

Evolving Demographic Diversity in El Paso County

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- The demographic diversity of El Paso County, home to Colorado Springs, Pikes Peak, and a variety of Air Force operations is rapidly changing.
- While the level of diversity is greater in Denver County, the dynamics of diversity are considerably greater in El Paso County
- In particular, El Paso has seen large percentage growth among both the Black and Hispanic populations, especially relative to Denver.

El Paso County is part of Colorado’s booming Front Range economy, running north to south along the I-25 corridor. It is the largest ¹county by population and contains the second largest city, Colorado Springs. El Paso is known for Pikes Peak, the Olympic Training Center, Air Force and Space Force bases, several Christian organizations, and, in the past, a traditionally White population. However, the region’s amenities and features are attracting a wide range of demographics and increasing job opportunities. Exploring El Paso’s demographics reveals that the county is more diverse than previously assumed. Such population trends may shed light on El Paso’s potential as an important part in the larger Coloradan economy and demography.

Quartiles of County Growth Rates 2010-2020

	County	Population Growth Rate	Change in Jobs
1	Broomfield	33%	30.32%
6	Denver	19%	22.41%
8	El Paso	17%	16.93%
16	Garfield	10%	4.74%
32	Saguache	4%	2.98%
48	Washington	0%	12.14%
64	Kit Carson	-15%	-2.09%

This report explores population demographics in El Paso County and uses Denver County, the second largest Colorado county by population, as a means of comparison. Comparing El Paso with Denver County reveals that El Paso is moving quickly towards greater population diversity comparable to the state’s capitol.

From 1970 to 1990, El Paso County’s population was continually decreasing. Since 1991, though, population has steadily increased largely due to net

in-migration. Positive migration patterns continued through 2022 despite COVID-19. Possible reasons for the featured population increases could be the various Air Force and Army Bases which tend to bring in people from all over the country, potentially increasing racial diversity in El Paso County. However, no major changes were documented for the composition of Military operations during our focal period².

A more salient explanation is that housing is cheaper in El Paso than in Denver³, especially since the job market has been strong in El Paso since COVID. As of December 2022, Colorado Springs recovered 128% of its pre-pandemic jobs, while Denver City regained 126% compared to 106% of jobs nationwide⁴. Job growth and population growth are codependent. As jobs increase, population increases, bringing in more talent. Talent in turn attracts businesses, creating more jobs. This cycle, paired with El

¹ All county data collected from Colorado Department of Local Affairs - <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/>

² DMDC DoD Data/Reports - <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/stats-reports>

³ Federal Housing Finance Agency - <https://www.fhfa.gov/DataTools/Downloads/Pages/House-Price-Index-Datasets.aspx#qexx>

⁴ Press Release from Colorado Department of Labor and Employment, “Colorado Employment Situation – December 2022” - <https://www.colmigateway.com/admin/gsipub/htmlarea/Uploads/Dec22PR.pdf>

Paso’s appeal to a wide array of people suggests that El Paso’s population is diversifying due to dynamic job demand, outdoor amenities, and relatively lower living costs.

Population Percentages by Race and Ethnicity 2020

	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Population total
Denver County	2.20%	4.68%	10.93%	82.19%	29.14%	70.86%	717,632
El Paso County	1.73%	4.33%	8.48%	85.47%	18.07%	81.93%	731,641
Colorado	1.97%	4.24%	5.45%	88.34%	22.01%	77.99%	5,782,914

The table above shows that the mix of ethnic demographics in 2020 clearly differ between the counties, with the ratio of Hispanics over 10 percentage points greater in Denver although the proportion of Blacks is similar between the two counties. Both counties broadly mirrored Colorado’s racial composition in 2020. This finding is reasonable since the City and County of Denver and Colorado Springs (within El Paso County) are the two largest cities in the state, thus having large weights on the state average; larger cities are also commonly more diverse.

Racial population data suggest that from 2010 to 2020, all minority racial groups have increased their share of population in both counties, but El Paso’s rate of diversification was faster than Denver’s for most minority groups. Significant changes in El Paso’s demographic populations include substantive increases in Hispanic, Black, and Native Americans.

Population Change by Race and Ethnicity between 2010 and 2020

	American Indian	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	White	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	Population Percentage Change
Denver County	4.33%	37.78%	12.07%	19.08%	8.74%	23.28%	18.65%
El Paso County	26.13%	30.20%	25.28%	15.08%	39.27%	12.61%	16.65%
Colorado	22.28%	41.88%	27.52%	12.59%	21.74%	12.62%	14.51%

Population increases in general are encouraging. The fact that El Paso’s demographic population increases are directly comparable to Denver County’s is promising for the county’s further economic growth as diversification leads to a stronger more resilient society and economy. The key takeaway is that the rate at which minority populations are increasing in El Paso County is likely due to job demand, outdoor amenities, and lower living costs. The data recount that El Paso County is not as far behind Denver County as previously assumed. El Paso has a far larger land area than Denver as well; therefore, it has even more potential for spreading and sustaining economic growth in the years to come.