

Colorado Votes

Civic Engagement in the Rocky Mountain State
2002–2006

By Benjamin Spears



1-800-546-8683 www.projectvote.org

Washington, DC, Office 739 8th Street SE, Suite 202 • Washington, DC 20003

Arkansas Office 2101 South Main Street • Little Rock, AR 72206

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Executive Summary

Colorado Votes: Civic Engagement in the Rocky Mountain State provides a concise review of population and voter participation trends of various demographic groups between 2002 and 2006. The report is based primarily on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS).

Key findings include:

- From 2002 to 2006, Colorado's population experienced very strong growth—50 percent higher than the U.S. growth rate.
- Half of eligible Coloradans did not participate in the 2006 general election either because they were not registered (33 percent) or because they were registered but did not vote (17 percent).
- Registration and voting in Colorado are both stratified by social and economic factors, including race or ethnicity, income and age.
- Once registered, Colorado's underrepresented populations vote at nearly the same as White, more affluent and older Coloradans.
- Twenty-seven percentage points separate the turnout rate for the lowest-income Coloradans and the most affluent Coloradans. Among registered voters, the disparity in voting between low-income and upper-income Coloradans declines to 9 percentage points.
- Despite a population that is becoming younger, Colorado's registration and voting is still heavily weighed toward older residents. In 2006, the 18 to 29 year-old voting-eligible population was less than half as likely to have voted as Coloradans 65 and over.

Introduction

This report examines changes in Colorado's population and rates of electoral participation between 2002 and 2006, then compares them to the United States as a whole. The report's major focal points include rates of eligibility, registration and turnout by race or ethnicity, income and age.

The largest survey of voting behavior is the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). The CPS and Population Estimates Program are the primary sources of data for this report, which provides a review of the frequency tables generated from responses to the November 2006 CPS.

This report is organized by the three major cross-sections of the electorate: race or ethnicity, income and age. First, we describe the size and demographic composition of Colorado's overall population and voting-eligible population. We then present characteristics of the registered population and conclude by describing some of the disparities in the composition of the voting populations.

The data show that those Coloradans who are White, those who are older and those who are more affluent are overrepresented in both the population that is registered to vote and the population that votes compared to their non-White, younger and lower-income counterparts.

Summary Table: Percent of Colorado Population Eligible to Vote, Voting and Not Voting, by Demographic Characteristics, 2006

Demographic Category	Voting-Eligible	Registered	Voters	Non-Voters
RACE				
White	82%	86%	88%	80%
Black	3%	2%	1%	4%
Latino	12%	10%	9%	13%
HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Less than \$25,000	18%	13%	12%	18%
\$25,000–\$74,999	46%	45%	46%	41%
More than \$75,000	37%	42%	42%	41%
AGE GROUP				
Under 30	22%	17%	13%	31%
30 to 64	65%	68%	70%	63%
65 and Over	13%	15%	17%	6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

Electorate by Race or Ethnicity

The U.S. population grew from 288 million to 299 million between 2002 and 2006. During that period, Colorado's population grew from 4.5 million to 4.8 million.

Colorado's population grew by 6 percent between 2002 and 2006, 50 percent higher than the 4 percent growth rate of the nation as a whole.

Colorado was less racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. as a whole. Seventy-two percent of Coloradans were White in 2006, whereas 66 percent of the overall American population was White.

Between 2002 and 2006, Colorado's non-White population grew by more than twice the rate of the state's White population. Latinos comprised approximately 45 percent of the state's overall population growth.

Table 1 shows Colorado's and the U. S.'s population change between 2002 and 2006.

Table 1: United States and Colorado Populations by Race and Ethnicity, 2002 and 2006

	2002		2006		Percent Population Change
	Total	Percent Total	Total	Percent Total	
Colorado	4,500		4,753		6%
White	3,306	73%	3,410	72%	3%
Non-White	1,194	27%	1,344	28%	13%
Black	168	4%	177	4%	5%
Latino	820	18%	934	20%	14%
Asian	106	2%	121	3%	14%
United States	288,126		299,398		4%
White	196,824	68%	198,745	66%	1%
Non-White	91,302	32%	100,653	34%	10%
Black	35,203	12%	36,690	12%	4%
Latino	38,598	13%	44,321	15%	15%
Asian	11,321	4%	12,882	4%	14%

Numbers in thousands

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Estimates of the Population by Selected Groups for the United States and States, 2002 and 2006

Sixty-six percent of Colorado's population was voting-eligible in 2002; sixty-seven percent was voting-eligible in 2006.

While Colorado's non-White population grew significantly between 2002 and 2006, the proportion of that population that was eligible to vote declined from 46 percent to 43 percent. Age and citizenship status are likely causes.

