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From Purple to Blue: The Political Realignment of Colorado from 1992 to 2023

Christopher Collins

A Thesis in the Field of Government

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2024

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Abstract

National realignment theory has been rightly criticized for failing to provide illuminative power in identifying critical elections as they unfold and predicting future political realignment. While this theory has been most often applied to national realignments, recent scholars have found it useful to study realignments at the subnational level. In this thesis I seek to, through the lenses of issue ownership and saliency theories, use Colorado as a case study of a political realignment at the subnational level to address these concerns by examining the relationship between critical elections, direct democracy, substantial public policies, and electoral gains. By understanding how policies approved by the electorate grant electoral gains to parties that own the political issues associated with such policies, I argue that a state's political realignment may be potentially identified and predicted through observing policy changes by the electorate that lead to electoral gains. Through the employment of descriptive analysis, my methodological approach is predicated on electoral returns, ballot measure data, county level data, data on electoral gains, and repeated cross-sectional public opinion data. My investigation and research resulted in finding that substantial public policy—approved by the electorate of a state via direct democracy at the ballot box—in a critical election can result in electoral gains that aid in a state's political realignment. My findings may have broader implications pertaining to the interconnectedness between ballot measures, direct democracy, public policies, critical elections, and the overall political realignment of a state.

Author's Biographical Sketch

Christopher Collins is a military child who has visited and lived in most states in America. As a child, he spent three years in Hohenfels, Germany, while his father served a tour in Iraq at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Upon his father's retirement, his family moved back to Colorado—the state he has resided in ever since.

Christopher has earned two undergraduate degrees from the University of Colorado Boulder in Political Science and Philosophy: Law and Society in December 2014 and May 2016, respectively. Upon completion of this thesis, he will earn his Master of Liberal Arts (ALM) in Government from the Harvard University Extension School. His passions lie in politics, philosophy, economics, and the law. His dream is to become a lawyer and make a meaningful and lasting imprint on the world.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family. To my dear wife and love, Stephanie Collins, your unwavering patience, encouragement, and support mean the world to me. Your belief in my dreams and your unconditional love serves as a reminder to me that I can achieve great things through hard work, perseverance, and tenacity. There is no one I would rather go through life with than you! To my children, Jason and Luna, you are my son and moon, lighting up my days and nights and giving me a reason to be better than I was yesterday every day.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

Elections are basic means by which the people of a democracy bend government to their wishes.

—V. O. Key Jr., Public Opinion and American Democracy

Colorado was once considered a competitive purple state, but as of 2023, it has the political composition of a blue state. In the Colorado 2022 midterm election, the Democrats made such great political strides at the national and state level that Republican State Representative Colin Larson called the election "an extinction-level event."[1] Could this change in the political landscape of Colorado have been explained or even predicted by observing data and events at the subnational level? This question is difficult to answer because the current political realignment literature; while offering us theories and causal mechanisms about when and how realignments occur, function, and affect the political landscape nationwide; has focused less on state level data, including the role that public policy—approved directly by the electorate—plays in shaping such realignments.

The current scholarship on political realignment is primarily, although not exclusively, concerned about political realignments on the national stage and several scholars have contributed greatly to the advancement of this field of study, including—V. O. Key Jr., Walter Dean Burnham, E. E. Schattschneider, James L. Sundquist, Allan J. Lichtman, and David R.

[1] Birkeland, Bente. "'An Extinction Level Event': Colorado Republicans React to Deep Election Losses." Colorado Public Radio, November 14, 2022. http://www.cpr.org/v2022/11/14/colorado-republicans-election-losses/.

Mayhew. Well-known political scientist Key was instrumental in building the foundation of the political realignment literature for scholars of the 20th and 21st century. Following in his footsteps, Burnham; Clubb, Flanigan, and Zingale; Schattschneider; and Sundquist expanded on his work and made sizeable contributions to the field. Lichtman and Mayhew, by examining extensively the works of prior scholars, critiques the political realignment literature and provides skepticism of the utility of such scholarship.

While the great strides these and other scholars have made provide a thorough overview of political realignments on the national stage, there exists opportunities to expand the perspective of the literature, acknowledging the subnational nature of these electoral phenomena.[2] To address this gap, I provide such a perspective by asking: "How can examining subnational events and data such as substantial public policy changes contribute to understanding and predicting of the political realignment of states?" and "How can studying such policies result in a richer understanding of political realignments as well as potentially aiding in predicting future electoral and political behavior?" To answer these questions, I gathered data on the political realignment of Colorado from various sources: 270toWin, American Politics Research Lab, Ballotpedia, Bell Policy Center, Colorado Blue Book, Colorado General Assembly, Colorado Secretary of State, National Conference of State Legislatures, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, State of Colorado Elections Database, the U.S. Census, and the U.S. Senate. I then compiled figures and tables that illustrate aspects of Colorado's political realignment.

I rely on political realignment theory to examine the case of the state of Colorado and its substantial public policy changes from 1992 to 2023. Through the lenses of issue ownership and saliency theories, I focus on two public policy changes in Colorado: The Taxpayer's Bill of

[2] Nardulli, Peter F. "The Concept of a Critical Realignment, Electoral Behavior, and Political Change." *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 1 (1995): 10-22.

Rights (TABOR) and Referendum C that I argue, are highly correlated, if not outright responsible as the primary causes of Colorado's political realignment from purple to blue. Within the context of states who practice direct democracy by its electorate voting on ballot measures at the ballot box, I assert that by studying the subnational events of policy changes, we can logically link these changes to critical elections and political realignments that influence the election of state and national officeholders within a state. Chapters II to V provide a roadmap to understanding these linkages by researching Colorado's political realignment (Chapter II), its substantial public policy changes (Chapters III and IV), and the saliency of fiscal issues over time (Chapter V); followed by a discussion with concluding remarks (Chapter VI).

Literature Review

The literature on national political realignments ties realignment to new party systems that are related to the 1800, 1828, 1860, 1896, and 1932 presidential elections. In the Revolution of 1800, political power transferred away from the Federalist Party to the Democratic-Republican Party with the election of President Thomas Jefferson; with the landslide election of 1828, Jacksonian democracy prevailed when President Andrew Jackson was elected; President Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican President whereas the Republican Party dominated the political landscape thereafter; populist and progressive politics came to the forefront with the election of President William McKinley in the 1896 election; and the 1932 political realignment garnered the greatest level of political support for the Democratic Party with the formation of the New Deal coalition. These national political realignments fundamentally transformed the course of political events that have shaped our lives today.

Well-known political scientist Valdimer Orlando Key Jr. was instrumental in building the foundation of the political realignment literature which encompasses critical elections, critical

realignments, party realignments, partisan realignments, and secular, ideological, and voter realignments. For scholars of the 20th and 21st century Key's political realignment theory, which focuses on how pivotal a critical election at the national level can be in changing the entire political landscape, is a mainstay.[3] In his highly recognized work, he wrote that "A concept of critical elections has been developed to cover a type of election in which there occurs a sharp and durable electoral realignment between parties."[4] For Key, one critical election—both sharp and durable—could be sufficient for a political realignment to unfold. Most notably, Key writes that "the truly differentiating characteristic of this sort of election … seems to persist for several succeeding elections."[5] However, according to Key's follow-up work four years later, secular realignments—also known as gradual realignments—can be as short as four years or over five to twenty years.[6]

Rather than focusing on a singular critical election as the pivot point for a political realignment, James L. Sundquist—analyzing the political realignments of the 1850s, 1890s, and 1930s—adds a new depth to Key's research by addressing the how and why of political realignments. He stresses the relevance of examining a period of years to a decade surrounding a critical election.[7] In addition to critical elections, scholars have drawn connections between public policy, political agendas, and political realignments; positing that realignments transform political agendas, establish new political control, and create the opportunity to adopt new public policy initiatives.[8] Focusing on the importance of critical elections is vital in examining how

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[3] Key Jr, Valdimer O. "A Theory of Critical Elections." *The Journal of Politics* 17, no. 1 (1955): 3-18; and Key Jr, Valdimer Orlando. "Secular Realignment and the Party System." *The Journal of Politics* 21, no. 2 (1959): 198-210.
[4] Key Jr, Valdimer O. "A Theory of Critical Elections." 16.
[5] Ibid., 4.
[6] Key Jr, Valdimer Orlando. "Secular Realignment." 198-210.
[7] Sundquist, James L. *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States.* Brookings Institution Press, 2011.
[8] Burnham, Walter Dean. "The Changing Shape of the American Political Universe." *American Political Science Review* 59, no. 1 (1965): 7-28; and Burnham, Walter Dean. *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American*

these elections can contribute to secular realignments at the state level. However, since a more thorough understanding of political realignment is desirable, delving into the periods surrounding these events; as well as their effects on the political agenda, control, and policy in succeeding elections is imperative.

In dissent to many political realignment scholars, American University Professor Allen J. Lichtman and Yale Professor David R. Mayhew examine and critique the national political realignment literature as failing to stand up to scrutiny. They contest that the national political realignment literature has lost favor in the academic community, treating it more akin to a perspective than a theory. Lichtman proposes that the political realignment theory is in dire need of a new research program while Mayhew is skeptical of the utility of the theory, criticizing the claims of realignment theory for failing to possess "illuminative power" and the inability to predict future electoral outcomes.[9] This illuminative power may come from redirecting our attention to realignment at the subnational level to better understand the correlation between public policy, direct democracy, electoral gains, and political realignments.

The national political realignment literature believes, rightly so, that the formulation of public policies—where national issues become prioritized—follows a critical election.[10] That is, in a constitutional republic, our politicians are duly elected to represent our interests at the

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Politics. Norton, 1970; Clubb, Jerome, William Flanigan, and Nancy Zingale. *Partisan Realignment: Voters, Parties and Government in American History*. Boulder (Colo.): Westview Press, 1990; and Schattschneider, Elmer Eric, and David Adamany. *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America.* Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich college publ., 1975.

[9] Lichtman, Allan J. "The End of Realignment Theory? Toward a New Research Program for American Political History." *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 15, no. 4 (1982): 170-188; and Mayhew, David R. *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre.* Yale University Press, 2008.

[10] Aldrich, John H. *Why Parties?: A Second Look.* University of Chicago Press, 2011; "Citizenship and Political Rights."; Clubb, Jerome, William Flanigan, and Nancy Zingale. *Partisan Realignment*; Dalton, Russell J. *Political Realignment: Economics, Culture, and Electoral Change.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018; Lichtman, Allan J. "The End of Realignment Theory?"; and Schattschneider, Elmer Eric, and David Adamany. *The Semisovereign People.*

national level, but they must first win an election to implement new public policy. However, at the subnational level in states where voters participate in direct democracy[11] via ballot measures,[12] the reverse is equally true. The study of subnational political realignments—which has been researched by a handful of scholars[13]—could inform us, by examining the impact of direct democracy by the people voting directly on political issues at the ballot box. This could provide further insights and reconceptualize the interconnectedness between critical elections, political realignments, and changes in public policy.

Recent scholars are becoming more cognizant and vocal about the capability of subnational political realignments to cause shifts that ripple through national politics and subsequently, stresses the importance of researching state and county level data on political realignments.[14] There is a prudent reason for this inquiry—to obtain illuminative power about realignments by realizing that electoral phenomena are subnational, not just national phenomena, which vary in form, and can be conducive to comprehending electoral behavior and the unfolding of political change that accompanies it.[15] In furtherance of this pursuit, the purpose of this thesis serves as a contribution to the political realignment literature by examining how

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[11] Scholarly definitions for what direct democracy encompasses differ greatly. In this thesis, direct democracy refers to the process by which voters' voices, opinions, or choices on political issues are expressed directly by voting on specific types of ballot measures at the ballot box (e.g., initiatives, referendums, propositions, and constitutional amendments).

[12] Cronin, Thomas E., and Robert D. Loevy. *Colorado Politics and Policy: Governing a Purple State (Politics and Governments of the American States).* Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2012; Darmofal, David, and Peter F. Nardulli. "The Dynamics of Critical Realignments: An Analysis Across Time and Space." *Political Behavior* 32 (2010): 255-283; and Daum, Courtenay W., Robert J. Duffy, and John A. Straayer. *State of Change: Colorado Politics in the Twenty-First Century.* Boulder, Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 2011.

[13] Darmofal, David, and Peter F. Nardulli. "The Dynamics of Critical Realignments"; Nardulli, Peter F. "Concept of a Critical Realignment"; Sundquist, James L. *Dynamics of the Party System;* and Wright, Jeffrey. "The Purpling of the Peach: Demographic Change and Partisanship in the State of Georgia." PhD diss., The University of Texas at San Antonio, 2022.

[14] Dyer, James A., Arnold Vedlitz, and David B. Hill. "New Voters, Switchers, and Political Party Realignment in Texas." *Western Political Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1988): 155-167; Nardulli, Peter F. "Concept of a Critical Realignment"; and Lee, Taeku. *Mobilizing Public Opinion Black Insurgency and Racial Attitudes in the Civil Rights Era.* Chicago, Ill: The University of Chicago Press, 2002.

