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# WELD COUNTY IN CONTEXT: AN OUTLIER WITHIN COLORADO

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



### **Dr. Caitlin McKennie – Director of Research**

Dr. Caitlin McKennie is an experienced economist and demographer who comes to the Common Sense Institute with more than eight years of experience working as a public servant for the State of Colorado. Her previous roles as an economist within the state government span across multiple agencies including: the State Demography Office (SDO) at the Department of Local Affairs (DOLA); the Colorado Workforce Development Council (CWDC) at the Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE); the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE); the Office of State Planning and Budgeting (OSPB) at Governor Polis’s Office; and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Caitlin is motivated by data analysis and empirical modeling as a tool for informed decision-making. She brings extensive experience in public policy and econometrics to this role at CSI in a manner that is outcome-focused and equity-driven. She holds an M.A. in applied economics from the University of Colorado, Denver, an M.S. in mineral and energy economics from the Colorado School of Mines, and a PhD in economics from the University of Stirling, Scotland.

## ABOUT COMMON SENSE INSTITUTE

**Common Sense Institute** is a non-partisan research organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of Colorado's economy. CSI is at the forefront of important discussions concerning the future of free enterprise and aims to have an impact on the issues that matter most to Coloradans. CSI's mission is to examine the fiscal impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI employs rigorous research techniques and dynamic modeling to evaluate the potential impact of these measures on the economy and individual opportunity.

## TEAMS & FELLOWS STATEMENT

CSI is committed to independent, in-depth research that examines the impacts of policies, initiatives, and proposed laws so that Coloradans are educated and informed on issues impacting their lives. CSI's commitment to institutional independence is rooted in the individual independence of our researchers, economists, and fellows. At the core of CSI's mission is a belief in the power of the free enterprise system. Our work explores ideas that protect and promote jobs and the economy, and the CSI team and fellows take part in this pursuit of academic freedom. Our team's work is informed by data-driven research and evidence. The views and opinions of fellows do not reflect the institutional views of CSI. CSI operates independently of any political party and does not take positions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>About the Author</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>About Common Sense Institute</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Teams &amp; Fellows Statement</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Key Points</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>A Local Exception to Wide Demographic Decline</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Growth, Affordability, &amp; Demand</b> .....	<b>9</b>

## INTRODUCTION

Statewide birth rates – a key demographic indicator with far-reaching implications for K–12, higher education systems, housing markets, and the future labor force – have remained consistently below historical norms in recent years. Between 2022 and 2023, Colorado experienced a decline in total births, with a year-over-year decrease of approximately 0.52%. Compounding this trend, Colorado’s fertility rate ranks among the lowest in the United States, placing 44th nationally with 51.5 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 44.<sup>i</sup>

Declining births and low fertility rates have long-term consequences, as today’s children represent the future student population and workforce, ultimately affecting nearly every facet of the state’s economic outlook. This reflects broader national trends, as the number of births in the United States in 2023 showed the lowest year-over-year growth since 1979.<sup>ii</sup> **Weld County, however, stands out as a notable exception to both state and national patterns.**<sup>iii</sup>

Weld is the only county along Colorado’s Front Range — including Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, the City and County of Broomfield, the City and County of Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, and Larimer — to report steady annual increases in birth rates since 2021. Weld represents the second-fastest rate of child population growth in the state, behind Broomfield.<sup>iv, v</sup> Figure 1 in the following section illustrates this trend, presenting a comparative analysis of year-over-year birth growth rates across Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, and Weld counties from 2021 to 2023.

The positive shift associated with Weld comes at a pivotal moment, as declining birth rates not only pose long-term economic challenges for Colorado but may also threaten the state’s share of federal funding. According to a 2025 [memorandum](#) from the U.S. Department of Transportation – signed by Secretary Sean Duffy – the agency will prioritize infrastructure projects in communities with higher birth and marriage rates.<sup>vi</sup>

## KEY FINDINGS

- Weld is the **only county** along Colorado's Front Range to report consistent annual increases in birth rates since 2021.
- Weld has the second-fastest rate of child population growth in the state.
- In 2024, births contributed to **nearly half** of Weld County's population growth, with 4,815 new births recorded between 2023 and 2024.
- Births in Weld are expected to climb from 1.3% in 2024 and peak at 2.6% in 2027.
- Since 2010, Weld County's median household income has increased by approximately 19.4%, attracting workers and movers to thriving industries and more affordable housing.
- Weld is the **only county in Colorado that is currently debt-free and does not impose a county-wide sales tax.**
- Weld's growing birth rate trend is a welcomed development for the state, as **the largest driver of Colorado's reduced population growth is the declining trend in births.** Colorado is ranked 44th in the U.S. in terms of fertility rates.
- Relative to State forecasts from 2004, Colorado has roughly 300,000 fewer residents than officials projected it would in 2024

