

Organizing the Vote:

Communities Gear Up for 2002 Elections

The 2000 Census and related redistricting reflect the profound impact that demographic changes are having on the political and social landscape of our region. This year's electoral cycle presents unprecedented opportunities for communities of color, new arrivals, and under-represented constituencies like low-income residents and women to build power through issue work and electoral activities. In 2000, well organized constituencies were the swing votes in many races (see *Views*, #21, *Winter 2001*). In 2002, groups in the West are gearing up to wield new power.

To support this organizing, Western States Center is beginning to field test a new curriculum, *Building Grassroots Power: An Introduction to Electoral Politics*. The training materials and related technical assistance are designed for community organizations that want to boost the participation of their members in the political process. Subjects include non-partisan activities such as voter registration, education and mobilization; voter access and voting rights issues; and infrastructure pieces such as database competency and knowledge of IRS and election regulations.

Here's a sample of some grassroots efforts shaping up around the region:

OREGON: Based in Woodburn, Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), Voz Hispana, and LUCHa Politica are the advocacy/education and political arms for the farmworker community and newly arriving Latinos, whose numbers in Marion County alone have increased by 267% to account for 17% of residents. In 2000 they piloted a strategy to register and activate new citizens. In 2002 they will do voter organizing work to increase Latino participation statewide and in targeted communities.

NEVADA: About one-third of Nevada residents are now people of color. Latinos for Political Education, Reno/ Sparks Indian Colony, Nevada Young Activist Project, the Nevada Empowered Women's Project, and other member groups of the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada are using a variety of non-partisan voter participation strategies to expand involvement in 2002.

IDAHO: While Latinos are still only about 10% of the statewide population, the Idaho Migrant Council and the Hispanic Caucus are working on voter participation strategies in three regions that experienced enormous Latino growth in the last decade: the southwest (Canyon County's Latino community tripled in size, now accounting for 18% of the population); the Magic Valley (Jerome County's Hispanic community has quadrupled and Minidoka County is over 25% Latino); and the southeast (Power County is 22% Latino).

WYOMING: Redistricting offers opportunities for Native Americans and Latinos in Wyoming. The Equality State Policy Center is supporting voter registration and voter participation strategies in these and other under-represented communities.

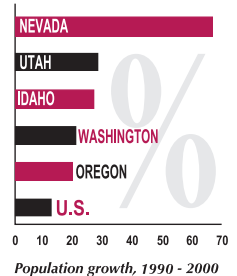
UTAH: The Utah Common Voices effort to defend against an "english only" ballot measure in 2000 strengthened relationships among people of color and other organizations. These allies, including the Salt Lake County Voter Registration Project, the Disability Rights Action Committee and a new LGBT PAC, Unity Utah, are planning increased voter mobilization efforts.

MONTANA: The Montana Income Support Collaboration, which worked in five cities and with allies on Indian reservations in the last cycle, will expand in 2002. Montana Women Vote, a coalition of eight organizations, aims to turn out a significant majority of the 15,000 low-income women that they will target (many of whom have never voted before). Wanda Martinez, Native Action organizer, says "the 2000 census has Native people as about 7% of the Montana population, but in reality we're about 10%." Working on seven reservations with Indian People's Action and other organizations in urban areas, their goal is to raise Native voter registration to 10% of the Montana voting electorate.

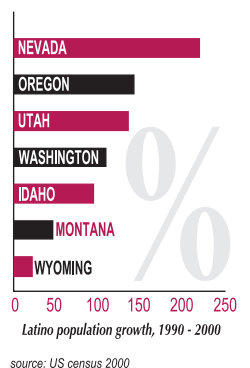


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Western Region Leads Nation in Population Growth



Latinos are the Fastest Growing Racial Group in the Region



source: US census 2000