[15] Nardulli, Peter F. "Concept of a Critical Realignment."

political realignment theory and critical elections, applied at the subnational level may be better understood and elucidate how a critical election—when a state's electorate decides on public policy for themselves through direct democracy—can lead to electoral gains for the major political party that owned the respective political issue by rigorously campaigning and championing substantial public policy for the people's consideration.

Through the analysis of initiated, influenced, and voter-approved public policy via direct democracy of ballot measures such as TABOR and Referendum C, we can understand how Coloradans have changed its political culture—through a critical election—ultimately contributing to the political realignment of a state through the electoral gains that are paid back in succeeding elections to the political party that supported such salient and substantial political issues. There is much to be gained from exploring how and what factors changed the internal politics of a state over time and Colorado is a shining example that represents the necessity of studying subnational political realignments and essentially, provide a historical account as to how and why, over the span of thirty-one years, Colorado realigned from a purple state to a blue state.

Theory & Argument

The theory put forward in this thesis is supported by issue ownership theory and saliency theory.[16] These theories center on voters' behavior, electoral choices, policy preferences, and saliency of political issues. The issue ownership theory posits that voters readily identify political

[16] Banda, Kevin K. "Issue Ownership, Issue Positions, and Candidate Assessment." *Political Communication* 33, no. 4 (2016): 651-666; Bélanger, Éric, and Bonnie M. Meguid. "Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, and Issue-Based Vote Choice." *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 3 (2008): 477-491; Jones, Ruth S., and E. Terrence Jones. "Issue Saliency, Opinion-Holding, and Party Preference." *Western Political Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1971): 501-509; Lacey, Robert J. "The Electoral Allure of Direct Democracy: The Effect of Initiative Salience on Voting, 1990-96." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (2005): 168-181; and Nicholson, Stephen P. *Voting the Agenda: Candidates, Elections, and Ballot Propositions.* Princeton University Press, 2021.

issues as being owned by a particular political party and vote according to which party can best deliver on salient issues. Issue ownership theory is closely tied to saliency theory. The scholars who publicized *How Parties Compete for Votes: A Test of Saliency Theory* observed that "voters' prioritisation [sic] of issues crucially varies between elections, whereas their policy attitudes change rather slowly."[17] Ian Budge wrote extensively on saliency theory and outlined three aspects pertaining to party strategic behavior: first, that parties employ electoral rhetoric to differentiate themselves from the opposing party; second, parties focus on specific issues to create an association between themselves and the electorate; and third, parties benefit when such issues become more important in the public's eye, especially during electoral campaigns.[18]

My theory is that when a substantial political issue is decided and approved by the voters at the ballot box, that political issue becomes accepted and part of the political culture of its respective political jurisdiction over time. Such political issues, once engrained into the political culture, become less salient to voters over time when making political calculations on who to elect for public office. In congruence with issue ownership and saliency theories, the argument advanced in this thesis is that TABOR has, by transferring the power to approve taxes away from the political decisionmakers of the state government into the hands of the Colorado electorate, produced a diminishing rate of return on the overall appeal of fiscal conservatism when the Colorado electorate is deciding who shall hold public office. Subsequentially, TABOR and Referendum C have contributed, at least partially, in the political realignment of Colorado by the Colorado electorate—through the exercise of direct democracy via the ballot box—by

[17] Dolezal, Martin, Laurenz Ennser-Jedenastik, Wolfgang C. Müller, and Anna Katharina Winkler. "How Parties Compete for Votes: A Test of Saliency Theory." *European Journal of Political Research* 53, no. 1 (2014): 60.
[18] Budge, Ian. "Issue Emphases, Saliency Theory and Issue Ownership: A Historical and Conceptual Analysis." *West European Politics* 38, no. 4 (2015): 767.

prioritizing fiscal issues less when deciding whether to elevate Republicans or Democrats to serve as their representatives.

Background Information

When the Colorado electorate approved TABOR in the 1992 presidential election, they fundamentally changed the relationship between voters and their elected officials at the state level. The enactment of TABOR's spending limitation formula constricts the growth of state government to last year's revenue plus the rate of inflation and population growth and requires any tax increase to be decided by the people. This supersedes the previous law that permitted "limiting annual increases in local government property tax revenue to 5.5 percent and limiting annual increases in state general fund appropriations to 6 percent or 5 percent of state personal income, whichever is less."[19] Referendum C, the only substantial public policy change that significantly modified TABOR's formula to a new and higher spending limit; in exchange for retaining TABOR refunds for five years and resetting the formula at a higher revenue level to retain such refunds, the state promised to allocate the funds to salient government programs.[20]

Since being-inscribed into the Colorado Constitution with 53.68% of the vote, TABOR has been challenged repeatedly at the ballot box and even in court. Excluding Referendum C, major attempts for the state to keep and spend TABOR refunds have been rejected by Coloradans while minor "sin taxes" such as increasing taxes on tobacco and marijuana have been approved.[21] TABOR, as a public policy in the Colorado Constitution, serves as a reminder that

[19] Ballot Information Booklet (Blue Book), Colorado General Assembly, leg.colorado.gov/content/initiatives/initiatives-blue-book-overview/ballot-information-booklet-blue-book.
[20] "Understanding Referendum C." The Bell Policy Center, November 3, 2017. https://www.bellpolicy.org/2005/11/03/referendum-c/.
[21] "2005 Nov 1: State of Colorado: Referendum: Referendum C: State Spending." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/6026/.

the people oversee their own political destiny. Compared to representative democracy, there is no greater expression of voters' political preferences than their direct expression of will, choice, and voice when ballot measures are decided upon by the electorate. The purest form of democracy in America is by the majority's simple affirmation or rejection of a political issue presented to them as a ballot measure for their and theirs alone decision-making. We the People, not the political elites nor the political establishment, are able to create our own policies through the act of voting directly. This emergence and exercise in autonomous political authority can help shape, transform, and realign the political landscape of a state.

In order to understand the intricacies and establish a foundational understanding of TABOR, an examination of the provisions, background of previous law, and impact of proposal are necessary. One may acquire this information from the 1992 Ballot Information Booklet, otherwise known as the Colorado Blue Book.[22] The impact is detailed very clearly that "government would be restricted to making changes in tax policy and the tax code that decrease taxes … other changes would require voter approval … governments would not be able to issue new revenue bonds or other multi-year financial obligations without voter approval … whether such limits were created by local ordinance, state law, or through an election, weakening those limits would require voter approval."[23] The enactment, triumph, and preservation of the Taxpayer's Bill of Right serves as the manifestation of fiscally conservative principles through the inscription of TABOR into Colorado's Constitution and overall political culture.

I believe there are legitimate reasons to postulate that Colorado has undergone some kind of political realignment, and that TABOR and Referendum C have been woven into Colorado's political society. Regardless of when the political realignment occurred in Colorado, there is

[22] Ballot Information Booklet (Blue Book).
[23] Ibid.

good reason for Larson's statement about the devastation the most recent election had upon the Colorado Republican Party. After the 2022 election, the Democratic Party gained control over both offices in the United States Senate, five of the eight U.S. Congressional seats—including, the newly created eighth U.S. Congressional seat—the Governorship, and the largest majority in the Colorado General Assembly (i.e., the Colorado House and Senate) in decades, if not ever. In consideration of this, I hypothesize that:

1. Colorado has undergone a political realignment from being a purple state to a blue state.
2. TABOR has (A) transformed the political culture of the Colorado electorate and (B) become engrained within it.
3. TABOR, as a form of public policy, has reduced the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans and is responsible for the diminishing appeal of electing fiscally conservative politicians and this fact, coupled with population growth and the liberalization of social issues explains Colorado's political realignment.

Data, Methodology, and Limitations

I gathered data on the political realignment of Colorado from various sources that allowed me to gauge and test the validity of my hypotheses. The data that I aggregated and analyzed to test my hypotheses were on: (1) election results over decades for state and national public office holders in Colorado from governmental websites to test my first hypothesis; (2) the history of ballot measures across decades of states that practice direct democracy obtained from Ballotpedia to test part A of my second hypothesis; (3) county level data and electoral gains by each party from reviewing voter registration statistics and data from the Colorado General Assembly, and the American Politics Research Lab to test part B of my second hypothesis; and

(4) the saliency of fiscal issues from exit polls that originated from the Roper Center to test my third hypothesis.

My methodological approach relies on descriptive analysis of electoral returns, ballot measure data, county level data, data on electoral gains, and repeated cross-sectional public opinion data. A more detailed descriptive analysis was explored to tie my data to each one of my hypotheses. To demonstrate how Colorado has undergone some form of political realignment, I examined Coloradans' political preferences for state and national officeholders over decades. Upon gathering data on the changes in the political preferences of Coloradans over the last few decades, we can test if my first hypothesis has any validity to it.

Recognizing that a shift in the political preferences of Coloradans is less interesting than reconciling the discrepancy between why such a transformation has occurred. In consideration of the ways TABOR has become an inseparable part of Colorado's political culture, I sought to analyze the impact of direct democracy via ballot measures since the ratification of TABOR into Colorado's Constitution. TABOR—unlike any other ballot measures ever approved in the United States—by granting the sole authority to approve tax increases by the Colorado electorate rather than by their duly elected representatives impacted the frequency and sheer number of fiscal matters brought forth to the Colorado electorate. This shift in the political culture of voters overseeing their own political destiny on fiscal matters may spill over to social issues as well.

It is vital to explore further as to whether and to what extent the exercise in political autonomy on the political decision-making process by voters impacts the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans. If TABOR has diminished the appeal of fiscal conservatism to some extent, then this may be observed by reviewing exit polls on the prioritization of fiscal issues across various elections. Unfortunately, my ability to obtain certain key data in this regard is limited. For one

thing, the political opinions, attitudes, and beliefs of voters only go back a handful of decades. Another limitation is that there is a deficit of meaningful and consistent state exit polling to analyze over time. For these reasons, I turn to the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research State Election Day Exit Polls. In terms of Colorado exit polls, there is relevant data beginning in 1986 to 2020. These exit polls were conducted by various organizations and each poll represents a sample size in the range of anywhere in the hundreds to tens of thousands of voters in each election when voters were polled specifically about the reasons why they voted as they did on election day.

The research I conducted for my thesis required gathering, shifting, aggregating, and analyzing data on Colorado's national politics, state politics, examining over a century of ballot measures in Colorado and decades of ballot measures in other states, reviewing the level of political support and opposition for TABOR at the county level, the impact of TABOR on direct democracy in Colorado, how electoral gains can be spurred by public policy decisions made by the electorate, and testing the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans by combing through decades of exit polls that reflect Coloradans' public opinion.

Chapter II.

Colorado's Political Realignment

In Chapter II, I test the validity of my first hypothesis: Colorado has undergone a political realignment from being a purple state to a blue state. I then provide a richer and fuller historical account of the oscillation of Coloradans in their political preferences for state and national officeholders from the 1992 presidential election—that coincided with the passage of TABOR—to 2023.[24] To gain a deeper understanding of Colorado's political realignment, I examine voter registration statistics on the political affiliation of Coloradans with the most recent and available data followed by considering the metric used in determining a state's political realignment. I turn my attention to changes in the political preferences of Coloradans that resulted in the election of one major political party possessing political control—evident by political domination in succeeding elections—of the government on the national and state level. Additionally, I thoroughly explore the races and electoral victories of political officeholders in presidential elections, senatorial elections, congressional elections, gubernatorial elections, and Colorado General Assembly elections, concluding Chapter II with my findings on the political realignment of Colorado and how these findings support my first hypothesis.

[24] My selection for this time series originated from the fact that, in accordance with tenets and scholars of political realignment theory, they propound the proposition that national realignments may occur in thirty-year intervals.

Political Affiliation and the Rise of the Unaffiliated in Colorado

Other scholars have discussed ideological realignments which questions whether party affiliation shapes political ideology or political ideology shapes party affiliation.[25] In other words, this type of realignment considers the relationship between party alignment and public policy preferences. It is not, however, a question of which shapes the other, but coming to recognize that they shape one another. Critically, voters' ideology and public policy preferences can cause voters to leave their party, reclassifying as unaffiliated. It is crucial to understand the historical record of party affiliation of voters in order to cross-reference this data with the ongoing political realignment of Colorado (see Figure 1).

