

## Introduction

**This report on the political demography and geography of four Intermountain West states**—Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona—is part of a series of reports on “purple” states in the 2008 elections. Purple states are states where the current balance of political forces does not decisively favor one party or the other, as it does in the solid red (Republican) and blue (Democratic) states. But demographic and geographic trends are constantly testing the balance in these purple states and may nudge them not just toward a particular party in this election but one party decisively over the longer term.

This report provides a guide to the trends currently reshaping these states, determining how they will lean in November 2008 and beyond.

Although a solid wall of Intermountain West states voted red (for George Bush) in 2004, the states of Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and, to a lesser degree, Arizona are considered to be “in play” for 2008. The reasons they are in play reflect some combination of the closeness of the last presidential election results and the turbulent demographic shifts among key voting bloc segments throughout the region.

Of course, demography will not be the only factor in the upcoming election. Presumptive GOP nominee John McCain is from this region and that may possibly help him. However, even in his home state of Arizona, his victory may not be a cakewalk, precisely because of the long-term trends that are nudging it toward purple status.

Colorado, Nevada, and New Mexico comprise 19 Electoral College votes, enough to have changed the election in 2004, had they voted for Democrat John Kerry, over the Republican George Bush. With Arizona included the four states will award 29 electoral votes, two more than the highly prized state of Florida.

The dramatic growth of these states is shown in **Table 1**. Thus far this decade, Nevada and Arizona are the two fastest growing states in the nation, increasing their total populations by a quarter, and a fifth, respectively. Colorado ranks eighth and New Mexico, the slowest growing of the four, still grew faster than the nation as a whole. For the most part, this growth is fueled by the lure of new western economies, tied to growing “megapolitan regions” and industries such as information technology, financial services, energy, and tourism.<sup>1</sup>

Their population growth comes from two migration sources: domestic in-movement from other US states, especially heavily Democratic California, and migration from abroad. **Figure 1** shows, for example, that Nevada’s migration gains from California are more than the total from the rest of the country. Compared to Nevada, there are even more California migrants destined for Arizona, though its gains from the rest of the US are even larger. Ex-Californians are also prominent among newcomers to Colorado and New Mexico.

**Table 1. 2000-2007 Growth by Race and Migration Components:  
Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona**

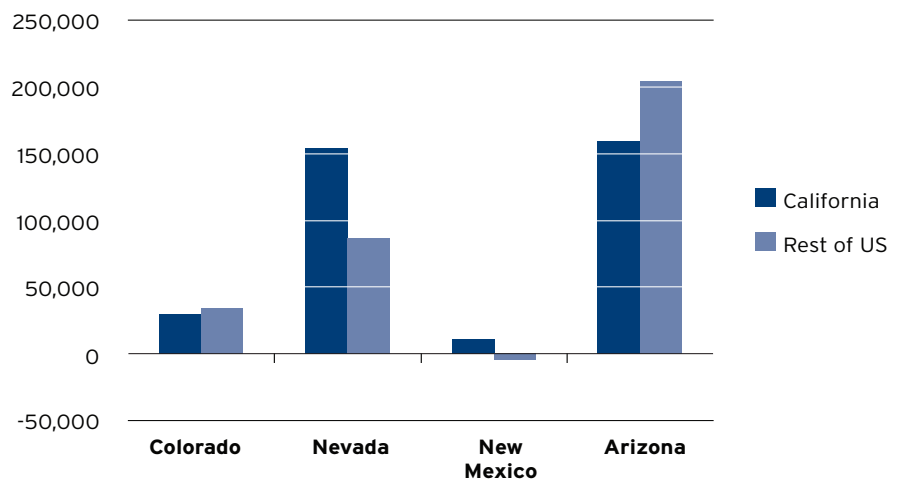
	Colorado	Nevada	New Mexico	Arizona
2007 Population (000s)	4,862	2,565	1,970	6,339
Growth Rate*				
Total	12.3	27.1	8.2	22.7
Migration Rate*				
Domestic Migration	2.8	17.4	1.5	12.3
Immigration	3.1	4.0	1.8	4.0

