

UC Berkeley

Policy Reports and Research Briefs

Title

Remedying Racial and Ethnic Inequality in California Politics: Watsonville Before and After District Elections

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5w39s0wm>

Author

Takash, Paule Cruz

Publication Date

1999-06-01

CLPP *policy report*

Remedying Racial and Ethnic Inequality in
California Politics: Watsonville Before and
After District Elections

By

Paule Cruz Takash Ph.D.

University of California, San Diego



A Publication of the
Chicano/Latino Policy Project

2420 Bowditch #5670
Berkeley, CA 94720-5670

(510) 642-6903

e-mail: clpp@uclink.berkeley.edu



Remedying Racial and Ethnic Inequality in
California Politics: Watsonville Before and
After District Elections

By

Paule Cruz Takash Ph.D.

University of California, San Diego

Chicano/Latino Policy Project
CLPP Policy Report
Volume 1 · Number 4
June 1999

Copyright © 1999
by the Regents of the University of California

All rights reserved.

Chicano/Latino Policy Project
Institute for the Study of Social Change
University of California, Berkeley
2420 Bowditch Street, #5670
Berkeley, CA 94720-5670
(510) 642-6903
FAX (510) 643-8844
E-mail: clpp@uclink4.berkeley.edu

The Chicano/Latino Policy Project (CLPP) is an affiliated research program of the Institute for the Study of Social Change at the University of California, Berkeley. The CLPP supports, coordinates and develops research on public policy issues related to Latinos in the United States and serves as a component unit of a multi-campus Latino policy studies program in the University of California. Although CLPP's current research focus is Latino youth achievement—CLPP is committed to supporting and promoting the development of public policy research from a wide range of disciplines, including, but not limited to education, health care, immigration and political participation.

The Institute for the Study of Social Change is an organized research unit at the University of California at Berkeley devoted to studies that will increase the understanding of the mechanisms that influence social change. The ISSC has a particular mandate to conduct research and to provide research training on matters of social stratification and differentiation, including the condition of economically and politically depressed minorities as well as the more privileged strata.

The University of California established

The California Policy Research Center (CPRC) (formerly the California Policy Seminar) in 1977 as a systemwide research and public service program charged with applying the extensive research expertise of the UC system to the analysis, development, and implementation of state policy and federal policy issues of statewide importance. CPRC provides technical assistance to policymakers, commissions policy-relevant research on statewide issues, and disseminates research findings and recommendations through publications and special briefings. CPRC administers the legislatively mandated Welfare Policy Research Project and the California Program on Access to Care, and under the auspices of the UC Committee on Latino Research (UCCLR) it also administers the UC Latino Policy Research Program.

The research presented in this report was conducted through a grant to the author from the Latino Policy Research Program. The views and recommendations contained in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the publishers, the UCCLR, or the Regents of the University of California.

A summary of this report is available at <http://www.ucop.edu/cprc/takash.html>, or you may request the paper version of this CPRC Brief by calling (510) 643-9328.

About the Author:

Dr. Paule Cruz Takash is an assistant professor in the Ethnic Studies Department at the University of California, San Diego where she teaches and writes about race, gender and class. Her areas of specialization include Latino and ethnic politics, women of color in politics, minority vote dilution, immigration and the ethnoracial transformation of U.S. cities.

Acknowledgments:

The issue of racial inequality is not an easy topic to confront. Still, many residents of Watsonville allowed me to interview them for this project even having read earlier versions of this study that some felt were unflattering. The history of race relations in Watsonville is not singular; rather, it reflects a national legacy of inequality based on race and class. To the people of Watsonville, I extend my sincere thanks for granting me their time and their thoughts about race and power in their community and applaud their efforts to make substantive changes.

I also want to thank the following persons who have assisted in the compilation of data for this project: Mr. Daniel Dodge, a paralegal and a Watsonville Planning Commissioner who provided me with voting turnout data and who painstakingly counted, by hand, Spanish-surname voters for the elections following district elections; Mr. Carlos Palacios, Watsonville's first Mexican-American city manager, who compiled for me information regarding the city budget over several years; Mrs. Lorraine Washington, Watsonville city clerk, who since my arrival in 1986 has always made herself and the city records available; and Mrs. Mary Ann Ash, personnel director for the City of Watsonville, who was most responsive to my several requests for affirmative action hiring data.

To David Runsten, an agricultural economist who has lived and conducted research in Watsonville and graciously edited a near final version of the report, *mil gracias*. Voting rights attorney Joaquin Avila is also deserving of thanks for keeping me informed about the latest developments in minority voting rights cases. A final word of gratitude goes to Raul Hinojosa Ojeda, professor of urban planning at the University of California Los Angeles, who took the time to review the report at its various stages and to provide substantive comments that contributed to the arguments put forth in this study.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	viii
LIST OF MAPS	viii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ix
INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Research Site	2
Research Questions and Focus	2
Methodology	3
Ethnography	3
Elite and Nonelite Interviewing	4
Voting Behavior, Candidate and Campaign Profiles	4
Secondary Sources	4
PART ONE: LATINO POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION	5
Structural Barriers to Latino Political Incorporation	5
Ideological Barriers to Latino Political Incorporation	6
A Question of Qualifications.....	8
Effect of the Noncitizen Population on Latino Voting Potential	9
A Return to Ward Politics?	10
“A Natural Progression of Political Activity” v. Judicial Intervention	12
Numerical Majority but Political, Social, and Economic Minority	12
A Dream Deferred: District Court Judge Rules for the City	13
Establishing Historical Discrimination	14
A City “Singularly Free” of Discrimination? Lower Court Overturned	16
“This is not Birmingham”: Pursuing the Case to the Supreme Court	18
The 1989 Council Elections: Broader Participation and Representation	20
The Earthquake and the Rise of Anti-Latino Sentiment	20
The Politics of Displacement: A Liberal Majority Ascends	24
Analysis of the 1989 Elections Outcome	24
Findings: A History of Discrimination Against Latinos	27
Racially Polarized Electorate Is Fundamental Barrier to Empowerment	27
Few Latinos Commission Appointments Prior to District Elections	27
Noncitizen Population Does Not Explain White Voting Preferences	27
Latino Political Initiative Does Not Explain Electoral Ineffectiveness	27
A History of Discrimination against Watsonville Latinos	27
Ideological Barriers to Latino Political Empowerment	28
Endnotes.....	29
PART TWO: DO DISTRICT ELECTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?	37
Latino Representation	37
City Commission Appointments	38

Minority Voter Participation	38
Facilitating Minority Political Participation	39
Affirmative Action and City Employment	40
Police and Community Relations	41
Community Program Funding.....	42
City Council Public Policy Initiatives.....	42
Affordable Housing	43
Affordable Housing and Growth	43
Community Attitudes about District Elections and Change	44
District Elections Have Effected No Change	44
No Changes, with Some Reservations	44
Some Changes, with Reservations	45
District Elections Have Effected Change	46
Once Opposed, Now Supportive	46
Watsonville Districting Case Sets Precedent for Other Political Jurisdictions	48
Findings: District Elections Make a Difference	49
Latino Representation on the City Council	49
Latino City Commission Appointments Increases	49
Minority Voter Participation Increases	49
Facilitation of Broader Minority Political Participation	50
Modest Gains in Affirmative Action and Minority City Hires	50
Police and Community Relations Improve	50
Increased Community Program Funding	50
New Public Policy Initiatives (Affordable Housing and Growth)	50
Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Brought about by District Elections	50
Watsonville Sets Precedent for Other Political Jurisdictions	51
Public Policy and Latino Political Empowerment	51
Generalizability of Watsonville Case	51
Research Needed on Racial Discrimination in California	51
Statutory Remedies for Latino Empowerment	52
Educational Remedies for Structural and Ideological Barriers to Incorporation	52
Concluding Summary	52
Endnotes	54

TABLES

Table 1. December 1989 Watsonville City Council District Election Outcome	23
Table 2. General and Spanish Surname Turnout Rates 1987 and 1989	26

MAPS

Map 1: Location of Watsonville in California and Eastern United States	11
Map 2: Watsonville District Plan	21

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three major legal and public policy arguments are made to justify a rollback in the application of federal civil rights remedies to electoral under-representation of African American and Latino voters: 1) political exclusion by race and ethnicity is now the exception; 2) existing barriers to minority political participation are internal to the populations and therefore not susceptible to external remedy; 3) external intervention will not change anything, because electoral inequality is not based on discrimination. If race and ethnicity no longer represent a major barrier to political participation, the argument goes, then federal intervention in state and local electoral affairs is no longer necessary.

To examine these claims, I analyzed a legal challenge to at-large elections waged by Latinos in Watsonville, California, in the late 1980s, and found each of them wanting. Although Watsonville is a relatively small community of 33,000, it is symbolic of Latino political struggle and empowerment in several respects, including minority voting rights. Latinos had become almost half the population by 1980, but none could get elected to the city council in an at-large election system. *Gomez vs. The City of Watsonville* overturned at-large elections in 1988 and set a legal precedent for similar challenges throughout California. Events in Watsonville demonstrate the role race and ethnicity can play in U.S. elections, and the impact of minority and majority power relations under conditions of rapid demographic change fueled by new Mexican immigration.

Before *Gomez*, the Watsonville Latino community had a long history of participation in electoral politics at the national, state, and local levels. Nonetheless, Latinos were unsuccessful in bids for a wide range of offices, from school district to Congress. Fourteen Mexican Americans had run for city council positions from 1971 to 1985, and all were soundly defeated. Many Latinos began to suspect that prejudice and the city's at-large election system, as well as a majority mainstream electorate, explained their lack of success.

BARRIERS TO EMPOWERMENT

The most fundamental barrier to Latino political empowerment in California is the lack of voting strength in a society in which ethnically polarized voting is widespread. Bloc voting by race or ethnicity is one of a number of mechanisms—including multimember election systems and gerrymandering—that an electoral majority can use to dilute the minority vote.

However, such structural obstacles to political incorporation may be relatively easier to overcome than the ideological barriers that reinforce them. Although Watsonville has long boasted about its diversity and mainstream residents continually invoke the "melting pot" credo, this metaphor ignores minority and majority power relations. On many formal and informal occasions in Watsonville, a person's race or ethnicity was not only noticed but was the basis for discriminatory treatment—from restricted access to social clubs, to documented cases of job, housing, and school discrimination.

Because of beliefs about individual social mobility and the community's social and political incorporation of people of European descent earlier in the century, the success of these groups was attributed to individual effort. Consequently, the lack of Latino social incorporation and Mexican Americans' unsuccessful bids for elected office were most often attributed to three factors: (1) their lack of qualifications and inability to represent "the best interests of the community"; (2) their failure to fully participate in community affairs and the political process; and (3) the presence of a large number of residents who could not or did not vote. Mainstream Watsonville also defended the status quo by attributing Latinos' weak electoral effectiveness to deficiencies within Mexican culture itself.

CONCLUSIONS

Although some may argue that Latinos should not have been brought under the protection of the Voting Rights Act of 1975, the history of discrimination and resistance to Latino empowerment by mainstream Watsonville leads to the conclusion that judicial intervention in the form of district elections was necessary to bring about minority political incorporation. Implementation of district elections resulted in increased minority voter turnout in the 1989 Watsonville elections, and the election of more-representative city council members, including one Latino.

The 1989 election paved the way for a Latino mayor two years later and also to the appointment of Latinos to city commissions. The research revealed that earlier, the city council had reinforced a discriminatory double standard with regard to who was deemed a viable candidate for local office. Latinos were expected to first serve on city commissions; whites were considered legitimate candidates with no prior commission experience.

For years Watsonville's political majority attributed Latinos' weak electoral effectiveness to a cultural ethos that devalues American institutions (citizenship) and political practices (voting). External factors like the at-large election system were deemed racially neutral and therefore in no need of remedy. These views were reinforced by the community's dominant institutions and culture.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

As the white population in California begins to lose its status as the overwhelming majority, issues of race and ethnicity have been thrust to the forefront of state policy and political debates. Precipitated by U.S. minority birth rates and immigration from non-European, non-English-speaking countries, the number of nonwhite people residing in California is expected to reach 50 percent of the state population around the year 2000.¹ Because Latino natural increase accounts for 55 percent of the state population growth since 1990, a focus on Latinos is particularly warranted at this time. Currently comprising 29 percent of the total state population, Latinos are expected to become the largest ethnoracial group in California by the first quarter of the twenty-first century. In the 1990s, Latino voter registration, voter turnout, and election to office have increased dramatically. Nonetheless, Latino political participation and influence are still thwarted in important ways, especially in cities and other political entities where Latinos constitute a minority of eligible voters. For example, although a record high number of all eligible Latino voters in the state (66.2%) turned out to vote in November 1996, their votes represented only 13.2 percent of all ballots cast in that election. As a result, although eight in ten of these Latino voters (80.3%) voted against Proposition 209, this statewide initiative eliminating affirmative action programs was passed by the majority electorate.²

Other events in the 1990s that underscore rising racial antagonisms and a deepening sense of minority disenfranchisement in the state include the verdict in the Rodney King case and the Los Angeles rebellion in 1992, mass demonstrations against Proposition 187 and passage of this anti-immigrant state initiative in 1994, ongoing mobilization for and against continuing affirmative action programs, and the recent passage of Proposition 227, which effectively eliminates bilingual education in public schools. Yet at a time when California critically needs an amendatory plan to ensure the integration and sociopolitical stability of the state, legislative and judicial remedies for racial discrimination are in danger of being eviscerated or dismantled altogether. Recent challenges to the provisions of the Voting Rights Act and to district elections, both of which have been instrumental in the political incorporation of blacks and Latinos for thirty years, are important cases in point.

Shaw v. Reno, a legal challenge by white voters to a state legislature's plans to create minority congressional districts, was upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1993.³ Although majority minority districts were originated to remedy recognized political inequalities based on race, the high court has paradoxically moved to discount the role that race continues to play in politics. Lower courts have begun to follow the Supreme Court precedent. In the state of Georgia, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit dismantled two of three majority black congressional districts, claiming that race cannot be the predominant factor for creating such districts.⁴ These rulings not only threaten the modest electoral gains at all levels of government that minorities have made in three decades; they also render the Voting Rights Act ambiguous. Whereas past amendments to the original act defined electoral inequality based on race broadly to include subtle as well as obvious disenfranchising devices, these court decisions give credence to advocates for a more restrictive interpretation of the act.

Three major legal and public policy arguments are put forth to justify a rollback in the application of past remedies: first, that black and Hispanic political exclusion is now the exception; second, that existing barriers to minority political participation are internal to these populations and therefore not susceptible to external remedy; and third, that external intervention will not change anything, because issues like the distribution of resources are not based on race discrimination but on other policy considerations.⁵ Abigail Thernstrom, an influential proponent of these tenets, maintains that views on these issues "turn on a more

intractable question: the continuing pervasiveness of American racism."⁶ If race no longer represents a major barrier to participation, as she and others contend, then federal intervention in state and local electoral affairs is no longer necessary.

Research Site

This study is designed to examine these claims put forth to justify a rollback in past remedies through an in-depth analysis of a challenge to at-large elections waged by Latinos in Watsonville, California. Although a relatively small community of 33,000 inhabitants situated in Santa Cruz County, Watsonville has become a symbol of Latino political struggle and empowerment on several fronts, including minority voting rights.⁷ Latinos had become almost half the population by 1980 but could not get elected to the city council in an at-large election system. *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville* overturned at-large elections in that city in 1988 and set a legal precedent for similar challenges throughout California.⁸ Events leading up to and surrounding the lawsuit demonstrate how race continues to play a significant role in American life and politics.

The study of Watsonville also provides an excellent opportunity to examine broader questions of "minority and majority" power relations under conditions of rapid demographic change. Though the ethnographic transformation of the population was only beginning in the 1980s elsewhere in the state, Watsonville residents were noting the latinization of the city by the late 1960s. An agroindustrial community, Watsonville has depended on an immigrant labor force for over a century and on Mexican-origin workers since the 1940s. Foreign and domestic economic and political changes in the mid-1960s, coupled with regional changes in agribusiness requiring a near year-round labor force, contributed to Latino families' settling in town in unprecedented numbers. Despite substantial Latino contributions to the economy as workers and consumers, rapid latinization was accompanied by increasing tensions as Latinos sought to become full participating members of the community. By 1980, Watsonville whites had become a numerical minority. Some white residents embraced the changes. The majority, however, struggled to maintain control and hold back change by electoral and other policy means, efforts permeated by an ideology of white superiority and Latino inferiority.⁹

The first court-ordered district election was held in Watsonville in December 1989. This ethnographic study of Watsonville thus affords a longitudinal analysis of the impact of district elections on Latinos and whites. Few such before-and-after analyses have been conducted, especially in California. Published research primarily addresses the situation of Mexican Americans in Texas cities where Anglos are the majority of the population. Moreover, evaluation is usually limited to a count of Latinos elected to office after district elections are instituted.¹⁰ The ethnographic case study method employed in this study provides a depth of analysis usually not possible in survey research.

The election of Latinos to government office was a major goal of the lawsuit filed by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). However, most advocates of district elections never supported candidates merely on the basis of their race; rather, they sought to elect candidates who would vigorously represent Latinos largely ignored by council members elected at large. This study thus examines an array of outcomes beyond the number of Latinos elected to the Watsonville city council under district elections and evaluates ideological as well as structural barriers to incorporation of Latinos into the political system. Comparative ethnographic case studies are required to assess whether the findings reported here are generalizable, but such studies are outside the scope of this research.

Research Questions and Focus

Focusing on Latino and white political experiences in Watsonville, this case study examines the following three questions at a critical period when the race and ethnic distribution in California is shifting from white to Latino and Asian/Pacific Islander:

- What are the major structural and ideological barriers to Latino electoral political incorporation?
- Does race play a role in shaping these barriers?
- Do external institutional remedies such as district elections facilitate minority political incorporation and/or the redistribution of municipal resources to traditionally disenfranchised and underserved groups?

To address these questions, the study is presented in two parts. Part One examines structural and ideological obstacles that until 1989 prevented Watsonville Latinos from electing representatives of their choice and from otherwise participating as equal members of society. Structural barriers include racially polarized voting, an at-large election system, and other political practices that discriminate against racialized minorities. Internal impediments such as immigration status, naturalization status, language, age, and socioeconomic status affect Latino incorporation in important ways as well and are touched upon in this report.¹¹

The voting rights case, *Gomez v. Watsonville*, also serves as a vehicle to examine the ideology of Latino inferiority whites constructed in order to account for and maintain their own positions of power and status. Reinforced by dominant institutions, cultural representations, and social practices, an ideology of minority inferiority becomes a formidable barrier to political incorporation.

Part Two of the study examines changes brought about by the adoption of district elections in Watsonville. In 1989 a liberal majority of Latino and white candidates displaced the entrenched conservative and predominately white city council. Results from race-conscious districting were measured six years after district elections were implemented. The question "Do district elections make a difference?" is examined both qualitatively and quantitatively. The qualitative analysis consists of interviews with Watsonville residents about what changes, if any, are attributable to the 1989 electoral reforms and about current relations between whites and Latinos.

Quantitatively, we assess how much difference district elections have made to Watsonville minority and white interests in the areas of minority representation, Latino voter turnout and broader forms of political participation, affirmative action hiring, police-community relations, public policy initiatives, and support of community social services.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed several methods designed to evaluate changing Latino and white political relations in the context of latinization. These include ethnography, in-depth interviewing of political elites and nonelites, and analyses of primary and secondary quantitative as well as qualitative data.

Ethnography

Ethnography is distinguished from other research approaches by the ethnographer's objective to learn about a people or phenomenon *emically*, or from the point of view of her subjects, as well as *eticly*, or from her vantage point as an "outsider." It employs a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods, including structured interviews, questionnaires, analyses of primary and secondary documents, genealogies, and oral and life histories, but participant observation and residence among and/or longitudinal study of the targeted populations is critical to the ethnographic enterprise.

The initial research upon which this case study is based was conducted by the principal investigator, an ethnographer who lived in the city of Watsonville for two years in the mid-1980s (1986-1988).¹² During these years in residence, I participated in and observed numerous events contributing to the political mobilization of the Watsonville community, including a protracted (eighteen-month-long) frozen food industry strike; campaigns in which Latinos ran for city council under at-large and district election systems; and district and appellate court hearings in connection with the MALDEF voting rights lawsuit. Since that time, I have continued to conduct research in Watsonville. Follow-up research informing this project was conducted during two two-week-long return visits in 1993, three week-long return visits in 1994 and 1995, and two additional week-long visits in 1997.

Elite and Nonelite Interviewing

All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator. Sixty-three persons were interviewed during the initial research, and many have been reinterviewed in subsequent years for the purposes of this current study. Additionally, eighteen new persons were interviewed for the follow-up research. Informants were primarily selected using the "snowball" method. Recognized white and Latino leaders identified potential respondents, who in turn suggested others. Respondents included elected officials and city employees, candidates for political office and members of their staffs, directors of community-based organizations and other community leaders, growers and other members of the landed elite, owners of local industries and other businesspeople, union officials and frozen food line workers, educators, students, and other ordinary Watsonville residents. Those interviewed represented various socioeconomic sectors, races, ethnic backgrounds, and worldviews. The majority of persons interviewed were white Americans of various ethnic heritages and persons of Mexican descent.

Typically an hour to two hours long, interviews were open ended but focused on how respondents viewed relations between Watsonville Latinos and whites; their views on the latinization of the city and how city residents were responding to these changes; what factors accounted for Latino losses at the polls; what specific criteria constitute an acceptable candidate for office; whether district elections were necessary for Latino political empowerment; whether district elections made substantive changes; what a community-oriented city government would look like, as reflected in its budgetary priorities; and what constitutes racism. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the questions asked, the actual names of some persons interviewed for this study are not revealed.¹³

Voting Behavior, Candidate and Campaign Profiles

Precinct-level voter registration, turnout, and voting data in Watsonville and Santa Cruz County was compiled and analyzed for the years 1971-1992. Statistical analyses of voting data for the years 1971-1986 provided by voting rights expert Dr. Bernard Grofman in *Gomez v. Watsonville* was relied upon as well.¹⁴ I was also advised on voting rights matters by Joaquin Avila, former president and chief counsel for MALDEF and lead attorney in *Gomez v. Watsonville*. Daniel Dodge, paralegal, a resident of Watsonville and an unsuccessful Latino candidate for city council in 1989, assisted in collecting voting turnout data.

Documents from political campaigns for years in which Latinos ran for office (1971-1992) were also collected and analyzed. A map was constructed depicting over time (1969-1989) where city council members resided in the city prior to district elections to determine whether representation was geographically dispersed or concentrated in particular areas in the city (see appendix). Analysis of campaigns in which Watsonville Latinos ran for elected office was also conducted and a profile of all Latino candidates constructed.

Secondary Sources

Content analysis of the local newspaper, the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, from 1940 to the mid-1990s was used to reconstruct the latinization of Watsonville as this process was expressed in articles and editorials, letters to the editor, and photographs. This analysis supplemented the recollections provided by the Watsonville residents who were interviewed. Other secondary data sources include Watsonville city council minutes and other government documents, census data, district and federal judicial records generated by the voting rights lawsuit, and the scholarly literature on Latino politics and race relations in the United States.