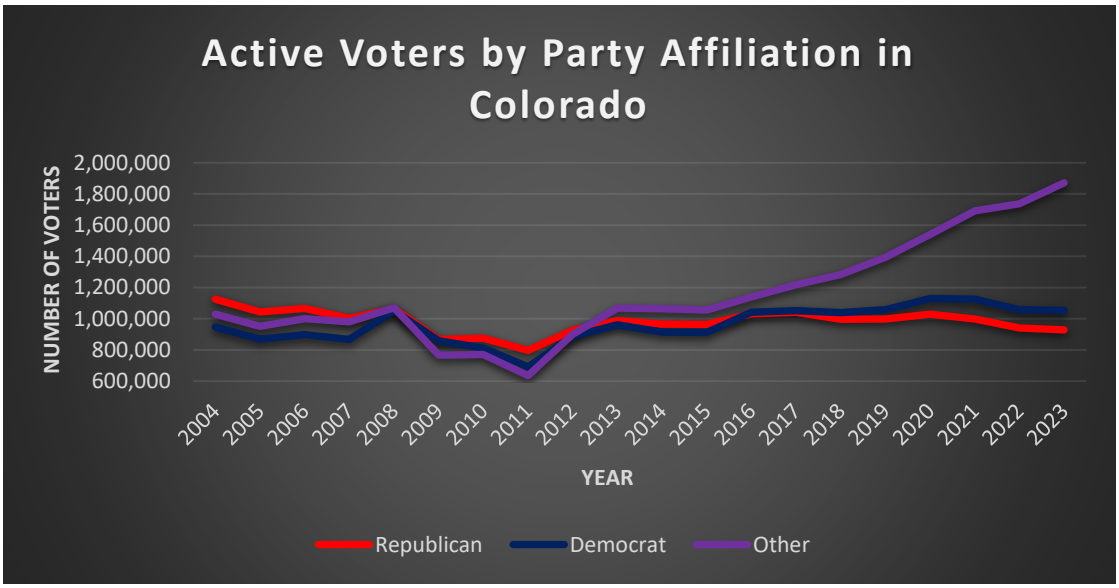


Figure 1. Colorado's Active Voters by Party Affiliation in Colorado from 2004-2023

Figure 1 depicts the political affiliation of active voters in Colorado. The "Other" category represents active voters that do not align themselves with either major political party.[26]

[25] Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. "Ideological Realignment in the US Electorate." *The Journal of Politics* 60, no. 3 (1998): 644.
[26] "2004-2023 Voter Registration Statistics." Colorado Secretary of State, n.d. www.sos.state.co.us/pubs/elections/VoterRegNumbers/VoterRegNumbers.html.

To preface, it is worth mentioning that the earliest available data on active voters by party affiliation in Colorado begins in 2004. In that year, the political affiliation of the Colorado electorate leaned more Republican than Democratic as active party voters in Colorado identified as 36.28% - 30.56% - 33.17% (Republican – Democratic – Unaffiliated). In 2008, the political composition of the Colorado electorate was relatively balanced with an almost equal number of active voters registered in each political affiliation: 33.39% - 33.03% - 33.58% (R-D-U). From 2004 to 2015, active registered Republicans outnumbered active registered Democrats, but ever since 2016, Democrats have outnumbered Republicans. Active registered voters in both parties—beginning in 2019 for Republicans and in 2021 for Democrats—each decreased below thirty percent as the number of active voters who self-identified as unaffiliated voters began rising precipitously after 2016. In fact, since 2013 there are more Coloradans who are unaffiliated with a political party than there are either Republicans or Democrats who affiliate with their respective political party.

As of 2023, the political affiliation of the Colorado electorate leans more Unaffiliated than Democratic and more Democratic than Republican as the active party registration is 24.11% - 27.33% - 48.56% (R-D-U). In less than twenty years, membership in the Colorado Republican Party has decreased approximately one-third compared to membership in the Colorado Democratic Party, which has decreased by about one-ninth all while the number of unaffiliated voters shot up by a staggering 146.40%. If this trend continues, then the unaffiliated will constitute most active voters whose political will would engulf both parties as they will outnumber the number of Republican and Democratic voters combined.

However, an unaffiliated voter is not the same as an undecided voter and therefore, unaffiliated voters cannot easily be categorically labeled as liberal or conservative. While it is

true that there are currently more registered Democrats than Republicans, the fact that Democrats are winning at such high margins reflects the reality that—all else being equal—unaffiliated voters are aligning more so with Colorado's Democratic Party than with Colorado's Republican Party when it comes to elections and electing state and national politicians to office. It may be the case that unaffiliated voters fall within a paradigm as being fiscally conservative and socially liberal.

Measuring Colorado's Political Realignment

When, and by what metric, can it be determined that a political realignment has occurred and is there evidence to suggest that Colorado has experienced such a political realignment? There is currently no universal consensus as to when, and by what metric, a political realignment has occurred in current scholarship, however for the purposes of this thesis, a political realignment for a state has occurred when the citizens of that state have realigned its political preferences to or away from its previously preferred political preferences. In other words, when there is oscillation between these three categories: blue state, purple state, and red state, then a political realignment at the state level can be observed. To determine whether Colorado has undergone a political realignment, let us turn to the voting behavior of Coloradans since 1992 as it marks the beginning of Colorado as a purple state. In this presidential election, a plurality of Colorado voters preferred President Clinton over his political opponents, elected a Democratic U.S. Senator, but elected Republicans to the Colorado General Assembly.

Colorado's Political Realignment on the National Level

The following sections are an examination of the history of presidential, senatorial, and congressional elections in Colorado over the past few decades.

History of Presidential Elections in Colorado

Since the 1992 presidential election, Colorado has behaved as a swing state, but over time, Colorado has realigned itself as a blue state when it comes to presidential politics (see Figure 2).

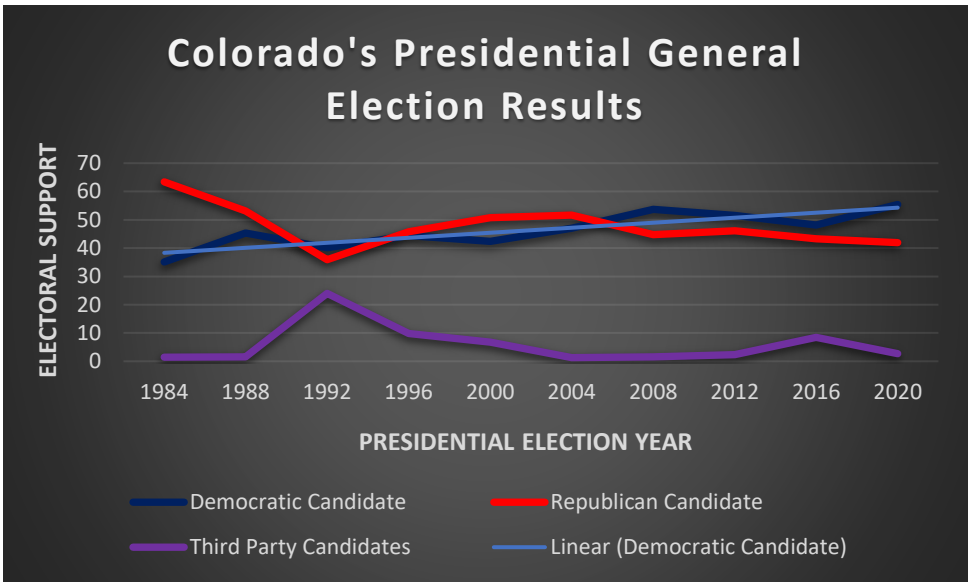


Figure 2. Colorado's Presidential General Election Results Since 1984

Figure 2 depicts the presidential general election results over the span of 10 presidential cycles. "Linear (Democratic Candidate)" is a trendline that represents Coloradans' shift in political preference towards Democratic Presidential candidates over the time series.[27]

[27] "Contest Results for Years 1984 to 2020, Office of President, Elections." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/contests/search/year_from:1984/year_to:2020/office_id:102/stage:et-id-7.

Colorado voted for the Republican candidate for President in the 1980, 1984, and 1988 presidential elections, but a plurality of Coloradans voted for Democratic President Bill Clinton in the 1992 presidential election followed by Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole in the 1996 presidential election. In the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, Colorado voted twice for Republican President George W. Bush. However, Colorado has voted for every single Democratic Presidential candidate since 2008; the longest historic support Colorado has given to the Democratic Party since its acceptance into the Union in 1876. The second longest historical trend in favor of the Democratic Party in Colorado's history was when Coloradans supported the Democratic candidates in the 1908, 1912, and 1916 presidential elections. The only comparable situation was when Colorado broke its consistent political support over four presidential cycles away from the Republican Presidential candidate in the 1876, 1880, 1884, and 1888 presidential elections by voting in favor of the People's candidate for President James B. Weaver in 1892 followed by twice voting for the losing Presidential Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan both in the 1896 and 1900 presidential elections. Since Colorado entered the Union and became a State, its voters have exercised their voice in thirty-seven presidential election cycles by proclaiming their support for twenty-two Republican candidates for President, fourteen Democratic candidates for President, and one People's candidate for President. Astoundingly, five of the fourteen instances resulting in support for the Democratic presidential candidate happened since the 1992 presidential election. If our metric to determine when Colorado's political realignment occurred is predicated on when it shifted its political preference in Presidential candidates, then Colorado's political realignment occurred with the election of President Barack Obama in the 2008 presidential election.

History of U.S. Senate Elections in Colorado

In Colorado, there are two classes for U.S. Senate: Class 2 and Class 3; each with their own separate election every two to four years. When it comes to U.S. Senate elections in Colorado, Table 1 shows how Colorado's political realignment occurred when Democratic U.S. Senator Ken Salazar defeated Republican challenger Pete Coors in the 2004 senatorial election. The only exception to Democrats winning U.S. Senate seats in Colorado since the 2004 election is when Republican U.S. Senator Cory Gardner won his one and only term to national office in the 2014 senatorial election.

Table 1. History of Colorado U.S. Senators

Duration of Term	U.S. Senate: Class 2	Duration of Term	U.S. Senate: Class 3
January 3rd, 1991 – January 3rd, 1997	Republican Senator Hank Brown	January 3rd, 1993 – March 3rd, 1995	Democratic Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell
January 3rd, 1997 – January 3rd, 2009	Republican Senator Wayne Allard	March 3rd, 1995 – January 3rd, 2005	Republican Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell
January 3rd, 2009 – January 3rd, 2015	Democratic Senator Mark Udall	January 3rd, 2005 – January 20th, 2009	Democratic Senator Ken Salazar
January 3rd, 2015 – January 3rd, 2021	Republican Senator Cory Gardner	Appointed On January 21st, 2009	Democratic Senator Michael Bennet
Since January 3rd, 2021	Democratic Senator John Hickenlooper	Since January 21st, 2009	Democratic Senator Michael Bennet

Table 1 shows each Colorado U.S. Senator, his party affiliation, and term(s) in office.[28]

Figures 3 to 4 show shifts in political preference for the Democratic Party based on senatorial election results.

[28] "U.S. Senate: States in the Senate | Colorado Senators." United States Senate, August 9, 2023. https://www.senate.gov/states/CO/senators.htm; and "Contest Results for Years 1986 to 2022, Office of United States Senator, Elections." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/contests/search/year_from:1986/year_to:2022/office_id:9/stage:et-id-7.

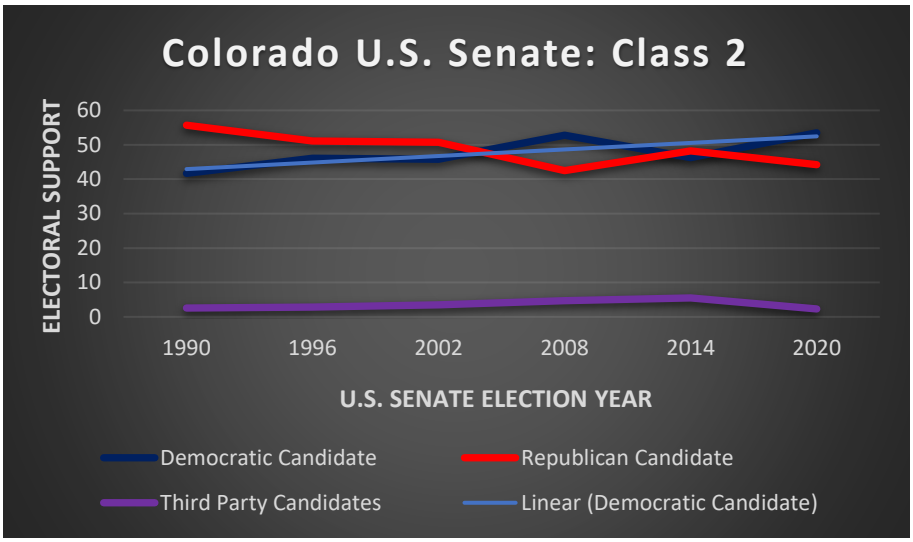


Figure 3. How Coloradans Voted for U.S. Senate (Class 2) Since 1990

Figure 3 depicts Coloradans' political preferences for U.S. Senator (Class 2) since the 1990 election.[29]

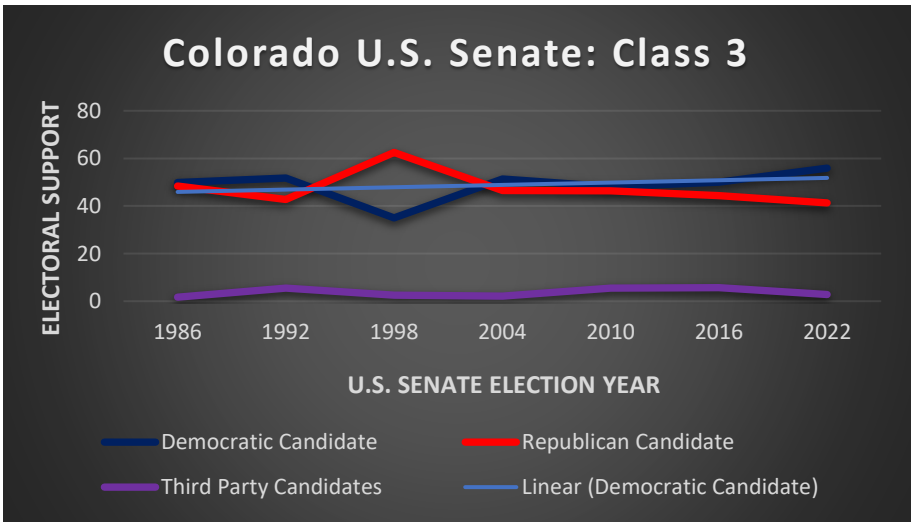


Figure 4. How Coloradans Voted for U.S. Senate (Class 3) Since 1986

Figure 4 depicts Coloradans' political preferences for U.S. Senator (Class 3) since the 1986 election.[30] *It is worth mentioning that Democratic U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell switched to the Republican Party shortly after the Republican Revolution in the 1994 election.*

[29] Contest Results, Office of United States Senator.
[30] Ibid.