Table 2 shows Colorado's 2002 and 2006 rates of voting eligibility by race.

Table 2: Colorado Voting-Eligible Population by Race and Ethnicity, 2002 to 2006

	2002		2006	
	Voting-Eligible Population	VEP as % of Population	Voting-Eligible Population	VEP as % of Population
White	2,407	73%	2,611	77%
Non-White	552	46%	576	43%
Black	114	68%	95	54%
Latino	362	44%	396	42%
Total	2,959	66%	3,187	67%

Numbers in thousands

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

Seventy-one percent of Coloradans were registered to vote in 2006, a 4-percentage-point increase from 2002. However, registration rates were not uniform across demographic groups. In 2006, Blacks and Latinos were less likely to be registered than Whites.

Table 3 shows the racial disparity in Colorado's registration rates, shown as a percent of its voting-eligible population over time.

Table 3: Colorado Registration as a Percent of Voting-Eligible Population by Race, 1998 to 2006

	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
White	76%	71%	70%	79%	75%
Black	46%	67%	61%	59%	51%
Latino	62%	57%	51%	57%	57%
Total	73%	68%	67%	74%	71%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November Supplements

Voting was also inconsistent across Colorado's demographic groups, and participation was skewed toward Whites as Blacks were less likely than their White counterparts to have voted in 2002 and 2006. Black turnout, in fact, worsened during the same time period as every other racial and ethnic group's turnout rate improved.

Table 4 shows Colorado's voter turnout by race and ethnicity in 2002 and 2006.

Table 4: Colorado Voter Turnout of Registration by Race, 2006

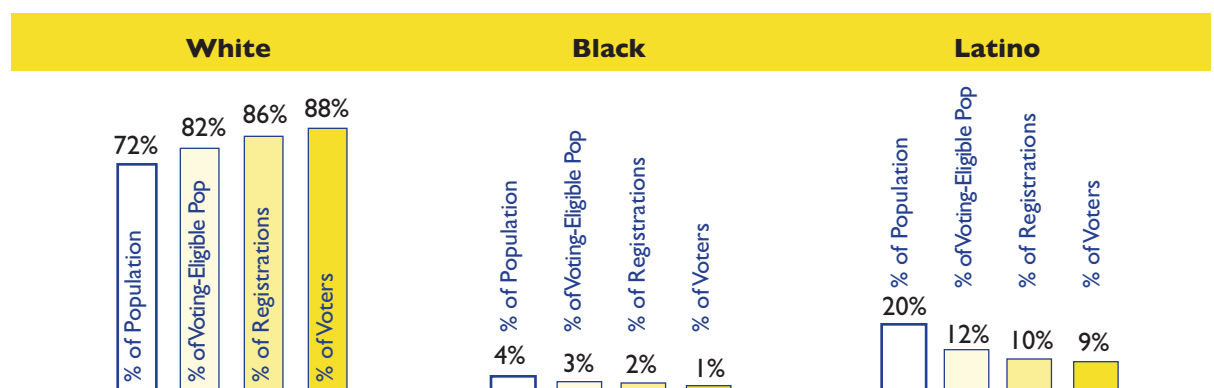
	2002	2006
White	76%	78%
Black	70%	51%
Latino	64%	70%
Total	75%	76%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

This data therefore shows that non-White Coloradans were underrepresented in the electoral process relative to their share of the population. Latinos' share of Colorado's voting population equals less than half their share of the overall population. Blacks, similarly, are 4 percent of the overall population but represent only 1 percent of the voting population.

Figure 1 shows the extent to which Whites are overrepresented as voters, while non-Whites are underrepresented as voters.

Figure 1: Colorado Racial/Ethnic Composition of Voting-Eligible Population, Registered Voters and Voters, 2006



Electorate by Income

Consistent with the U.S. as a whole,¹ the likelihood of being registered to vote in Colorado rises with income. In 2006, lower-income Coloradans were underrepresented in registration relative to their higher-income counterparts.

Table 5 shows Colorado income groups' registration as a percentage of the voting-eligible population.

Table 5: Colorado Registration by Income, 2006

	VEP	Registered	Registered as % of VEP
< \$25,000	506	276	55%
\$25,000–39,999	408	273	67%
\$40,000–74,999	892	680	76%
\$75,000 & over	1,042	881	85%
Reporting Total	2,848	2,111	74%

Numbers in thousands

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

In addition to registration, voting was not a behavior that occurred consistently across Colorado's income groups. Of the voting-eligible population earning less than \$25,000, 37 percent voted in 2006. In contrast, 64 percent of voting-eligible Coloradans earning more than \$75,000 voted.