PART ONE: LATINO POLITICAL MOBILIZATION AND PARTICIPATION

STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO LATINO POLITICAL INCORPORATION

The most fundamental barrier to Latino political empowerment in California is the lack of voting strength in a society where racially polarized voting is widespread. Racially polarized voting is defined by the U.S. Supreme Court as occurring where "a white bloc vote ... nominally will defeat the combined strength of minority plus white 'crossover' votes."¹⁵

Racial bloc voting is supported by a host of other mechanisms for diluting the minority vote. Among these are multimember election systems and gerrymandering. Though not inherently discriminatory, both have been frequently employed for the purpose of diminishing the electoral power of enfranchised minorities. Chandler Davidson recounts the many means employed by whites in this and the last century to circumvent the political gains made by minorities, including the adoption of at-large elections in jurisdictions where district elections had long been the norm. Vote dilution occurs when "election laws or practices, either singly or in concert, combine with systematic bloc voting among an identifiable group to diminish the voting strength of at least one other group."¹⁶ Ethnic and racial vote dilution, according to Davidson, is a special form of vote dilution.

Students of minority vote dilution maintain that racial bloc voting is found, not only in southern states where institutionalized racism is historically most rampant, but in other regions of the country as well.¹⁷ In Watsonville, fourteen Mexican Americans ran for city council positions from 1971 to 1985. Latino candidates ran bona fide campaigns, yet all were soundly defeated. Despite winning the overwhelming support of the Latino electorate, a Mexican-American candidate would not be elected to the Watsonville city council until 1987.

Watsonville Latinos did not restrict their electoral efforts to the city council. As early as 1969, Latinos began to run for school board and community college trustee: John Philip Sanchez, director of a community agency, ran for Cabrillo Community College trustee and was defeated by a prominent Watsonville resident. In 1975, Alex Solano became the first person of Mexican origin to win a seat on the board of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD). He was not, however, elected from the Watsonville district (Area Four Watsonville Elementary). Four other Mexican Americans and a Filipino American won school board positions in subsequent years, but no person of color was elected from Area Four until 1981. Watsonville Area Service Center Director George Kypuros and businessman Mario Carabarin were unsuccessful candidates for county supervisor as well.

The Watsonville Latino community's interest in political representation was not limited to the city or county, as demonstrated by their active support of Julian Camacho's bids for Congress in 1972 and 1974. Residing in Santa Cruz County, Camacho was opposed in his first campaign by two Democratic candidates but won the Democratic Party nomination in the congressional primary. He was defeated by incumbent Burt Talcott in both races, however. Several Watsonville Latinos now in their late seventies also recalled with great sentimentality and conviction their participation in the "Viva Kennedy" presidential campaigns in the 1960s.

Members of the Mexican-American community participated in non-Latino political campaigns as well. In the 1980s, several white candidates for city council sought and obtained endorsements and campaign assistance from Mexican Americans. Local Mexican-American organizations also endorsed white candidates. Yet, despite this history of participation in mainstream electoral politics participation at the national, state, regional, and local levels, and an impressive history of activity in community politics, white Watsonville voters deemed that Latinos lacked the requisite knowledge of American political institutions and the necessary qualifications to hold office.

Latinos suspected that racism and the city's at-large election system, in combination with a majority white electorate, better explained their lack of success. Shortly after the defeat of city council candidate Maria Bautista in May 1985, a group of Watsonville Latinos and non-Latino supporters calling itself "WatsCAN" consulted with representatives from the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF). The meeting was spearheaded by community activist Dolores Cruz Gomez, who had also been rejected by the majority electorate in her 1983 bid for city council.

MALDEF, a national Latino legal and civil rights organization, has an impressive record of successful challenges to at-large elections in Texas. Together with the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project (SVREP), MALDEF targeted at-large election systems and redistricting plans that had prevented Latino voters from electing their candidates of choice. Between 1974 and 1987, Latino representation increased significantly in the Lone Star State not only at the municipal level but also in the state legislature and judiciary.¹⁸ Today, Texas continues to lead all other states in the number of Latinos elected to public office, boasting 1,722 Latino officeholders, or 6.2 percent of all (27,628) Texas elected representatives. By comparison, Latinos comprise only 4 percent (752) of the 18,918 California elected officials.¹⁹

WatsCAN considered placing the issue of district elections on the ballot but determined to pursue a legal remedy after their meeting with MALDEF. They also approached and received the endorsement of the Pajaro Valley League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the leading Mexican-American organization in Watsonville at that time. MALDEF filed suit against the City of Watsonville in May 1985, and LULAC was officially designated a "friend of the court."

District elections remain a principal legal remedy for minority vote dilution despite the aforementioned recent Supreme Court decisions.²⁰ Amendments made to Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act in 1982 released counsel for minority plaintiffs from the burden of proving discriminatory intent. If an election system was adopted without intending to discriminate against minorities, the practice can still be challenged if proven to result continuously in minority vote dilution: "all that matters ... is voter behavior, not its explanations."²¹ Such was the case in Watsonville. At-large elections were adopted in 1952 before Latinos became a substantial portion of the city population. Nonetheless, citywide elections served as an effective barrier to Latino political empowerment once the Latino population began to grow.

The new amendments to the Voting Rights Act were tested in 1985 in a precedent-setting U.S. Supreme Court case, *Thomburg v. Gingles*.²² This case provided three major criteria upon which subsequent challenges to at-large elections could be decided. The first requires that a minority community "of sufficient size and compactness" exist such that at least one minority district may be constructed; the second, that the minority group be "politically cohesive"; and the third, that the majority voting group consistently defeat minority candidates by voting in a bloc (racially polarized voting). Watsonville Latinos and MALDEF attorneys believed they could meet these criteria. Besides determining the future of voting and representation in this one community, the MALDEF lawsuit would become the theater in which would be played out broader issues of institutionalized racism and democratic practice.

Ideological Barriers to Latino Political Incorporation

Structural obstacles to political incorporation (such as at-large elections) may be relatively easier to overcome than the ideological barriers that reinforce them. This study also focuses on the ideas that shape and maintain structural barriers to minority empowerment. Among the most potent ideas providing explanatory if inadequate frameworks for the incorporation of ethnic groups into American society are assimilation models.²³ Popular interpretations of such theoretical constructs become the conceptual tools used by laypeople to understand socioeconomic differences and power differentials between groups.

Although the "melting pot" was discredited in the 1930s by social scientists, it has proved to be a tenacious national icon of an amalgamation process by which persons of diverse backgrounds gain equal access to opportunity and American institutions. Despite much evidence to the contrary, it is assumed that racial minorities can likewise become fully integrated into society. The persistence of racism and inequality, rather than invalidating the melting pot construct, is instead explained by cultural deficiency theories. Like other explanations that fail to locate Latino empowerment in historical and contemporary contexts of institutionalized racism, the "melting pot" metaphor ignores racial minority and majority power relations.

Watsonville has long boasted being as racially and ethnically diverse as any major immigrant-receiving city in the country. Reflecting the history of importation of agricultural labor to California, the city has accommodated persons of Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, black, and Mexican origin, among other nonwhite groups. The white community itself comprises numerous distinct ethnic populations. Of these, the most prominent today are Yugoslavians, commonly referred to in Watsonville as "Slavonians." The national identities of these European immigrants and their offspring, like those in the rest of the country, were transformed over time. Not only did they generally shed their national identities and take on an American mantle, they also assumed a racial identity as "whites." Vis-à-vis Latinos and other nonwhite groups, persons of European heritage in Watsonville are commonly spoken of as "white"; the local newspaper, the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, employs the terms "white" and "Anglo."

Proud of their immigrant and generally working-class origins, as well as their relative material success achieved in this country, Watsonville whites also invoke uncritically the melting pot credo. In a series of articles appearing in the local paper in the mid-1950s, the writer celebrated the city's history of immigrant settlement:

All races and creeds not only live in Watsonville—they ARE Watsonville.

They have given the city an example of democracy at work in its finest tradition.... every one of them American to the core. And from each group come citizens active in the growth of Watsonville.... They belong to the same clubs, attend churches together, have children playing on Little League ball teams together, run for office against each other and compete in business.... Watsonville was predestined to become a melting pot for all nationalities.²⁴

In these articles entitled "Watsonville-Melting Pot," modernity is equated with the loss of immigrants' native tongue and customs. With regard to Latinos, the reporter wrote, "One of the trends of modern life for the Mexican Americans is the manner in which many of their children have spurned their parents' language." "Modern" Japanese-American children are described as unable to read and write Japanese and as rejecting their parents' customs for "American ideas of romance and marriage." Watsonville whites are also depicted as essentially color-blind, the writer asserting that local Japanese had become so assimilated "they themselves must remind us occasionally of their ancestry."²⁵

The writer failed to mention, however, the many formal and informal occasions when a person's race was not only noticed but was the basis for discriminatory treatment. Asians and Latinos, even if U.S. citizens, were explicitly restricted from membership in the local Elks Club, which maintained a "whites only" membership until the mid-1970s. Members of a women's church-based "secret club" acquiesced to a minority decision to restrict from membership an Asian-American woman, a respected and long-time resident of the community.²⁶ The Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) documented numerous cases of job and housing discrimination, and the Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Office of Civil Rights found that the Pajaro Valley Unified School District discriminated against minority students. Few Latinos were appointed to city commissions before 1983, and no whites ever slated a person of color to run for political office until the city was taken to court by MALDEF.²⁷ A more discerning *Register-Pajaronian* journalist would later comment,

For the average Mexican family, life in Watsonville is not overly promising. Ask most Anglos and they'll look aghast at the suggestion that discrimination is practiced against Mexicans in town. But ask most Mexicans and they will be able to cite case after case, many of them documented, of subtle but definite discrimination.²⁸

Still, Watsonville whites embraced the melting pot metaphor, although in time it would undergo some revision. At the height of the 1987 city council elections, held during the MALDEF challenge, an incumbent described the community as "a melting pot that hasn't quite melted yet."

Assimilation theories also obscure the history of social policies that have significantly contributed to the social mobility and incorporation of white ethnic groups as compared to that of nonwhite groups.²⁹ White success is instead attributed to individual effort afforded opportunities provided by a democratically rendered "level playing field." Mirroring these prevalent social beliefs, the majority of Watsonville whites rejected any suggestion that racism accounted for the lack of Latino incorporation or the lack of white support for Latino candidates. Instead, Mexican Americans' unsuccessful bids for Watsonville city council were most often attributed to their lack of qualifications and inability to represent "the best interests of the community"; to the

failure of the Latino community to fully participate in community affairs and the political process; and to the presence of a large number of residents of Mexican ancestry who could not or did not vote.

Likewise, the at-large election system was deemed by most whites interviewed to be nondiscriminatory and more democratic than district elections because one can vote for all council candidates. District elections, it was said, would represent a return to the corrupt ward politics of the past and limit voters to electing only one candidate to the council. Popular and expert opinion held that "[t]here is a simple solution" to Latino political empowerment: "register more Hispanics communitywide and encourage them to vote."³⁰

A Question of Qualifications

During the MALDEF lawsuit, the Watsonville city attorney claimed that a "qualified Hispanic" could win in at-large elections. The nine Latinos who had run prior to 1987 had lost, according to this spokesman, because none were "viable" candidates who could appeal to both Hispanics and whites. He further claimed that Latinos had yet to participate in a meaningful way: "The candidates have not been involved in city and community affairs—on boards and commissions and the Chamber of Commerce."³¹

In view of how often white respondents repeated these contentions, they were asked to specify their criteria for a qualified candidate. Among the most frequently mentioned attributes was "prior community service," defined as serving on city commissions, boards, or committees and participating in service clubs. Having "knowledge of the community" was also considered important and usually equated with being a long-term resident if not a native of Watsonville. White informants also wanted evidence that a Latino candidate had served in "communitywide" or non-Latino organizations. Though Latino respondents examined the candidate's past record of addressing Latino issues, they also stipulated that any candidate should work in behalf of all groups. Occupation and educational background were also invoked as important qualifiers.

An empirically derived list of seven criteria was thus constructed, including education, occupation, length of residency in Watsonville, civic participation in white-dominated institutions and events, civic participation in Latino-dominated institutions and events, and political ideology.³² Successful white and unsuccessful Latino candidates were then measured accordingly. Most of the Latinos more than met these qualifications. The majority had achieved some college education; several held business or college degrees. The nine included a college instructor, owners of small businesses, and directors and employees of public service and nonprofit agencies. Six were "locals," born or raised in Watsonville; the other three had resided and worked in the community for two to nine years.

As for civic participation "communitywide," two Latino candidates had served on the city planning commission, and several were members of the county antipoverty agency, the Community Action Board. Others were board members of Planned Parenthood, the Santa Cruz chapter of the American Cancer Society, and the Watsonville Area Development Corporation; served on the Welfare Advisory Committee and the Community Advisory Committee; and chaired the Committee on Health and Social Services. All but one were members or founders of local Latino service organizations, but their espoused political ideology ranged from conservative to moderate or liberal. Jesse Gomez, an accountant and the first Watsonville Latino candidate for city council, emphasized his finance experience and service on the city planning commission. He had also supported white candidates and worked for their political campaigns. Running on a platform of "fiscal conservatism," he did not fit the stereotype of a Chicano radical. Still, he lost.

On one hand, white informants claimed Latino candidates were not viable because they were unable to represent the entire community. (Dolores) Cruz Gomez established the Sixteenth Congressional District Immigration Task Force to monitor Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) activities in that region, actions interpreted by the electorate as connoting her "special interest" politics. On the other hand, whites did not doubt their own ability to represent Latino interests. Former Mayor Ann Soldo's participation on the same immigration task force was cited as proof of her work in behalf of the Latino community during the MALDEF district court hearings. Attorneys representing the city during the lawsuit also stressed that "it does not take a Hispanic to represent a Hispanic." Soldo recounted in court that she was designated "Mayor of the Hispanics" in a newspaper article about her mayoral campaign.³³ Yet, no one supporting at-large elections ever suggested that it does not take an Anglo to represent Anglo constituents. No Latino candidate was designated "Mayor of the Anglos."

Latino candidates calling for "broader representation" on the city council, meaning representation not only of Mexican Americans but also of Latino noncitizens, always emphasized they would also represent the needs of the entire community. As evidenced by its voting behavior, the majority white electorate remained unconvinced. Though the perceived "radicalism" of three of the Latino candidates might explain the electorate's failure to support them, it does not explain lack of support for the other six. In view of the above analysis, white voters' rejection of Latino candidates on the basis of unmet civic and personal qualifications is unsubstantiated. White candidates with no city commission experience, little or no community service, and less education than Latino candidates nonetheless won voters' confidence—and political office.

Watsonville whites defend the status quo by attributing Latinos' weak electoral effectiveness and the paucity of Mexican-American elected officials to deficiencies found within Mexican culture itself, views reinforced in popular and scholarly literature. Political scientist Abigail Thernstrom maintains that "discrimination clearly was not the only cause."³⁴ Citing a thirty-year-old study of Mexican Americans dismissed by most social scientists as culturally biased, she attributes Latinos' inferior political and social status to their own "internal disunity" and "culture of political passivity." Thernstrom concludes that "if factors other than racism played a significant part in keeping Mexican American office holding disproportionately low, then protection from racism—the promise of Section 5—is correspondingly unnecessary."³⁵

Effect of the Noncitizen Population on Latino Voting Potential

The majority of whites interviewed also argued that Latinos' failure to win political office was not the result of at-large elections but rather of the large number of Mexican-origin residents who could not or did not vote. A vernacular rendition of this position attributed Latinos' inability to garner enough votes to the large number of "illegal aliens" residing in but otherwise not participating in the community.

Indeed, the presence of a substantial noncitizen population within the total Latino population did diminish the overall voting strength of that population. At first glance, the large percentage of Spanish-origin population suggested that the Latino community would have no difficulty electing their chosen candidates to the city council; about 94 percent of those identifying themselves as of Spanish origin in the 1980 census were of Mexican origin. However, the Spanish-origin population percentage also contained persons who were not citizens.

According to sample census data, of the 23,543 total population, 18,102, or 77 percent, were citizens. With respect to the Spanish-origin population, of 11,466 persons, almost 59 percent were citizens. Of the city's total citizen population, the Spanish-origin citizen population comprised 37 percent. Thus, the pool of Latino eligible voters was considerably less than the total Spanish-origin population.

The potential Latino impact on the electoral process prior to district elections was further diminished by the levels of Spanish-surname registration. The percentage of Spanish-surname registered voters in Watsonville was 17 percent in 1973, 15 percent in 1979, 17 percent in 1981, 19 percent in 1983, and 22 percent in 1985. The registration rate for the Latino population and the Anglo population differed significantly. In 1980, there were 8,936 non-Spanish-origin persons who were at least eighteen years old and citizens. Of this eligible voter population, there were 6,554 non-Spanish-surname registered voters, a registration rate of 73 percent. For the same year, there were 3,935 Spanish-origin persons at least eighteen years old and citizens. Of this Spanish-origin eligible voter population, there were 1,338 Spanish-surname registered voters, a registration rate of 34 percent.

The disparity in the registration rates was reflected in turnout rates as well. For example, in the 1985 city council elections, of 6,879 non-Spanish-surname registered voters, 28 percent, or 1,900 voters, turned out to vote. In sharp contrast, of 1,891 Spanish-surname registered voters, only 247 voted, a turnout rate of 13 percent.

Other factors may also explain in part the low registration and turnout rates of Latino citizens in Watsonville. There are a significant number of persons who speak Spanish and are not fluent in English. In 1980, about 41 percent of those city residents who were then at least five years old spoke Spanish at home. In the same age category for Spanish-origin persons, about 3,824 persons spoke a language other than English at home, did not speak English well, or did not speak English at all. Despite this large number of residents who

were not fluent speakers of English, the city did not make any affirmative efforts to involve these persons in the electoral process. From 1953 to 1985, there were 992 persons appointed as election officials to provide assistance to the voter at the polling place. Of this total number, only 30, or 3 percent, had Spanish surnames. Without bilingual election assistance, the participation of Latino voters who do not understand the English language could be expected to continue at low levels.

Attributing Latino candidates' electoral loss to the presence of noncitizens of Mexican origin in the population is, then, simplistic. More important, it strongly suggests that Latino candidates should expect support only from members of their own ethnoracial group, a position rendering the practice of racially polarized voting a social norm. This point is often missed.

Under the circumstances detailed above, Latinos running for office in at-large systems require the support of sufficient numbers of white voters. Though noncitizens may depress overall Latino voting potential, the "illegal alien" rationale also fails to explain why white voters refused to support Latino candidates.

A Return to Ward Politics?

Many older Anglos interviewed for this study had participated in a "Good Government" campaign to professionalize the running of the city in the 1950s. Reforms included replacing the alderman form of government with a councilman-city manager system and implementing citywide elections. Charges of corruption and ward bossism provided much of the impetus for these efforts. These elders therefore resisted MALDEF's proposed district elections on the grounds that it represented a "return to the ward system." This position also proved fallacious, as it is the councilman-city manager form of government, not district or at-large elections, that deters ward "bossism" as it was practiced in Watsonville prior to 1960.

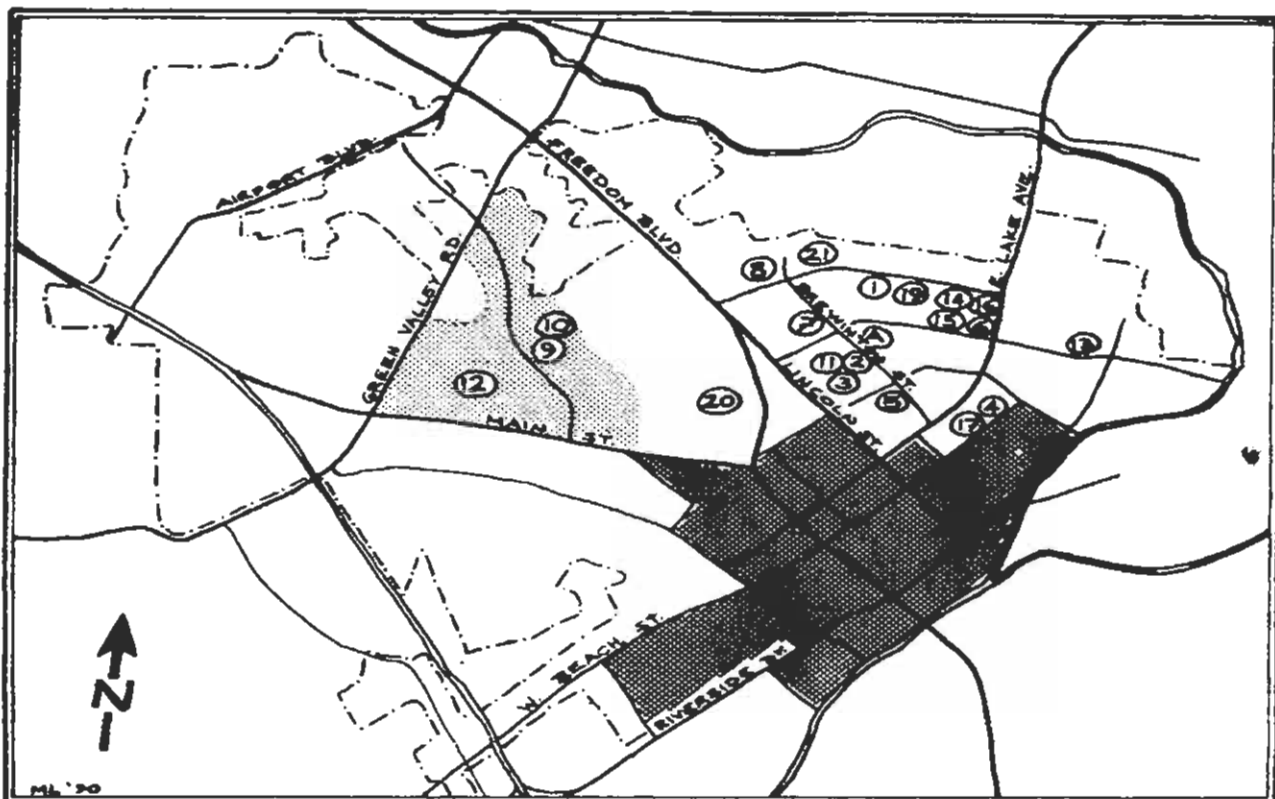
Ironically, supporters of district elections claimed that the reigning city manager personified bossism. Still, the changes proposed by MALDEF were not directed at dismantling the councilman-city manager system. Although the incumbent city manager was forced to retire by the first district-elected city council in 1990, there was never a suggestion to "throw the baby (the councilman-city manager system), out with the bath water (the city manager)." MALDEF supporters were clearly not advocating a return to the previous ward system.

Champions of the Good Government movement and others rejected these obvious differences even after the appellate court rendered its decision in favor of the plaintiffs. In a letter addressed to the council, one man stated, "I can assure you that my acquaintances and friends, many who boast Mexican heritages and are not few in number, see only mischief in the return to the district system for electing council members. District representatives will only represent 'local pledges or attachments.'"³⁶

This rationale was also specious, given the actual pattern of representation that emerged and endured under at-large elections. Although elected citywide, the majority of council members resided in one part of town, which was also the wealthiest part of the city. (See Map 1). This circumstance contributed to the grievances of district election advocates, who charged that council members ignored the problems of residents living outside this area. City Attorney Don Haile brushed off the residential concentration of council members, stating, "That's been criticized but that's the way the cookie crumbled."³⁷ Yet even the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* editorial staff, supportive of the city's opposition to districts throughout and after the lawsuit, conceded that, on this point, MALDEF supporters had cause:

That point was well taken. After all, five members of the existing (seven-member) City Council live so close together that a backyard barbecue threatens to become a violation of the state's open meeting laws. It makes sense that residents of areas surrounding downtown would feel more comfortable calling a council member who has lived in their neighborhood awhile than someone who lives in the Brewington-Martinelli district.³⁸



The arguments put forward by Good Government advocates and like-minded supporters thus begged the question, Good government for whom and by whom?



