

Wisconsin Votes

Civic Engagement in the Badger State
2002–2006

By Benjamin Spears



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Executive Summary

Wisconsin Votes: Civic Engagement in the Badger State provides a concise review of population and voter participation trends of several demographic groups in the November 2006 election. The report is based largely on the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey (CPS). Key findings include:

- From 2002 to 2006, Wisconsin's population grew by 2 percent, just half of the U.S. growth rate.
- Fifty-two percent of eligible Wisconsinites participated in the 2006 general election. Twenty percent were registered but did not vote, and 28 percent were not registered.
- Both registration and voting in Wisconsin are stratified by social and economic factors, including race or ethnicity, income and age.
- Blacks lag 16 percentage points behind Whites in registration and Latinos lag 26 percentage points behind Whites.
- Young voting-eligible Wisconsinites ("Under 30") lag 30 points behind Wisconsinites "65 and older" in registration.
- Lower-income eligible voters (\$25,000 and under) lag 18 percentage points behind affluent voters (\$75,000 and over) in registration.
- Once registered to vote, historically underrepresented populations vote at rates similar to White, more affluent and older Wisconsinites.
- Once registered, only 5 percentage points separate the voting rate of low-income and higher-income individuals.
- Although Wisconsin's population is becoming younger, registration and voting are still heavily skewed toward older residents. Despite a 165% increase in turnout rate from 2002 to 2006, the "18- to 29-year-old" voting-eligible population was still half as likely as Wisconsinites "65 and over" to cast a ballot.

Introduction

This report examines changes in Wisconsin's population and rates of electoral participation between 2002 and 2006, and 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 Wisconsin'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 Wisconsinites 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, while Wisconsinites of color, who are under 30 or who earn less than \$25,000 a year are underrepresented.

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

Demographic Category	Voting-Eligible	Registered	Voters	Non-Voters
RACE				
White	90%	92%	93%	89%
Black	5%	4%	4%	5%
Latino	3%	2%	2%	4%
HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Less than \$25,000	20%	17%	16%	21%
\$25,000–\$74,999	52%	53%	54%	51%
More than \$75,000	28%	30%	30%	29%
AGE GROUP				
Under 30	23%	17%	16%	22%
30 to 64	60%	63%	63%	62%
65 and Over	18%	20%	22%	16%

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

Electorate by Race or Ethnicity

The U.S. population grew by 4 percent between 2002 and 2006, from 288 million to 299 million. During that period Wisconsin's population grew by 2 percent, from 5.4 million to 5.6 million.

Wisconsin was less racially and ethnically diverse than the U.S. as a whole. Eighty-six percent of Wisconsinites were White in 2006, whereas 66 percent of the overall American population was White.

Consistent with a national trend, between 2002 and 2006, Wisconsin's non-White population grew ten times faster than the state's White population.

Table 1 shows the population change in Wisconsin and the U.S. between 2002 and 2006.

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

	2002		2006		Percent Population Change
	Total	Percent Total	Total	Percent Total	
Wisconsin	5,439		5,557		2%
White	4,717	87%	4,761	86%	1%
Non-White	721	13%	795	14%	10%
Black	311	6%	323	6%	4%
Latino	217	4%	259	5%	19%
Asian	97	2%	110	2%	13%
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*

In 2002, the White population was 26 percentage points more likely to be eligible to vote than the non-White population. In 2006 this gap decreased slightly to a 24-percentage point difference between the voting-eligibility of the White and non-White populations.

The percentage of Blacks and Latinos who are eligible to vote moved in opposite directions. While the Black population's voting eligibility increased 10 percent from 2002 to 2006, the voting eligibility of Latinos actually decreased 6 percent over that same time.