For Class 2, Republican U.S. Senators Hank Brown and Wayne Allard held this senate seat from the 1990 senatorial election until Democratic U.S. Senator Mark Udall defeated Republican challenger Bob Schaffer, whose election coincided with the electoral victory of President Barack Obama in the 2008 election. In the 2014 midterm election, Senator Udall was narrowly defeated by Republican Senator Cory Gardner with less than a two-point advantage. Six years later, Senator Gardner would lose his seat by over nine-points to former Colorado Governor, but now duly elected Democratic U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper.

Compared to Class 2, the history of the selection by Colorado voters of their choice for U.S. Senator for Class 3 reveals a sooner and more consistent realignment in favor of the Democratic Party. In the 1992 senatorial election, Democratic U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell easily won his seat against Republican challenger Terry Considine with over a nine-point advantage. However, with the massive electoral gains made by Republicans during the Republican Revolution—where Republicans reclaimed political control of the U.S. House and U.S. Senate away from the Democrats for the first time in forty years—in the 1994 midterm election, U.S. Senator Campbell switched his political affiliation to the Republican Party on March 3rd, 1995. He retired after serving two terms and in a contest for his open seat, Democratic candidate Ken Salazar won his seat with almost five points in the 2004 election. U.S. Senator Salazar left his Senate seat when President Obama appointed him as his Secretary of the Interior on January 20th, 2009. In response, Democratic Governor Bill Ritter promptly appointed Denver public school superintendent Michael Bennet as Salazar's replacement effective January 21st, 2009, as the new Colorado Democratic Senator for Class 3. As a result of the Great Recession, Republicans regained control of the U.S. House of Representatives and increased their number of seats in the U.S. Senate in the 2010 midterm election. Concurrently, Colorado

Republicans gained a state senate seat and took back political control of the state house by gaining six additional seats since the previous election just two years prior. Democratic U.S. Senator Bennet, as a political newcomer with less than two years of political experience fought for his political life in his first election in 2010 when electoral victory was anything but guaranteed. He narrowly succeeded in defending his seat against Republican challenger Ken Buck with approximately a one and a half percentage point lead. In the 2016 election, U.S. Senator Bennet would go on to defeat Republican challenger Darryl Glenn by over five points. He, once again, won his re-election bid in the 2022 election against Republican challenger Joe O'Dea, but this time, by a landslide election with almost a fifteen-point advantage.

The electoral victories by the Democratic Party from both Class 2 and Class 3 are evidence for the claim that the political realignment of U.S. Senators began in 2004. That is, except for one-term U.S. Senator Cory Gardner, the Democrats have consistently won U.S. Senate seats in Colorado since 2004 and most noticeably, the recent senatorial elections in 2020 and 2022 were won by significant margins.

History of U.S. Congressional Elections in Colorado

In the 1990 midterm election, there were six Congressional seats in Colorado that were evenly divided between the two major parties with the alignment changing in favor of Republicans thereafter. Colorado's 3rd Congressional member Ben Nighthorse Campbell left his U.S. House seat and successfully won his race for U.S. Senate, but his open seat was won by Republican Scott McInnis against Democratic candidate Mike Callihan by an eleven-point lead in the 1992 election, thus shifting which party held the most Congressional seats. In contrast, when U.S. Congressman Wayne Allard left his U.S. House seat and successfully won his race for

U.S. Senate, the Republican seat was retained with the election of Bob Schaffer by more than eighteen-points in the 1996 election.

This trend of Coloradans consistently electing four Republicans and two Democrats to the U.S. House of Representatives continued from the 1992 to the 2000 Congressional elections. With the increase in Colorado's population, the 2000 U.S. Census recognized that a seventh Congressional seat should be created to represent the new voters of the Colorado electorate. The newly created Congressional seat was won by Republican Bob Beauprez, whose victory was obtained by a razor-thin margin of only 121 votes out of 163,457 total votes cast. The Republicans continued to hold most U.S. House seats until the 2006 midterm election when Democrats gained the majority control when Congressman Bob Beauprez was defeated by Ed Perlmutter by more than twelve points, shifting the balance of political power to four Democrats and three Republicans representing Colorado in the U.S. House. The Democrats' majority expanded to five Democrats and two Republicans in the 2008 election when Betsy Markey defeated Congresswoman Marilyn Musgrave by more than twelve points. This trend was short lived as Republicans regained a four to three majority in the 2010 election when Democratic Congresswoman Betsy Markey lost to Republican State Representative Cory Gardner by more than eleven points and the 3rd Congressional seat was reclaimed by a Republican. In the 2012 election, all U.S. House members were re-elected to their respective Congressional district. In the 2014 election, the trend of four Republicans and three Democrats persisted, but this time, former Republican candidate for U.S. Senate Ken Buck won the 4th Congressional seat by more than a thirty-five-point lead when Representative Cory Gardner decided to run and successfully became U.S. Senator Gardner. In the 2016 election, just as in the 2012 election, all U.S. House members were re-elected to their respective Congressional district. In the 2018 election, the

Democrats reclaimed the majority of Colorado's Congressional seats when Democratic Congressman Jason Crow defeated Republican Mike Coffman of the 6th Congressional district by at least eleven points. In 2020, 3rd Congressional district Republican Congressman Scott Tipton, who won his seat in 2018 with 51.5% of the vote, lost his party's primary to Lauren Boebert in the 2020 Republican primary. She later became Congresswoman Boebert by securing 51.4% of the vote; just as much as Congressman Tipton received two years prior. With the population increase in Colorado once again, the 2020 U.S. Census recognized that an eighth Congressional seat should be created to represent the new voters of the Colorado electorate. In the 2022 election, the Democrats retained their prior Congressional victories, and expanded their majority since the 8th Congressional seat was won by Democrat Congresswoman Yadira Caraveo, who won by less than one percentage point. Congresswoman Lauren Boebert won re-election by only 546 votes out of 327,132 total votes cast.

The change in Colorado's Congressional districts over time revealed in Figure 5 provides the most support for the claim that Colorado's political realignment is more of a state rather than a national phenomenon.

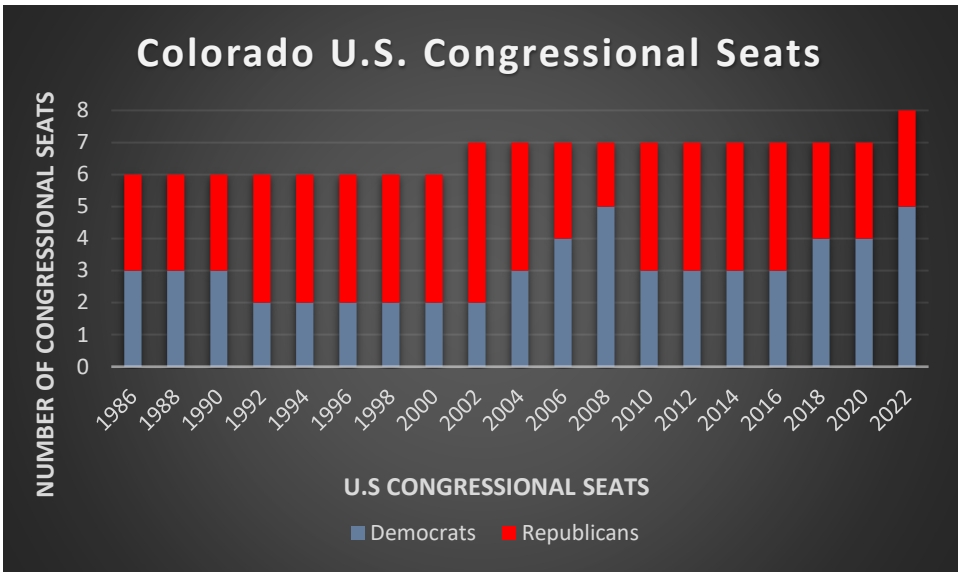


Figure 5. How Coloradans Voted for U.S. Congressional Seats Since 1986

Figure 5 depicts the changes in political composition for the Colorado U.S. House of Representatives from the 1986 to 2022 elections.[31]

From the 1986 to 1990 elections, Colorado's six Congressional seats were equally held by the same number of Democrats and Republicans. However, the Republicans controlled most Congressional seats from the 1992 election to the 2004 election. Democrats were able to interrupt this trend in both the 2006 and 2008 elections. However, the political pendulum swung back to the Republicans in the 2010 election and remained that way until the 2018 election when Democrats regained and retained the majority. As of the 2022 election, except for Republican Congresswoman Boebert and Democratic Congresswoman Caraveo, every Congressperson won their district by no less than approximately fifteen points and as much as over sixty-two percentage points. Under the 2022 election margins of victory for Colorado's Congressional

[31] "Colorado Presidential Election Voting History - 270toWin." 270toWin.com, n.d. https://www.270towin.com/states/Colorado.

districts, the Republicans can, at best, hope for a tie in the 2024 election, but if the Republicans lose just one Congressional race or if Congresswoman Caraveo retains her seat, or both, then the Democrats will continue to hold the most seats in the U.S. House from Colorado

Colorado's Political Realignment on the State Level

The following sections are an examination of the history of gubernatorial and Colorado General Assembly elections over the past few decades.

History of Governor Elections in Colorado

Before diving into the history of Governor elections in Colorado, it is worth mentioning that both the office of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, in accordance with Amendment 5 of the Colorado Constitution—approved by the Colorado electorate in the 1990 election with about 71% of the electorate's support—term-limited these and other state officials to no more than two consecutive terms. This Amendment also applies to offices of the "Secretary of State, Attorney General, Treasurer, members of the Colorado General Assembly, and United State Senators and Representatives elected from Colorado."[32] However, the United States Supreme Court ruled in a split five to four decision on May 22nd, 1995, in *U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton* that "States cannot impose additional restrictions, such as term limits, on its representatives in the federal government beyond those provided by the [U.S.] Constitution."[33] Interestingly, Republican Attorney General Gale A. Norton was one of the Attorney Generals in the country who submitted an amici curiae brief to the U.S. Supreme Court in this case. An amici

[32] "Colorado Amendment No. 5, Term Limits for Certain Offices Initiative (1990)." Ballotpedia, n.d. https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_Term_Limits,_Initiative_5_(1990).
[33] "U.S. Term Limits, Inc. v. Thornton, 514 U.S. 779 (1995)." Justia Law, n.d. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/514/779/.

curiae brief is Latin for "'friend of the court' – someone who is not a party to the litigation, but who believes that the court's decision may affect its interests."[34] Simply put, Amendment 5 remains in effect for Colorado's state officials, but its applicability to U.S. Senators and U.S. Congresspersons was deemed to be unconstitutional by the highest court in the land.

Despite these term limits, Democrats have consistently won the office of Governor ever since Democratic Governor Bill Ritter defeated Republican Representative Bob Beauprez in the 2006 election by almost seventeen points. Before then, during the 1990s, Democratic Governor Roy Romer was Colorado's Governor, but upon his retirement from politics after three terms—since his first electoral victory was in 1986—he was the last Colorado Governor to serve more than two terms. The open seat upon Governor Romer's retirement was won by Republican Bill Owens. Governor Owens initially won with only 8,297 more votes than Democratic challenger Gail Schoettler out of a total of around 1.3 million total votes cast. In the 2002 election, Governor Owens won in a landslide re-election against Democratic challenger Rollie Heath with almost a twenty-nine-point advantage (see Figure 6).

[34] "Amicus Curiae." Definition: Amicus curiae, n.d. http://www.techlawjournal.com/glossary/legal/amicus.htm.