# A LOCAL EXCEPTION TO WIDE DEMOGRAPHIC DECLINE

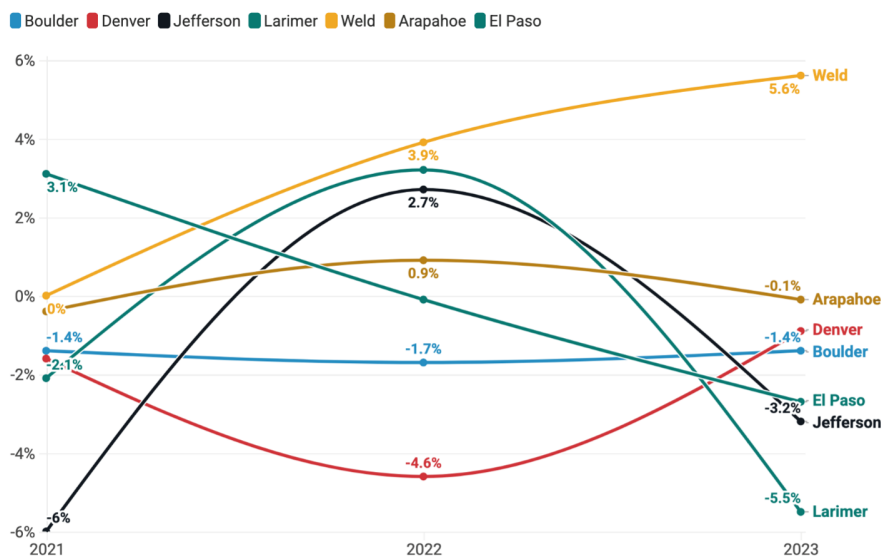
Weld County experienced a significant rebound in birth rates in recent years, rising from approximately 0% growth in 2021 to a 5.6% increase in 2023 (Figure 1). This recovery followed a sharp decline of 4% between 2020 and 2021, mirroring trends observed across many Colorado counties and at the national level.<sup>vii</sup> The decline was largely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic — an event whose demographic impact, particularly on fertility rates, was not widely anticipated by economists. National birth certificate data suggest that the early months of the pandemic led to an estimated 100,000 fewer births than projected based on pre-pandemic trends.<sup>vii</sup> Several factors likely contributed to this decline, including delays in planned pregnancies due to restricted access to reproductive health care, shelter-in-place mandates, increased rates of miscarriages and stillbirths, and behavioral fertility responses to heightened economic uncertainty.

In 2024, births contributed to **nearly half** of Weld County’s population growth, with 4,815 new births recorded between 2023 and 2024.<sup>ix</sup> Over a quarter of Weld County’s population was under the age of 18 during this period — significantly higher than neighboring counties like Denver and Boulder, where this age group makes up just 17.7% and 17.0% of the population, respectively.<sup>x</sup>

Moreover, current forecasts indicate this positive birth rate trend is likely to remain steady, at least in the short

FIGURE 1

## Growth Rate of Births (%) Across Selected Front Range Counties: 2021-2023



Sources: Colorado State Demography Office, CSI Research and Modeling, 2025.



term. Projections of Weld continue to see positive growth in birth rates in upcoming years, although not as strong in magnitude as what we saw in 2022 and 2023. Births are expected to climb from 1.3% in 2024 and peak at 2.6% in 2027. Afterwards, birth rates are expected to remain positive but begin to marginally decrease in 2028 and flatten out in 2029 through 2031 (Figure 2).<sup>xi</sup>

Weld's valuable growth in births comes at a critical time when the state's overall population has significantly slowed. Relative to State forecasts from 2004, **Colorado has roughly 300,000 fewer residents**

**than officials projected it would in 2024.**<sup>xii</sup> Fewer people living in the state is linked to major economic implications, including school closures and unfilled job openings. For example, current state data indicates that if migration was withdrawn from population estimates, based on the age distribution in the state, Colorado's economy would experience a total decline in its labor force.<sup>xiii</sup> In 2024, 50,000 new jobs were created in the state. When combined with the retirement of 40,000 residents (due to an aging population), this generated a **workforce demand of 90,000 new workers to maintain labor market stability.**<sup>xiv</sup> Last year, there were an estimated 1.5 openings for every Coloradan job seeker.<sup>xv</sup>