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

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

	2002		2006	
	Voting-Eligible Population	VEP as % of Population	Voting-Eligible Population	VEP as % of Population
White	3,610	77%	3,650	77%
Black	165	53%	203	63%
Latino	113	52%	120	46%
Total	3,975	73%	4,071	73%

Numbers in thousands

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

Seventy-two percent of Wisconsinites were registered to vote in 2006—an increase over the 2002 rate of 69 percent.

However, registration rates were not uniform across demographic groups. In all recorded years, Whites consistently registered at a higher percentage than their non-White counterparts.

In every year, the White population saw relatively stable rates of registration. The Black population saw significant increases in 2000 and 2004 nearing the registration rates of the White population, but those gains retreated to a greater extent than the White population in 1998, 2002 and 2006.

Latinos experienced a significant decrease in the percentage of their voting-eligible population who were registered to vote between 1998 and 2000, despite it being a presidential election year, but saw a large gain in 2004. However, 2006 again saw a large drop in voter registration for the Latino population. This drop was far worse than the 15-percentage-point drop for the Black population or the 9-percentage-point drop for the White population between 2004 and 2006.

Table 3 shows the disparity in registration rates for Wisconsin's racial or ethnic populations.

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

	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006
White	71%	80%	73%	83%	74%
Black	57%	76%	58%	74%	59%
Latino	64%	44%	45%	73%	48%
Total	70%	79%	69%	82%	72%

Voting was also inconsistent across Wisconsin's demographic groups. Participation was skewed toward Whites as Blacks and Latinos were less likely to have voted than their White counterparts in 2002 and 2006. However, turnout increased among all demographics from 2002 to 2006, with the largest increase among Latinos.

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

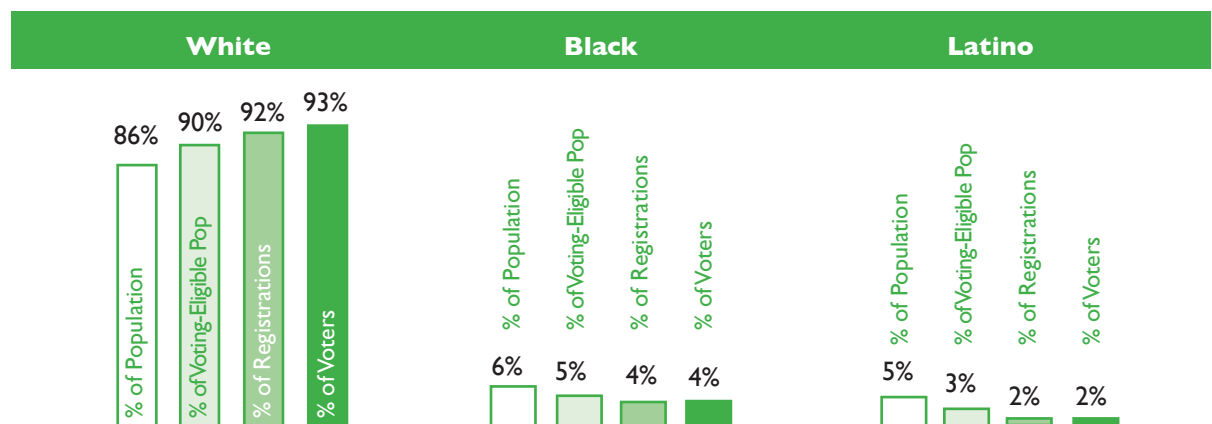
Table 4: Wisconsin Voter Turnout of Registration by Race, 2006

	2002	2006
White	74%	80%
Black	72%	74%
Latino	40%	62%
Total	73%	80%

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

Figure 1 shows the extent to which Whites are overrepresented in the electorate compared to their share of the voting-eligible population, while non-Whites are underrepresented.

Figure 1: Wisconsin 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 Wisconsin rises with income. In 2006, lower-income Wisconsinites were underrepresented in the population of registered voters compared to their higher-income counterparts.