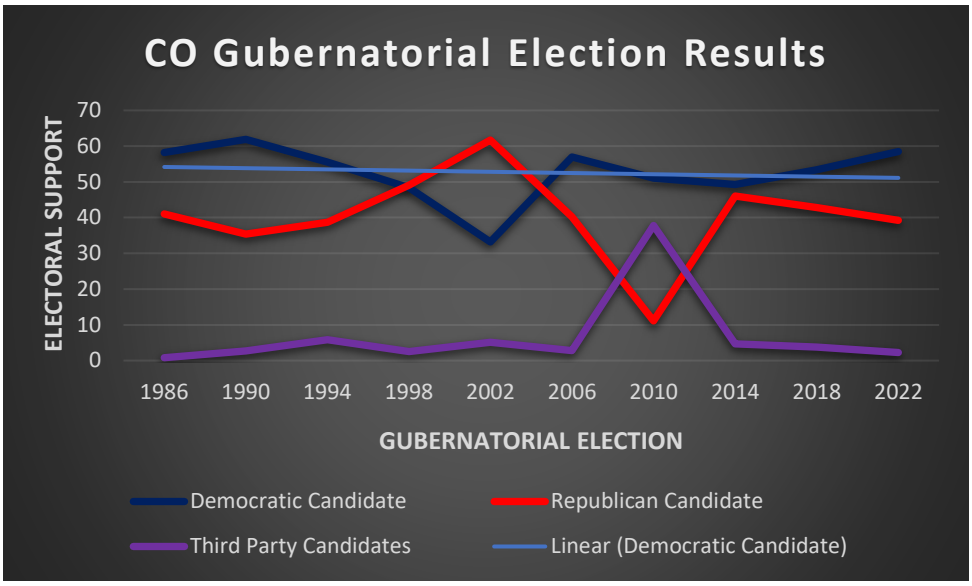


Figure 6. How Coloradans Voted for Governor Since 1986

Figure 6 depicts the gubernatorial general election results over the span of 10 election cycles. "Linear (Democratic Candidate)" is a trendline that represents Coloradans' relative consistency for the Democratic gubernatorial candidates over the time series.[35]

And yet, Governor Owens would be the last Republican Governor in Colorado up to its current history because four years later in the 2006 election, Democratic Governor Bill Ritter easily won the Governorship. In the 2010 election for Governor, Democratic candidate John Hickenlooper won the Governorship in an open seat election in a three-way race against Republican Congressman Tom Tancredo and Republican candidate Dan Maes with Governor Hickenlooper garnering 51.05% of the Colorado electorate compared to 47.52% of the vote of his top two Republican competitors: a lead of three and a half points. Governor Hickenlooper

[35] "Contest Results for Years 1986 to 2022, Office of Governor, Elections." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/contests/search/year_from:1986/year_to:2022/office_id:4/stage:et-id-7.

won his re-election in 2014 against Republican Representative Bob Beauprez by approximately three and a third points. Even though Representative Beauprez came much closer to winning the Governorship in the 2014 election than when he ran against Governor Ritter in the 2006 election, the gap between the Democratic candidate and the Republican candidate only grew in the 2018 election. In the 2018 election, Democratic Congressman Jared Polis won his first term as Governor of Colorado against Republican State Treasurer Walker Stapleton by a margin of over ten and a half points. In the 2022 election, Governor Polis won against Republican CU Regent Heidi Ganahl in a landslide election of 58.5% to 39.2%, over a nineteen-point difference. Although Governor Polis is prevented from another re-election bid because he is term-limited, such a wide margin of victory in the Governor's race reflects voters' political preference solidly in favor of the Democratic Party. In essence, the Democrats have controlled the office of the Governor since 1987—apart from Republican Governor Owens, who was elected and re-elected in 1998 and 2002—and ever since the election of Democratic Governor Ritter in the 2006 election, thereby beginning the political realignment of the Governor's office for the Democratic Party.

History of Colorado General Assembly Elections

Figures 7 and 8 show how the majority of the Colorado General Assembly have predominately consisted of members of the Democratic Party since the 2004 election with very few exceptions.

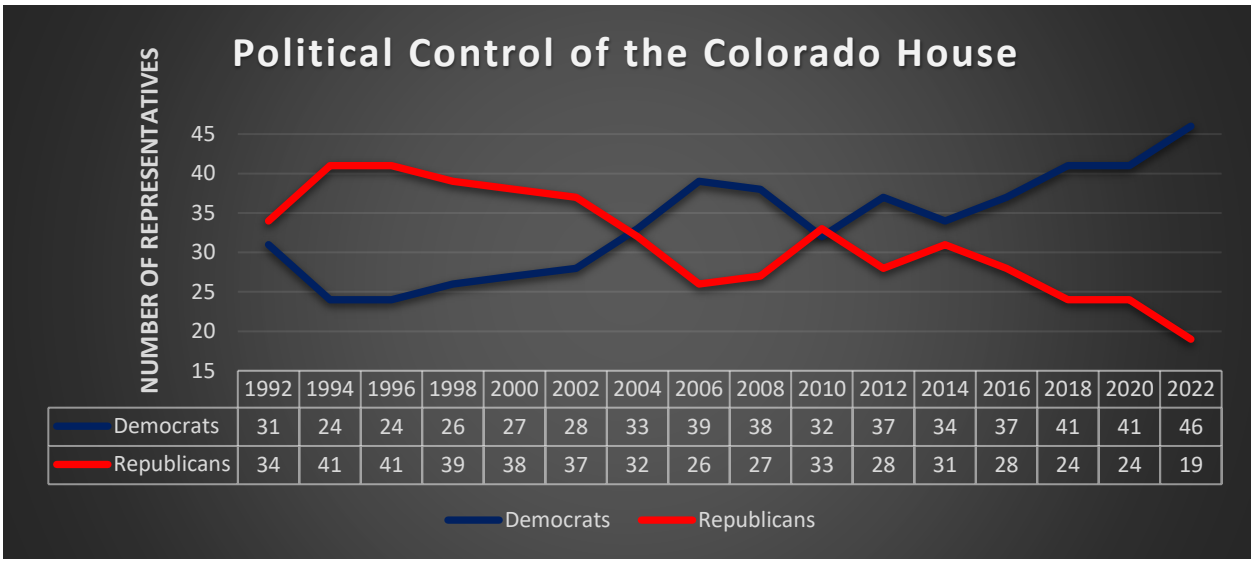


Figure 7. Political Control of the Colorado House

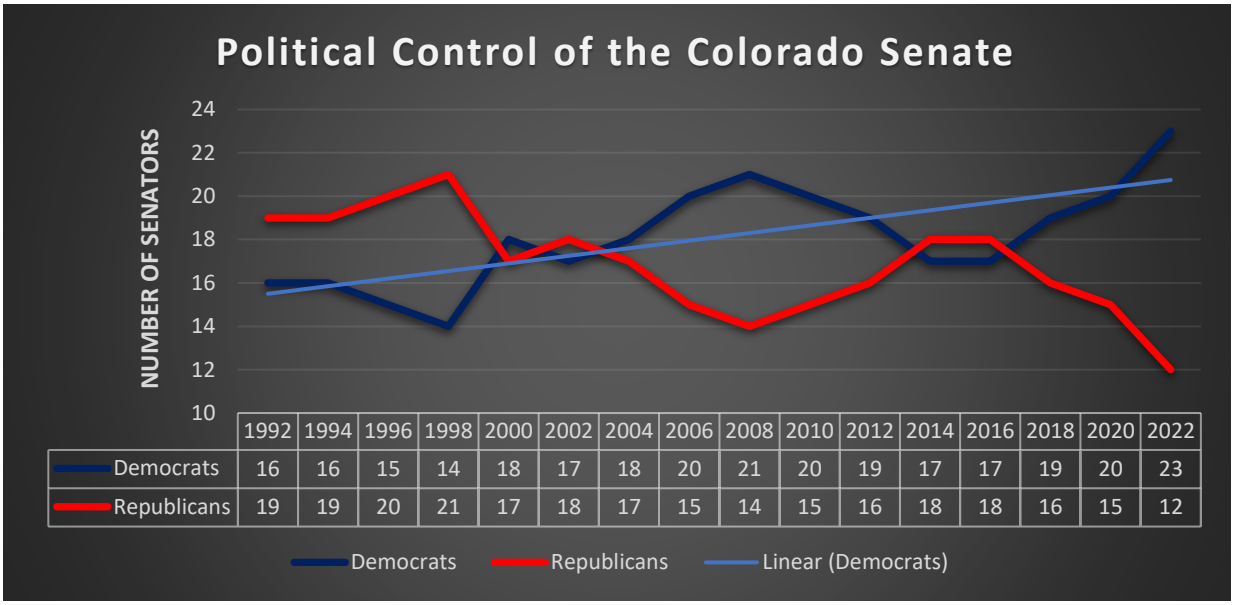
Figure 7 depicts the changes in the time series for the political control for the Colorado House of Representatives from the 1992 to 2022 elections.[36]

In the Colorado House, there are sixty-five state Representatives who may serve for two years and no more than four consecutive terms, and in the Colorado Senate, there are thirty-five state Senators who may serve for four years and may only serve up to two consecutive terms. As Figure 7 shows, the Republicans held the majority in the Colorado House since 1992 until the Democrats narrowly won political control in the 2004 election with the slimmest possible majority of 33-32 members. Since the 2004 election, the only time that the Republicans retook political control of the Colorado House was after winning the same slimmest possible majority in the 2010 election. Immediately in the next election in 2012, the Democrats reclaimed political control and they continue to control the Colorado House. Since the 2016 election, they have only

[36] "Colorado General Assembly." Ballotpedia, n.d. https://ballotpedia.org/Colorado_General_Assembly.

expanded their majority. As of the 2022 election, the composition of the Colorado House is over seventy percent Democratic.

While the data suggests that Republicans have fared better in winning the majority more frequently in the Colorado Senate than in the Colorado House, the political composition of the Colorado Senate's members in the majority party have predominately been Democratic since the 2004 election. As Figure 8 shows, from the 1992 election to the 1998 election, Republicans consistently controlled the Colorado Senate, but Democrats reclaimed control in the 2000 and 2004 elections.



	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022
Democrats	16	16	15	14	18	17	18	20	21	20	19	17	17	19	20	23
Republicans	19	19	20	21	17	18	17	15	14	15	16	18	18	16	15	12

Figure 8. Political Control of the Colorado Senate

Figure 8 depicts the changes in the time series for the political control for the Colorado Senate from the 1992 to 2022 elections.[37]

[37] Colorado General Assembly.

From the 2000 to the 2004 election, the majority party in the Colorado Senate was the thinnest majority of eighteen to seventeen members. In the 2000 election, majority control was initially won by the Democrats, whose majority was won back by the Republicans in the 2002 election, and finally, in the 2004 election, the Democrats reclaimed their majority once again. For the next decade, the Democrats continued their electoral victories against the Republicans in the Colorado Senate. However, in both the 2014 and 2016 elections, the Republicans momentarily held political power in the Colorado Senate with only a small majority of an eighteen-to-seventeen-member advantage. Since the Democrats took back the Colorado Senate in the 2018 election, they have yet to lose it. In fact, as of the 2022 election, twenty-three Senators from the Democratic Party and only twelve Senators from the Republican Party were elected ensuring that Democrats held almost two-thirds of all Senate seats in Colorado. Since the 1992 election, neither the Republicans nor the Democrats possessed such a strong majority in the bicameral state legislature as the current Democratic Party enjoys now.

Findings of Political Realignment in Colorado from 1992-2023

The data strongly supports my first hypothesis. While there is overwhelming evidence to suggest that Colorado has realigned from a purple state to a blue state, the exact timing of Colorado's political realignment is elusive and due to the unpredictable and chaotic nature of politics, there is no way to determine the longevity of such a political realignment. On a national level, Colorado has voted for the Democratic candidate for President since the 2008 presidential election; voted for Democratic candidates for U.S. Senate since the 2004 senatorial election apart from one-term Republican U.S. Senator Cory Gardner in the 2014 election; and consistently voted for most Democratic candidates for U.S. House since the 2018 election. On a state level, Colorado has voted for the Democratic candidate for Governor since the 2006 gubernatorial

election; which gave the Democrats political control of the Colorado Senate since the 2000 election except briefly relinquishing control to Republicans in the 2002, 2014, and 2016 elections; and Democrats gained control of the Colorado House since the 2004 election, except when they briefly lost it in the 2010 election, but reclaimed it shortly thereafter. After some cogitation, and in consideration of Colorado state and national politics, it is reasonable to postulate that Colorado's political realignment occurred between 2004 and 2008. The few exceptions may be more appropriately viewed as some political backsliding along the way to Colorado's political realignment from a purple state to a blue state. The overall evidence presented in this chapter supports my first hypothesis that the change of Colorado from a purple state to a blue state can be considered a political realignment at the subnational level.

Chapter III.

Direct Democracy in Action

In this chapter, I gauge the validity of part A of my second hypothesis: TABOR has transformed the political culture of the Colorado electorate. In determining how, and in what ways TABOR has transformed Colorado's political culture, I extensively research similar ballot measures to TABOR that preceded it, the history of ballot measures in Colorado, and TABOR's impact on the level of direct democracy practiced in Colorado. The last section of this chapter compares the level of direct democracy practiced in Colorado to other states throughout the nation, emphasizing the manner in which Coloradans have, historically speaking, exercised their collective voice on political issues at the ballot box.