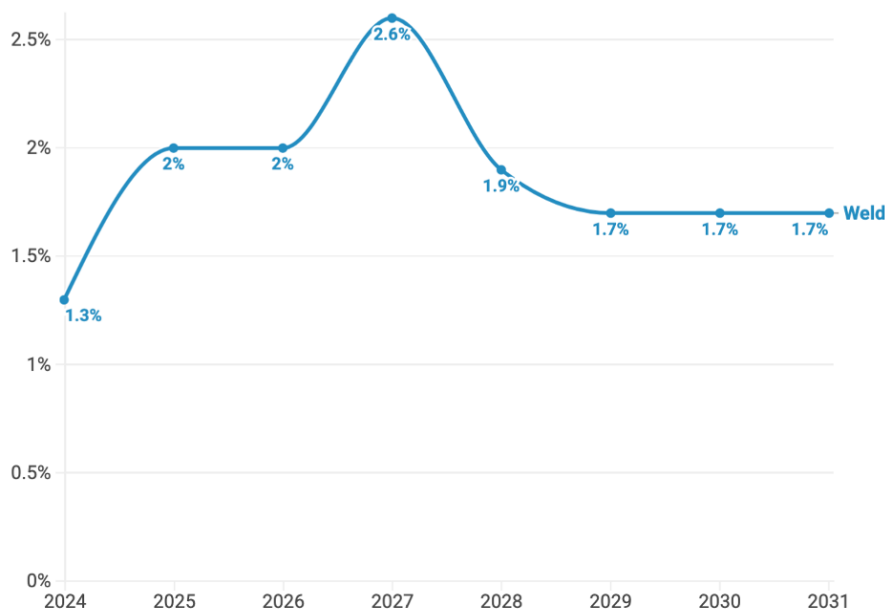
According to the Colorado State Demography Office (SDO), **the largest driver of Colorado's reduced population growth is the declining trend in births.**<sup>xvi</sup> This is reflective of national trends. In 2023, the U.S. fertility rate was linked to a historic low of 1,616.5 births per 1,000 women.<sup>xvii</sup> Colorado, however, experienced an elevated impact relative to the U.S. and was associated with the **sixth-lowest fertility rate in the country** during 2020, with less than 1.5 births per woman. To replace the state's population, the fertility rate must be no less than 2.1.<sup>xviii</sup>

## Demographic Dynamics Behind Weld's Birth Rate Trends

Multiple demographic factors, particular to Weld County, drive this outcome. In addition to high birth rates, Weld is also attracting movers to migrate there. Between July 1st, 2023, and July 1st, 2024, while the population in counties such as El Paso and Larimer experienced declines, Weld was associated with the highest growth in the state, with an estimated influx of **9,529 additional residents** added during the 12-month period.<sup>xix</sup> Relative to 2010, its population has seen a growth rate of **48.6%.**<sup>xx</sup>

FIGURE 2

### Growth Rate Projections of Births in Weld County (%) 2024-2031



Sources: Colorado State Demography Office, CSI Research and Modeling, 2025.





Weld County attracts new residents through a combination of robust industry sectors and competitive employment opportunities. Beyond its well-established agricultural base — recognized as the “richest agricultural county east of the Rocky Mountains,” with over 20% of farms generating annual sales exceeding \$100,000 — the county also plays a pivotal role in Colorado’s energy sector. Specifically, Weld spearheads the state in the oil and gas sector, representing 83% of the state’s crude oil production and 56% of its natural gas output.<sup>xxi, xxii</sup> Moreover, the county has emerged as a hub for manufacturing in the renewable energy sector, hosting companies such as Vestas, a wind turbine manufacturer, and Sphere Renewables, a renewable energy company.<sup>xxiii</sup> The Professional and Business Services sector is also strong, attracting a highly educated and skilled workforce with competitive salaries.

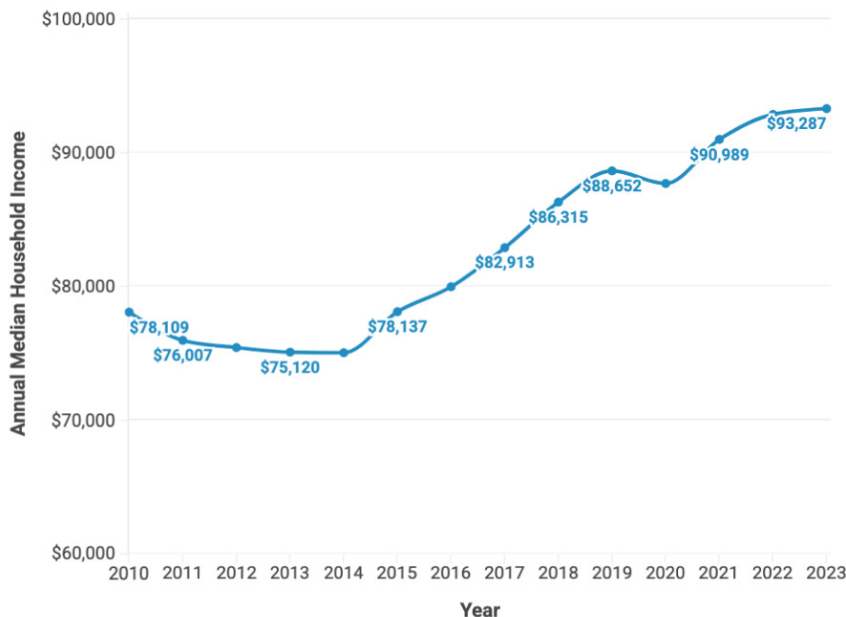
Supporting this trend, data presented in Figure 3 indicates a steady rise in household income levels, consistent with the county’s economic diversification and business growth. In 2023, the annual median household income sat at \$93,287. This is roughly **20.1%** above the state’s living wage threshold of approximately \$74,539 in 2025.<sup>xxiv</sup> Since 2010, Weld County’s median household income has increased by approximately **19.4%**.

