



POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR OF COLORADO MILLENNIALS

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Overview

Young voters were a key component of the voter coalition that won Colorado for Barack Obama and the Democrats in 2008. Two years later, solid pluralities of Colorado Millennials (18-29 year olds) intend to vote for Democratic gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, and Congressional candidates in this year's midterm elections. The Democratic vote intentions of Colorado Millennials are based on the continued identification of a majority of them with the Democratic Party, and of the greatest number as liberal or progressive. In addition, the greatest number support governmental activism in the economy, a position normally associated with the Democratic Party. Finally, most continue to hold favorable attitudes toward the Democratic Party and to approve of Barack Obama's performance as president.

At the same time, the extent to which these young Coloradans turns out at the polls this fall is a major concern. Barely half say that they are certain to vote and less than a third believes that the outcome of this year's midterm elections is very important to them. Political participation, and the extent to which the political parties and other organizations attempt to enhance it, is the overriding issue in Colorado youth politics in 2010.

2010 Vote Intention

Colorado Millennials favor Democratic candidates in all key races, although significant numbers remain undecided.

- In the gubernatorial race, young voters favor Democrat John Hickenlooper over Republican Dan Maes by greater than a 2:1 margin (43% vs. 18%). Independent Tom Tancredo is a distant third (7%) while 31% are undecided.
- In the contest for US Senate incumbent Democrat Michael Bennet holds an edge over Republican Ken Buck (36% vs. 27%) with more than a third (37%) undecided.
- In the generic House ballot, 38% say they will vote for the Democratic candidate in their district while 25% prefer the Republican and 37% have not yet decided.
- In all races, the Democrats are strongest among women and, especially, minority Millennials. Among both African-Americans and Hispanics Democratic candidates hold at least a 2:1 margin in all contests. Republican candidates perform most strongly among white Millennials, especially on the congressional generic ballot and Senate races, where the two parties are in a dead head. In the gubernatorial race, however, Democrat Hickenlooper leads Republican Maes by about 2:1 even among white Millennials (41% vs. 21%).
- Neither party suffers significant defections from within its ranks. Upwards of two-thirds of both Democratic and Republican prefer the candidates from their own party in all races with no more than one in twenty indicating support for a candidate from the opposition. The one exception is in the gubernatorial race on which only 49% of Republican identifiers prefer GOP candidate, Dan Maes, and one in ten each favor Democrat John Hickenlooper and Independent Tom Tancredo.

Turnout Issues

Youth turnout in November is a major concern in Colorado as it is elsewhere in the U.S.

- Overall, registration is less of a barrier to voting turnout than are attitudes toward politics. Nearly all Colorado Millennials (85%) are now registered to vote. However, significant percentages (31%) of the youngest Millennials—18-20 year olds— and African-Americans (28%) have not yet registered.
- Among those who have not yet registered, a plurality (43%) explains this by saying that they only reached voting age recently. In addition, significant numbers say that they don't care enough about politics (28%) or don't believe politics is important enough (17%) to have registered.
- A bare majority (56%) of Colorado Millennials say they are absolutely certain to vote in November. About a quarter (23%) say there is a better than even chance that they will vote while about one in ten each indicate that there is a 50/50 (13%) or less than even (8%) chance that they will do so. There are only slight demographic differences in projected turnout, although Hispanics (63%) are most likely to say it is certain that they will vote and African-Americans (49%) are least likely. Both Republicans (66%) and Democrats (56%) are more likely than Independents (44%) to indicate that they are absolutely certain to vote in the 2010 midterm elections.
- Those unlikely to vote base this on three primary factors: a lack of information about and interest in politics; a perception that politics is corrupt and dirty; and, a belief that voting doesn't produce political change or that an individual's vote has little impact on election outcomes.
- Less than one-third of Colorado young people (31%) claim that the outcome of the 2010 elections is very important to them. Similar percentages say the results of the elections are only somewhat (36%) or not very important (34%) to them. There are few demographic differences on this item although, once again, Hispanics are most likely to place great importance on the election results (38%) and African-Americans (21%) the least. Concern with the election is greatest among Republicans (44%) and Democrats (34%) and least among Independents (9%).

Political Identifications

- As with Millennials across America, a majority of Colorado young people (54%) identify as or lean to the Democrats. About a third (30%) says they are Republicans and 16%, Independents. Democratic identifications are greatest among women (57%), 25-29 year olds (57%), African-Americans (89%), and Hispanics (65%). Republican identifications are greatest among males (35%) and whites (38%).
- Nearly half of Colorado Millennials (46%) label themselves liberal or progressive. About three in ten (28%) claim to be moderate and a quarter, conservative (26%). Women (51%) and Hispanics (62%) most often say they are liberal, while men (33%) and whites (30%) most frequently label themselves conservative.

Political Attitudes

- A solid majority of Millennials (59%) favors a government that actively tries to solve the problems facing society and the economy. A third (32%) prefers a government that stays out of society to the greatest extent possible. Women (64%), African-Americans (66%) and Hispanics (69%) favor an activist government. Males (36%) and white Millennials (32%) are more likely to prefer a more restrained government.
- A plurality of Millennials (48%) believes that the best policy is to promote economic equality by ensuring that all Americans have at least a basic standard of living and income, even if that increases government spending. Four in ten (42%) favor letting each person get along economically on their own, even if that means some have more than others. Majorities of women (52%), African-Americans (54%), and Hispanics (51%) favor policies designed to produce greater economic equality

Attitudes Toward Political Institutions and Figures

- A slight plurality of Colorado Millennials holds favorable as opposed to unfavorable attitudes toward the Democratic Party (46% favorable vs. 41% unfavorable). By contrast, a majority holds unfavorable versus favorable attitudes toward the Republican Party (32% favorable vs. 56% unfavorable).
- A clear plurality of Colorado young people have unfavorable in contrast to favorable attitudes toward the Tea Party movement (22% favorable vs. 45% unfavorable).
- A majority of Colorado Millennials (53%) have a favorable impression of Barack Obama. A third (36%) have unfavorable impressions of the President. Women (59%), African-Americans (73%) and Hispanics (64%) are most favorable toward Obama.
- A plurality approves rather than disapproves of Barack Obama's performance as president (49% approve vs. 40% disapprove). Women (52%), African-Americans (61%), and Hispanics (61%) are especially positive.

Perceived Importance of Issues

- Majorities of Colorado Millennials rate jobs and the economy (61%) and education (52%) as critical issues requiring federal government attention. These are followed in perceived importance by government spending and the federal deficit (42%); the cost of college education (39%); reform of the financial system (36%); healthcare reform (34%); and the environment and immigration (32% each).
- At least a plurality of Colorado young people believes that the Democratic rather than Republican Party will do the best job of dealing with each of these issues.

Methodology

The poll results described above were obtained in an online survey of Colorado Millennials (18-29 year olds) sponsored by NPI. The survey was designed and analyzed by Dr. Michael D. Hais, an NDN Fellow and fielded by communications research and consultation firm, Frank N. Magid Associates. The sample was stratified and weighted to ensure that it reflected the gender, age, and ethnic distribution of Colorado young adults based on current Census Bureau estimates. A total of 616 respondent participated in the survey resulting in a sampling error of +/- 4% for results based on the entire sample. The interviews were conducted from August 25-September 3, 2010 and averaged 19 minutes to complete.