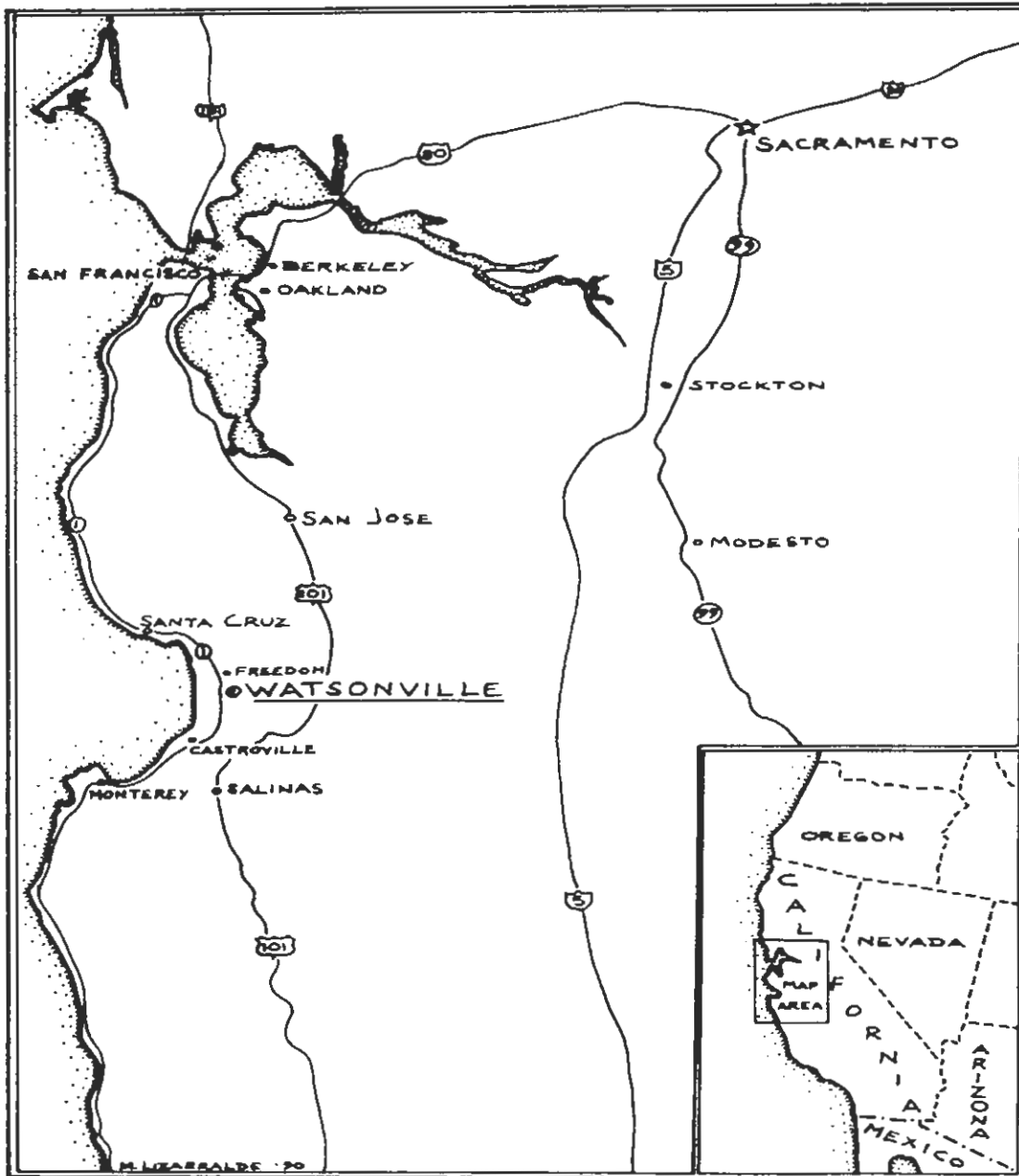
MAP 1: LOCATION OF WATSONVILLE CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS RESIDENCES (1969-1989) AND LATINO RESIDENTIAL DENSITY.

Key:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| A) John Radin (City Manager) | 11) Frank Osmer |
| 1) Betty Murphy (Mayor 1987-1989) | 12) Jean McNeil |
| 2) Tony Campos | 13) Charles Palmtag |
| 3) Dennis Osmer | 14) Donald E. Santi |
| 4) Ann Soldo (Mayor 1983-1987) | 15) Donald A. Sauer |
| 5) Vito Deretich | 16) Joe Richards |
| 6) Joe Marsano | 17) Gene Rugh |
| 7) Rex Clark | 18) Robert Pollock |
| 8) Gwen Carroll | 19) William Murphy (Mayor 1967-1971) |
| 9) Roy Ingersoll | 20) Edward C. Hall |
| 10) Bill Johnston (Mayor 1971-1983) | 21) Ernest Wong (appointed 1969) |

-  50-75% Latino
-  More than 75% Latino

Source: Adapted from 1980 Neighborhood Census



MAP 1: LOCATION OF WATSONVILLE IN CALIFORNIA AND WESTERN UNITED STATES.

"A Natural Progression of Political Activity" v. Judicial Intervention

The City of Watsonville was insured against civil rights claims at the time MALDEF filed suit, assuring the council of the funds and expert representation to pursue the case in court. The case was first heard in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California in San Jose, January 1987; Judge William Ingram presided. In his opening statement, the city's lead attorney, Vincent Fontana, claimed that the failure of Latinos to win elective office was not the result of racially polarized voting but simply the failure of Mexican Americans to register and turn out to vote in sufficient numbers. He further maintained that Latino political activity was of recent origin, the result of "encouragement" by Anglo city council members. Anglo encouragement was evidenced in "more and more" Latino appointments to city commissions, "more and more" Latinos hired by the city, and "more and more" efforts to get qualified Latino candidates into politics. "It's our view," he concluded, "that the natural progression of political activity is all that is needed in this case."³⁹

Fontana and witnesses for the defense emphasized the importance of city commission experience as "a first step towards having Hispanics on the City Council."⁴⁰ Incumbent council members claimed that city officials had been appointing Latinos since the mid-1960s and took credit for having appointed more Latinos to commissions during their tenure. A review of city commission appointments substantiates that city officials began to appoint more Latinos in 1983 and continued to do so. However, the analysis also substantiates five important points never brought up in court that call into question claims that city officials' made concerted efforts to get "qualified" Latinos into political office.

First, it reveals the city's poor record of Latino commission appointments prior to 1983. The first Latino was appointed in 1964; only seven others received appointments during the next eighteen years. Second, despite the appointment of seven more Latinos between 1983 and February 1987, there is a real lack of parity Anglos. The ratio of Latino to non-Latino appointments is approximately 15:83 during a twenty-three-year period; put another way, Latinos comprised only 19 percent of all commissioners ever serving the city. Third, not all commission appointments are equal in terms of providing the city management credentials white voters regard as necessary for potential political aspirants. Only four Latinos were appointed to the planning commission, viewed as the most important of the city commissions.

Fourth, no mention was made about how long a Latino was expected to serve as a commissioner before running for office. If a "natural progression of political activity" was all that was needed, Jesse Gomez's fifteen-month tenure on the personnel commission would conceivably have made him an acceptable candidate, as should have Anthony Campos's four years' service on the planning and design review commissions. Regardless, none of the fifteen appointed Latino commissioners were ever seriously supported for elective office by city officials or white voters prior to the MALDEF lawsuit.

Finally, the city's informal policy of "grooming" Latinos for political office by having them first serve on city commissions takes on a markedly discriminatory face. Though one might agree that "it only makes good sense for anyone wanting to serve on the council to become familiar with the operations of the city before running for office by first serving on commissions,"⁴¹ one must also ask why white candidates were not held to the same standard.

A Numerical Majority but Political, Social, and Economic Minority

Of all criteria used in at-large challenges to establish vote dilution, racially polarized voting is recognized as the most important.⁴² Lead attorney for the plaintiffs Joaquin Avila reminded the court that although Latinos had made nine attempts to win elective office over a period of sixteen years, none had prevailed. "This is an exclusion particularly glaring," he underscored, "since the Hispanic population is close to 50% of the ... population in the city of Watsonville."⁴³ In addition to testimony by local minority members actively involved in the political process, MALDEF employed ecological regression and homogeneous case analysis to establish the presence of racially polarized voting and the need for electoral reform in Watsonville. Both statistical methods have been approved and relied upon by the U.S. Supreme Court in similar voting rights cases.⁴⁴

The most common method used to establish race-based voting consists of correlating the ethnicity of the voters within a given precinct and the votes received by one or more minority candidates. This correlation is documented by applying a bivariate ecological regression analysis. A second method, the homogeneous precinct analysis, involves examining voting behavior in those precincts either predominantly white or predominantly minority. The absence of white support for Latino candidates was also extensively documented in the Watsonville case.⁴⁵ Latino candidates usually placed last or next to last in elections. Anglo support for Latino candidates ranged from 3 percent of white voters in the 1979 mayoral election to 22 percent of white voters in the 1983 city council election. In sharp contrast, the Latino community unanimously supported the Latino candidates. Statistical evidence indicated a very high correlation between the ethnicity of the voter and the ethnicity of the candidate. The evidence further demonstrated that white candidates supported by the Latino community, with the exception of one, were not supported by the white community in the elections of 1973, 1979, 1981, 1983, and 1985.

Although the defense did not present an expert witness who statistically invalidated MALDEF's findings, a demographer/urban geographer was employed to cast doubt on the political cohesiveness of Watsonville Latinos. Dr. Peter A. Morrison postulated that as the Latino community was socioeconomically heterogeneous, they would not necessarily vote for a Latino candidate but would vote their socioeconomic interests. He expected that "Hispanic homeowners might be aligning themselves with the Anglo and non-Hispanic homeowners."⁴⁶ Fontana pressed for a "general conclusion" about Latino political cohesiveness in Watsonville, to which Morrison responded,

My conclusion is that I— I guess the most, the single most important conclusion for this case is that I *would not expect*, based on the heterogeneity that I see here, to find all Hispanics in Watsonville voting alike.... Certainly, the antecedents for political cohesiveness are not there, not for a single Hispanic community. I would not, [based on] the census data theory, *expect* to find in this community that all Hispanics voted alike.⁴⁷

Curiously, Morrison did not refer to the *actual* voting behavior of the Latino community, as provided by an analysis of electoral data, nor did he provide evidence that Latino homeowners in fact voted differently than renters. Rather, he based his testimony on what he expected to find, what he expected not to find, and how Latino homeowners may hypothetically behave politically. This did not prevent him, however, from proposing a remedy for the lack of Latino representation on the Watsonville city council. According to Morrison, the "simple solution" was to register more Hispanics and encourage them to vote.⁴⁸

A Dream Deferred: District Court Judge Rules for the City

Judge Ingram found that counsel for the plaintiffs had, indeed, established the presence of racially polarized voting in Watsonville:

On the issue of polarization, as indicated in *Thomburg*, the court is principally concerned with the behavior of the Anglo community and whether as a factual reality that behavior dictates the virtual impossibility of the election of an Hispanic candidate under the present at-large election procedures. On the basis of the evidence before me, I conclude that a preponderance of the evidence favors plaintiffs on this issue.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Ingram rejected the plaintiff's case on the grounds that MALDEF had failed to prove the geographical compactness and political cohesion of the Latino population.

In rendering the decision, the court applied a new standard and did not incorporate the language of the Supreme Court's decision in the *Thomburg v. Gingles* case. In regard to geographical compactness, *Thomburg* requires at-large election challengers to demonstrate the possibility of creating at least one single-member district that contains a numerical majority of a given racial or ethnic minority group. The minority plaintiffs in the Watsonville case satisfied this requirement: a districting plan containing seven districts, two designated as minority districts, was submitted to the court. However, Judge Ingram established an additional requirement.

According to the trial court, when the minority populations are combined, the minority districts must contain at least a numerical majority of the city's entire minority population. The two minority districts presented in the Watsonville case contained only 37 percent of the city's Latino citizen population, thereby failing to meet the new standard, even though each of the minority districts contained about an 80 percent Latino population concentration.

Thomberg also requires that the minority community be politically cohesive. The Supreme Court specifically noted that evidence demonstrating that a significant number of the minority community votes for the same candidates is one way of establishing a minority community's political cohesiveness. Ingram recognized that the minority plaintiffs would meet this standard if the focus were limited only to those who actually voted in municipal elections. Nonetheless, the judge ruled that minority political cohesiveness could not be demonstrated because of the small number of Latino voters. Ingram required that plaintiffs prove that the Latinos who actually voted were cohesive politically with Latinos who did not vote.

In amending the Voting Rights Act, Congress recognized that discriminatory at-large elections can depress minority political participation. Thus, according to the statutory standard, low minority voter participation is a factor supporting a conclusion that the challenged election system does discriminate against minority voting strength. Witnesses for the plaintiffs also testified that Latinos were discouraged from participating in the political process in part because of the history of consistent losses by Latino candidates. Under the at-large system, white voters were able to consistently defeat candidates preferred by the minority community. Ingram, however, did not utilize the low minority voter turnout in Watsonville to support a finding of a violation of the Voting Rights Act. According to the judge, low minority voter participation was instead evidence that the minority community was not politically cohesive.

Ingram also disregarded the 1982 congressional amendment to the Voting Rights Act stipulating that minority plaintiffs are not required to prove historical discrimination nor that the discriminatory effect of electoral mechanisms was intentional. This amendment was intended to free plaintiffs' counsel from the time-consuming and costly burden of conducting historical research to establish that a climate of racial discrimination helps explain consistent minority losses at the polls. But in the absence of such documentation, Ingram fashioned his own history of race relations in Watsonville, concluding that "Watsonville has been singularly free of overt discrimination against Hispanics or any other group for the period covered by the evidence, which is generally the thirty-year period between 1950 and 1980."⁵⁰

Establishing Historical Discrimination

Had proof of historical discrimination been a requirement, plaintiffs' counsel could have amassed evidence spanning several decades. Notwithstanding some intermarriage and interracial friendships, the majority of Mexican-origin people have been relegated to a secondary racial and class position. In the 1940s and 1950s, Latino and white relations were largely characterized by social separation; the Watsonville Mexican population was small and insular. Mutual aid associations, or *mutualistas*, helped compatriots adjust to their new environs and provided participating families with funds to cover medical, funeral, and other expenses and take care of widows. Mexican holidays were celebrated within the group. *Mutualista* leaders also served as brokers between the Latino and white communities. One old-timer flatly stated, "Everyone knew their place; if you didn't, there would be trouble."⁵¹

In recounting how Mexican and white relations have changed since midcentury, several older Latinos remarked not only on the increased numbers of Latinos shopping downtown but on the ease with which they stroll up and down Main Street. A Mexican-American businesswoman remarked that when she was growing up, "you never saw Mexicans downtown unless their employers brought them here ... no way, they knew better."⁵² A former Watsonville police officer serving in the 1950s concurred that there existed a "community understanding" that Mexicans were not to venture above "lower Main." The police were instructed to enforce this social convention if breached.⁵³ Still, the Watsonville economy was dependent on Mexican labor.

Although Mexican-origin people have lived in the Pajaro Valley since before the founding of Watsonville, they have only comprised a significant portion of the city's population since 1960. Mexican workers were recruited to the area in large numbers to alleviate the shortage of agricultural workers during the Second World War, a relationship formalized in 1942 by the U.S. and Mexican governments under Public Law 78, or the Bracero Program. When the program was terminated in 1964, growers heavily recruited Mexican-American workers from along the Mexican border. In 1950, Latinos comprised about 9 percent of the total population, nearly doubling ten years later to 17 percent. Contributing to this early latinization of the city were changes in agricultural industries that required a near year-round labor force; former migrant workers and their families now settled in and around town.

The Latino population' grew 127 percent from 1960 to 1970, growth reflected in the city's public school population throughout the decade. Children of Mexican heritage comprised over one third of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) by 1967. In his study of white response to the latinization of Pajaro Valley schools, Ruben Donato remarks,

As more Mexican American children entered the schools, their academic and social standing became topics most school authorities tried to avoid. At the time the Pajaro Valley schools were consolidated, the local paper indicated that Mexican American children were having difficulty in school [and that] reorganization would make the problem easier to solve. School authorities, however, paid little attention to the increasing problems Mexican American children faced in their schools⁵⁴

Eventually, claims of educational inequities by Mexican-American students and parents were substantiated. In 1974, the HEW Office of Civil Rights cited the school district for noncompliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in five areas. Among other violations, the HEW found that students with limited English language skills were assigned to special education classes intended for the "educable mentally retarded," and gifted minority students were excluded from classes for advanced children.⁵⁵ The investigation also discovered that Title I monies appropriated to meet the needs of "culturally deprived" students were instead used for media equipment and other general expenditures.⁵⁶ Latino demands for equity in education would persist throughout the next two decades.

The agricultural industry's need for a permanent workforce also increased pressure on the available housing stock. In a 1967 *Register-Pajaronian* article, the writer noted that the most visible discrepancy between local Anglos and Mexicans was housing. A county housing inspector documented that 78 percent of a thousand homes surveyed in the Pajaro Valley were substandard, over half of them occupied by Mexican farm workers. Among those residing in substandard conditions were families who could afford to rent more adequate housing but who were prevented from doing so because of redlining. EOC Area Service Center personnel tested reported cases of housing discrimination by sending Latino staff to rent a home. If they were rejected, a white "couple" was sent to the same property. The agency documented cases in which the Anglo pair's application was accepted after the Latinos had been told the home was no longer available. The agency director also reported extreme cases of overt housing discrimination in which Latinos were told outright, "We don't rent to you people." The Area Service Center documented cases of employment discrimination by the same method.⁵⁷

Well into the 1970s, the Watsonville Elks Lodge No. 1300 subscribed to its national "whites only" membership policy.⁵⁸ Although several white men resigned from the club upon its refusal to grant membership to a respected Japanese-American businessman, the majority of its members remained, thereby supporting a known policy of racial exclusion. A Mexican-American woman's public condemnation of the club's prevailing color bar was reported by the local press as having "jarred" the community. It also prompted an Elks Lodge spouse to send the Latina spokeswoman an anonymous letter deprecating Mexican people and defending the club's right to discriminate:

Senora "Ill Manners"— You and many of your Compadre's Come here— Take all you can get and insult us; and we're supposed to take it. Because you're one of the minority groups (as you call them). We pay taxes so you can live in fine homes— eat high off the hog— and help support you in the style you have Never been accustomed to. The Elks reserve the right to pick and choose their members; as it is a "private club." I'm the proud WIFE of an Elk.⁵⁹

In establishing historical discrimination in Watsonville, the portrayal of Latinos as uninterested in community affairs or politically inert without the prodding of whites crumbles. From 1969 through the mid-1970s, local Latino mobilization began to reflect the protest and demand politics of civil rights groups around the country. Community advocates called attention to issues of housing, revenue sharing, child care, social justice, immigration, employment, education, health service accessibility, and cultural self-determination.⁶⁰ A lack of representation at city hall and on other decision-making bodies also became a focal point. A Chicano spokesperson stated, "We want to participate in the choice of those representatives.... We will not wait. Bad housing means bad health ... there is no job training in Watsonville ... there is no Mexican American on the council."⁶¹

Historical research also suggests that a climate of racial tension contributed to the defeat of Latino city council candidates.⁶² The Pajaro Valley was embroiled in farm labor unionizing disputes throughout the 1970s during the time the first Latinos ran for office. The *Register-Pajaronian* designated 1970 “the year of the strike” and called the activities of the United Farm Workers’ of America (UFW) “the most significant thing to happen to this area since the 1930s ... [when] there was an attempt then to organize the field workers.”⁶³ Lettuce coolers were shut down, lettuce shipments decreased, and violence broke out on the picket lines. Five months later, the first Mexican American ran for city council. Boycotts against local merchants were also visited on the city by the farm workers’ union.

Mexican Americans ran for school board and city council in 1973 in the midst of Latino political mobilization in the schools and UFW threats to again picket and boycott local growers if they refused to negotiate. In 1979, a Latino ran for mayor during the time the Salinas and Pajaro Valleys became the “decisive battleground” for the UFW’s unionizing efforts. Twenty-eight Watsonville growers were in pitched battle with the farm workers’ union, culminating in what was called a “Day of Rage” and the farmers’ ultimate capitulation to union demands one month after the city council election. Latino residents publicly expressed concern that the strike would “hurt Mexican-American candidates by triggering resentment of their ethnic group.”⁶⁴

By the late 1970s, local reporters had begun to ask political candidates if “racial division is a major problem in Watsonville.” Candidate Donald West replied affirmatively, adding, “Projections indicate that in a few years the city’s population will be more than 50 percent Mexican American, a fact that much of the community is refusing to accept.... The council [should] promote any program which will create a better understanding between the races.”⁶⁵

A second candidate denied that racism was a problem. Once again evoking an image of Watsonville as “a city of many cultures,” she identified the problem instead as “the major influx of illegal aliens ... upsetting the status quo by their competition in the labor market—in fact, for all services.”⁶⁶ Her policy recommendation was to press for legislation in order to “protect our good law abiding citizens of all nationalities ... legal residents.”⁶⁷ She was elected that year and reelected four years later; West was unsuccessful. Reporters raised the question about Watsonville race relations in subsequent elections.

The *Register-Pajaronian* characterized the 1970s as having “[begun] with the UFW strike and ended with the PVUSD desegregation case unresolved.”⁶⁸ Latino candidates in the 1980s ran for office in the context of growing tension about the ongoing latinization of the city, increased Mexican gang activity, and a changing economy precipitating an eighteen-month-long frozen food industry strike that further polarized Latino and white residents. These Latino candidates would fare no better than their predecessors until MALDEF sued the city.

Judge Ingram found that there was “no evidence that the City of Watsonville has been unresponsive to the needs of the Hispanic community, and [that] indeed the evidence reveals to the contrary.”⁶⁹ He also dismissed as unimportant plaintiffs’ evidence detailing the inferior socioeconomic position of Watsonville Latinos despite these factors’ being included in the “totality of relevant facts” for determining vote dilution by Congress. “There is no evidence,” the judge concluded, “that any differences in educational attainment, job opportunity, income or health benefits are the result of past discrimination of any kind, or that past discrimination has caused those factors to impede the ability of the Hispanic community to participate in the process.”⁷⁰

A City “Singularly Free” of Discrimination? Lower Court Overturned

City officials and their supporters celebrated Ingram’s decision as proof that the at-large election system was not discriminatory and that they, by extension, were not racists. Forgotten were the judge’s finding that Watsonville whites’ voting behavior “dictates the virtual impossibility of the election of an Hispanic candidate under the present at-large election procedures,”⁷¹ the documented cases of historical racism and Latino political initiative known to the people of Watsonville, and the charges of council indifference to the Latino community during the recent frozen food industry strike. A congratulatory *Register-Pajaronian* editorial further absolved city officials and their supporters and reaffirmed Latinos as the real

problem. Noting a foregone conclusion that at least one Latino would be elected to the Watsonville city council in the May 1987 elections, the writer stated,

The city has won its case, at least for now (MALDEF may appeal). With a council election coming up this Spring, the city has a chance to show how wrong MALDEF really was in its lawsuit. But for this to happen, *Hispanics themselves will have to get involved in local politics at least to the extent of learning something about the candidates and issues, and registering and voting.*⁷²

Despite the loss at the district court level, the MALDEF lawsuit had already affected whites' political behavior. City officials realized that a mere reiteration of positions justifying the status quo would no longer suffice. By mid-February, MALDEF announced that the plaintiffs would appeal the trial court decision. Word quickly circulated in the community that city officials were inquiring into the background of several Latinos in order to promote them for the upcoming May 1987 elections. Latinos failing to get their endorsement lost the election. A Juan Morales supporter and LULAC member remarked, "Watsonville is not ready for a person who tells it like it is— about racism, about discrimination, about the lack of Latino representation— [Morales] wasn't toeing the line they need to hear— not like Tony."⁷³ Anthony Campos, the first Mexican-American council candidate slated by local white political brokers, also became the first Hispanic elected to the Watsonville city council. His supporters' celebratory mood would prove, however, short-lived.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit overturned the lower court's decision in July 1988. The three presiding judges ruled unanimously for the plaintiffs, finding that the trial court judge had erred on several major points. By focusing on the "recent good intentions" of the city officials, the district judge had failed to see that Watsonville Latinos still suffered from "historical discrimination." Low voter turnout and registration are "indicative of the lingering effects of past discrimination."⁷⁴ Judge Dorothy Nelson, author of the opinion, added,

We assume that had the district court considered the history of discrimination, rather than just recent reforms, it would have reached an opposite conclusion. Discrimination against Hispanics in California and the Southwest has pervaded nearly all aspects of public and private life.... This discrimination has touched the right of California Hispanics to vote and to participate in politics.... California has discriminated against Hispanics by limiting their access to education. Discrimination in social settings and employment have hindered and continue to harm Hispanics....