Weld County’s competitive advantage in population growth and fertility rates is also closely linked to its relative affordability. Notably, Weld is the **only county in Colorado that is currently debt-free and does not impose a county-wide sales tax.**<sup>xxv</sup> Housing data further underscores this affordability, revealing significantly lower home prices compared to neighboring regions.

This dynamic facilitates homeownership for younger families — typically in their childbearing years and earlier stages of their careers. As of 2023, Weld County’s median age of its residents is 35.2 — 3.5 years younger than the national median and 2.3 years younger than Colorado’s overall.<sup>xxvi</sup> The demographically younger age profile likely partially contributes to higher birth and fertility rates, as a greater proportion of the population falls within prime childbearing years.

**FIGURE 3**

**Weld County Median Household Income Over Time : 2010-2023**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2025



# GROWTH, AFFORDABILITY, & DEMAND

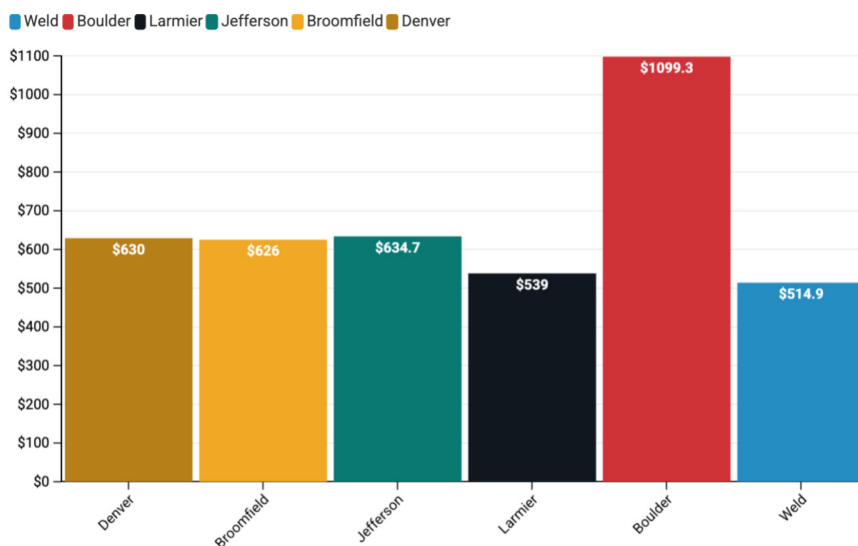
Geographically, Weld County is situated within reasonable commuting distance to major metropolitan areas, with Denver approximately 1.5 hours away by car. Despite this proximity, Weld’s median single-family home prices remain approximately 18% lower than those in Denver as of 2025. The disparity is even more substantial when compared to Boulder, where median home prices are more than double those in Weld — about 53.2% higher in 2025 (Figure 4).<sup>xxvii</sup>

As a final point, municipalities within Weld County show no signs of slowing their development efforts. On April 15, 2025, the Greeley City Council – representing the county seat of Weld – voted 5–2 in favor of advancing a **\$1.1 billion redevelopment initiative** coined the Cascadia project.<sup>xxviii</sup> This project aims to transform the western portion of the city into a dynamic entertainment district, signaling a major investment in the region’s economic and cultural future. The 300-acre development will feature an 8,600-seat arena for a minor-league hockey team, an indoor water park, a hotel and convention center, over **11,000 new units of mixed residential housing**, and a range of recreational amenities, including equestrian trails and kayaking facilities.<sup>xxix</sup>

Securing funding for new housing development is particularly critical at this time. According to a prior [report by the Common Sense Institute](#), Weld County is facing a housing shortage of between 3,500 and 10,000 units, largely due to in-migration growth. Closing this gap would require a 2.8% to 7.8% increase in the county’s current housing stock.<sup>xxx</sup> This gap would be completely bridged through the Cascadia project’s proposal.

**FIGURE 4**

**Median Single-Family Home Price: February 2025 (in thousands of dollars)**



Source: Zillow, 2025.

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