, the City could organize an annual civic engagement summit, in part to communicate past accomplishments and highlight future needs.

#### **4. Support the development of more digital content for public affairs.**

The City of Seattle should continue to invest in the development of ethnic media. The survey revealed that a majority of respondents found information on public affairs from the internet (59%) and ethnic television (52%). To build upon these practices, the City should encourage more video-based content development through trainings, technical assistance, and grants. Special attention should be paid to formats that are cell phone friendly and culturally appropriate.

#### **5. Research impact of electoral reforms that promote more engagement.**

Elections in the City of Seattle have recently undergone a significant transformation. Before the implementation of the hybrid at-large/district system, Seattle was the largest city with all at-large seats. Further, the City is now the first jurisdiction with Democracy Vouchers, a public financed campaign system that provides each registered voter with \$100 to contribute to municipal campaigns. To understand the impact of electoral reforms on immigrant and refugee communities, the City should commission research that includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

In addition, the City of Seattle should also add other prospective reforms to such a research agenda. For instance, how would turnout change in immigrant and refugee communities if municipal elections were moved to even-numbered years? If there were ranked-choice voting with no municipal primaries? If there were multi-member districts instead of single-member districts? These are reforms that other municipalities have implemented, which show promise in increasing voter participation and are therefore worthy of a deeper dive.