These facts can leave no doubt that Hispanics in California have been subject to widespread discrimination for many years. This history is more than sufficient to meet the first Senate factor. We also find that Watsonville Hispanics bear the effects of this discrimination and appellants have thus established the presence of the fifth Senate factor.⁷⁵

City officials vehemently denied the higher court's charges of racial discrimination. City Attorney Don Haile asserted, "If we were in the South, with neighborhoods with unpaved streets, I think you could point to discrimination, but I defy anyone to say that it is true in Watsonville."⁷⁶ The mayor insisted that Watsonville's problem was not racism but getting Hispanic candidates to run: "We've tried to encourage them, but it's not like people are waiting with their tongues out wanting to be on the council. It's a lot of hard work."

The majority of white Watsonville residents interviewed for this study reject the racist label; typically they equate racists with individuals harboring animosity toward racial minorities or with members of extreme hate groups. A former elected official said, "A racist is someone who condemns a total group when they're really angry at a few of the minorities of the group ... I think that's when you're a racist— when you make these broad statements."⁷⁷ A resident active in civic affairs differentiated between racism and prejudice on the basis of the involved parties, not their behavior: "Well, when I think of racists, I mean *red* racists, I think of the Ku Klux Klan, and the skinheads and, you know, these Nazi groups or something like that. But if it's just, say, a friend of mine that expresses, you know, thoughts, then I think of them as prejudice.... *Racist* seems a little extreme to me."⁷⁸ A few entertained the idea that they and others may have "a little bit" or "tinge" of racism. "I don't think we're mean, skinhead racist type of thing," said one incumbent council member, "[there are] degrees of racism ... I think all of us have a little flaw-type thing."⁷⁹

Advocates of district elections tended to articulate elements of structural or institutional racism models, locating racism within the structures of various state apparatuses rather than in the individual.

Popular expressions of structural-racism tenets included blaming "the system" for perpetrating discrimination. A young Latino activist differentiated structural from personal racism in the following manner: "At-large elections ... that's institutional racism ... it's racism by a system as opposed to the individual."⁸⁰ In their view, racial inequality is maintained as much by whites who do little to change existing relationships of power as by overtly racist individuals.

"This Is Not Birmingham": Pursuing the Case to the Supreme Court

The city council voted unanimously to fight the appellate court's decision. As a first measure, attorneys for the city petitioned the court of appeals to rehear the case, a move zealously endorsed by the local paper. The tone of the editorial indicates the degree to which MALDEF detractors rejected the federal court's charges of racism:

Watsonville ... has already had its fill of district representation. It finally got rid of it, with its corrupting influence and inefficiency, in the late 1950s.... And now, MALDEF wants to turn the clock back on the tenuous basis that Hispanics are being underrepresented under the at-large system.

We've argued this point before: If Hispanics are not electing Hispanics to the council, it is not because racial discrimination works against their election but because they're not going to the polls and voting. Turnout of Hispanics in past elections have been pitifully small. Federal Judge William Ingram ... agreed, finding in essence that the failure of Hispanics to win election to the council could not be attributed to the fact they were Hispanic.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Judge Ingram on the flimsy basis he ought to have considered how Hispanics vote, rather than be influenced by the fact that only a few voted. We feel now as we did then that these few votes carry little significance in light of the great number of Hispanics who deigned not to vote....

This newspaper has always championed candidates, Hispanic or otherwise, who it feels are fit for office, and can serve the entire city well ... but not at the cost of uprooting the entire political structure of the city. We fear, too, that a district system of electing council people could promote disharmony and create political and racial divisions this city's been singularly free of in the past.

In essence, MALDEF is saying that since it can't win by the existing rules adopted by the majority of people in Watsonville, the rules must be changed. And the 9th district circuit court is aiding this fraud on the people of Watsonville by ordering what is nothing less than judicial gerrymandering.⁸¹

On December 7, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit rejected the city's request for a rehearing. Judge Nelson also amended her first opinion to note that MALDEF had not presented sufficient evidence of historical discrimination against Hispanics. She added, however, that proof of historical discrimination is not needed to establish a violation of Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act and that MALDEF had more than adequately demonstrated that Watsonville was in violation of Section 2. Within days of the rejection, Fontana recommended that the city petition the United States Supreme Court, a recommendation Mayor Betty Murphy championed in the name of trying to avoid the "polarization that we never had before."⁸² Those critical of the city's decision to pursue the case likened the city council to "George Wallace standing at the school doors to keep blacks from attending."⁸³

In light of the city officials' decision, district election advocates again began to mobilize. This time, however, the council's unanimity of resolve broke. Making clear that he was still not in favor of district elections, council member Dennis Osmer asked his colleagues to "put this thing behind us," requesting that the council begin to investigate potential district plans. To pursue further litigation, he believed, would only intensify the ill will between Latinos and whites. In a written statement presented to council members on December 20, 1988, Osmer stated,

The finding [of discrimination] is an affront to the Council's sense, and indeed the sense of many here, that the Council represents the majority and that racism and discrimination in government is present only to the smallest extent humanly possible.... The court battle has generated bad feelings on both sides of the issue within our community.

It has also brought a new consciousness and awareness to the Hispanics who comprise more than 48 percent of our community. *Whether or not we personally believe racism and discrimination exists to the extent charged*, we must understand that the sense of exclusion in any person or group is the seed of anger and resentment. We can be sure that our continued appeal will invite among us a depth of resentment we have never encountered and are taxed to imagine....

In demanding an appeal, the Council will leave Watsonville "under the glass" of the entire nation for an indeterminate period. Studies and commentaries already made by outsiders are harsh and unflattering.... *I'm sure you all share my revulsion at the comparison of our city with Birmingham in the '60s*. We know this is unfair and in reality untrue, but we must deal with this perception and its negative influence on our community.⁸⁴

The council rejected both Osmer's charter proposal and demands that council meetings convened to discuss the appeal be open to the public, contributing to his further estrangement from his colleagues. He would conclude that "there is much less interest [by the council] in justice than there is in retaining power."⁸⁵ The year came to a close without a formal statement from the council about their intentions and with a growing pro-district coalition of community groups determined to keep coming back to city hall until they got district elections. The MALDEF lawsuit was judged by the local press as "topping the year's news" and as having placed the small town under national scrutiny: "As 1988 ends, cities and school districts throughout the nine-state area under the appeals court's jurisdiction have been portrayed as waiting with bated breath for the outcome."⁸⁶

The lawsuit continued to engage the energies of Watsonville residents and dominate local headlines throughout January and February 1989. The *Register-Pajaronian*, however, began to shift its position, the angry tone discernible in its earlier editorial becoming muted. Though maintaining its support of the council and the council's position that at-large elections were not responsible for Watsonville Latinos' inability to win council seats, the editorialist recommended that the city council accept the court of appeals decision. The recommendation was based on three reasons: first, the expense of further pursuing the case; second, the divisiveness it engendered; and third, the negative light in which Watsonville was being cast by outside observers. On this last point the editorial writer noted that "in the last two months the suit had taken on a life of its own. It is increasingly being seen around the state as a symbol for the Hispanic struggle against entrenched interests for political power. A conference held last month at San Jose State showed how widely that view is becoming accepted and how isolated the City Council has become in its position."⁸⁷

Despite the outpouring of community sentiment, a petition for district elections signed by over two hundred residents, and the editorial advice, the council announced its decision to press on with an appeal. The city attorney claimed that the city's civil rights insurance coverage required them to do so, otherwise the city could be liable for over a million dollars in legal fees. The public was skeptical, especially when requests for copies of the city's insurance policy were denied.

Several council members also became increasingly skeptical. According to those privy to the closed meetings, the council was informed that the insurance company would not guarantee payment if the case was lost at the U.S. Supreme Court level. Anthony Campos and Vito Deretich now joined Osmer in opposition. Like Osmer, they stated publicly that their reason for breaking ranks with the council majority was not to support district elections but to stop the polarization of the community.

The final council vote to petition the Supreme Court was 4-3; the majority was apparently willing to risk the city's financial security in order to win the case. The Watsonville districting case would not, however, be among the 5 percent of the cases selected for review by the U.S. Supreme Court. By March 20, 1989, city officials were faced with having to draw up district plans as ordered by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit under the supervision of Judge Ingram of the district court. Once the plan was approved by all sides on May 30, the city of Watsonville prepared to elect a new council on November 7, 1989, by court-ordered districts.

The 1989 Council Elections: Broader Participation and Representation

The city adopted a single-member, seven-district election plan (see Map 2); two of the districts, District 1 (West Side) and District 2 (Downtown), were predominantly Latino, 78 percent and 80

percent respectively. Two districts, District 4 (Arthur Road–Alta-Vista) and District 5 (Heights) had Latino populations of 44 percent. Latinos comprised 37 percent of District 3 (North End) and 31 percent of District 7 (East Side). District 6 (Brewington–Martinelli), where five of the seven 1987 city council members resided, had the fewest Latino residents, 27 percent. Voters also no longer elected the mayor directly. Instead, the mayor was selected by and from among the council members themselves (see Map 2).

The day after the city agreed to a district plan, Deretich announced his decision not to run in the next election, remarking, "Let the Whiz Kids do it. They've got all the answers."⁸⁸ Three other incumbents affirmed their decisions not to run, including Osmer, who would instead make a bid for county supervisor. No new candidate came forth to run against incumbents Mayor Betty Murphy and Tony Campos for the sixth district seat; Gwen Carroll was the only other incumbent to run for reelection. Thus, only two incumbents could possibly return to the Watsonville city council.

By September 1, seventeen candidates had entered the race; for many of them, their candidacy represented their entrée into public life. The *Register-Pajaronian* observed, "Surveying the candidates as a whole, one striking feature of the group is the relatively small number who are connected with the old family–Chamber of Commerce–service club axis that has dominated city elections for years. The new City Council should have a different cast to it, no matter who wins."⁸⁹

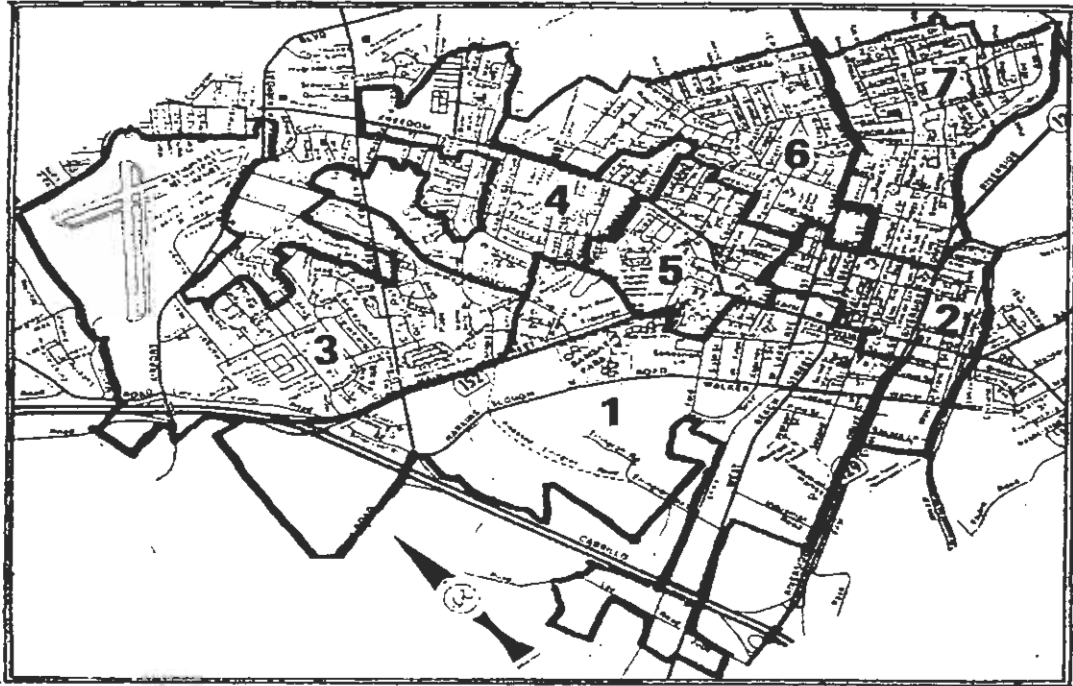
The Earthquake and the Rise of Anti-Latino Sentiment

Watsonville was thrust back into the national spotlight before its first district elections were held. On October 17, 1989, the city was devastated by an earthquake measuring 7.1 on the Richter scale. Infrastructure and downtown businesses were destroyed, contributing to the further weakening of the local economy; hundreds of families were made homeless. Officially designated a Federal Disaster Area, the city was forced to turn its attention to the community's immediate needs; the elections were postponed to December 5.

Latinos and whites interviewed claimed that the earthquake heightened Anglo-Latino tensions and affected the elections. To the chagrin of some residents, Watsonville was portrayed as a largely Mexican farm worker town by the media. Districts 1 and 2, where the city's Latino population and poor are largely concentrated, were among the areas most affected by the earthquake. A majority of the people forced to take refuge in shelters were thus of Mexican heritage and the ones most frequently featured in the media. Anti-Mexican sentiment was expressed in letters to the editor throughout this period, one writer remarking, "The Mexicans ... have the gall to demand that we find them housing immediately, or they will 'take over city council'; [this] is nothing short of the worst type of prejudice. A lot of whites, Orientals, blacks and so on have lost their homes and you don't see them making a fuss."⁹⁰ In a similar vein, another gentleman remarked,

When will the Latinos, Hispanics or whatever learn? "Latinos are being left out of the decision making. They weren't asked." Since when, in a dire emergency, do people have to be asked? They volunteer.... But, oh no, not the Latinos. They weren't asked. Is it any wonder there is such resentment? They benefited and are benefiting more than anyone yet they still haven't learned how to be part of this community—a good part. I hope voters keep all this in mind next month. The example set so far doesn't merit *this kind* on the city council.⁹¹

On the eve of the elections, persons supporting status quo candidates (Kacsmaryk, Hoffman, Milladin, De La Cruz, Murphy, Carroll) ran a derogatory half-page political advertisement in the local paper in which district election proponents and candidate (Dolores) Cruz Gomez (District 1) were labeled "complainers." They were also depicted as "trashing our local government for the selfish purpose of advancing their own political agenda—a dangerous mixture of discredited socialist/populist notions, plus a heavy dose of old-fashioned demagoguery."⁹² On election day, outgoing councilman Dennis Osmer worried there would be an anti-Hispanic backlash at the polls, "There is a very strong sentiment that there is a preponderance of Hispanic [candidates] taking advantage of the earthquake. It's something I don't agree with but it's there."⁹³



MAP 2: WATSONVILLE DISTRICT PLAN.
District 1 is 78 percent Latino; District 2, 80 percent; District 3, 37 percent;
District 4, 44 percent; District 5, 44 percent; District 6, 27 percent; and District 7,
31 percent (Source: Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund).

Districts 1 and 2 received the greatest attention, being the two "minority districts" created by the lawsuit. In addition to race, district elections were recognized as giving liberal and progressive candidates a greater opportunity to win office; conservatives thus played on antiliberal sentiments as well. Candidate Paul Milladin (District 1) described his opponent (Dolores) Cruz Gomez as critical with few solutions. "Destructive confrontation won't help," his campaign advertisements read. Indicative of the new political rules wrought by districting and the fact that he was competing in a Latino district, the Yugoslav-American candidate ran campaign advertisements in Spanish as well as English: "*El amigo verdadero de los Mexicanos* (A Proven Friend of the Mexican People)."⁹⁴ Native to Watsonville and former part owner of the Richard Shaw frozen food company, Milladin is connected to powerful Yugoslav-American and business interests locally.

Oscar Rios was the most visible candidate in District 2. Like (Dolores) Cruz Gomez, he ran on a Latino ticket, advocating the need for representatives of working-class Latinos. Rios was already well known to his constituents for his role during the protracted frozen food industry strike as regional organizer for the Cannery Workers Organizing Project in Watsonville. Many residents in District 2 were frozen food plant workers of Mexican origin involved in or otherwise affected by the strike. Rios and his supporters had not participated in the district elections struggle or in city elections prior to the MALDEF victory. They had, however, articulated during the strike the pressing need to elect Latino council members who would represent workers and minorities, charging that the all-white city council was uncooperative and, at times, hostile.

The eighteen-month Watsonville frozen food industry strike was resolved in February 1987, nearly a year and a half before the appellate court decision. With greater resources than other strike support groups, the Cannery Workers Organizing Project eclipsed earlier efforts to organize frozen food workers, including those of (Dolores) Cruz Gomez; the ill will between these groups engendered during the strike would reemerge during the first district elections.

Rios' opponent, Daniel Dodge, was inspired by the MALDEF victory and became a vocal advocate for district elections during the period when the city was resisting the appellate court's decision. Supported by (Dolores) Cruz Gomez, Dodge became embroiled in the rivalry between the (Dolores) Cruz Gomez and Rios camps. The status quo candidate, Ray Hoffman, never seriously threatened the Latino campaigns. Todd McFarren (District 4) became a target for conservative south county voters eager to keep liberal politics out of Watsonville. Characterizing McFarren as a mouthpiece for progressive Santa Cruz politics, a Carroll supporter warned *Register-Pajaronian* readers:

One of the under-reported aspects of our council election is the move being made by the Santa Cruz City "progressives" to take control of our city. Led by council candidate Todd McFarren, a lawyer, these people seek to install a Gary Patton regime in the south county.... Vote "No" on S.C.A.N. [Santa Cruz Action Network]. Vote "No" on Patton. Vote "No" on McFarren. Re-elect Gwen Carroll to the fourth district seat!⁹⁵

This letter was photocopied, thrice circled in red ink, and hung on doors in District 4 early on the morning of the election. Intended to influence voters at the last possible minute, the effort failed to reelect the incumbent.

TABLE 1. December 1989 Watsonville City Council District Election Outcome

	# of votes	% of votes
District 1		
Paul Milladin	258	54%
Dolores Cruz Gomez	224	46%
(1,371 registered voters, 35% Spanish-surname; 28.2% turnout, 31.3% Spanish-surname)		
District 2		
Oscar Rios	195	53%
Ray Hoffman	96	26%
Dan Dodge	78	21%
(811 registered voters, 61.3% Spanish-surname; 37.7% turnout, 57.8% Spanish-surname)		
District 3		
Lowell Hurst	380	66%
David Wildman	176	31%
Robert Armstrong	21	4%
(1,633 registered voters, 20.6% Spanish-surname; 31.9% turnout, 17.7% Spanish-surname)		
District 4		
Todd McFarren	303	54%
Gwen Carroll	259	46%
(1,306 registered voters, 34.8% Spanish-surname; 38.8% turnout, 20.5% Spanish-surname)		
District 5		
Parr Eves	278	63%
Luis De La Cruz	145	33%
Marie Williams	19	4%
(1,142 registered voters, 28.8% Spanish-surname; 33.7% turnout, 20.8% Spanish-surname)		
District 6		
Betty Murphy	533	53%
Tony Campos	467	47%
(2,042 registered voters, 16.2% Spanish-surname; 44.8% turnout, 12.3% Spanish-surname)		
District 7		
Johnny Kacsmaryk	726	73%
Robert Chacanaka	272	27%
(2,048 registered voters, 17.5% Spanish-surname; 44.2% turnout, 12.6% Spanish-surname)		

Source: City Clerk's Statement of Results of General Municipal Election, 5 December 1989

The Politics of Displacement: A Liberal Majority Ascends

Electoral reforms increase minority political participation, at least initially; whites also typically turn out in even greater numbers. So many people jammed into the city hall chambers on election night in Watsonville in December 1989 that the vote counting machine malfunctioned due to the heat. Unlike the turnout at ordinary city council meetings, the crowd was multiracial and multiethnic; the largely Latino and Anglo crowd was also dotted with Native Americans, Asians, and African Americans. The city clerk's suggestion to move the machine to a cooler back room was first met with suspicion; campaign representatives demanded to be allowed to accompany her to ensure that the count was legitimate. Elections results were projected on an overhead screen in the city council chambers; as the final returns for Districts 2 and 4 flashed on the screen, district election supporters broke into loud jubilation. "There is a God!" exclaimed a Mexican-American activist; Todd McFarren and Oscar Rios had won. Their excitement was muted when the last votes in District 1 were projected; (Dolores) Cruz Gomez lost to Milladin by a mere thirty-four votes.

National and local television, radio, and print media had come to cover a story about Hispanic ascendancy in a city that former presidential candidate Jesse Jackson had likened to Selma, Alabama, in the 1960s. Having hung around polling places in Districts 1 and 2 all day long, they now descended on Oscar Rios, the only Latino to have carried his district. Rios' supporters lifted him onto their shoulders and carried him out into the city hall foyer, where he rightly called his victory "a people's victory." Of all the newly elected council members, Rios most represented working-class people of Mexican descent. To symbolize the class origin of his constituency, he removed his suit jacket and donned the workman's denim jacket offered him. Surrounded by his supporters' children, he embraced them, stating that one day they too would be on the council.

Predictably, the media asked (Dolores) Cruz Gomez, the most visible of the MALDEF plaintiffs, whether district elections really work, given the single Latino elected that evening. Admitting she was disappointed that only one Latino had been elected, (Dolores) Cruz Gomez nonetheless maintained that the district system had already proven better than the at-large system; more persons sympathetic to the needs of the poor, the working class, and Latinos had been elected. Much of the nonlocal media overlooked this critical point; MALDEF advocates had fought for and won an election system that would give candidates supported by Latino voters a better opportunity to win. Four of the liberal candidates they had supported won, displacing the majority conservative vote on the Watsonville city council.