\* growth rates per 100 population  
\*\*non Hispanic members of race

Source: Authors' analysis of US Census estimates,

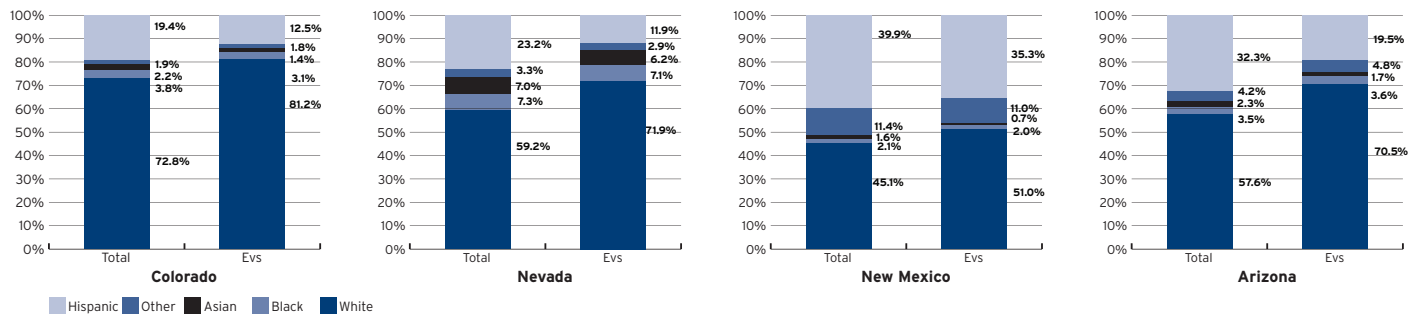
An increasingly important source of growth to the Intermountain West is immigration, especially from Mexico and Latin America. Hispanics in particular should loom large in the 2008 presidential election and beyond, as this group is younger and growing far more rapidly than native-born whites in each of the four states examined. While Hispanics are typically viewed as strongly favoring Democratic candidates, we show below that this support has varied considerably across these states in the past.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1. Net Migration Exchanges with California and Rest of US, 2000-6**



Source: Authors' analysis of Internal Revenue Service Migration Flow data

**Figure 2: Race-Ethnic Profiles: Total Population vs Eligible Voters**



Source: Author's analysis of 2007 Current Population Survey

However, it is important to stress that new immigrant minorities, both Hispanics and Asians, are less well represented among eligible voters than among the population as a whole. Among Hispanics, in particular, large shares of their total population are ineligible to vote due to their being under age 18, or having non citizenship status.<sup>3</sup> In Nevada, for example, Hispanics constitute 23 percent of the total population but only about half that percentage of eligible voters (**Figure 2**). In New Mexico, however, where most Hispanics are native born and the product of generations of settlement, the disparity between total and eligible voter representation is quite small—over one third of New Mexican eligible voters are Hispanic. The Hispanic vote will likely be crucial in each of these states given the closeness of the previous election and potential for increase in Hispanic turnout.

Clearly the rising numbers of immigrants, Hispanics, and ex-Californians will be an important part of the story behind these states' 2008 election results. Still, these states differ from each other in several significant ways. For example, Colorado ranks fourth in the nation in the percentage with bachelors degrees—roughly one third of the state's adults—whereas Nevada ranks 46th, with barely one-fifth having achieved a college degree (**Table 2**). Nevada, on the other hand, fares well on household income, and well below the U.S. average on poverty levels. At the other extreme is New Mexico, which ranks 42nd on household income and has the fourth highest poverty rate. It does rank above the national average on the percentage of professionals in its workforce, and above Nevada in college graduates. These disparities reflect different mixes of in-migration of low skilled immigrants, high tech workers, and the compensation associated with industries prominent in these states.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, these states have different political terrains, though a recent Democratic surge has lead to closer elections and more balanced party representations in state and national offices than has been the case in the past. It is the latter surge that has created interest in these previously red states and will be the focus of the state-specific analyses below.