This disparity is significantly reduced, however, when examining turnout as a percent of registered voters. Once registered, Colorado's income groups display less-stratified turnout rates. Whereas the spread for voting by the voting-eligible population is 27 points, the spread for voting by registered voters is 11 points.

Table 6 shows Colorado's 2006 voter turnout, as a percentage of the registered and voting-eligible populations.

¹ "Representational Bias in the 2006 Electorate" provides a review of voter participation in the 2006 elections based on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). http://projectvote.org/fileadmin/ProjectVote/Publications/Representational_bias_report_2006.pdf

Table 6: Colorado Voter Turnout by Income, 2006

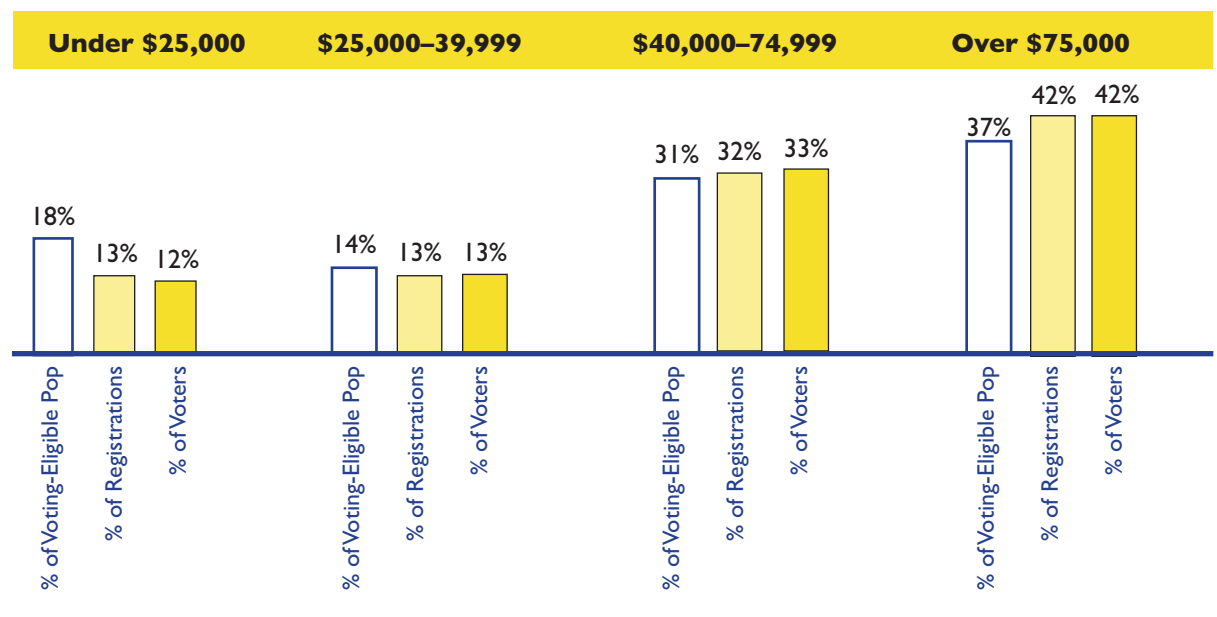
	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP
< \$25,000	37%	67%
\$25,00–39,999	51%	76%
\$40,000–74,999	60%	78%
\$75,000 and over	64%	76%
Reporting Total	56%	76%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

Despite representing 18 percent of Colorado's voting-eligible population, Coloradans earning less than \$25,000 constituted closer to 12 percent of the voters in 2006.

Figure 2 shows that Coloradans earning greater than \$75,000 were overrepresented in the registered and voting populations relative to their share of the voting-eligible population.

Figure 2: Colorado Income Composition of Voting-Eligible Population and Electorate, 2006



Electorate by Age

Colorado's voting-eligible population grew by 228,000 people from 2002 to 2006, an increase of 8 percent. The under-30 age group's voting-eligible population growth rate exceeded 11 percent.

In Colorado, the growth of the under-30 voting-eligible population amounted to one-third of the state's overall growth from 2002 to 2006.

Table 7 shows Colorado's voting-eligible population by age.

Table 7: Colorado Voting-Eligible Population by Age, 2002 to 2006

	2002	2006	Change	Percent Change
Under 30	644	716	72	11%
30 to 64	1,903	2,066	163	9%
65 and Over	412	404	-8	-2%
Total	2,959	3,187	228	8%

Numbers in thousands

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2002 and 2006

Coloradans' registration rates varied by age group, but registration rates increased for all age groups between 2002 and 2006.