Analysis of the 1989 Election Outcome

With the implementation of district elections, members of the Watsonville Latino community were for the first time able to elect candidates to represent their interests in city government. Opponents of the 1982 amendments to the Voting Rights Act have argued that districts dilute rather than enhance minority political empowerment despite such gains. According to this thinking, nonwhite officeholders elected from the few minority-designated districts remain a minority vote and therefore ineffective. They also argue that concentrating nonwhite voters into a few districts diminishes the influence of those minority voters remaining in white-dominated districts and that all-white districts can ignore minority interests altogether.⁹⁶ Echoing these arguments, attorney Vincent Fontana maintained that if districts were adopted in Watsonville, Latinos "could not hope to be elected dogcatcher" in the five predominantly white districts.⁹⁷ Likewise, council member Rex Clark predicted that "the two heavily Hispanic districts would probably have no clout on the council, since the remaining five councilmen would be more likely to band together and out-vote the two from the Hispanic districts."⁹⁸ They had underestimated, however, the grassroots political mobilization sustained from earlier organizing efforts that converged during this first district election.

Political skills acquired by confronting frozen food industry bosses and unresponsive union leaders during the Watsonville strike were transferred to local electoral politics. Strike leaders had also run for union offices and were active participants in the 1988 presidential campaign. Gloria Bettancourt, a twenty-four-year veteran frozen food worker and high-profile strike spokeswoman, was elected a Jesse Jackson delegate for the Sixteenth Congressional District. The strike thus provided Oscar Rios and (Dolores) Cruz Gomez with politically informed and mobilized constituencies.

An interracial, church-based coalition whose goals included developing Latino leaders was organized in the mid-1980s prior to the frozen food industry strike. Successful "planned actions" by the Parish Church Communities included the installation of public bathrooms in city parks and forced closure of a rat-infested downtown movie house. Many of the relationships forged between white liberals and Latinos endured beyond the life of this organization. Liberal council members elected to office under district elections were among its members, as were a number of their campaign supporters.

Mexican-American women dominated the League of United Latin American Citizens leadership from the mid to late 1980s. Under their direction, LULAC initiated a successful broad-based housing task force that organized formidable support for the preservation of agricultural lands. They also launched vigorous voter registration and get-out-the-vote drives, increasing the number of Latino voters and Latino participation in local and regional political campaigns. These activities contributed to these Latinas' growing sense of political efficacy and actual influence.

After the appellate court decision, a multiracial liberal coalition emerged from these and other politicizing experiences. Although fragile, the coalition sustained itself long enough to confront the entrenched political machine and to select council candidates whom they believed to be more accountable to minorities, the working class, and poor people.

Although the impending district elections were often seen in terms of white versus Latino candidates, the 1989 Watsonville election was more ideologically and ethnoracially complex. The election of Latinos to government office was a major goal of the MALDEF lawsuit; however, most Watsonville Latinos and their non-Latino allies never supported candidates merely on the basis of their race or ethnicity. There were eleven white candidates, five Latinos, and one American Indian. Of the eleven white contenders, district advocates supported three: Todd McFarren, Parr Eves, and Lowell Hurst. An active member and former treasurer of LULAC, McFarren had participated in the effort to achieve district elections from its inception. Parr Eves, a participant in the Parish Church Communities coalition, was also trusted by the coalition. High school teacher Lowell Hurst had no relationship with the district election advocates nor any record of community political participation prior to the 1989 city council campaign. After meeting with the candidate to ascertain his political views, the coalition determined that Hurst was supportive of their issues and endorsed him.

As Rios was the only Latino elected, some observers questioned whether district elections are a viable mechanism for increasing minority representation. But the numbers of Latinos running in the 1989 elections tended to obscure other factors that influenced decisions made by the electorate. Although there was a field of five Latino candidates, a maximum of four could have been elected, as Oscar Rios and Dan Dodge ran against each other in District 2. White support for Anthony Campos (District 6) was significantly eroded, as district elections pitted him against fellow incumbent Betty Murphy. Several Anglo residents of District 6 interviewed for this study claimed that neighbors had cast anti-Mexican votes against Campos in order to maximize the number of Anglos remaining on the city council. One elderly, conservative Brewington Street resident stated, "I couldn't believe it—Tony's a good ol' boy—but my neighbors said they don't want any more Mexicans on the council than they have to."⁹⁹

For most members of the liberal coalition, only Districts 1 and 2 offered acceptable Latino candidates. Luis De La Cruz (District 5) and Anthony Campos (District 6) were rejected on the basis of their opposition to district elections and their alliance with the white political machine in general. In District 5, district advocates actively supported Parr Eves over De La Cruz and Marie Williams and endorsed Native American candidate Robert Chacanaka (District 7) over conservative candidate Johnny Kacsmaryk. Nonlocal media coverage of the election obscured the fact that, had all four possible Latino candidates succeeded, the majority vote on the city council would have remained conservative and representative of those who opposed efforts by the Latino community for political self-determination.

Conservative detractors attributed (Dolores) Cruz Gomez's failure to carry District 1 to the electorate's intolerance of "radical" politics; others claimed she had failed to give her campaign sufficient attention due to her involvement in earthquake relief work. Given the closeness of the race (she lost by thirty-four votes), neither of these explanations are entirely adequate. Milladin ran a high-profile, well-financed campaign aimed at attracting Latino and Spanish-speaking voters as well as whites. Population changes in District 1 may also have affected the election outcome. Compared with District 2, where 61 percent of the registered voters were Latino, only 35 percent of registered voters were Latino in District 1; Southwest Voter

Registration Education Project workers canvassing District 1 for new voters discovered many more noncitizens than they had anticipated. The districts had been drawn based on 1980 population census data. In addition, the population profile of District 1 had changed in the intervening years due to construction of new housing whose residents were largely white.

The implementation of district elections resulted in increased minority voter turnout in the 1989 Watsonville elections. Although some speculated that the earthquake would depress the overall vote, the turnout rate was higher than in 1987. In Districts 1 and 2, turnout rates were not only higher than in 1987, Spanish-surname voters in these districts also voted at a higher rate than the general electorate.

TABLE 2. General and Spanish-Surname Turnout Rates 1987 and 1989

	1987	1989	1989
	(Latino/Non-Latino) General Turnout*	(Latino/Non-Latino) General Turnout	Spanish-Surname** Turnout
District 1	27%	33.8%	37%
District 2	29%	44.7%	49%

*Based on precinct equivalents

**Percentages achieved by a hand count of Spanish-surname voters by Dodge and Takash; neither the county nor the Watsonville City Clerk's office provide a Spanish-surname breakdown.

Source: Adapted from the *Watsonville Register Pajaronian*, 20 December 1989, p. 1.

The political displacement of the Watsonville white conservative majority was formally accomplished with the swearing in of the new city council members on December 12, 1989. Banner headlines in the local presses read, "City's New Era Begins: Voters Turn Watsonville Politics Upside Down"; "Dramatic Changes on the City Council"; "New Regime Takes Over"; and "Liberal Faction Shows Its Strength." Betty Murphy was returned to the council by District 6 voters but did not retain the position of mayor. The liberal council majority voted Todd McFarren for mayor and Oscar Rios for vice-mayor, rendering the demise of the old political order a *fait accompli*.

The 4-3 vote, this council's first official decision, appeared to signal how these four would vote on future issues. Capturing the sentiments of those politically displaced, a resident of neighboring Capitola likened the impact of the new council majority to the devastating impact of the October 17 earthquake on the city. "God have mercy on dear Watsonville. The new '7.1 shaker' has beset itself at your very doorstep. Take heed and begin to retrofit before all the street people are deported from the Santa Cruz downtown to Main Street and Freedom Boulevard."¹⁰⁰ But an alternative perspective now emanated from inside the Watsonville City Hall chambers: "I hope we'll have a new sort of politics, a politics of persuasion and accommodation and inclusion of people," said the new mayor. "I see working-class people, I see other groups, finally being able to elect their own people. It's no longer an insiders' game."¹⁰¹

FINDINGS: A HISTORY OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST LATINOS

Proponents of removing legislative and judicial protections of minority voting rights enacted since the 1960s argue that Latinos should not have been brought under the protection of the Voting Rights Act in 1975 in the first place. According to this view, Latinos have no history of racial discrimination comparable to the "extraordinary history of southern blacks."¹⁰² Yet, the history of racial discrimination and resistance to Latino empowerment by Watsonville whites documented in the first half of this study leads to the conclusion that judicial intervention in the form of district elections was indeed necessary to bring about minority political incorporation in Watsonville.

Racially Polarized Electorate Is Fundamental Barrier to Empowerment

The research found that racially polarized voting characterized the Watsonville voting electorate. Under at-large elections Latinos could not win election to the city council. With the implementation of district elections, Latinos were able to elect their choice of candidates for the first time. Oscar Rios became the first Latino elected to the council independent of the local white power structure; two years later, he became the first Latino mayor of Watsonville.

Few Latino Commission Appointments Prior to District Elections

The study also found that, prior to district elections, few Latinos were appointed to city commissions, a recognized route to local political office. The research revealed as well that the city council reinforced a discriminatory double standard with regard to who was deemed a viable candidate for local office. Latinos were expected to first serve on city commissions, whereas whites were considered legitimate candidates with no prior commission experience.

Noncitizen Population Does Not Explain White Voting Preferences

Watsonville whites explained Latino electoral ineffectiveness as due to the large number of Mexican-origin residents who could not or did not vote, to Latino candidates' lack of qualifications, and to local Latinos' lack of political initiative. Though the study found that the presence of a substantial number of noncitizens within the total Latino population did diminish their overall voting strength, this finding does not explain why the white electorate consistently failed to vote for qualified Latino candidates. The research substantiated that Latino candidates ran bona fide political campaigns for sixteen years prior to district elections and were qualified contenders for local office, the latter determined by criteria specified by Watsonville white and Latino voters.

Latino Political Initiative Does Not Explain Electoral Ineffectiveness

The first part of the study provides evidence of Latino political activity in Watsonville over a thirty-year period, disproving claims that Latino powerlessness resulted from their own lack of initiative. Watsonville Latinos were found to have actively engaged in a wide range of public policy issues, at times influencing school district, city, and countywide policies.

A History of Discrimination against Watsonville Latinos

The 1982 congressional amendment to the Voting Rights Act stipulated that minority plaintiffs are not required to prove historical discrimination. The study found, however, that the absence of such documentation allowed the district court judge and many Watsonville whites to fashion their own history of race relations in that community, a revisionist history devoid of racism. The research documented a pattern of discrimination against Latinos over a thirty-year period.

Some manifestations of overt discrimination have been addressed during these years. Children with limited English language skills are no longer assigned to classes for the educable mentally retarded; housing discrimination against Mexicans is less widespread; and racial minorities are no longer excluded from

membership in the local Elks Club. However, these changes, like those following the court-mandated district elections, did not come about without direct legislative and judicial intervention.

Ideological Barriers to Latino Political Empowerment

In its focus on ideas that shape and maintain structural barriers to minority political empowerment, the research found that popularized versions of assimilation models provided Watsonville residents with explanatory if inadequate frameworks for understanding structural relations of power. The “melting pot” in particular was employed to express a belief that all persons, regardless of background, have equal access to opportunity and American institutions. Because the melting pot failed to account for the power differential between racial minorities and majorities, the persistence of inequality was therefore explained by cultural deficiency theories. Accordingly, Latinos’ weak electoral effectiveness and the paucity of Latino elected officials were said to result from a cultural ethos that devalues American institutions (citizenship) and political practices (voting); external factors like the at-large election system were deemed racially neutral and therefore in no need of remedy. The research found that these views are reinforced by dominant institutions, cultural representations, and much scholarly literature.

¹ David Hayes-Bautista, Wensner O. Schenck, and Jorge Cixapa, *The Burden of Support: Young Latinos in an Aging Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), p. 26.

Latinos are racially as well as ethnically constructed. Although all persons of Mexican heritage were extended rights of citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe, the majority were disenfranchised by state legislators on the basis that Mexicans were of Indian descent and thus "nonwhite." The 1849 California state constitution included a racially explicit clause that restricted the right to vote only to whites and white Mexicans. As they did not specify what criteria constituted Mexican whiteness, this decision was left up to local interpretation. Before and after the American-Mexican War, congressional debate about the annexation of Mexican territories focused on whether a racially mixed population could or should be assimilated. The prevailing sentiment as evinced by the congressional testimony and mainstream media at this time was that Mexicans were an inferior race largely incapable of participating in a republican democracy and as a mestizo people could bring about an unwanted mongrelization of the white race. More recently, Latinos have been legally defined as "white" but nonetheless socially constructed as "nonwhite." The U.S. Bureau of the Census now stipulates that Latinos can be of any race. For further discussion regarding the racialization of Latinos, see Paule Cruz Takash, *New Minorities, New Majorities: Latinization and the Erosion of Whiteness in Watsonville, California* (Cornell University Press, forthcoming). Also see Marta Monchaca, "Chicano Indianism: A Historical Account of Racial Repression in the United States," *American Ethnologist* 20, no. 3 (1993): 583-603; and Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981).

² Southwest Voter Research Notes (*A Publication of the William C. Valasquez Institute*) 11, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 1.

³ *Shaw v. Reno*, 713 S.Ct. 2876 (1993). The court upheld the decision on grounds of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment.

⁴ *Miller v. Johnson*, 63 U.S.L.W. 4726 (June 1995). Also see Texas Appellate Court case, *Bush v. Vera*, no. 94-805.

⁵ Legal efforts aimed at dismantling race-based districting are also argued on the basis that the practice is unconstitutional under the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection. Determining the constitutionality of race-based districting is beyond the scope of this study. See "Voting Rights in Courts," *California Lawyer*, November 1993, pp. 39-43; "Court Considers Race and Politics," *New York Times*, 6 December 1995, pp. A1, 13; and "Court Draws Georgia Map of Congressional Districts," *New York Times*, 14 December 1995, p. A14. Also see Andrew Kull, *The Color-Blind Constitution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), which provides a history of the debate about whether the United States Constitution prohibits governmental racial classification.

⁶ Abigail Thernstrom, *Whose Votes Count? Affirmative Action and Minority Voting Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 242.

⁷ In the mid-1980s, Mexican workers waged an eighteen-month-long strike against the frozen food industry that attracted many political groups, university students, and artists to the city as well as national and international media; Watsonville at this time was the "frozen food capital" of the United States. Although the strikers ultimately prevailed, the frozen food industry downsized and otherwise left Watsonville, creating massive unemployment in this community. The lawsuit against at-large elections, launched during the strike, kept issues of Latino disenfranchisement and struggle for political inclusion before the community long after the strike was resolved. Given its potential to set legal precedents, the case was carefully watched by other cities and was reported widely in local, regional, and national media. The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake kept the City of Watsonville in the news; damaging much of the city's already limited affordable housing stock, the earthquake exacerbated existing tensions between Latinos and Anglos. Finally, in the 1990s Watsonville was selected by the United Farm Workers of

America as the site to renew their organizing efforts. As a major producer of strawberries, Watsonville has once again attracted the media, political groups, and college students from across the state as the UFW's campaign to unionize this workforce began.

⁸ *Gomez v. City of Watsonville*, 863 F.2d 1407 (9th Cir. 1988).

⁹ Here majority is defined as the majority electorate, which in Watsonville was and continues to be white.

¹⁰ See Robert Brischetto, David R. Richards, Chandler Davidson, and Bernard Grofman, "Texas" chap. 8 in *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act 1965-1990*, edited by Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 246-257. Also see Chandler Davidson and George Korb, "At-Large Elections and Minority Group Representation: A Re-examination of Historical and Contemporary Evidence," *Journal of Politics* 43:982-1005. In their excellent review of minority voting rights efforts in Texas and comprehensive survey of the effect of district elections in that state, Brischetto et al. (p. 246) remark that Davidson and Korb's research "was the only before-and-after study published in the 1970s or 1980s that examined the impact of at-large elections on Mexican Americans."

¹¹ For a comprehensive discussion of the internal barriers to Latino and Asian Pacific Islander political incorporation, see Steven Eric and Harold Brackman, "Paths to Political Incorporation for Latinos and Asian Pacifics in California," *The California Policy Seminar, University of California, 1993*.

¹² See Paule Cruz Takash, "A Crisis of Democracy: The Latinization of a California Town Dependent on Immigrant Labor" (Ph.D. diss., Department of Anthropology, University of California Berkeley, 1990).

¹³ For citation purposes, interviewees were identified by occupation (i.e., police officer, student, Watsonville resident) and assigned a number. The actual names of public officials are sometimes used in connection with the MALDEF lawsuit and city council elections.

¹⁴ Bernard Grofman, "Report on Racial Bloc Voting in Watsonville, California, 1973-1985," 28 October 1986, prepared for *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*.

¹⁵ Cited in Laughlin McDonald, "The 1982 Amendments of Section 2 and Minority Representation," in *Controversies in Minority Voting: The Voting Rights Act in Perspective*, edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 69.

¹⁶ Courts found excessive racially polarized voting in Arkansas; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Springfield, Illinois, as well as in Watsonville. See Chandler Davidson, "The Voting Rights Act: A Brief History," in *Controversies in Minority Voting: The Voting Rights Act in Perspective*, edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 24-25.

¹⁷ McDonald, "The 1982 Amendments," p. 75. Regaled also asserts that "the primary cause of Latino inefficacy in the Los Angeles political process is racism, gerrymandering, and the use of at-large districting of representative positions." See James A. Regaled, "Latino Representation in Los Angeles," in *Latino Empowerment: Progress, Problems, and Prospects*, edited by Roberto E. Villarreal, Norma G. Hernandez, and Howard D. Neighbor (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988), p. 93.

¹⁸ Robert R. Brischetto, *The Political Empowerment of Texas Mexicans 1974-1988, Latino Electorates Series* (San Antonio, Tex.: Southwest Voter Research Institute, 1988).

¹⁹ *The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), National Directory of Latino Elected Officials, 1 January 1996.*

²⁰ For a comprehensive review of the status of voting rights litigation since the Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s, see Joaquín Avila, "Minority Access to the Political Process: Present and Future Challenges," report presented to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, n.d.

²¹ Cited in McDonald, "The 1982 Amendments," p. 69.

²² *Thornburg v. Gingles*, 478 U.S. 30 (1986).

²³ For a discussion of assimilation models and their application to racial minorities in the United States, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986).

²⁴ "Watsonville Melting Pot: Many Nationalities Have Contributed to History," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 15 August 1956 [emphasis added].

²⁵ "Watsonville Melting Pot," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 15 August 1956; "Old-Fashioned Virtues Lift Japanese-Americans to Place in Community," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 23 August 1956.

²⁶ Interview 13, a white long-term Watsonville resident active in community affairs, 20 March 1995, p. 28. This informant was also a member of this informal social club at the time of the incident.

²⁷ Ernie Wong, a Chinese-American businessman raised in Watsonville, was appointed to the city council in 1969 to fill a vacancy, the first person of color to serve on that body. The local paper opined that as all city officials had been of "Anglo-Saxon" heritage up to that time, it was "proper and fitting" that a minority had been appointed. It is unclear, however, whether Wong would have been elected in Watsonville under the at-large election system had he decided to run. Although well-liked by some Watsonville whites, he had nonetheless been refused membership in the Watsonville Elks Club, which continued to employ a "whites only" policy locally and nationally well into the 1970s. Interview with Ernie Wong, 13 June 1988. Also see "Over Pa's Called Racist," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 7 November 1969, p. 16.

²⁸ "Mexican Lot Not Always Happy One," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 14 September 1967 [emphasis added].

²⁹ For a discussion about how national public policy such as the Homestead Act, G.I. Bill, and FHA home loans contributed to the upward mobility and therefore "whitening" of European immigrant groups, see the following: George Lipsitz, "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: Racialized Social Democracy and the 'White' Problem in American Studies," *American Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (September 1995): 369-387; Karen Sacks, "How Did Jews Become White Folks?" in *Race*, edited by Steven Gregory and Roger Sanjke (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994); Dennis R. Judd, "Segregation Forever?" *The Nation*, 9 December 1991, pp. 740-744. Also see David R. Roediger, "Whiteness and Ethnicity in the History of 'White Ethnics' in the United States," in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History* (New York: Verso, 1994), pp. 181-199.

³⁰ Transcript from *Gomez v. City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 23 January 1987, p. 460.

³¹ "Voting Bias Suit Goes to Court Tuesday (Suit Seeking District Elections in Watsonville Is Going to Trial)," *San Jose Mercury News*, 19 January 1987, pp. 1 B-2B. Also see "Latinos Sue Watsonville for a Piece of the Political Pie," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 20 January 1987, p. 4.

³² In other words, the list of criteria was stipulated by the informants, not by the investigator.

³³ Soldo referred to an article commenting on her mayoral victory in a Spanish-language newspaper distributed in that region, *El Monitor*. See *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, Decision No. C85-20319 WAI, January 1987, p. 332.

-
- ³⁴ *Themstrom, Whose Vote Counts?* p. 61.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Letter submitted to the City of Watsonville (City Clerk's Office) by Raymond A. Armbrin, long-term Watsonville resident and local practicing attorney, 10 January 1989.
- ³⁷ "Latinos Sue Watsonville," p. 4.
- ³⁸ "You Must Be New to the Neighborhood," Watsonville Register-Pajaronian, 25 July 1989, p. 24.
- ³⁹ Transcript from *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 20 January 1987, pp. 11-12.
- ⁴⁰ Transcript from *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 20 January 1987, pp. 11-12. Also see "Voting Bias Suit Goes to Court Tuesday," San Jose Mercury News, 19 January 1987, pp. 1B-2B. Of course, commission appointments were determined by incumbent city council members.
- ⁴¹ Interview 40, a former Watsonville city council member and mayor, 6 November 1986.
- ⁴² Bernard Grofman, "Expert Witness Testimony and the Evolution of Voting Rights Case Law," in *Controversies in Minority Voting: The Voting Rights Act in Perspective*, edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992), pp. 197-200.
- ⁴³ Transcript from *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 21 January 1987.
- ⁴⁴ The analyses were conducted by Dr. Bernard Grofman, a political scientist and recognized voting rights expert. See Bernard Grofman, "Report on Racial Bloc Voting in Watsonville, California, 1973-1985," prepared for *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Transcript from *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 23 January 1987, p. 460.
- ⁴⁷ Transcript from *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, No. C85-20319 WAI, 23 January 1987, pp. 456-458 [emphasis added].
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, Decision No. C85-20319 WAI, U.S. District Court for the Northern District, 30 January 1987, pp. 14-15.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ⁵¹ Interview 50, an elderly Latino male formerly active in Mexican civic affairs, 4 April 1987.
- ⁵² Casual conversation with Mexican-American Main Street businesswoman raised in Watsonville, 14 May 1987.
- ⁵³ Interview 53, an informant who is now an attorney practicing in the Santa Cruz area, 3 April 1987.

⁵⁴ Ruben Donato, "Struggle: Mexican Americans in the Pajaro Valley Schools, 1900-1979" (Ph.D. diss., School of Education, Stanford University, 1987).

⁵⁵ See "Race Policies in Local Schools Target of HEW," *Watsonville Register Pajaronian*, 14 October 1974, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁶ Interview 42, a naturalized Mexican-American woman who became a major community activist in Watsonville from the late 1960s through the 1970s, especially around educational equity issues, 25 February 1987. Also see "Program under Fire in 'Target' Schools," 5 November 1969, p. 1; and "The Chicano Child— Has Education Failed?" *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 26 November 1969, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ Interview 43, Andy Dieppa, second Watsonville Area Service Center Director, 22 February 1987. Dieppa left Watsonville in the 1970s; at the time of the interview he was chair of the social work school at San Jose State University.

⁵⁸ See *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 9 December 1970, p. 26; and 20 December 1970, p. 16.