The Cultivation of TABOR

At the time, the ratification of TABOR in 1992 was anything but guaranteed. By combing through the ballot measures of Colorado since 1908, I discovered that throughout Colorado's history on ballot measures, the spirit of measures similar to TABOR were continuously voted down: Measure 4 in 1934, Amendment 10 in 1976, Amendment 4 in 1986, Amendment 6 in 1988, and Amendment 1 in 1990 (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Road to TABOR: A History of TABOR-related Ballot Measures

	Measure 4 (1934)	Amendment 10 (1976)	Amendment 4 (1986)	Amendment 6 (1988)	Amendment 1 (1990)	TABOR (1992)
SUPPORTED	45.93%	25.25%	37.50%	42.19%	48.93%	53.68%
OPPOSED	54.07%	74.75%	62.50%	57.81%	51.07%	46.32%

Table 2 shows how the persistence of the political movement driven by incremental progress reveals TABOR as an increasingly salient and substantial public policy decision made by the electorate.[38]

If approved, Measure 4 would grant "people the sole power to impose or approve the imposition of excise taxes through the initiative and referendum process."[39] With its defeat and forty-two years later, Amendment 10 proposed to Colorado voters that the electorate must grant "approval of all state and local executive or legislative acts which result in new or increased taxes."[40] Since Amendment 10 barely garnered roughly a fourth of the electorate's support, it is unsurprising that another ballot measure would follow. And yet, only ten years later, Amendment 4 followed suit with a new ballot measure containing different language espousing that "prohibiting new or increased state or local taxes without the approval, at a biennial election, of the voters of the unit of government proposing and increasing the tax, and requiring the state to provide the funds for any increase in spending it mandates for a political subdivision."[41] Although defeated in 1986, Amendment 4, with a twelve and a quarter point percentage increase compared to ten years earlier, inspired the political movement to keep moving forward in 1988 with the new revision—Amendment 6—which was re-worded to "require voter approval for

[38] "List of Colorado Ballot Measures." Ballotpedia, n.d. https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_Colorado_ballot_measures; and Colorado General Assembly, n.d. http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/.
[39] "Ballot History." Colorado General Assembly Home Page, n.d. http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf/.
[40] "1976 Nov 4: State of Colorado: Amendment 10: Constitutional Amendment." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/18497/.
[41] "1986 Nov 4: State of Colorado: Amendment 4: Constitutional Amendment: Taxation." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/10016/.

certain increases in state and local government tax revenues, to restrict property, income, sales and other taxes, and to limit the rate of increase in state spending."[42] The slight change away from negative language to positive language gained some momentum. Trying once again two years later in 1990, Amendment 1—almost approved, but barely defeated in a vote of 48.93% for and 51.07% against—required "voter approval for certain state and local government revenue increases; to restrict property, income, and other taxes; to limit the rate of increase in state spending; to change property valuation and assessment laws; and to provide for additional initiative and referendum elections and for the mailing of information to registered voters."[43] It took steadfast effort that led to the cultivation of TABOR in 1992. TABOR reads as follows:

> Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado Constitution to require voter approval for certain state and local government tax revenue increases and debt; to restrict property, income, and other taxes; to limit the rate of increase in state and local government spending; to allow additional initiative and referendum elections; and to provide for the mailing of information to registered voters?[44]

The modification in the language of ballot measures leading to TABOR and through many failures at the ballot box led to nuanced changes and with the tenacity of the political movement behind TABOR, these measures paved the path for the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights to be interwoven into the tapestry of the Colorado Constitution and more importantly, inextricably engrained into the political culture of Colorado.

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[42] "1988 Nov 8: State of Colorado: Amendment 6: Constitutional Amendment: Taxes." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/9670/.
[43] "1990 Nov 6: State of Colorado: Constitutional Amendment: Amendment #1 - Limit Taxation." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/9325/.
[44] "1992 Nov 3: State of Colorado: Constitutional Amendment: Tax Limitations." State of Colorado Elections Database, historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/24859/.

TABOR and Its Impact on Direct Democracy

Through analyzing the history of ballot measures in Colorado, it becomes evident that Colorado has a long history of engaging and practicing direct democracy, which only accelerated with the ratification of TABOR. The available data suggests that the earliest ballot measures in Colorado appeared in the 1908 election. For explanatory purposes, the history of ballot measures has been divided into two periods: 1908-1920 and 1922-2022 (see Figures 9 and 10). This division of time permitted me to analyze the data on Coloradans as practitioners of direct democracy over the span of the last one hundred years.

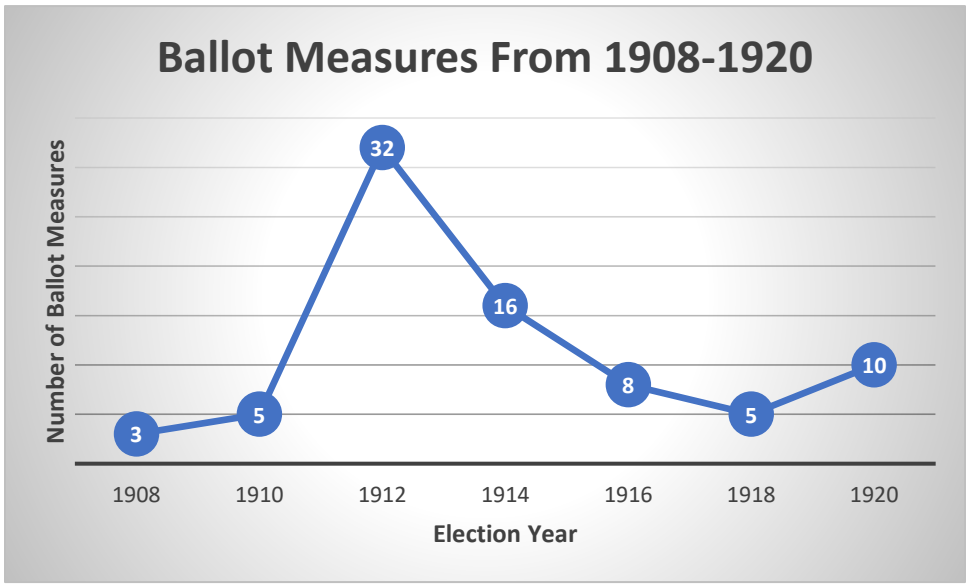

Figure 9. Ballot Measures From 1908-1920

Figure 9 depicts the total number of ballot measures Coloradans voted on from the 1908 to the 1920 elections.[45]

[45] List of Colorado Ballot Measures.

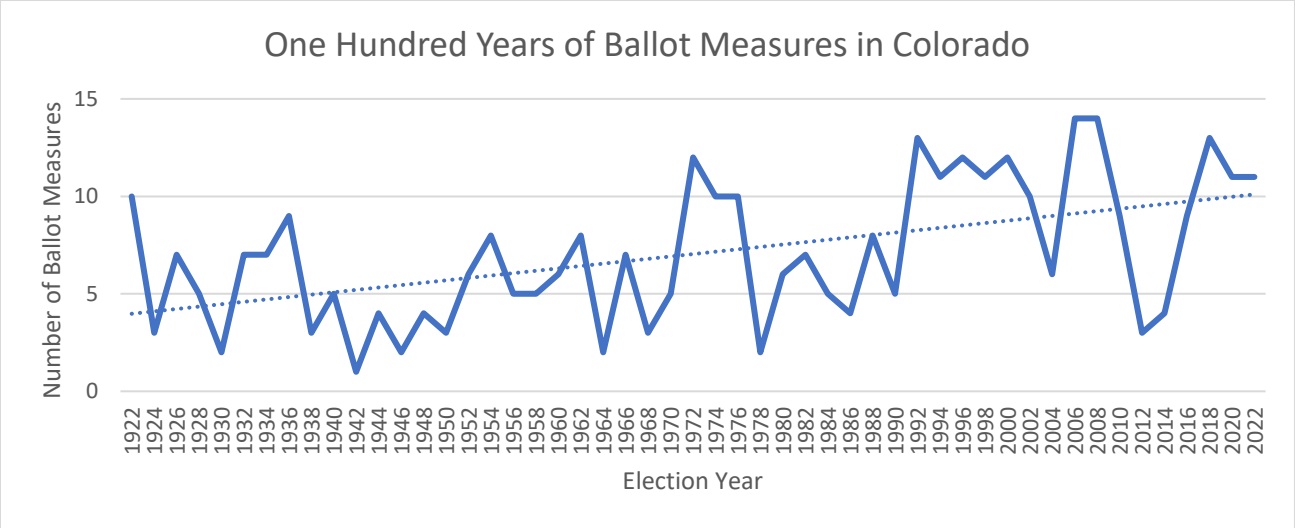

Figure 10. One Hundred Years of Ballot Measures in Colorado

Figure 10 depicts the total number of ballot measures Coloradans voted on over the span of one hundred years.[46]

Aggregately, Colorado has voted on a total of four hundred and sixty ballot measures since 1908. In the former period representing only seven election cycles, a staggering seventy-nine ballot measures were voted on. In just over three election cycles from 1912 to 1916, thirty-two ballot measures—the greatest number of ballot measures in Colorado's history—were voted on in 1912, then sixteen ballot measures were voted on in 1914, and once again, the number of ballot measures were cut in half with eight ballot measures being voted on in 1916. It is reasonable to infer that once Coloradans received the right to exercise their collective voice on political matters at the ballot box in 1908, they hotly debated a host of political issues. However, after the 1922 election, the Colorado electorate never voted on more than nine ballot measures until half a century later. In the 1972 election, Coloradans decided on twelve ballot measures and

[46] Ibid.

ten ballot measures both in the 1974 and 1976 elections. When Amendment 10—a ballot measure requiring voter approval of all new or increased taxes—failed decisively with three-to-one voters rejecting it, ballot measures fell to the single digits until the 1992 election. When TABOR was passed, a total of thirteen ballot measures were decided—the highest number of ballot measures since the election of 1914—and historically speaking, have stayed relatively high in even numbered year elections compared to the rest of Colorado's history.

Practitioners of Direct Democracy Throughout the Nation

The evidence strongly supports that the political culture that preceded and cultivated TABOR coincided, if not outright caused, the proliferation of direct democracy in Colorado. Since TABOR restructured the relationship between Colorado voters and their respective state government, it has also changed the dynamics and reliance upon ballot measures to affirm or deny tax increases. This new exercise in political autonomy did not stop with the right to decide the fate of tax increases, but other political matters as well. Noticeably, before TABOR, ballot measures were only decided every even election year, but since TABOR was ratified, ballot measures are also decided during most odd year elections. Extensive research computing the number of ballot measures across the top practitioners of direct democracy from 1980-1991 and from 1992-2023 reveals that the trend in Colorado is relatively unique (see Table 3).

Table 3. Total Number of Ballot Measures from 1980 to 1991 & 1992 to 2023

Total Number of Ballot Measures					
Ballot Measures: 1980-1991			Ballot Measures: 1992-2023		
Ranking	State	Number	Ranking	State	Number
1	CA	184	1	CA	286
2	TX	124	2	LA	241
3	ME	112	3	OR	221
4	OR	93	4	TX	212
5	RI	85	5	CO	185
6, 7	AL	72	6	ME	183
6, 7	ND	72	7	WA	165
8, 9	AZ	71	8	AL	155
8, 9	GA	71	9	AZ	148
10	LA	69	10	NM	129
11	OK	65	11, 12	FL	114
12	NJ	63	11, 12	MO	114
13	NV	62	13	RI	111
14	WA	57	14	NV	104
15	MO	47	15	OK	103
16	FL	42	16	GA	101
17	AK	39	17	SD	95
18	CO	35	18	ND	91

Table 3 shows the change in the level of direct democracy as a function of total number of ballot measures in time periods before and at/after the approval of TABOR. Colorado improved its ranking the most of all 50 states.[47]

[47] "List of Ballot Measures by State." Ballotpedia, n.d. https://ballotpedia.org/List_of_ballot_measures_by_state; and "Database Statewide Ballot Measures Database." National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d. https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/statewide-ballot-measures-database.

In terms of raw numbers, Colorado only decided upon thirty-five ballot measures from 1980-1991—interestingly, the exact same number of ballot measures decided by Montana, Nebraska, and South Dakota resulting in a four-way tie—placing Colorado eighteenth of all states as practitioners of direct democracy. TABOR changed that dramatically from 1992-2023 as an astonishing one hundred and eighty-five ballot measures—more than a five hundred percent increase when compared to the number of ballot measures from 1980-1991—were decided upon placing Colorado fifth in the nation as a practitioner of direct democracy. Over the course of twenty-nine election cycles in thirty-one years, Coloradans averaged over six ballot measures per election cycle.[48] This data supports the claim that Coloradans' interest as practitioners of direct democracy intensified with TABOR.

To better understand this phenomenon (that is, the proliferation of ballot measures in Colorado), it is helpful to compare Colorado with Oregon (3rd), Texas (4th), Maine (6th), and Washington (7th), as these four states were the closest in ranking to Colorado (5th). A closer examination was given to these four other states specifically as to the number of ballot measures that were approved and rejected from 1992-2023 for a comparative analysis. Out of 221 ballot measures, Oregonians approved 106 and rejected 115 ballot measures meaning that roughly 48% were approved while 52% were rejected. Out of 212 ballot measures, Texans approved 191 and only rejected 21 ballot measures meaning that approximately ninety percent of all ballot measures were approved. Out of 183 ballot measures, Mainers approved 141 and rejected 42 ballot measures meaning that 77% were approved while 23% were rejected. Out of 165 ballot measures, Washingtonians approved 89 and rejected 76 ballot measures meaning that about 54% were approved while 46% were rejected. Out of 185 ballot measures, Coloradans approved 85

[48] There were no ballot measures for Coloradans to vote on in 2007, 2009, and 2017.

and rejected 100 ballot measures meaning that only 46% were approved and 54% were rejected. In other words, it is not enough just to say that Coloradans now exercise their collective political voice, but that they are more inclined—as compared to voters of these other states, except Oregonians—to vote against proposed ballot measures than they are to approve them. Oregonians behave similarly as Coloradans as compared to Texans who, on the opposite side of the spectrum, approve of almost everything that is proposed to them when it comes to ballot measures.