Colorado's "under-30" voting-eligible population was registered to vote at a greater rate in 2006 than in 2002. Still, the percentage of younger Coloradans' who were registered to vote was much lower than their older counterparts.

Table 8 shows registration rates of Colorado's age groups as a percentage of the voting-eligible population in 2002 and 2006.

Table 8: Colorado Registration as a Percent of Voting-Eligible Population by Age, 2002 to 2006

	2002	2006
Under 30	53%	55%
30 to 64	69%	76%
65 and Over	78%	79%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2002 and 2006

In 2002, 29 percent of Colorado's voting-eligible population under 30 voted. That figure was more than double—66 percent—for Coloradans 65 and over. Despite improving their turnout rate from 2002, only 56 percent of registered Coloradans under 30 voted in the 2006 general election. Ninety percent of Coloradans over 65 voted in 2006.

Table 9 shows voter turnout of Colorado's age groups in 2002 and 2006 as percentages of the registered and voting-eligible populations.

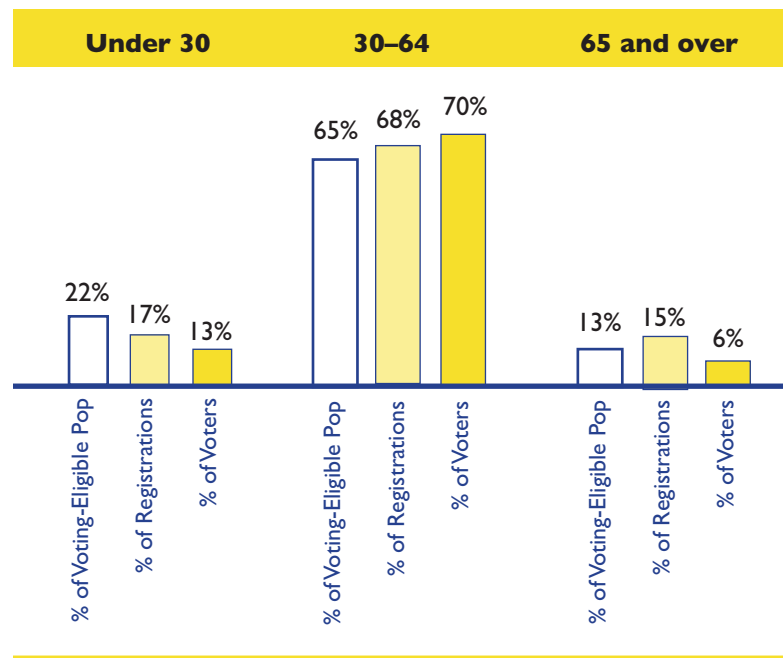
Table 9: Colorado Voter Turnout by Age, 2002 and 2006

	2002		2006	
	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP
Under 30	55%	29%	56%	31%
30 to 64	78%	54%	78%	59%
65 and Over	85%	66%	90%	71%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2002 and 2006

Figure 3 shows the composition of Colorado's electorate by age in 2006.

Figure 3: Colorado Age Composition by Voting-Eligible Population, Registered Voters and Voters, 2006



Conclusion

This report presents participation data on Colorado and the United States between 2002 and 2006, with a focus on disparities by race or ethnicity, income and age. Each of those categories was compared through the lenses of eligibility, registration and voting.

As the report shows, Whites represented a higher percentage of that state's population than that of the overall nation. The Latino population grew at a relatively high rate between 2002 and 2006 but continued to lag behind Whites in registration and voting rates. Conversely, Blacks' registration and voting rates are in decline, exacerbating the underrepresentation of Colorado's non-White populations.

Consistent with decades of data from the U.S. as a whole, registration and voting rates were lower among younger and less affluent Coloradans. In addition, younger Coloradans were underrepresented in the 2006 electorate. Public agencies, community organizations and the general public should take note of the disparities in participation to further engage young people, low-income people and new citizens. Continued failure to do so will risk the further disenfranchisement of groups historically locked out of our democracy.

About Project Vote

Project Vote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in low-income and minority communities. With offices in Washington, DC, and Little Rock, AR, Project Vote's staff are experts in the fields of voting rights, election law and large-scale voter contact programs.

About the Author

Ben Spears has been a research assistant with Project Vote since September 2006. He graduated in 2005 from the George Washington University in Washington, DC, where he was active on hunger and homelessness issues. While in the nation's capital, Ben interned with Congressman John Lewis (GA-5) and participated in dialogues with other student leaders as part of the National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness. Before joining Project Vote, Ben served as researcher and project assistant at multiple international humanitarian organizations in Atlanta, Georgia, including CARE USA.



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