⁵⁹ This letter was shown to the principal investigator during Interview 42 by the Latina activist whom the writer had targeted, 25 February 1987. Also see *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 13 February 1971; and "Audience Jarred by Talk," 6 February 1971, p. 1.

⁶⁰ See Paule Cruz Takash, "A History of Chicano/Mexicano Political Participation and Mobilization in Watsonville," chap. 4 in "A Crisis of Democracy," pp. 147-216.

⁶¹ "200 Militants Serve Demands on Council: Insist on a Voice in Community Affairs," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian and Sun*, 1 May 1969, pp. 1-2.

⁶² Paule Cruz Takash, "A Quest for Mexican-American Representation: Electoral Politics and the MALDEF Lawsuit," chap. 5 in "A Crisis of Democracy," pp. 281-293.

⁶³ "Agriculture-Strife, Uncertainty, Bitterness," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 31 December 1970, p. 2.

⁶⁴ "Watsonville Election," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 5 May 1979, p. 15.

⁶⁵ "Candidate Lists 3 Important Goals," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 2 May 1977, p. 11.

⁶⁶ "Slower Growth Urged," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 6 May 1977, p. 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ "Rise of the UFW— A 70s Success Story," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 31 December 1979, p. 8.

⁶⁹ *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, Decision No. C85-20319 WAI, p. 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville*, Decision No. C85-20319 WAI, pp. 14-15.

⁷² Editorial, *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 4 February 1987.

⁷³ Personal communication with Latina activist on election night, 12 May 1987.

⁷⁴ *Opinion by Judge Dorothy W. Nelson, Gomez v. The City of Watsonville, No. 87-1751, D.C. No. CV85-20319 WAI, 27 July 1988, pp. 9234-9236.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ "Cover Finds Election System in California Town Is Biased," *New York Times*, 28 July 1988, p. A11. A young Latino native of Watsonville, Manuel Busanin, would charge that by driving through the west side of the city the need for district elections became apparent: "There are no lights and there are children playing in the streets.... But you drive down Roosevelt Street and there's enough light to read a newspaper." Busanin was not affiliated with any advocacy group at this time. See "Crowds Told Election Suit Won't End," *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, 11 January 1989, pp. 1-A12.

⁷⁷ Interview 25, a former council member and mayor of Watsonville, 20 March 1995.

⁷⁸ Interview 13, a long-term white resident of Watsonville active in civic affairs, 20 March 1995.

⁷⁹ Interview 5, a white Watsonville native and current city council member, 26 July 1994.

⁸⁰ Interview 11, a young Chicano activist raised in Watsonville, 20 March 1995, p. 28.

⁸¹ "Salinas Vote Has No Bearing Here," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 6 December 1988, p. 24 [*emphasis added*].

⁸² "City Loses Appeal of Election Ruling," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 6 December 1988, p. 24.

⁸³ Comments to the author by Jesse Chaxerria, one-time reporter for the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* then a staff member for the *Salinas Californian*. These comments would appear in the *Salinas Californian*, 10 December 1988.

⁸⁴ Memo submitted by council member Dennis Orner to Watsonville city council at a council meeting, 20 December 1988 [*emphasis added*]; also reprinted in the *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 22 December 1988, p. 24.

⁸⁵ "City Intent on Appealing Vote Ruling," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 21 December 1988, p. 1.

⁸⁶ "Election Lawsuit Topped Year's News," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 31 December 1988, p. 1.

⁸⁷ "The Time Has Come to Pull Together," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 10 January 1989, p. 24. The former *Register-Pajaronian* editor retired in December 1988 and was replaced by the paper's managing editor, a much younger man. The tone in this editorial probably reflects this change in leadership.

⁸⁸ "Watsonville Mayor Soldo, Councilman Won't Run Again," *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, 25 February 1987, p. 1.

⁸⁹ "Diverse Candidates in the City Elections," *The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 1 September 1989, p. 29.

⁹⁰ "No privileges". *The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, November 24, 1989:28

⁹¹ "Who's Left Out?" *The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 17 November 1989, p. 32 [*emphasis added*].

⁹² "Divisive Criticism," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 15 November 1989, p. 24.

⁹³ "Historic Watsonville Election Today," *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, 5 December 1989, p. A-2.

⁹⁴ *Political advertisements in the Watsonville Register-Pajaronian, 25 and 27 November and 4 December 1989; also in El Sol, 30 November 1989, p. 11.*

⁹⁵ *"A Patton Regime?" Watsonville Register-Pajaronian, 29 November 1989, p. 24.*

⁹⁶ *See Themstrom on this point in Whose Vote Counts? pp. 187-188.*

⁹⁷ *Statements made at a meeting between Fontana and his associate, Donald Haile (the Watsonville city attorney at the time), Esteben Flores (a fictitious name, a Latino resident native to Watsonville), and myself on 20 November 1986 at the city manager's office. The city's attorneys were interviewing Latinos who could testify in the city's behalf in the MALDEF lawsuit; Flores had asked me to accompany him.*

⁹⁸ *Councilmember Rex Clark cited in, "Extension granted to city for appeal." The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian, August 12, 1988:1*

⁹⁹ *Interview 75, an Irish-American native of Watsonville.*

¹⁰⁰ *"Disappointed," The Watsonville Register-Pajaronian, 15 December 1989, p. 36.*

¹⁰¹ *Statement by Todd McFarren, Watsonville's first mayor elected under the district system.*

¹⁰² *Themstrom, Whose Vote Counts? pp. 31-43.*



PART TWO: DO DISTRICT ELECTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

There is debate in the social science and legal communities about what changes, if any, are brought about by a move from at-large to district elections.¹⁰³ Part of the debate centers on whether residents are better served by district representatives. Advocates of districts maintain that officeholders are more accountable because they are dependent on district voters to stay in office. They also claim that district representatives bring to the larger governing body a deeper understanding of the specific needs of the area they represent and better ensure that their constituents receive a fair share of city services. Opponents contend that there is less accountability under district elections because voters have fewer potential advocates on the governing board; they also warned that representatives might put the interests of their districts before those of the entire community. An assessment of whether district elections make a difference is, in part, a question about greater or lesser responsiveness by officeholders to their constituents under district or at-large election systems.

In their study of ten Northern California cities, Browning, Marshall, and Tabb found that where minorities and white liberals comprised the city council majority, public policy became more responsive to minority issues.¹⁰⁴ In Watsonville's first district election, Latino and white liberals swept into office, displacing the conservative majority white city council. Six years later we examined whether district elections had made substantive differences to minority and white interests in eight areas, including minority representation, Latino voter turnout and broader forms of political participation, affirmative action hiring, police-community relations, public policy initiatives, community social service support, and current white and Latino relations.

LATINO REPRESENTATION

The 1989 election effectively broke a racial barrier that had kept Latino and other minority candidates from winning city council offices. Latinos in Watsonville had run concerted electoral campaigns since 1971 but had been soundly defeated under the at-large election system. With district elections, Oscar Rios became the first Latino not slated by whites in power to be elected to the city council. After serving as vice-mayor his first two years in office, Rios became Watsonville's first Latino mayor in November 1991.

Two other Latinos, Al Alcalá and Anthony Campos, were elected to office in 1991, bringing the total of Latinos serving on the city council to three. All three have also served a term as mayor of Watsonville.¹⁰⁵ Because of Alcalá's and Campos's conservative politics and their political ties to whites who resisted Latino empowerment, some district proponents' initial euphoria over dismantling the racial barrier has dissipated, to the point where they dismiss altogether the difficulty and real significance of this accomplishment. Though district elections may bring down racial barriers to representation, they do not guarantee that minorities of a particular ideology will be elected.

Nonetheless, district elections have also facilitated the electability of liberal and progressive candidates, both Latino and non-Latino. In an at-large system where the majority voting electorate is conservative, liberal candidates are generally rejected by the voters, especially those candidates with strong ties to the minority community. In Watsonville, the majority of Latino voters supported liberal white candidates over Latinos slated by the white political machine; under district elections, they were better able to elect the candidates of their choice. The Watsonville city council consequently became more ideologically diverse, contributing to new public policy initiatives.

Finally, the dissolution of the racial barrier also expanded council representation to minority working-class residents. At-large elections had not prevented white working-class voters from electing candidates representing their class interests. Vito Deretich, a cold storage supervisor and native of Watsonville, exemplified such council members. The election of Oscar Rios marked the first time working-

class Latinos felt they, too, had a representative at city hall. City staff members, police officers, and several council members interviewed for this study confirmed that many Latino workers residing outside his district took their problems to Rios.

City Commission Appointments

Minority representation on city commissions prior to district elections was poor.¹⁰⁶ City commission appointments provide political aspirants with opportunities to learn city management, participate in program planning, develop leadership skills, and gain entrée into other sociopolitical networks; minority appointees may also enhance the city's public policy responses to minority communities. The City of Watsonville currently has three commissions and a library board, each body comprising seven members. A council member nominates a person from his or her district who, if accepted, is appointed by the entire council.

Six years after the first district election, council members had made thirteen appointments to the Planning Commission. For the first five years, however, only two Latinos were appointed to this commission, prompting criticism from Latino community advocates. Both Latino commissioners served in minority Districts 1 and 2. A year later, four Latinos were serving on the commission, bringing the total of Latino appointees to seven, or slightly more than half (7:6) of all postdistrict minority appointments to the Planning Commission.

Latino representation on the Personnel Commission was less. Of fourteen appointments, five were Latinos. Only Rios (District 2) consistently filled these positions with Latinos. Of eighteen appointments made to the Parks and Recreation Commission, ten were Latinos; a Japanese American has also served since 1989. Two Latinas have sat on the Library Board since December 1989, but out of fourteen appointments to the board after district elections only one Latina was appointed.

A total of fifty-nine commission and Library Board appointments were made in the six-year postdistrict period under scrutiny; of these, twenty-three were Latinos. Although racial parity has yet to be achieved, the record shows that overall minority representation increased. By comparison, in the twenty-three-year period prior to district elections, only sixteen of ninety-eight commission appointees were Latinos.

MINORITY VOTER PARTICIPATION

Another test of whether district elections have made a difference is increased minority voter participation. Results from the first three city council elections held after districts were adopted are provided here. In the city's first district election, held in December 1989, Spanish-surname voters in minority Districts 1 and 2 turned out at a higher rate than the general electorate. In District 1, 39 percent of registered Spanish-surname voters cast ballots; the general turnout was 35 percent. In District 2, 51 percent of registered Spanish-surnamed voters turned out to vote; general turnout was 46 percent.

General turnout rates were also higher in the two districts in 1989 than in 1987. In the 1987 election, turnout in precinct equivalents of Districts 1 and 2 were 27 percent and 29 percent, respectively. District advocates' efforts to boost minority voter participation by use of absentee ballots proved effective as well. Spanish-surname voters comprised almost 75 percent of absentee voters in District 2 and 58 percent in District 1. By all accounts, Latino voter participation significantly increased in the city's first district election.

In 1991, the majority of all Watsonville registered voters stayed away from the polls; total voter turnout dropped to 23 percent, with 2,360 fewer persons voting than in the previous election. Whereas Latinos made up 21 percent of all voters in 1989, they comprised only 16 percent of the total voter turnout in 1991.

Persons interviewed for this study often remarked upon the low turnout of Latinos in District 1, where candidate Al Alcalá won with a total of 79 of 84 votes; indeed, only 38 Latinos cast votes in that district. None mentioned, however, that most non-Latinos also failed to vote in District 1; only 46 of the 351 non-Latino registered voters chose to exercise their franchise in that election. General voter turnout in

District 2 dropped as well, from 35 percent in 1989 to 17 percent, although turnout of Latino voters remained high, at 79 percent.

In 1994, the gubernatorial race and a citizen's initiative to deny state and federal benefits to undocumented workers and their children (Proposition 187), brought voters out to the polls in greater numbers. In Watsonville, 63 percent of registered voters cast ballots, compared with 45 percent in 1989 and 23 percent in 1991. Spanish-surname voters comprised over 22 percent of the 1994 general turnout.¹⁰⁷ The majority of voters in Santa Cruz County and the City of Santa Cruz voted a straight Democratic ticket for governor, lieutenant governor, and federal and state representatives and voted against Proposition 187. Latino and civil rights advocates throughout the state condemned the initiative as racist legislation scapegoating immigrant workers for the economic downturn the state was then experiencing. Statewide, 78 percent of the nearly one million Latino voters who cast ballots in the 1994 election opposed the initiative and also supported candidates who opposed it.¹⁰⁸

Governor Wilson's endorsement of Proposition 187 revitalized his own campaign and legitimated the authors and supporters of the initiative. Although the majority of Watsonville voters also supported most Democratic candidates running in that election, they elected Pete Wilson over Kathleen Brown for governor and voted for Proposition 187.¹⁰⁹

In local races, city council incumbents Lowell Hurst (District 3) and Todd McFarren (District 4) were reelected. Parr Eves (District 5) did not run for reelection, paving the way for Dennis Osmer's return to the city council, while Betty Bobeda, a native of Watsonville, won her bid to represent District 7. Rios, McFarren, Hurst, and Eves did not always vote as a bloc, one or another at times being a swing vote on particular issues. Osmer's decision to support Anthony Campos for mayor, however, represented a symbolic if not substantive shift back to conservative control of the council. A moderate, Osmer proved to be a swing vote for either the liberal or conservative council factions depending on the issue.

Latino voter participation in Watsonville has increased since district elections were adopted, although overall it remains low in relation to Latino registration and low compared with non-Latino voter turnout. On closer examination, it appears that Latinos turn out to vote in races in which candidates they support enthusiastically have a chance to win. In 1989 and 1991 more Latinos voted in District 2 than in any other district. Latino voter numbers also doubled in 1994, an election in which Latinos locally and statewide felt under attack and had a clear interest in voting against Proposition 187.

Facilitating Minority Political Participation

Although voting is critical in a representative democracy, it is only one among several measures of political participation. This study also examined other mechanisms facilitating minority political participation. In a city where a substantial portion of the community is not fluent in English, language can be a barrier to participation. Prior to district elections, a Spanish-speaking interpreter was provided if requested five days in advance. Community service providers and other advocates for Spanish-speaking clients who wished to attend or speak before the city council generally requested this service. Equipment was borrowed from the school district.

Seeking to make city council meetings more accessible to people who are not fluent in English, Rios campaigned for Spanish translation at all council meetings. Despite a conservative council member's admonishment that they should "get off your fannies and learn the English language," the newly elected city council voted unanimously to support this policy in 1989.¹¹⁰ A translator and a dozen headsets are now made available at every city council meeting. Although this service is publicized on the council agenda that is available at city hall, knowledge about it is still largely disseminated by community organizations and by word of mouth.

The attendance of working-class monolingual Spanish-speakers at city council meetings increased markedly after the first district elections. In interviews conducted almost three years later, the city manager commented that "there's been a lot of [Latino] people who have come to the meetings. There's some Latino people who are kind of regulars now. They come and they sit there with some earphones."¹¹¹ Others estimated that at any given meeting two to four persons avail themselves of the headsets. Portions of council meeting transcripts are also provided in Spanish.¹¹²

Most persons interviewed for this study credited council member Oscar Rios in particular with having increased the participation of working-class Spanish-speakers at city council meetings. A fellow council member stated, "[Rios] has brought people to city hall that would have never thought of it or walked into that building four years ago ... farm workers and cannery workers, people who would never have thought that city hall had anything to offer, they come to city hall meetings, they speak, they call him up to take care of their neighborhood problems.... You just walk the halls of city hall, you see Latinos now that you wouldn't have seen before [district elections]."¹¹³ Several Spanish-speakers also attributed their attendance at council meetings to what they perceived to be greater receptivity by the majority of the council. "*Hay mas personas ahora en el council que tienen interes en nuestra problemas. Ahora, nos escuchan, no como antes* [There are now more persons on the council who are interested in our problems. Now, they listen to us, not like before]."¹¹⁴

Citizen participation is notoriously low at all levels of government in the United States. Most efforts to enhance participation are generally narrowly conceived, directed primarily at means by which to increase voter registration and turnout. In a polity where a substantial portion of the population are not citizens, mainstream approaches to participation are even less effective. Given the number of noncitizens residing in Watsonville, several community advocates explored means to facilitate their participation in local politics, efforts mostly focused on participation in the schools by noncitizen parents. Besides giving them a voice in decisions affecting the education and future life-chances of their children, advocates claimed, the proposed extension of voting rights could hasten these parents' becoming citizens and full participants in political life.¹¹⁵

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) president Dr. Pedro Castillo made a similar case in his petition to the city that noncitizens be allowed to serve in nonelective positions such as city commissioner. As city officials often complain that too few persons volunteer to serve in these capacities, allowing interested noncitizens to apply would also increase the pool of applicants. Council members listened politely to Dr. Castillo's recommendations but took no action. A council member confided that in the present anti-immigrant political climate this proposal would "go nowhere."

In Watsonville, the appointment of noncitizens to city commissions would require a city charter amendment after voter approval. Given their strong support for Proposition 187, it is unlikely that the majority electorate would approve a measure to extend political rights to noncitizens at this time. Still, precedents exist elsewhere in the country both historically and at present.

In the mid-1800s several states and new U.S. territories granted voting rights to noncitizens in order to attract settlers to these sparsely populated locales.¹¹⁶ More recently, noncitizen residents of Tacoma Park, Maryland, were given the right to vote in municipal elections in 1991. Tacoma Park has been home to a substantial Central American population since the 1980s. In New York City, regardless of their voter registration or citizenship status, any parent who has a child in the school system may vote in community school board elections.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AND CITY EMPLOYMENT

The City of Watsonville has had an affirmative action hiring policy since the early 1980s. Although minority full-time city workers had gained a somewhat larger share of city jobs (37%) than before district elections (31% in 1988), the majority of full-time city employees remained white (63%).¹¹⁷ In 1988, as noted during the MALDEF lawsuit, 60 percent of minority city employees were concentrated in the lowest-level jobs. Of twenty-three administrative and professional-level positions, only one was held by a minority; nonwhites also filled only seven of thirty-eight supervisory jobs. Whites comprised 71 percent of full-time protective-service workers (police officers and firefighters) as well.¹¹⁸

Since 1988, the city's full-time workforce has increased by only 13 employees; part-time workers decreased from 141 to 116 by 1994. Gains by minorities have been incremental but are notable for where they have been made; they also appear to be attributable to a council directive to increase minority city employment in the higher ranks. "I think we've been more conscious about affirmative action," claimed a liberal council member; "staff has the message that it's really a priority to try to do something about it...."

Predistrict it was a hoop you had to jump through, whereas now we really mean it."¹¹⁹ Six years after district elections, minorities comprised 38 percent of protective-service workers and held four of thirty administrative and professional positions. In the latter capacity, Latinos have served as the assistant financial manager, chief of police, and city attorney. In 1997, the Watsonville city council hired its first Mexican-American city manager. Bilingual speakers (English and Spanish) were also hired to head the Finance Department and the Housing and Economic Development Program. The finance director knew no Spanish speakers among finance personnel prior to district elections. "Today, we have six or seven [bilingual] people here ... this is a community that needs that ... and they make the [finance department] more approachable. Sensitivity has been heightened a great deal because of district elections.... Staff has been directed to areas where I'm not sure we would have in the past."¹²⁰

Other efforts to facilitate minority hiring include an internship program for minority college students interested in municipal government careers. Several former interns have since been hired by the city. Though several staff members credited the internship program to Oscar Rios, Rios himself acknowledged taking advantage of an existing internship agreement between Cabrillo Community College and the city.

POLICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Several persons interviewed claimed that district elections have brought about improved community and police relations. Relations between the Watsonville police department and Latino community had been particularly strained in the mid to late 1980s during the eighteen-month-long frozen food industry strike. One police officer attributed the changes to the first post-district city manager's "encouraging" the police department to hold public meetings at which community residents could air their grievances. "That may not sound like a big deal," he remarked, "but that never would have happened before. Under the 'old order,' city officials less tolerant of 'people wanting to express themselves' ordered the police to 'stop the march' and 'throw [the protectors] out of the park.'" ¹²¹ The former city manager was described as having stopped a city council meeting to have a person holding up a protest sign removed from the council chambers.

Improved community and police relations were also attributed to the greater accountability council members have to their constituents: "Whereas before the council members were accountable kind of in general, they weren't accountable for a certain area."¹²² A police officer commented, "A lot of things that might get ignored before are priorities now ... that's put us in more direct communication with the community.... And it's kind of encouraged people in some of these districts and neighborhoods who never felt comfortable speaking out or talking to the police, it's kind of given them a way [to have us] respond to them ... whereas in the past they got ignored, or they were just afraid."¹²³ In a *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian* editorial, better police and community relations were specifically attributed to district elections and to council member Oscar Rios:

When the pluses and minuses of district election systems are added up, one of the positives is that every neighborhood has a representative who can bring city government closer to it. A good example of this occurred last week when a meeting was held for residents of District 2, which takes in many low-income areas near the downtown. Police Chief Terry Medina and Recreation Director Pat Donohue spent the evening answering people's questions about crime and youth activities. It's the sort of meeting that should happen more often, and City Councilman Oscar Rios should be commended for setting it up.¹²⁴

Others remarked that the appointment of a Mexican American to the position of police chief was appropriate for a community now 61 percent Latino. The chief of police was credited with supporting efforts to hire more nonwhite and bilingual police officers and initiating a program to recruit and train minority youths for future careers in the police force. Latino youths still report being singled out for harassment by police who assume they are gang members or otherwise up to no good. One young man active in the community said, "I think there have been better community police relations [but] there's still a lot of room for improvement."¹²⁵ Speaking of a recent experience, he recounted witnessing police holding his tattooed

friend at gunpoint, erroneously believing him to be an armed suspect they were seeking. "What the city needs," the Latino youth suggested, "is a citizens' police review board."¹²⁶

Some police personnel were candid in their remarks about incidents of police racism. "We have police officers that are racist. We terminated an officer one time who grabbed a handcuffed prisoner ... banged his head on the wall and said some racist comment ... it was tragic that we had an officer that did that, what was really good was we had two officers that came forward [to report it]."¹²⁷ Another story was cited to exemplify how stereotypes of minorities affect police judgment. After "a commotion in a Watsonville bar" a person ran out of the bar, yelling in Spanish, upon which the police officer chased him down and handcuffed him. Other bar patrons effected his release, informing the officer that the arrested man was in fact "a good Samaritan" who was attempting to catch the actual criminal. "The police officer saw a Latino running from the bar and only thought 'fugitive.' And the officer would never admit that he was racist or anything— people develop these stereotypes and they get in the way— plus the fact that he didn't speak Spanish."¹²⁸

According to police personnel, a day-long racism reduction workshop was provided for Watsonville police officers in 1993 by the National Coalition Building Institute. Reflective of past hiring practices, the majority of older members of the police force are white men and newer members of the force are more diverse by race and gender. Reportedly, the latter group more readily accepted the training than did the white older members of the department.

COMMUNITY PROGRAM FUNDING

Former city council member Ed Hall echoed the concerns of other district election opponents that the liberal council majority would prove fiscally irresponsible, given their ideological sympathy for social welfare issues. Worried that funds for police and fire protection would disappear in favor of social programs, he also opined that not much could change, as the city was fiscally strapped.¹²⁹ To the contrary, postdistrict councils remained financially committed to ensuring public safety while still increasing funds to support community programs.