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

Table 5: Wisconsin Registration by Income, 2006

	VEP	Registered	Registered as % of VEP
< \$25,000	705	445	63%
\$25,000–39,999	697	500	72%
\$40,000–74,999	1,126	890	79%
\$75,000 & over	976	790	81%
Reporting Total	3,503	2,625	75%

Numbers in thousands

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

In addition to registration, turnout was uneven across Wisconsin's income groups. Of the voting-eligible population earning less than \$25,000, 47 percent voted in 2006. In contrast, 65 percent of the voting-eligible population earning more than \$75,000 voted.

This disparity is greatly reduced when one examines turnout as a percent of registered voters. Whereas the spread for turnout of voting-eligible population is 18 points, the spread for turnout of those registered is only six points.

Table 6 shows Wisconsin'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: Wisconsin Voter Turnout by Income, 2006

	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP
< \$25,000	75%	47%
\$25,000-39,999	79%	57%
\$40,000-74,999	81%	64%
\$75,000 and over	80%	65%
Reporting Total	79%	60%

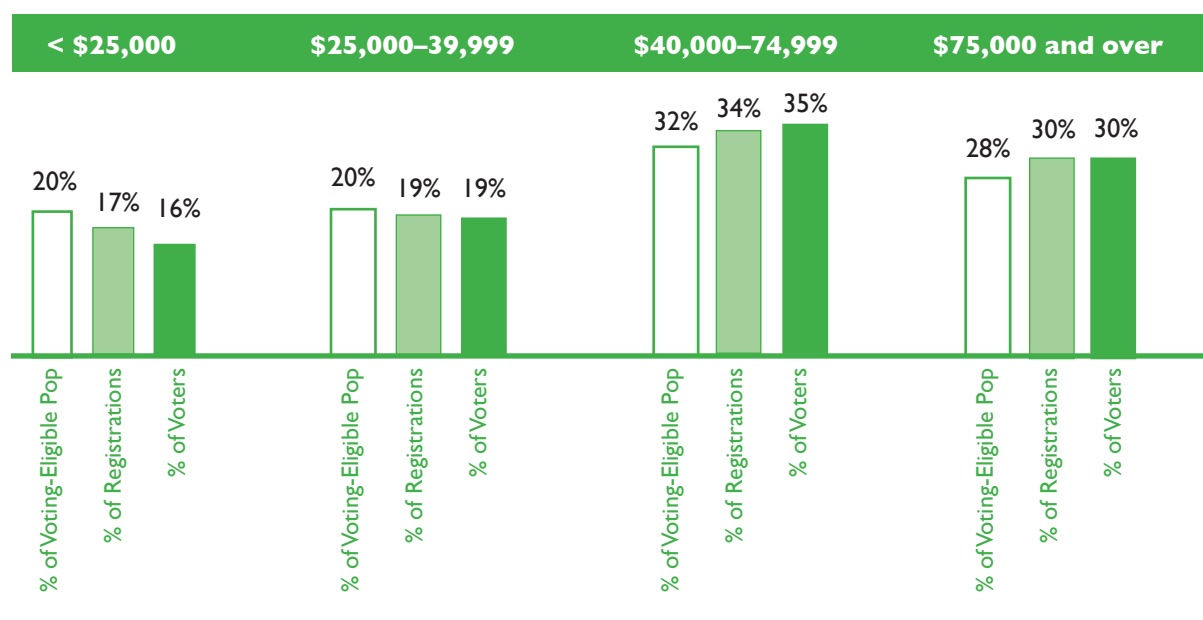
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, November 2006

Despite representing 20 percent of Wisconsin's voting-eligible population, Wisconsinites earning less than \$25,000 constituted only 16 percent of voters in 2006.

Figure 2 shows that Wisconsinites earning greater than \$40,000 were overrepresented in the registered and voting populations relative to their share of the voting-eligible population. This effect is more pronounced at the extremes of the income spectrum.

Despite the disparity in registration, there exists only a 1 percent or less difference between turnout rates among registered voters across all income levels.

