

# THE EARLY VOTING INFORMATION CENTER at Reed College

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## **Voting by Mail—Turnout Effects in Oregon**

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It's been Election Day in Oregon for eight days now. For more than a decade statewide elections in Oregon have been conducted entirely by mail. It is clear, when compared to the 2002 and 2004 contest, that early voting is not higher in Oregon, in contrast to what is occurring in states such as Tennessee, Florida, Colorado, and Texas.

Early voting increases rapidly when states relax their requirements—such as adopting no excuse absentee balloting—and make early voting convenient. However, these new voting methods do not appear to have much of an impact on turnout, especially once the systems have been in place for a significant length of time, as they have been in Oregon.

Instead, campaign spending, voter mobilization, and the state of the times drive turnout. In Oregon in 2006, A lot more money is being spent on GOTV this year, but because there are not many ballot measures energizing the base—such as gay marriage or abortion—turnout will be similar to 2002.

### **Tracking Early Votes**

There is currently six days' worth of ballot return data available for the 2006 contest. By comparing the ballot returns this far with similar data from the 2002 and 2004 elections, we can observe differences in the rate of ballot return across three general elections.

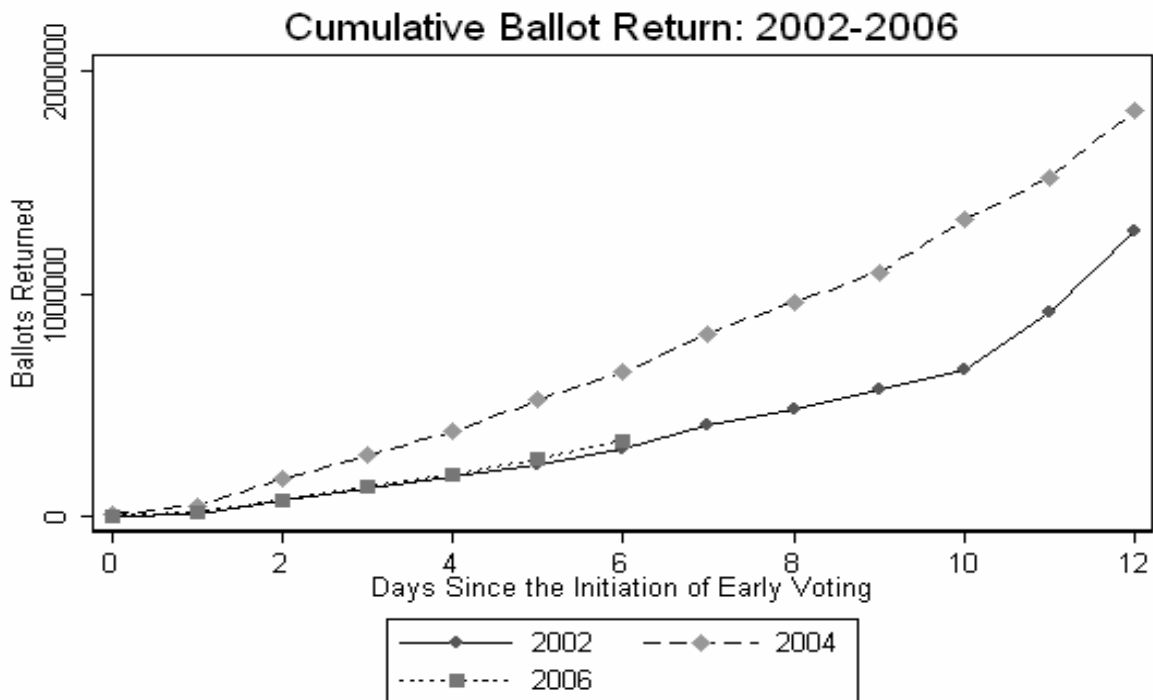
	<i><b>Total Registration</b></i>	<i><b>2-Day Cumulative Ballot Return</b></i>	<i><b>5-Day Cumulative Ballot Return</b></i>	<i><b>Rate of Ballot Return</b></i>	<i><b>Total Turnout</b></i>
2002	1,872,615	10,786	174,287	16.16	1,276,752
2004	2,141,249	47,138	381,039	8.08	1,818,544

	<i>Total Registration</i>	<i>2-Day Cumulative Ballot Return</i>	<i>5-Day Cumulative Ballot Return</i>	<i>Rate of Ballot Return</i>	<i>Total Turnout</i>
2006	2,019,115	18,936	187,903	9.92	

The above table shows voter participation and ballot return data from three general elections. An increase in registered voters can be seen in the Presidential contest of 2004. At this point in the 2006 cycle, ballot returns show a similar trend to the 2002 cycle in terms of a 2-day and 5-day ballot return count.

### Projecting 2006 Turnout

Early indications suggest that 2006 resembles the 2002 midterm contest. Based on this comparison, the Early Voting Information Center at Reed College (EVIC) estimates that voter turnout in 2006 will be 1,342,164. This turnout accords with the lower level of intensity observed in non-Presidential elections in Oregon since 1960 and may indicate a diminishing increase in turnout over time due to voting by mail. The chart below tracks ballot returns for the complete 2002 and 2004 cycles, and current counts for 2006.



For more information, please see the Early Voting Information Center's website: <http://www.earlyvoting.net> or contact us at [earlyvoting@reed.edu](mailto:earlyvoting@reed.edu).

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