From the mid to late 1980s, 36 to 39 percent of the general fund supported public safety programs, a figure that increased to 43 percent by fiscal year 1994/95. In comparison, community organization grants constituted less than 1 percent of the general fund up through fiscal year 1989/90, increasing to almost 2 percent in subsequent years. In actual dollars, total funding for community programs averaged less than \$90,000 before fiscal year 1990, rising to over \$300,000 from fiscal years 1991 through 1994/95.¹³⁰ Persons interviewed for this study frequently mentioned this increase in spending for community programs as a measure of change brought about by district elections .

CITY COUNCIL PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVES

Two major issues the inhabitants of Watsonville still face are housing and employment. Insufficient housing for migrant and low-income workers, a long-standing problem, was exacerbated by the 1989 earthquake, which destroyed much of the available rental and affordable housing stock; homes in the predominately Latino districts near downtown were especially affected. Recovery from the earthquake has occurred in an economic recession during which most of the remaining frozen food industry has closed its doors or relocated to Mexico. Employing 8,000 workers at its peak in the early 1980s, this industry today employs 2,000 full- and part-time workers. As late as 1995, unemployment in Watsonville was estimated at 20 to 25 percent; while still high, it currently is 16.6 percent, reflecting an improved economy.¹³¹

Although there are inherent limitations to municipal government's ability to create jobs, housing, and income redistribution, especially under the conditions just described, city government still remains the major provider of services to the public and an important influence on the private sector. In his study of the political displacement of whites by blacks in major U.S. cities, Peter Eisinger asserts, "The range and quality of services a city chooses to offer materially affect the quality of life in a city.... City hall [can also] ... bring

leverage to bear on private sector firms, influencing their hiring practices, their investments, and their location decisions."¹³²

Affordable Housing

Throughout the 1980s, Latino activists petitioned the city council to exercise its influence on for-profit developers who wished to build in Watsonville. Housing advocates pressed the council to pass an affordable housing inclusionary ordinance insuring that 25 percent of new housing would be affordable. Ignored by the city council prior to district elections, the ordinance was adopted by the district-elected council in July 1991 by a 5-1 vote.

Apart from destruction or damage by the earthquake, the shortage of affordable housing was attributed to the high cost of new market-rate homes and the growing numbers of moderate- and low-income families. The Watsonville Housing Task Force, a committee of community members brought together after the earthquake, advised the city council that 2,500 affordable homes were required. Federal and state housing subsidies alone could not meet these housing needs.

The City of Watsonville found that "it is a public policy of the State of California to make available an adequate supply of housing for persons of all economic segments ... and to ensure that such supply of housing remain affordable to subsequent purchasers."¹³³ In endorsing the inclusionary ordinance, the city also determined that "new residential development which enjoys the benefits of public resources and City facilities must participate in protecting and enhancing the public welfare."¹³⁴

According to affordable housing agency personnel, few large-scale construction projects have been initiated since the earthquake, a circumstance they attribute to the recession; as a consequence, there has been little opportunity to exercise the inclusionary ordinance. Nonetheless, a low-income housing spokesperson opined that district elections have brought a palpable change in the city's housing policy beyond the ordinance, as evidenced in the council's support for several affordable housing developments. Six years after district elections, approximately 250 affordable housing units had been built in Watsonville, more than in any other city in the county. The first postdistrict city manager is also credited with creating the city's Housing and Economic Development Program and with expanding the Redevelopment Agency to include affordable housing set-asides. The former city manager was said to have resisted the latter policy.¹³⁵

Not all affordable housing advocates are as generous in their assessments of whether district elections have resulted in substantive housing policy changes. One long-term activist remarked that most changes resulting from electoral reforms have been "inconsequential." "Something like rent control would be a major statement about supporting low- and moderate-income people in this community, but that is a hurdle no one in any major leadership position or even emerging leadership position has gotten behind."¹³⁶ Another charged that despite petitions "signed by the thousands" supporting rent control and a massive turnout by Watsonville workers to further persuade council members, these pleas were remanded to committee in order to bury the issue. Characterizing the liberal council members as having settled for a "politics of the possible," he claimed that "[o]ff the record, the liberals explained that a rent control law would only lead to a recall election."¹³⁷

Affordable Housing and Growth

Affordable housing also became a political lightning rod that split the advocacy community and the majority liberal council. Prior to district elections, Watsonville housing activists demanded more affordable housing while supporting the preservation of prime agricultural land. An agricultural community bounded to the east and west by farmland and to the south by Monterey County, Watsonville is under constant pressure to rezone farmland for development. A Latina community leader succinctly articulated the dilemma:

The need for affordable housing is so great that there are times when I am tempted to agree to development on agricultural land. What sobers me is the reality that in annexing and developing housing on agricultural lands, families who live here and/or need housing most would not be those who would live in those houses. Agriculture is still the basis of Watsonville's and the county's economy. Loss of agricultural lands mean loss of jobs.¹³⁸

The annexation of the Franich property in 1993, seventy-two acres of prime agricultural land earmarked by the city for a park, a school, and market-rate as well as some affordable housing, best captures the evolving land use drama in Watsonville. The Pajaro Valley chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) was instrumental in originating and pushing through the affordable housing inclusionary ordinance. Together with the Watsonville Wetlands Watch and Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau, LULAC strenuously opposed the Franich annexation. The majority of city council members endorsed the annexation supported by CHISPA, a professional low-income housing developer new to Watsonville whose primary objective is to build affordable housing. Oscar Rios cast the deciding city council vote in exchange for nine acres of low-income housing.

Those opposed to the Franich annexation worry that it will hasten urban sprawl, eventually turning this agroindustrial town into one more bedroom community for nearby Silicon Valley.¹³⁹ A council member expressed his disappointment that the liberal majority was “chipped away” around land use issues. A new council majority with an aggressive pro-growth stand entered into what he described as an “unholy alliance” with “nouveau affordable housing people” and developers ready to “pave over the Pajaro Valley.”¹⁴⁰

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES ABOUT DISTRICT ELECTIONS AND CHANGE

As might be expected, opinions regarding district elections in Watsonville—whether they have facilitated Latino political empowerment and otherwise changed the community’s political landscape—range from solid affirmation, agreement and disagreement with reservations, and steadfast disagreement.

District Elections Have Effectuated No Change

Those who had steadfastly opposed the change to districts from the outset most strenuously denied that racism was a problem. After enumerating political and social changes that had occurred over the past five years, a former council member opined that these changes were not the result of district elections: “I think we would be where we are today regardless of district elections ... we had Hispanics on the commissions before. I don’t see Oscar Rios as making a big change in the community; Al Alcáala has because he does it in a very quiet manner.... He has a wonderful direction for people ... [and via the Chamber of Commerce Hispanic Committee has] brought people together once a month for lunch; Oscar Rios was never able to do that.”¹⁴¹

According to this former elected representative, more Latinos had not won office under the at-large system because “they were just beginning to get political ... in fact, when did they become political ... 1972, 1971?... You can’t automatically get into politics and say, ‘Today I’m gonna get in without background and knowledge.’”¹⁴² Though the police were characterized as “strongly involved and more so than they’ve ever been,” the change had “nothing to do with district elections.” Rather, “it’s because they realize they have to work with the young people ... that if you have crime problems, you better get in and see what you can do.”¹⁴³

Others suggested that the only thing district elections accomplished was intensifying racial polarization in the community. One resident stated, “I go around and talk to all these old-timers ... hear their stories ... there is a lot of animosity toward the Hispanic community.... Sometimes, it’s pretty startling because [they] say, ‘I’m not prejudiced,’ but I think we all have some kind of prejudice.... They want them to leave, they want them to move.... I think they’re scared more than anything.... I’m talking about people who have lived here all their lives.”¹⁴⁴

No Changes, with Some Reservations

Another native of Watsonville was reluctant to attribute much positive change to the 1989 electoral reforms apart from the decision by the council’s liberal majority to get rid of the city manager. “Any change from Radin must be construed as a positive because the city had to be brought into the twentieth century, Radin kept it in the nineteenth century.... But in terms of the council changing things, I don’t think they’ve done any of that, I don’t think they’ve really changed anything.”¹⁴⁵

Though never conceding that at-large elections were institutionally discriminatory, he had cast the first city council vote to accept the appellate court’s ruling to implement district elections. He had also

nurtured some expectation that district elections might bring about change. "What I did expect," he stated, "was that district elections would allow a clearer sense of community—that you would be part of a district, [that there would be] meetings in each district every three months, four months ... when you have a sense of community you can accomplish some great things."¹⁴⁶ Upon further questioning, he admitted that Oscar Rios had in fact held several such meetings with District 2 residents: "Oscar, yeah, Oscar played it up—I shouldn't say no one—no one else did, though."¹⁴⁷

Some Changes, with Reservations

A supporter of district elections echoed the council member's sentiments on this point: "The other thing I haven't seen happening that I had hoped would, is kind of community neighborhood meetings, with council members getting together in their districts ... getting people in their districts together to talk about what they want and what they need. I had hoped that would happen more ... that's disappointing to me and probably a lot of other people too."¹⁴⁸ She also expressed disappointment over what she described as the nominal political participation of Latino residents and the district-elected council's moderate approach to key issues. "Really, ... I don't think this council has gone out on a limb in any direction whatsoever.... They have made some changes, definitely, but they haven't taken any drastic steps.... They passed the inclusionary ordinance, but we aren't sure whether that's working or not."¹⁴⁹

A member of the farming community concurred that "on the big policy issues" such as land use, the district-elected council differed little from its predecessors. Once on the inside, he suggested, elected representatives have more information that may change their original positions on certain issues. Still, he credited the majority liberal council with increasing city funding for community-based organizations, "a true commitment by the city council that wasn't there before."¹⁵⁰ He also felt that district elections had provided most residents "at least one member ... they can identify with, that they feel comfortable talking with.... Before council members were similar in personalities and backgrounds ... and you may not have found someone there that you were comfortable speaking with or addressing your issues."¹⁵¹ "In that regard," he concluded, "[election by district] has allowed for maybe more access to city government."¹⁵²

Long-held ambivalence about politicians in general by the director of a community organization contributed to her depiction of Watsonville politics as little changed, but all the while she described postdistrict changes in the redistribution of city resources and in her access to government officials. Characterizing the "life of a politician [as] giving and selling ... 'I'll sell you a vote today, you give me that vote tomorrow,'" she nonetheless affirmed that districts had effected the election of the first Latino mayor, who was "paving the way" for others. If Rios "wavered," it was because "there has been no other model for him to follow.... He [also] needs ... to represent everyone in this community, especially the historical community that has been here and for a hundred years has had the power."¹⁵³ While asserting that Rios has had to "sell out ... to support growth," she described him as the only council member upon whom she could rely to support her organization. Still, the district-elected council increased her funding from \$1,000 to \$10,000 and voted unanimously to extend to the organization an emergency loan of \$250,000.

A community leader instrumental in organizing sustained support for the MALDEF lawsuit was often frustrated that more had not been accomplished. She conceded, however, that progress had been made:

When I really sit down and look at it, when I go to council and see that there's people there that make it easier ... [I think] there's actually hope that the things we care about or the things that we're trying to have happen will happen. At least there's hope, and a lot of times that hope gets fulfilled. We've been able to do that many times.

But, to me, I thought it was going to be a bit easier; I thought it wouldn't take as much of a struggle ... but the struggle is constantly there. It doesn't really get any easier, because even if your friends are in power or even if you've gotten what you want, you have to make it succeed. It's not easy, it's not something that just automatically happens. It's constantly having to make it happen, make it become successful.¹⁵⁴

District Elections Have Effectuated Change

Some Watsonville residents were unequivocal in their position that district election outcomes are more than symbolic. A Latino youth whose first experiences in Watsonville city council campaigns predated district elections asserted, "Compared to what this town was like before district elections and what it is today, it has changed quite a bit for the better."¹⁵⁵ He proceeded to enumerate the changes: "I think part of the participation you see today by high school students has to do with the new role models that have come out of district elections.... The community policing we now have, a lot of it has to do with district elections ... the youth center ... the impact has been positive.... I think there is more Latino participation even though ... we still have a long way to go."¹⁵⁶

A city council member maintained that "the MALDEF suit ... was one of the key turning points for this particular community ... in terms of changing the community, bringing about a sense of equity, recognizing diversity, and opening people's eyes to the demographic reality of Watsonville today."¹⁵⁷ The court decision "empowered Latinos to the degree to which they had not been empowered before, and it gave many people, not just Latinos, a sense of change and social justice that had not been present in the past; it really opened things up politically."¹⁵⁸

Once Opposed, Now Supportive

Perhaps more impressive are the views of persons once opposed to district elections who today support its outcomes; among the converts are long-time city staff members. Several were candid about how they, like predistrict council members, believed the MALDEF supporters and other community activists to be agitators. "To me, we're all residents of Watsonville," stated one city employee; "that's why I was against the MALDEF suit and district elections, I somehow felt that it was more of a separation than a coming together.... I somehow got the feeling that they were separatists"¹⁵⁹ A city department head described the "rancor" of the "established community ... when the people from the outside were coming in to organize and they started stirring up the workers.... And then we had the MALDEF suit.... I think this is a community," she contended, "that would just as soon take care of it, acknowledge its problems and take care of it internally."¹⁶⁰

"We have a good number of activists," another department head remarked, "who have come to Watsonville probably in the last ten years.... I hear from people that are old-time Watsonville, but they're Latino, that they resent these people coming in and telling them how their city should be run.... There's resentment, 'How can this person from Berkeley come in and tell us that the system is wrong,' and it's not necessarily just the government ... 'now they're coming in and telling us we have to provide housing for everybody, and they just got here.'"¹⁶¹ Interestingly, these and other city employees attribute their change in opinion about district elections primarily to their working with and getting to know Oscar Rios.

A fellow council member described Rios favorably as "the epitome of what we thought district elections would bring to Watsonville government."¹⁶² Beyond symbolizing Latino political empowerment, he in practice also responded to the requests of "farm workers and cannery workers," people with little representation prior to district elections. "Although Oscar may have been the unlikely person to do it," remarked this officeholder, "I think he fulfills that prophecy."¹⁶³ Rios came to symbolize everything many district opponents feared as well.

A city administrator admitted that "the other thing everybody was worried about when district elections occurred is that we're going to get people in power who are not really capable of accepting that level of responsibility ... [they] would be so after their special interest that they would ruin anything that we've ever built up here as far as a financial base, economic incentives, and priority on keeping business and industry satisfied enough to keep our tax base."¹⁶⁴ These sentiments "caused some terrible battle scars," he claimed, "and I think the guy who really had it the hardest is Oscar because people predicted he would come in with his own list of things and ... not see the rest of the story, that he would focus on hammering out decisions that benefited this group of people that he wanted to satisfy."¹⁶⁵

City employees and community members recounted how Rios was called a "troublemaker" and thrown out of city hall by city manager Radin when he attempted to participate in an earthquake relief planning meeting. A candidate for District 2 at the time, he had been asked to attend the meeting by a county supervisor from Watsonville, Sherry Mehl, in her stead. "Oscar almost had his face slapped," reported a

department head. "We had people who wanted to help, but we wouldn't allow them to help.... Oscar and the group that was with him, they wanted to help ... to go to the plaza ... tell people what was going on and where they could get water ... [but] we had our own plan and we were going to do that plan and we [felt] we didn't need any help."¹⁶⁶

Maintaining strong loyalties to members of "the old guard," she still admitted, "We were wrong ... even though we thought we were doing the right thing.... And I have to take blame for that too, 'cause I know I felt the same way.... I wasn't cooperative at all."¹⁶⁷ Rios' motives were suspected. "It was like, 'Do they really want to help, or are they here because it's part of the campaign and election?... That was the thought behind a lot of people kind of questioning whether they were really there to help the people or to help Rios' campaign."¹⁶⁸

Once Rios was elected to the city council, the irony of his becoming the city manager's "boss" was not lost on community observers. The director of a community health clinic remarked, "Radin kicks him out of the meeting because he said he was a troublemaker—because he was a Latino, that was the reason he was kicked out—and sure enough he ... gets elected, and now he's this man's boss."¹⁶⁹ A police officer defined this incident and Rios' subsequent election as "one of the most traumatic examples of how politically things are changing, how rapidly things began to change from the time of the cannery strike in '85 and the MALDEF lawsuit in '89.... Rios was thrown out of a meeting, and it wasn't too long afterwards that he is chairing these city government meetings.... Radin is thrown out, and Rios eventually becomes the mayor."¹⁷⁰

Rios has been described as "this Latino guy who can't even speak English good, who talks with his hands, is short and dark, and wears cheap suits"¹⁷¹ and a "former labor organizer and member of some leftist Communist group ... in other words, the white community's worst nightmare."¹⁷² A city administrator stated, "People were expecting the worst ... they take things and twist it around.... One of the first times I realized [Rios] was being victimized by his position ... was over the parking ticket incident."¹⁷³

Persons in several city departments recounted how Rios had been accused by a former city official of "fixing tickets for Mexicans"; he was at that time the mayor of Watsonville. A Mexican woman had contested a parking ticket on the basis that she could not read the English parking sign specifying which hours one could and could not park in that location. The ticket was waived by the proper police authorities and then sent to the mayor's office for his signature, as is customary. White city employees, "furious that Oscar got elected," and in a position to "see these things going through ... leaked it to [the former officeholder], who, of course, became furious ... called the city manager and the chief of police and said Oscar was doing favors."¹⁷⁴

"It turns out that a police captain had authorized the waiver, which is proper procedure," explained a city worker. "It was her first offense, he sent it up, and the mayor signed it; that's the normal course, so there was nothing unusual in the event. But the fact that it was a Latina who spoke Spanish and Oscar signed it—the women in the office ... who are old-time Watsonville ... right away thought it was a patronage kind of thing, something under the table.... Even when we explained to them what happened, they kept it in their minds that Oscar was a cheat. They *dox* to believe it ... and they constantly spread that rumor around, 'He writes off tickets.'"¹⁷⁵

"I see it as a plain case of racism," the staff member opined, "[but] they would say, 'I just don't like him as a person.... He's too radical, he's not professional.' Of course, they don't like him because they haven't dealt with somebody not speaking English, somebody acting differently ... it's like they hate him.... It's really scary almost ... they hate him because he sort of epitomizes this new group that has come into power and he's the one in power ... and they'd like to get him out."¹⁷⁶

Several persons suggested that these sentiments lay behind a petition drive to have the mayor elected at-large once again rather than selected by the council members from among their ranks. "There was a lot of anxiety about him becoming mayor prior to his becoming mayor," reported a police officer. "While he was mayor he spoke out on occasion, he went on a march in Santa Cruz and spoke, and he spoke in Spanish to one group and English to another."¹⁷⁷ Rios' public affirmation that the Los Angeles police who beat Rodney King were guilty of misconduct caused ire among some residents, who felt his views did not represent their own. A department head commented, "This is certainly not confidential, it was in all the papers. During the Rodney King verdict, I believe Oscar went to Santa Cruz and gave a little speech on the steps of the county building. We received a good deal of calls from people that were upset about that saying, 'He's the mayor of Watsonville, but he's saying things that are not reflective of our community at all.'"¹⁷⁸

A protective-service worker recalled, "The *Register-Pajaronian* specifically picked up on the part of his speech [before UCSC students] where he really identified with the Rodney King cause, and it kind of gave him an anti-American type of image ... like it was an attack on the system.... People really reacted to that, a lot of people have talked about it ... it was a really one-sided article."¹⁷⁹ In mentioning the "Rodney King-Oscar Rios" incident, a city employee contended, "The pillars of the community were leading a charge recently to go back to ejecting the mayor at-large as opposed to [being chosen] by the council.... They say, 'Oh no, we just think it's a good idea that the whole community elect the mayor,' but really anyone who knows anything about the situation here knows that they were mad because Oscar got elected mayor ... they were mad, the whole community was mad because they had this guy who didn't speak English good, who walked around talking to all the Mexicans in the plaza, who was a newcomer."¹⁸⁰ A firefighter concluded that "[m]ayors are always subject to being scrutinized, but I think [Rios] catches that a lot more."¹⁸¹

If Rios' tenure as mayor caused consternation for some Watsonville residents, it provided others an opportunity to come to know him and his policy motives better, contact that also proved decisive in changing their views about district elections. The city employee who had depicted district elections as separatist politics commented that "during the court case we were trying to defend what we were doing in our practices because we felt and still feel that our personnel practices have always been aboveboard.... I've been here for ten years. But I know my feelings did change over the suit, particularly when it was over and we actually had the district elections. I felt that it wasn't going to separate anymore, that it was more of a bringing together.... And I'll tell you one thing that did me a world of good ... was when Oscar was mayor and he worked up here in our offices and I began to see the reason for this and the blending together. It wasn't a separate issue, it wasn't dividing us anymore. Maybe that's when my feelings did start to change, when I got to know Oscar better and learned his feelings."¹⁸²

A city administrator confided, "A concern many of us had was about leaders being single-focused and not broad-based enough from these districts, but it didn't play out.... They are sincerely interested in doing the right thing, they look at all sides of the issue, and they're very mature about their decision-making process."¹⁸³ Rios, he contended, "is actually doing the opposite of what people predicted he would do ... so we're kind of battling that ... overall, the image just has to come around.... Hopefully one day people will recognize that the man is just trying to be as fair as he possibly can in regards to the entire city's interests."¹⁸⁴

Other practices adopted at city hall contributed to a broader acceptance of district-elected city councils, especially by staff members. City manager Steve Salomon was credited with having instituted a "more user-friendly and welcoming city hall for the public and involving the employees more in the government than they've ever been before ... all segments of the employees serve on [internal] committees from the managers to the very bottom."¹⁸⁵ City workers are also solicited for their ideas for generating or saving city revenues, making "all the employees feel they're part of the solutions, not part of the problems."¹⁸⁶ "I don't think something like this would've happened before," remarked an employee who has worked for the city since 1965, "and I don't say it's because we have a new city manager and that's the way he is. I think he's reflecting what the council is asking, what the council is feeling and wanting for the community also."¹⁸⁷

Watsonville Districting Case Sets Precedent for Other Political Jurisdictions

The Watsonville district elections case also effected change beyond the city limits. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision in (Dolores Cruz) *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville* made national headlines due to the political ramifications for literally thousands of cities throughout the nine Western states within the jurisdiction of the court. The *Baltimore Sun* characterized the special election as "a symbol of political empowerment for Latinos across the nation, [that] is expected to be closely watched throughout California, where dozens of communities are under threat of lawsuit to correct a system that is said to dilute minority voting strength."¹⁸⁸ At the time of the decision, several newspapers noted that it was the first time an at-large election system had been invalidated by the Ninth Circuit. Although MALDEF had investigated the political profiles of several cities prior to the decision, inquiries from other cities now began to come in earnest.

Latino activists from Salinas in Monterey County had followed the Watsonville case with great interest with the intention of pursuing a similar course of action. By August 1988, MALDEF filed a class-action lawsuit against the City of Salinas.¹⁸⁹ In the wake of the Watsonville decision, and also because

Salinas had no insurance to pay for a protracted civil rights lawsuit, Salinas city officials and community activists quickly agreed to implement district elections. The *Salinas Herald* opined that “it would almost certainly be a losing battle— thanks to an uncompromising ruling by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in a case involving Watsonville a month ago.”¹⁹⁰ The decision to increase the number of council members from five to seven and to elect all members except the mayor by districts was approved by a majority of Salinas voters in December 1988.¹⁹¹ Today, four of seven council members are Latinos; many more minorities have also been hired as city department heads and appointed to important commissions and advisory boards.