**Table 2: Demographic, Economic, and Political Indicators:US and four states**

Indicator	U.S.	Colorado	Nevada	New Mexico	Arizona
<b>State Rank</b>					
<b>Demographic Indicators</b>					
%White	<u>66.2</u>	<u>71.5</u>	<u>58.6</u>	<u>42.4</u>	<u>59.5</u>
		30	45	49	42
% Age 65+	<u>12.4</u>	<u>10.0</u>	<u>11.1</u>	<u>12.4</u>	<u>12.8</u>
		47	45	31	26
%Born in Same State#	<u>67.4</u>	<u>46.9</u>	<u>28.5</u>	<u>56.6</u>	<u>42.0</u>
		44	51	35	48
<b>Economic Indicators 2006</b>					
%College Grads*	<u>27.0</u>	<u>34.3</u>	<u>20.8</u>	<u>25.3</u>	<u>25.5</u>
		4	46	29	27
%Professionals**	<u>20.2</u>	<u>20.9</u>	<u>14.6</u>	<u>21.9</u>	<u>18.7</u>
		17	51	9	38
%Manufacturing**	<u>11.6</u>	<u>7.3</u>	<u>4.6</u>	<u>5.3</u>	<u>7.9</u>
		42	48	45	39
Median HH Income	<u>48,451</u>	<u>52,015</u>	<u>52,998</u>	<u>40,629</u>	<u>47,265</u>
		14	11	42	23
%Persons in Poverty	<u>13.3</u>	<u>12.0</u>	<u>10.3</u>	<u>18.5</u>	<u>14.2</u>
		31	41	4	15
<b>State Political Indicators</b>					
Dem/Rep House Members		4D/3R	1D/2R	2R/1D	4D/4R
Dem/Rep Senators		1D, 1R	1D, 1R	1D,1R	2R
Governor: Dem or Rep		D	R	D	D
Democratic Margin- 2006 Senate		n/a	-14	42	-10
Democratic Margin- 2004 President		-5	-2	-1	-11
# among native born residents					
*among persons age 25 and over					
** among civilian employed population age 16 and over					
Source: Authors' analysis of 2006 American Community Survey and state election results					

For each state, we start by delineating our regions of analysis and discussing population growth patterns for the state as whole and each individual region. We then provide demographic and growth profiles for the state and each region, focusing particularly on the key demographics of minorities, white working age college graduates, the working age white working class, and white seniors. We then describe the demographic voting patterns within the state, followed by an extensive discussion of how

different regions within the state have trended politically since 1988. We conclude the analysis of each state with an assessment of the key trends and groups to watch as the 2008 campaign unfolds.

Together these analyses will show how these states went from a heavily Republican bloc to a new swing region in U.S. politics. The results of the 2008 election will reflect the final balance struck in each state between the diverse demographic and geographic trends identified below.

## Data Sources and Definitions

**The demographic, polling and voting statistics presented in this report are the latest available from authoritative sources.** The demographic profiles of states and their regions are drawn from U.S. Decennial Censuses through 2000, U.S. Census population estimates for states and counties through July 2007, and the Public Use Micro Sample (PUMS) of the Census Bureau's 2006 American Community Survey. Polling data are drawn from the CBS/New York Times (1988) and National Election Pool (2004) state exit polls. Presidential and congressional election data are drawn from official county level election returns for the four states.

Our analysis of eligible voters—citizens age 18 and above—draws from the 2006 American Community Survey and the 2000 census. We examine these voters according to several social and demographic attributes. Special emphasis is given to four key demographic segments of eligible voters: (1) *minorities*—all persons stating something other than non-Hispanic white as their race-ethnicity; (2) *white seniors*—non-Hispanic whites ages 65+; (3) *working age white college graduates*—non-Hispanic whites ages 18-64 with a four year college degree or more; and (4) *working age white working class*—non-college-educated non-Hispanic whites ages 18-64.

The sub state regional definitions that we employ will be discussed in Part A and displayed on maps in each state-specific section. They are typically based on counties or groups thereof, comprising metropolitan areas or other regions that are strategically important in terms of their recent demographic shifts or voting trends. These regions will be used to identify sub-state trends drawn from US census county population estimates and county level election returns. Regions delineated for the analyses of eligible voter demographics presented in Part B of each state-specific section, and in Appendix Tables will sometimes deviate slightly from the regional definitions presented in Part A. This is due to the geography limitations of data available with the 2006 American Community Survey Public Use Micro-Sample, which is used in these analyses. Details about these slight differences in regional definition are available from the authors.