The overall evidence presented in this chapter supports part A of my second hypothesis that TABOR has transformed the political culture of the Colorado electorate. Chapter IV seeks to test the validity of part B of my second hypothesis that TABOR has become engrained into the political culture of the Colorado electorate.

Chapter IV.

Substantial Public Policies: TABOR and Referendum C

In Chapter IV, I address the validity of part B of my second hypothesis, but more importantly, I reconceptualize Key's theory of a critical election by focusing on the importance of the role the relationship between these elections, policy, and electoral gains plays in political realignments at the state level. The remaining portion of this chapter is spent reviewing major ballot measure challenges to TABOR that correspond to Coloradans' political stance on TABOR; broken down by political support, opposition, and unsureness as well as political affiliation. The evidence presented explicates the role that TABOR has played in Colorado's political realignment from purple to red and the role that Referendum C has played in Colorado's political realignment from red to blue and informs us how these substantial public policies have contributed, at least in part, to Colorado's political realignment from purple to blue.

Critical Elections, Substantial Public Policies, and Electoral Gains

To assess the validity of part B of my second hypothesis that TABOR has become engrained within the political culture of the Colorado electorate, it is important to connect why—when it comes to state and national politics—Colorado has realigned from a purple state to a red state to a blue state. These two political transitions (i.e., from purple to red and from red to blue) can be directly tied to two substantial public policies approved by the Colorado electorate—the approval of TABOR by voters in the 1992 critical election and the approval of Referendum C by voters in the 2005 critical election. However, how does one know that the 1992 and 2005

elections in Colorado were critical elections that each resulted in the approval of a substantial public policy? To determine this, we can turn to the Bell Policy Center, a left-of-center think tank located in Denver, CO, which has been a strong opponent of TABOR and assisted greatly in the passage of its countermeasure Referendum C.

The Bell Policy Center aided in forming coalitions in support of Referendum C that included, but not limited to, the Democratic Colorado General Assembly, teachers, labor unions, chambers of commerce, technology entrepreneurs, real estate developers, others, but most importantly, Republican Governor Bill Owens.[49] Even though it was a bipartisan effort, the measure was vehemently opposed by almost all grassroot Republicans and the anti-tax movement.[50] President Wade Buchanan of the Bell Policy Center observed that "I've never seen a coalition like that before," and says "I don't think we'll see it again. It was the most important state election [2005] in the last 15 years."[51] In this regard, Referendum C—as a substantial public policy—is "owned" by the Democratic Party since it was a counterrevolution to the Republican base and anti-tax movement that passed TABOR. As an organization that has openly and adamantly opposed TABOR and fought strongly in favor of Referendum C, they readily concede that in 2023 that "[t]hirty years later, Colorado has grown, changed, adapted, and had many successes, but the 1992 election still controls what Colorado can do, in many ways, and is a significant part of every fiscal policy decision in the state."[52] Certainly, TABOR and Referendum C were substantial public policies that fundamentally changed the course of Colorado politics since their approval by the Colorado electorate.

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[49] "Bell Policy Center." InfluenceWatch, September 6, 2019. https://www.influencewatch.org/non-profit/bell-policy-center/; and Harney, Sarah. "Rewriting the Formula." Governing, August 11, 2010. https://www.governing.com/archive/rewriting-formula.html.
[50] Harney, Sarah. "Rewriting the Formula."
[51] "Bell Policy Center." InfluenceWatch.
[52] "TABOR: Restrictive Tax Policy Limits Colorado's Potential." The Bell Policy Center, September 26, 2023. https://www.bellpolicy.org/basic/colorados-tabor/.

The ratification of these two ballot measures were followed by electoral gains by the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, respectively. If there is validity to the issue ownership theory (which I believe there is), then it would be accurate to proclaim TABOR as being "owned" by the Republican Party and Referendum C as being "owned" by the Democratic Party. Table 4 highlights electoral gains made by both political parties; for Republicans, they benefited electorally from campaigning and supporting the passage of TABOR and for Democrats, they benefited electorally from campaigning and supporting the passage of Referendum C.

When TABOR was passed in 1992, the Republicans made electoral headway in the Governor's race from the 1994 to 2002 gubernatorial elections and made electoral gains in the Colorado General Assembly. While Democratic Governor Roy Romer won his re-election bid in the 1994 gubernatorial race, he won only fifty-five percent of the electorate despite winning almost sixty-two percent of the electorate just four years prior in 1990. Due to the results of the 1992 election, Republicans consisted of thirty-four members of the State House and nineteen members of the State Senate. In the succeeding elections, Republicans won the Governorship in the 1998 and 2002 gubernatorial elections. When compared to the 1992 election, Republicans held a larger majority comparatively in the Colorado House in the 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, and 2002 elections than when TABOR was first ratified. As for the Colorado Senate, the number of Republican Senators remained unchanged in the 1994 election, but they made gains in the 1996 and 1998 elections. In terms of state politics, Republicans made electoral gains in the race for Governor and the Colorado General Assembly from TABOR's ratification for a few succeeding elections thereafter. In terms of national politics, Colorado voted for the Republican presidential candidate in the 1996, 2000, and 2004 elections. Despite Democratic U.S. Senator Ben

Table 4. Electoral Gains from 1992-2022

	Governor (R)	Governor (D)	State House (R)	State House (D)	State Senate (R)	State Senate (D)
1992 (TABOR)			*34*	31	*19*	16
1994	*38.7*	*55.5*	**41 (+7 Seats)**	24 (-7 Seats)	**19 No change**	16 No change
1996			**41 No change**	24 No change	**20 (+1 Seat)**	15 (-1 Seat)
1998	**49.1 (+10.4 pts)**	48.4 (-7.1 pts)	**39 (-2 Seats)**	26 (+2 Seats)	**21 (+1 Seat)**	14 (-1 Seat)
2000			**38 (-1 Seat)**	27 (+1 Seat)	*17*	*18*
2002	**61.7 (+12.6 pts)**	33.2 (-15.2 pts)	**37 (-1 Seat)**	28 (+1 Seat)	18	17
2004			32	*33*	17	18
2005 (Ref. C)						
2006	40.2 (-21.5 pts)	**57 (+23.8 pts)**	26 (-6 Seats)	**39 (+6 Seats)**	15 (-2 Seats)	**20 (+2 Seats)**
2008			27 (+1 Seat)	**38 (-1 Seat)**	14 (-1 Seat)	**21 (+1 Seats)**
2010	47.5* (+7.3 pts)	51.1 (-5.9 pts)	*33*	*32*	15 (+1 Seat)	**20 (-1 Seat)**
2012			28 (-5 Seats)	37 (+5 Seats)	16 (+1 Seat)	**19 (-1 Seat)**
2014	46 (-1.5 pts)	49.3 (-1.8 pts)	31 (+3 Seats)	34 (-3 Seats)	*18*	*17*
2016			28 (-3 Seats)	37 (+3 Seats)	18 No Change	17 No change
2018	42.8 (-3.2 pts)	53.4 (+4.1 pts)	24 (-4 Seats)	41 (+4 Seats)	16 (-2 Seats)	19 (+2 Seats)
2020			24 No change	41 No change	15 (-1 Seat)	20 (+1 Seat)
2022	39.2 (-3.6 pts)	58.5 (+5.1 pts)	19 (-5 Seats)	46 (+5 Seats)	12 (-3 Seats)	23 (+3 Seats)

Table 4 shows subsequent electoral gains for Republicans after the approval of TABOR in 1992 and Democrats after the approval of Referendum C in 2005.[53]

** I combined data for candidates Dan Maes (R) and Tom Tancredo (Constitution Party) from the results of the 2010 gubernatorial election because Tancredo is a well-known Republican.*

[53] Contest Results, Office of Governor; and Colorado General Assembly.

Nighthorse Campbell being elected in the 1992 senatorial election, he switched to the Republican Party in 1995 and since then, Republicans have held onto both U.S. Senate seats until the 2004 senatorial election of Democratic Senator Ken Salazar. Furthermore, Republicans held a majority of Congressional seats in Colorado from the 1992 to the 2004 elections. When state and national politics are considered together, Republicans gained an electoral advantage due to Coloradans approval of TABOR in the 1992 critical election.

Similarly, when Referendum C was passed in 2005, the Democrats made electoral headway in the Governor's race from the 2006 gubernatorial election onward and made electoral gains in the Colorado General Assembly. The year prior to passage of Referendum C, Democrats held the narrowest majority possible in both the Colorado House and Senate; there was one more Democratic member in each legislative chamber than Republican member because of the 2004 election. A year right after Referendum C was approved by the voters, Democratic Governor Bill Ritter was elected in the 2006 gubernatorial election with fifty-seven percent of the vote and alongside his election, Democrats gained six seats in the Colorado House and two seats in the Colorado Senate compared to the previous election. The 2006 election was when the political realignment of Colorado occurred at the state level. The proof of this stems from the fact that for the first time since 1963, Democrats won a political trifecta whereas they gained political control of the Governorship and both chambers of the Colorado General Assembly. In the succeeding elections after the 2004 election, Democrats held a larger majority in the Colorado House in the 2006 and 2008 elections and they held a larger majority in the Colorado Senate in the 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections than compared to their narrow majorities in the 2004 election. In terms of state politics, Democrats made electoral gains in the race for Governor and the Colorado General Assembly from Referendum C's ratification for a few succeeding elections thereafter. In

terms of national politics, Colorado voted for the Democratic presidential candidate ever since the 2008 election. Besides Republican U.S. Senator Cory Gardner, who served one term after being elected in the 2014 election, Democrats won senatorial elections in Colorado since the 2004 election. In the 2006 and 2008 elections, Democrats held a majority of Congressional seats in Colorado; a feat they would not achieve again until a decade later in the 2018 election. When state and national politics are considered together, Democrats gained an electoral advantage due to Coloradans approval of Referendum C in the 2005 critical election.

Admittedly, the relationship between the approval of substantial public policy by a state's electorate and electoral gains by the political party that "owns" such policy—at least by analyzing Colorado as a case study—reveals that electoral gains may materialize for two to five succeeding elections. Some political backsliding occurred when the Republicans briefly took back political control of the Colorado House for one term in 2010 and the Colorado Senate for two terms as a result of the 2014 election alongside Republican U.S. Senator Gardner winning a U.S. Senate seat for one term in the 2014 election. Since then, the Democrats in Colorado have dominated in terms of state and national politics. Conclusively, TABOR and Referendum C—as instances of substantial public policy decided by the electorate—have resulted in electoral gains by the political party that owns such policy, but certainly, other additional factors have contributed to the political realignment of Colorado.

The Solidification of a New Political Culture

I collected data and statistics for a county level analysis of ballot measures that would, if passed, alter TABOR, and grant the state government the right to keep and spend some, if not all, of their TABOR refunds: Referendum C (2005), Proposition CC (2019), Proposition 117 (2020), Proposition 120 (2021), and Proposition HH (2023). Appendix 1 shows the text, support, and

opposition of these measures. When TABOR passed, there were sixty-three counties with Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Denver, Douglas, El Paso, Jefferson, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Weld representing the eleven largest counties. In 1998, voters approved a measure adding the city and county of Broomfield. I determined that large counties are those that have, at minimum, 10,000 voters supporting and 10,000 voters opposing a measure. Utilizing this metric, when TABOR, Referendum C, and Proposition 120 were proposed, there were eleven large counties. When Proposition CC and Proposition HH were proposed, there were twelve large counties (including Broomfield); and when Proposition 117 was proposed, there were fifteen large counties (including the addition of Broomfield, Eagle, Garfield, and La Plata counties). Table 5 shows that TABOR became cemented into the political culture of Colorado by the fact that Coloradans persistently refused to relinquish their TABOR refunds when confronted by major ballot measures[54] that asked them to do so.

A synopsis of TABOR-related ballot measures is necessary to comprehend the relationship between these measures and TABOR. In the 1992 critical election, TABOR was approved by eight of the eleven largest counties (except Boulder, Denver, and Larimer) and an equal number of small counties supported and opposed TABOR. In the 2005 critical election, Referendum C—as a substantial public policy—was the most consequential exception and modification to TABOR. Approved by voters, it became a permanent revenue change. It permitted a five-year pause from TABOR on the condition that the state allocates the excess revenue to highly salient issues: education, health care, transportation, and retirement plans for firefighters and police officers. Additionally, after the pause on TABOR ended in 2010, Referendum C reset TABOR's limit to the Referendum C cap, which was calculated based on

[54] In this context, major ballot measures refer to attempts to retain and spend TABOR refunds outside of the scope of "sin" taxes such as marijuana and tobacco taxes.