At the time of the Watsonville and Salinas decisions, no racial minorities or women sat on the board of supervisors of Los Angeles County, the most populous and diverse county in the United States. Charging that the existing districts had been gerrymandered, MALDEF sued to redraw district boundaries and to increase the number of supervisors from five to seven.¹⁹² The national president of MALDEF, Antonia Hernandez, remarked, “The case in Los Angeles, coupled with Watsonville, is the beginning of a process that will open up the political process in California and change it.”¹⁹³ Although the number of county supervisor seats remain the same, MALDEF was successful in getting the districts redrawn. Voters elected Gloria Molina to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors in 1991, making her the first woman and first person of Mexican heritage in this century to hold this powerful office. Since that election, other women and racial minorities have been elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Political jurisdictions that have similarly moved from at-large elections to districts include the Monterey County Board of Supervisors, the city council in Dinuba, and elementary and high school and hospital districts. Other cases were either unsuccessful or are still pending.

FINDINGS: DISTRICT ELECTIONS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Evidence provided in Part Two of the study supports a conclusion that district elections have made a difference not only in Latino political participation and the redistribution of city resources, but in attitudes. The attitudes of some whites, including those working in city government who had supported the status quo, were also changed, as was their relationship to Latinos.

Latino Representation on the City Council

A racial barrier that had kept Latinos and other minority candidates from ever winning city council offices in Watsonville was shattered by the first district election, held in December 1989. To date, three Latinos have been elected to the city council and have served as mayor of Watsonville. District elections facilitated the election of liberal and progressive candidates as well, resulting in a more ideologically diverse city council that initiated new public policies. Council representation under district elections was also expanded for the first time to minority working-class residents.

Latino City Commission Appointments Increases

The research found that since district elections were implemented, minority representation on city commissions has increased overall. Six years after the first district election, twenty-three of fifty-nine commission and Library Board appointments were Latinos. In the twenty-three-year period preceding district elections, only sixteen of ninety-eight commission appointees were Latinos.

Minority Voter Participation Increases

Despite non-Latino and Latino voter apathy in the 1991 elections, the research demonstrated that overall Latino voter participation in Watsonville increased after district elections. Minority voter use of absentee ballots also increased. Nonetheless, Latino voter turnout remained low in relation to Latino registration and non-Latino voter turnout.

Facilitation of Broader Minority Political Participation

Spanish translation at all council meetings was unanimously supported by the district-elected city council in 1989. The research found that six years after the implementation of district elections monolingual Spanish speakers attended city council meetings more frequently. Spanish speakers interviewed for this study also attributed their attendance at council meetings to greater receptivity by the majority of the council. Portions of the city council minutes are translated into Spanish as well. Efforts to facilitate the political participation of noncitizen residents in city and school board politics were not, however, endorsed by the district-elected council.

Modest Gains in Affirmative Action and Minority City Hires

Though the study documented that the majority of full-time city employees remained white (63%), modest gains were made in minority full-time city employment (37%). More minorities were also recruited and hired for higher-level and professional positions, as mandated by the district-elected council. Non-Latino bilingual (English and Spanish) employees were also hired to head the city finance department and housing and economic program. In 1997, the first Mexican-American city manager was hired.

Police and Community Relations Improve

Improved community and police relations were attributed to postdistrict policies and to council member Oscar Rios. The first Mexican-American chief of police was also credited with supporting efforts to hire more nonwhite and bilingual police officers and with initiating a program to recruit and train minority youths for future careers in the police force. More improvements appear to be needed, however, as Latino youth were reportedly still harassed by police who assume they are gang members or otherwise up to no good.

Increased Community Program Funding

After 1991, postdistrict councils significantly increased the amount spent to support community programs. Community organization grants constituted less than 1 percent of the general fund up through fiscal year 1989/90, but the amount was increased to almost 2 percent in subsequent years. In actual dollars, total funding for community programs averaged less than \$90,000 before fiscal year 1990 and rose to over \$300,000 from fiscal years 1991 through 1994/95.

New Public Policy Initiatives (Affordable Housing and Growth)

An affordable housing inclusionary ordinance mandating that 25 percent of new housing in Watsonville be affordable was adopted by the first district-elected council. Although there has been little opportunity to exercise the inclusionary ordinance, the research revealed council support for several affordable housing developments. Six years after district elections, 250 affordable housing units had been built in Watsonville, more than in any other city in the county.

The issue of affordable housing has, however, split the advocacy community and the majority liberal council as the pressure to rezone Watsonville farmland for development mounts. A new council majority with an aggressive pro-growth stand has emerged whose recent land use decisions portend a loss of farm worker jobs and an increase in urban sprawl that may further erode the agricultural basis of the entire Pajaro Valley.

Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Brought about by District Elections

Though opinions range about whether district elections changed the community's political landscape, the research found important changes in attitude among whites, including city staff members who earlier had not been supportive of district elections. City employees attribute their change of opinion primarily to working with and getting to know Oscar Rios during his tenure as mayor and to a growing realization that policies implemented by the liberal council members would not result in the undoing of city government. Some who had once seen district elections as separatist politics came to redefine its outcome as a "bringing together" of the city's diverse racial and ideological groups.

Watsonville Sets Precedent for Other Political Jurisdictions

(Dolores Cruz) *Gomez v. The City of Watsonville* set a precedent for cities throughout the nine Western states within the jurisdiction of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit at the time of the decision. Moreover, it has become an important symbol of political empowerment for Latinos across the country. In California, the Watsonville decision has facilitated the election of Latinos not only to city councils but also to county boards of supervisors, to elementary and high school boards of education, and to hospital boards.

PUBLIC POLICY AND LATINO POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

The experiences of communities like Watsonville may serve as guides to policymakers and the public on how to manage a transition to a more viable, if not more vibrant, democracy in which racial minorities and newcomers integrate, influence, and enrich California legislative bodies. For Latinos in California, whose rapidly growing numbers are only beginning to translate into effective political leverage at the ballot box, elections by district in jurisdictions with discriminatory election systems could increase their political efficacy and influence on public policy. The retreat of the courts from remedying the racial exclusion of minorities by these electoral devices has chilled voting rights litigation in California and may portend a significant setback for Latino empowerment.¹⁹⁴ The state of California therefore incurs an even greater responsibility to further the goal of opening up the political process to all its citizens.

Generalizability of Watsonville Case

Given the paucity of minority voting rights litigation in California to date, the generalizability of the Watsonville case to other municipalities has yet to be established.¹⁹⁵ Nonetheless, the findings of this study, as well as the gains in representation made in California political jurisdictions where districts have been adopted, strongly suggest that district elections provide a remedy for thwarted minority political incorporation where discriminatory election systems and voting practices exist. Research on the impact of voting rights litigation conducted elsewhere, though not entirely applicable to California, support these findings as well. Longitudinal survey research in Texas evinces that Mexican Americans and other minorities achieved greater representation in majority Anglo cities after some form of district elections was implemented.¹⁹⁶ In New Mexico, state-mandated single member districts within specified population categories for electing city, county, and school board members contributed to an increase in Latino representation. Today, New Mexico has more Latino elected officials (33%) in proportion to its adult Latino population (35%) than any other state.¹⁹⁷

Research Needed on Racial Discrimination in California

Joaquin Avila estimates that in California several hundred political entities could meet the U.S. Supreme Court's criteria for challenges to at-large elections.¹⁹⁸ More research is needed to establish the extent to which discriminatory election systems and practices continue to affect minority political participation in this state. In Watsonville, the absence of research on local white and Latino relations contributed to litigation costs. It also allowed local residents and the district court judge to discount historical and recent discrimination against Watsonville Latinos and thereby reject the need for political remedies.

Academic studies proving institutionalized discrimination are readily available about metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, but there is a dearth of such research on smaller communities despite their comprising the majority of potential legal challenges. Research is particularly warranted for communities with substantial minority populations that have little or no minority political representation. State policymakers can facilitate this research by further investing in existing joint programs between the universities and state government that apply faculty research expertise to these fundamental public policy issues.

Statutory Remedies for Latino Empowerment

If research finds a substantial number of political entities where at-large elections are vulnerable to challenge, in lieu of litigation state policymakers could adopt statutory amendments to existing election structures for these political jurisdictions or elect to pursue other statutory remedies.¹⁹⁹ Resources now devoted to litigation could be redirected to other needs of the Latino community, such as citizenship and voter registration to further facilitate participation in California political institutions.

Educational Remedies for Structural and Ideological Barriers To Incorporation

Community leaders and scholars correctly assess that improved educational opportunities for Latinos are prerequisite for their full incorporation, but findings from this study suggest the need for an even broader educational agenda than one that targets only Latinos.²⁰⁰

Primary and Secondary Education. The near absence of public information and school curriculum focused on the structural roots of discrimination reinforces ideologies and practices of white superiority and minority inferiority. A recent study found that 85 percent of Los Angeles Unified School District students have no human relations instruction, a situation aggravated by the severe lack of multicultural curriculum specialists.²⁰¹ State policymakers can play a critical role in dismantling institutionalized racism by allocating resources for implementing comprehensive ethnic studies programs from kindergarten through high school as well as at the university level.

Multicultural Training for Government Employees and Officeholders. Multicultural educational programs focused on the structural and ideological basis of inequality could also be provided for all state, county, and city government employees and elected representatives, a task that with adequate funding could be overseen by corresponding state, county, and city human relations commissions. California can play an important role in developing the recommended adult education programs by allocating resources to university research centers and individual scholars who can apply their expertise to these public policy areas.

Though revenues available to the state are limited, policymakers should recognize that aggressive mechanisms for Latino political incorporation are a very efficient use of public resources as well as strengthening the legitimacy of state and other governing bodies. It is in the state of California's long-term interest to redouble its efforts to adequately educate and integrate the Latino population as it increasingly comprises a substantial portion of the workforce upon which the state depends. The cultural and linguistic expertise of an educated Latino population will also be a state asset as California becomes integrated into a regional economy that includes Mexico and Latin America.

CONCLUDING SUMMARY

The structural and ideological barriers to participation documented in this study must be addressed if Latinos are to be meaningfully incorporated. The findings of this case study strongly suggest that the three aforementioned objections to race-conscious remedies are unfounded. First, though overt racism was essentially eliminated twenty years ago, the research uncovered significant evidence of institutionalized and subtle racism that excluded Watsonville Latinos from full participation. Without adequate representation, decisions affecting Latinos and the community at large were made with little or no regard given to the Latino community.

Moreover, the study revealed that the earlier documented cases of overt racism were not eliminated by a "natural progression" of racial enlightenment on the part of Watsonville residents but rather were aided by direct federal intervention. Given the strong resistance by the majority white electorate to Latino empowerment then and more recently, the research concluded that legislative and judicial remedies, in the form of district elections, were necessary to dismantle barriers to Latino political participation in Watsonville.

Second, rather than the stereotype of a minority group hobbled by cultural or internal barriers, this case study demonstrates longstanding Latino political mobilization and struggle in Watsonville that had been thwarted by the majority voting electorate.

Third, analysis of district electoral outcomes substantiates that in Watsonville, district elections made a difference not only in minority representation, voting turnout, and political participation, but also in the distribution of resources under the city's control, in the types of public policies pursued and implemented, and in the everyday racial attitudes and practices of some residents.

Though internal impediments to minority incorporation, such as immigration status, naturalization status, language, age, and socioeconomic status, affect Latino empowerment in important ways, this report has focused on the primacy of external obstacles to participation, including election systems (at-large elections), voter practices (racially polarized voting), and dominant beliefs about Latinos (Latino inferiority). It is clear that Latino political empowerment is predicated not only on the actions taken by Latinos themselves but also on the decisions made by the state's majority electorate and its political leadership.

¹⁰³ For discussion about single-member districts' facilitation of minority political participation and changes in public policy, see Rufus P. Browning, Dale Rogers Marshall, and David H. Tabb, *Protest Is Not Enough: The Struggle of Blacks and Hispanics for Equality in Urban Politics* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986); Peter Eisinger, *The Politics of Displacement* (New York: Academic Press, 1980); and Laughlin McDonald, "The 1982 Amendments of Section 2 and Minority Representation," in *Controversies in Minority Voting*, edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992), pp. 79–80. For alternative perspectives, see Abigail Thernstrom, *Whose Vote Counts?* and Timothy O'Rourke, "The 1982 Amendments and the Voting Rights Paradox," in *Controversies in Minority Voting*, pp. 85–113. Francine Rabinovitz, a voting rights consultant and professor of public administration at the University of Southern California, also supports the latter viewpoint, contending that "the literature does not show that in large cities in California a change from at-large to district elections changes the delivery of services," in "The Quiet Fire of Joaquin Avila," *West Magazine*, 5 January 1992.

¹⁰⁴ Browning et al., *Protest Is Not Enough*.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Campos, first elected in 1987 under the at-large election system, was reelected in 1991. He had been slated by whites opposed to district elections but lost their support when he was forced to run against a popular white fellow incumbent in the city's first district election. An informant remarked that the majority white electorate in this district did not support Campos under these changed conditions as they wanted to limit the number of Latinos on the city council. These voters returned their support to Campos only after the white incumbent decided not to run for office in 1991.

¹⁰⁶ Based on the author's analysis of commission appointments for the last twenty-five years, data provided by the Watsonville City Clerk's office.

¹⁰⁷ As the absentee votes cast in that election were not available to us, we assume that the number of Spanish-surname voters was higher than we report here; many Spanish-surname voters in minority Districts 1 and 2 had cast absentee ballots in the two previous elections. Also, voting in Watsonville was consolidated for the 1994 elections by the county in an effort to increase overall voter turnout. Neither the county nor the City of Watsonville provides a breakdown of Spanish-surname voters; these data were retrieved by a hand count done by Daniel Dodge, a Watsonville resident, paralegal, and unsuccessful candidate for city council in 1989.

¹⁰⁸ Southwest Voter Research Institute, *Southwest Voter Research Notes* 9, no. 1 (Winter): 1, 3.

¹⁰⁹ Consolidated General Elections for Santa Cruz County, 8 November 1994, p. 75.

¹¹⁰ "City Council Meetings to Be Translated," 10 January 1990, *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, p. 1. The council's decision to provide Spanish-language translation at city council meetings also inspired a letter to the editor in which black and Latino leaders were characterized as preaching "defeatism and separatism." "Separatist Act," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 20 January 1990, p. 9.

¹¹¹ Interview with Steve Solomon, city manager of Watsonville, 21 September 1993.

¹¹² Interviews with 27, a Watsonville city department head, 10 June 1993, and 8, a sitting Watsonville council member, 9 June 1993.

¹¹³ Interview with 15, Watsonville city council member and former mayor, 19 July 1993.

¹¹⁴ Conversation with Mexican residents attending a Watsonville city council meeting.

¹¹⁵ See "Push Is on for Voting-Rules Change," 20 May 1992, p. 1, 10; and "Experiments with Limited Voting Rights for Non-Citizens," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 21 May 1992, pp. 1, 10.

¹¹⁶ Telephone conversation with Jamin B. Raskin (American University), August 1992. For a comprehensive historical review of noncitizen suffrage in the United States, see Jamin B. Raskin, "Legal Aliens, Local Citizens: The Historical, Constitutional and Theoretical Meanings of Alien Suffrage" (unpublished manuscript, n.d.). Also see Raskin, "Time to Give Aliens the Vote (Again)," *The Nation*, 5 April 1993.

¹¹⁷ Table A, Full-time, Department Workforce Analysis, General Workforce Analysis, 31 December 1994 (provided by the City of Watsonville Personnel Department).

¹¹⁸ Table V, General Workforce Analysis, 1 July 1988 (provided by the City of Watsonville Personnel Department).

¹¹⁹ Interview 15, a Watsonville city council member and former mayor, 19 July 1993.

¹²⁰ Interview with Eric Frost, City of Watsonville finance director, 17 March 1995. The Latino city attorney was hired prior to district elections.

¹²¹ Interview 7, a Watsonville police officer, July 1993.

¹²² Interview 35, a Watsonville police officer, 20 July 1993.

¹²³ Interview 7, a Watsonville police officer, July 1993.

¹²⁴ "The System at Work," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 27 February 1990, p. 20.

¹²⁵ Interview 11, Chicano youth, 20 March 1995.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Interview 7, a Watsonville police officer, July 1993. This officer, a native of Watsonville and white, had served over twenty-five years on the force.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ "How Did District System Work?" *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 6 December 1989, p. 1.

¹³⁰ Total Budget, Grants, General Fund, and Public Safety data for the City of Watsonville for fiscal years 1984–1994, provided by the City of Watsonville City Manager's office, 11 December 1995.

¹³¹ California State Employment Development Department, December 1995 and April 1998.

¹³² Peter K. Eisinger, *The Politics of Displacement: Racial and Ethnic Transition in Three American Cities* (New York: Academic Press, 1980), p. 153.

¹³³ City of Watsonville Ordinance No. 866-91, Amending Title 14 of the Watsonville Municipal Code by Adding a New Chapter 1446 to Establish Affordable Housing Requirements, 11 July 1991, p. 2.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Interview 4, a director of a Watsonville-based affordable housing organization, 27 July 1994.

¹³⁶ Interview 14, a director of a Santa Cruz County antipoverty agency, 10 June 1994.

¹³⁷ Frank Bardacke, *Good Liberals and Great Blue Herons: Land, Labor, and Politics in the Pajaro Valley* (Santa Cruz, Calif.: Center for Political Ecology, 1994), p. 124.

¹³⁸ "All of Watsonville Wouldn't Benefit by Annexing Franich Ag Land," *Santa Cruz County Sentinel*, 16 May 1993.

¹³⁹ Mike Kostyal, "Dominos of Growth," *Santa Cruz Magazine*, May 1993, pp. 9, 13.

¹⁴⁰ Interview 15, a Watsonville city council member and former mayor, 19 July 1993.

¹⁴¹ Interview 25, a former Watsonville council member and mayor, 20 March 1995.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Interview 13, a long-term Watsonville resident active in civic affairs, 20 March 1995.

¹⁴⁵ Interview 18, a Watsonville city council member, 30 July 1993.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Interview 4, a director of a Watsonville-based affordable housing organization, 27 July 1994.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview 6, a director of a Pajaro Valley-based farmer's organization, 22 July 1996.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Interview 10, a director of a Watsonville community health clinic, 9 June 1993.

¹⁵⁴ Interview 7, a Watsonville Latina activist, 7 June 1993.

¹⁵⁵ Interview 11, a Latino youth active in Watsonville politics, 20 March 1995.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Interview 12, a Watsonville city council member and former mayor, 20 July 1993.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

-
- ¹⁵⁹ Interview 3, a Watsonville city staff member, 22 July 1994.
- ¹⁶⁰ Interview 20, a Watsonville city department head, 21 March 1995.
- ¹⁶¹ Interview 27, a Watsonville city department head, 10 June 1993.
- ¹⁶² Interview 15, a Watsonville city council member and former mayor, 19 July 1993.
- ¹⁶³ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁴ Interview 24, a Watsonville city administrator, 21 July 1993.
- ¹⁶⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁶ Interview 27, a Watsonville city department head, 10 June 1993.
- ¹⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁶⁹ Interview 10, a director of a Watsonville-based health clinic, 9 June 1993.
- ¹⁷⁰ Interview 7, a Watsonville police officer, July 1993.
- ¹⁷¹ Interview 21, a Watsonville city staff member, 19 July 1994.
- ¹⁷² Interview 36, a Watsonville activist, 20 July 1994.
- ¹⁷³ Interview 24, a Watsonville city administrator, 21 July 1993.
- ¹⁷⁴ Interview 21, a Watsonville city staff member, 19 July 1994.
- ¹⁷⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷⁷ Interview 7, a Watsonville police officer, July 1993.
- ¹⁷⁸ Interview 27, a Watsonville city department head, 10 June 1993.
- ¹⁷⁹ Interview 24, a Watsonville protective-service worker, 21 July 1993.
- ¹⁸⁰ Interview 21, a Watsonville city staff member, 19 July 1994.
- ¹⁸¹ Interview 37, a Watsonville firefighter, 21 July 1993.
- ¹⁸² Interview 3, a Watsonville city department head, 22 July 1994.
- ¹⁸³ Interview 24, a Watsonville city administrator, 21 July 1993.
- ¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Interview 27, a Watsonville city department head, 10 June 1993.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ *Baltimore Sun*, 10 October 1989, as reported in "An Easterner Looks at Our Elections," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 10 October 1989, pp. 1-2.

¹⁸⁹ *Armenta v. City of Salinas*, Civ. Act. No. C-88-20567 WAI (N.D. Cal. 1988).

¹⁹⁰ "The Salinas Suit," *Salinas Herald*, 5 September 1988, p. 16.

¹⁹¹ For a comparison between the Watsonville and Salinas cases, see William V. Flores, "Chicano Empowerment and the Politics of At-Large Elections in California," in *Community Empowerment and Chicano Scholarship*, edited by Mary Romero and Cordelia Candelaria (Berkeley, Calif.: National Association of Chicano Studies [NACS], 1992), pp. 181-199.

¹⁹² For a discussion of redistricting efforts in Los Angeles County prior to the court decision, see James Regalado, "Conflicts over Redistricting in Los Angeles County: Who Wins? Who Loses?" in *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California*, edited by Byran O. Jackson and Michael B. Preston (Berkeley, Calif.: Institute of Government Studies [IGS] Press, 1991), pp. 373-394.

¹⁹³ Cited in "LA Supervisors, Meet Watsonville," *Watsonville Register-Pajaronian*, 31 January 1990, p. 24.

¹⁹⁵ Although Supreme Court decisions dismantling majority minority congressional districts do not mean that all such districts are now prohibited, they have chilled minority voting rights litigation in California (see Joaquin G. Avila, "Minority Access to the Political Process" [report presented to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1997] for a comprehensive discussion of the impact of these decisions on voting rights litigation in California). As a result, only twenty-four cases involving minority voting rights have been filed since the Watsonville decision in 1988. Comparative research at this time is difficult, as only six of these cases targeted municipal governments. Three were unsuccessful (Stockton, Pomona, Oxnard), and one lost at the district court level and is currently pending appeal (Santa Maria). The two successful cases (Salinas and Dinuba) were settled out of court. Although the process by which district elections were implemented in Salinas and Dinuba differs from that instituting district elections in Watsonville, comparative research on postdistrict outcomes in these cities may eventually be possible.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Brischetto, David R. Richards, Chandler Davidson, and Bernard Grofman, "Texas," chap. 8 in *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act 1965-1990*, edited by Chandler Davidson and Bernard Grofman (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 248-255. Also see *Controversies in Minority Voting*, edited by Bernard Grofman and Chandler Davidson (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1992); and Frank Parker, *Black Votes Count: Political Empowerment in Mississippi after 1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

¹⁹⁷ The National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO), *National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials*, 1994, pp. viii-ix.

¹⁹⁸ Personal communication with voting rights attorney Joaquin G. Avila, May 1998.

¹⁹⁹ See Joaquin Avila, "Mexican American Political Participation: A Review of the Past, an Assessment of the Present, Strategies for the Future" (unpublished manuscript, 2 September 1986), pp. 187-188.

²⁰⁰ NALEO reports that Latino elected officials across the country identified educational problems as the most important issues currently facing Latinos, even more important than job training or unemployment. See NALEO, *National Roster of Hispanic Elected Officials*, 1994, pp. xii-xiii. Also see public education policy recommendations for California Latinos by Steven Erie and Harold Brackman in "Paths to Political Incorporation for Latinos and Asian Pacifics in California," The California Policy Seminar, University of California, 1993, pp. 32-33.

²⁰¹ The Multicultural Collaborative, "Race, Power and Promise in Los Angeles: An Assessment of Responses to Human Relations Conflict," January 1996.