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



Electorate by Age

Wisconsin's voting-eligible population grew by 2 percent, from 397,000 in 2002 to 4,071,000 in 2006. The "under-30" age group experienced a voting-eligible population growth rate that was the largest increase at 24 percent.

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

	2002	2006	Change	% Change
Under 30	743	924	181	24%
30 to 64	2,636	2,430	-205	-8%
65 and Over	596	717	121	20%
Total	3,975	4,071	97	2%

Numbers in thousands

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

Not all of Wisconsin's age groups were registered at the same rate in 2002 and 2006. Between those years, however, registration across all of Wisconsin's age groups improved.

Wisconsin's under-30 voting-eligible population registered at a greater rate in the 2006 election than in the 2002 election. Still, younger Wisconsinites' registration rates were much lower than the registration rates of their older counterparts.

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

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

	2002	2006
Under 30	46%	54%
30 to 64	73%	76%
65 and Over	79%	84%

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

In 2002, 24 percent of Wisconsin's voting-eligible population under 30 voted. That figure was almost triple—69 percent—for Wisconsinites 65 and over.

Despite improving their turnout rate from 2002, only 40 percent of registered Wisconsinites under 30 voted in the 2006 general election. Seventy-one percent of Wisconsinites over 65 voted in 2006.

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

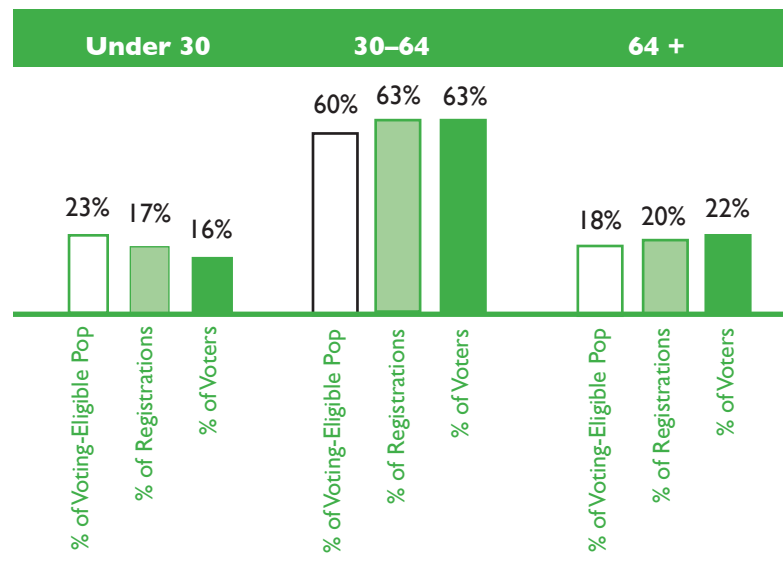
Table 9: Michigan Voter Turnout by Age, 2002 and 2006

	2002		2006	
	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP	Voted as % of Registered	Voted as % of VEP
Under 30	52%	24%	74%	40%
30 to 64	73%	54%	80%	61%
65 and Over	87%	69%	84%	71%

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

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

Figure 3: Wisconsin Age Composition of Voting-Eligible Population, Registered Voters and Voters, 2006



Conclusion

This report presents participation data on Wisconsin and the United States between 2002 and 2006, with a focus on disparities by race/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 in registration and voting rates.

Consistent with decades of data from the U.S. as a whole, registration and voting rates were lower among younger and less affluent Wisconsinites. In addition, younger Wisconsinites were underrepresented in the 2006 electorate. Registration seems to be a key component to engaging this group.

About Project Vote

ProjectVote is a national nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes voting in low-income and minority communities. With offices in Washington, DC, and Little Rock, AR, ProjectVote'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 ProjectVote 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 ProjectVote, Ben served as researcher and project assistant at multiple international humanitarian organizations in Atlanta, Georgia, including CARE USA.



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