Table 5. TABOR and TABOR-related Ballot Measure Data from 1992 to 2023

Election Year	**1992**	**2005**	*2019*	**2020**	*2021*	*2023*
Ballot Measure	**TABOR**	**Referendum C**	*Proposition CC*	**Proposition 117**	*Proposition 120*	*Proposition HH*
Outcome Statistics Support to Oppose	**53.68% to 46.32%**	**52.06% to 47.94%**	*46.34% to 53.66%*	**52.55% to 47.45%**	*42.96% to 57.04%*	*40.69% to 59.31%*
Total Counties	**63 Counties**	**64 Counties**	*64 Counties*	**64 Counties**	*64 Counties*	*64 Counties*
Total Supported and Opposed	**34 Supported 29 Opposed**	**36 Supported 28 Opposed**	*12 Supported 52 Opposed*	**50 Supported 14 Opposed**	*7 Supported 57 Opposed*	*6 Supported 58 Opposed*
Number of Large Counties (Percentage of Total Votes Cast)	**11 Large Counties (83.89% of the Vote)**	**11 Large Counties (81.19% of the Vote)**	*12 Large Counties (84.27% of the Vote)*	**15 Large Counties (88.63% of the Vote)**	*11 Large Counties (82.41% of the Vote)*	*12 Large Counties (84.37% of the Vote)*
Number of Small Counties (Percentage of Total Votes Cast)	**52 Small Counties (16.11% of the Vote)**	**53 Small Counties (18.81% of the Vote)**	*52 Small Counties (15.73% of the Vote)*	**49 Small Counties (11.37% of the Vote)**	*53 Small Counties (17.59% of the Vote)*	*52 Small Counties (15.63% of the Vote)*
Large Counties Supported and Opposed Statistics	**8 Supported 3 Opposed 53.86% Yes 46.14% No**	**6 Supported 5 Opposed 52.20% Yes 47.80% No**	*3 Supported 9 Opposed 47.64% Yes 52.36% No*	**10 Supported 5 Opposed 52.01% Yes 47.99% No**	*1 Supported 10 Opposed 43.20% Yes 56.80 % No*	*2 Supported 10 Opposed 41.68% Yes 58.32% No*
Small Counties Supported and Opposed Statistics	**26 Supported 26 Opposed 52.74% Yes 47.26% No**	**30 Supported 23 Opposed 51.46% Yes 48.54% No**	*9 Supported 43 Opposed 39.43% Yes 60.57% No*	**40 Supported 9 Opposed 56.78% Yes 43.22% No**	*6 Supported 47 Opposed 41.83% Yes 58.17% No*	*4 Supported 48 Opposed 35.29% Yes 64.71% No*
Republican Democratic Unaffiliated	**Data Not Available**	**36.42% 30.36% 33.22%**	*28.94% 30.65% 40.41%*	**27.80% 30.54% 41.66%**	*26.18% 29.49% 44.33%*	*24.11% 27.33% 48.56%*

Table 5 shows both the political support and opposition to TABOR and subsequent TABOR-related ballot measures at the county level alongside the percentage of party affiliation.[55] *The bolded measures were approved while the italicized measures were rejected.*

[55] 2004-2023 Voter Registration Statistics; TABOR; Referendum C; Proposition CC; Proposition 117; Proposition 120; and Proposition HH.

the highest amount the state collected during the five-year pause (i.e., fiscal year 2007-2008) on TABOR and became the new baseline for applying TABOR's formula in years following 2010.[56] Proposition CC[57]—referred by the Democratically controlled state legislature to the Colorado electorate—sought to permanently end TABOR refunds on the condition that the excess revenue be spent on education and transportation; the percentage of votes TABOR received was approximately equal to the percentage of votes in opposition to Proposition CC. Proposition 117—approved by ten of fifteen large counties (except Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Eagle, and La Plata) and forty of fifty small counties—modestly modified TABOR to extend to state enterprises that exceed $100 million in the first five years of its creation. Proposition 120, supported by the Republican Party, was opposed across almost all large counties in Colorado (except Pueblo) that would have permitted the state to retain and keep TABOR refunds up to $25 million per year for five years in exchange for a property tax cut of a billion dollars. Finally, Proposition HH, supported by the Democratic Party, was repudiated by all large counties (except Boulder and Denver), and supported by four small counties (Costilla, Pitkin, San Juan, and San Miguel); it sought to keep and retain TABOR refunds in exchange for property tax relief. Proposition CC, 120, and HH were all failed attempts at keeping TABOR refunds. Table 5 shows how correlatively, as voters became more politically unaffiliated, the stronger their desire to keep their TABOR refunds grew.

When TABOR, Referendum C, and other TABOR-related ballot measures are examined with a closer look at the figures in Appendix 1, some interesting facts can be learned. Every large

[56] Sobetski, Greg. "Colorado's Constitutional Spending Limit." Colorado General Assembly, n.d. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/14_tabor_and_referendum_c_limit_issue_brief.pdf.

[57] Burness, Alex, and Justin Wingerter. "Colorado Prop CC: Effort to End TABOR Refunds Fails." The Denver Post, November 6, 2019. https://www.denverpost.com/2019/11/05/proposition-cc-tabor-colorado-election-2019/.

county that supported TABOR opposed Referendum C and every large county that opposed TABOR supported Referendum C except Arapahoe, Jefferson, and Pueblo who supported both. Every large county that supported TABOR opposed Proposition CC and every large county that opposed TABOR supported Proposition CC except Larimer that opposed both. Every large county that supported Proposition CC supported Proposition HH and every large county that opposed Proposition CC opposed Proposition HH except Broomfield who initially supported Proposition CC but opposed Proposition HH four years later. Table 5 shows how correlatively, as ballot measures were rejected that sought to retain and spend TABOR refunds, a higher percentage of the electorate rejected such attempts, and a higher number of small counties rejected such attempts. Essentially, the solidification of TABOR has successfully been cemented into the political culture and fabric of Colorado society against major challenges to it and consequently, the agglomeration of these facts supports the claim that TABOR became cemented into the political culture of Colorado.

Coloradans' Political Stance on TABOR

The researchers at the American Politics Research Lab are part of the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. For eight consecutive years, they have conducted the Colorado Political Climate Survey from 2016 to 2023. For my thesis, only the surveys conducted between 2016-2019 and 2023 are analyzed as the surveys conducted between 2020-2022 leave out questions pertaining to TABOR. The relevant surveys sample between 799 and 1,004 Coloradans. It is important to note that their analysis is sometimes restricted only to Colorado registered voters and sometimes open to all Colorado residents, not just registered voters. The surveys gauge, inquire, and research into the political behavior, attitudes, beliefs, party affiliations, and other pertinent political matters amongst Coloradans. Table 6 shows the

level of political support, opposition, and unsureness of Coloradans on TABOR and Table 7 shows the political affiliation of respondents of the 2023 survey.

Table 6. Coloradans' Political Stance on TABOR from 2016-2019 and 2023

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2023
Sample Size	1,004	799	800	800	800
Favor	53%	45%	49%	49%	54%
Oppose	22%	26%	30%	26%	18%
Unsure	25%	30%	21%	25%	27%

Table 6 shows the percentage of Colorado residents who favor, oppose, and are unsure about TABOR from 2016-2019 and 2023. In the survey, respondents were asked "How much do you favor or oppose TABOR remaining the law in Colorado?"[58]

** For surveys 2016-2019, Strongly Favor and Favor are combined into the same category (Favor) and Strongly Oppose and Oppose are combined into the same category (Oppose).*

Table 7. Coloradans' Political Stance on TABOR by Party Affiliation in 2023

	Republicans	Independents	Democrats
Sample Size	229	263	263
Favor	72%	50%	47%
Oppose	12%	15%	26%
Unsure	16%	35%	27%

Table 7 shows the percentage of Coloradans who favor, oppose, and are unsure about TABOR by party affiliation in 2023.[59]

The data presented in Tables 6 and 7 show that TABOR has become engrained within Colorado's political culture. Coloradans' lowest level of support for TABOR across this time series is forty-five percent compared to Coloradans' highest level of opposition against TABOR across this time series is thirty percent. When it comes to party affiliation in 2023, seventy-two

[58] Adler, E. Scott, Anand E. Sokhey, and Carey E. Stapleton. "Colorado Political Climate Survey 2019 Topline Election Report." Colorado Political Climate Survey | American Politics Research Lab | University of Colorado Boulder, November 4, 2019. https://www.colorado.edu/lab/aprl/colorado-political-climate-survey; and Adler, E. Scott, Madeline Mader, and Anand Edward Sokhey. "Colorado Political Climate Survey 2023 Report." Colorado Political Climate Survey | American Politics Research Lab | University of Colorado Boulder, January 29, 2024. https://www.colorado.edu/lab/aprl/colorado-political-climate-survey.

[59] E. Scott Adler, Madeline Mader, and Anand Edward Sokhey. "Colorado Political Culture Survey 2023 Report."

percent of Republicans support TABOR while only twelve percent of Republicans oppose it; fifty percent of independents support TABOR while only fifteen percent of independents oppose it; and even for Democrats, a staggering forty-seven percent support TABOR while only twenty-six percent of Democrats oppose it. Most interestingly, after the recent unsuccessful attempts of Proposition CC (2019), Proposition 120 (2021), and Proposition HH (2023) to retain and spend TABOR refunds, the most recent data show how Coloradans are reporting their highest level of support for TABOR at fifty-four percent versus only eighteen percent who oppose TABOR. I find that part B of my second hypothesis that states that TABOR has become engrained within Colorado's political culture is supported by the evidence and data.

Chapter V.

Saliency of Fiscal Issues and Other Factors Considered

In order to test the validity of my third hypothesis that TABOR has reduced the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans and diminished the appeal of electing fiscally conservative politicians, it is important to discern the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans. To achieve this goal, I contrasted the survey data on public opinions of Coloradans, Americans, and voters from other states reflected in exit polls acquired from the archives of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at Cornell University. The Roper Center is the world's largest and oldest compilation of databases encompassing archives of data pertaining to social science and public opinion dating back to 1935. While combing meticulously through the state and U.S. national election day exit polls, I discovered both similar and identical questions and answer choices to help determine the saliency of fiscal issues of Coloradans, Americans, and voters from other states (see Appendix 2). I gathered electoral data from exit polls about the saliency of fiscal issues for the following elections: 1986, 1990, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2020.[60]

When determining the saliency of fiscal issues of voters, only the expressed opinion of voters was considered and certain answer choices were excluded from analysis such as: no opinion, none of these, none of the above, other, don't know, refused, and blank/omit. On the other hand, the answer choice "I don't like the other candidates" was included since that is an

[60] "Exit Polls." Exit Polls | Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, n.d. https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/elections-and-presidents/exit-polls.

expressed opinion of voters contrary to the other answer choices mentioned. The surveys used were organized by date, survey organization(s), state(s) and national exit polls, saliency questions and answer choices, sample size, and corresponding saliency of fiscal issues. Across the time series of the exit polls, the sample sizes vary from an approximate range of 1,000 to 2,600 voters in Colorado, 8,900 to 26,900 voters in the United States, and 600 to 4,900 voters for the other states that are analyzed.[61] Appendix 2 provides a more complete understanding of the saliency of fiscal issues by reviewing the full and complete list of questions and answer choices found within the exit polls used in this thesis. Before diving into the data, it is helpful to provide a brief comparative cross-case analysis of the political composition of the other four states that are like Colorado when it comes to the level of direct democracy practiced in these states (see Table 3 in Chapter III).

Political Composition: States with Similar Levels of Direct Democracy

The political composition of these four states is as follows: Oregon and Washington are solidly blue; Maine leans Democratic but has a history of occasionally voting for politically independent candidates; and Texas is a red state. Scholars of politics, political science, and government along with astute observers of the American political system will require little convincing of these facts, but the establishment thereof is necessary for a proper comparative cross-case analysis of the saliency of fiscal issues of Coloradans to Mainers, Oregonians, Texans, and Washingtonians. I examined the Presidential, U.S. Senate, U.S. House, and Governor voting history of these four states. The analysis of Oregon and Washington shall be done together while Maine and Texas will be tackled separately.

[61] The sample sizes are rounded down to the nearest hundred and rounded up to the nearest hundred for the lower and upper bounds of the ranges, respectively.

Oregon and Washington are both indisputably blue states. Each of these states have opted for the Democratic candidate for President ever since the 1988 presidential election, with President Reagan being the last Republican candidate to win these states. Oregon has voted for a Democratic U.S. Senator (Class 2) since the 2008 election and a Democratic U.S. Senator (Class 3) since the 1998 election. Washington has voted for a Democratic U.S. Senator (Class 1) since the 2000 election and a Democratic U.S. Senator (Class 3) since the 1986 election. From the 1986 to 2022 U.S. House elections, most Congressional seats—ranging from sixty to eighty percent of seats—in Oregon have been held by Democrats. During the same time series, most Congressional seats—with the exception of the 1994 and 1996 elections—in Washington have been held by Democrats. The last time Oregon voted for a Republican Governor was in the 1982 election and they have voted Democratic ever since the 1986 election. The last time Washington voted for a Republican Governor was in the 1980 election and they have voted Democratic ever since the 1984 election.[62]

Maine leans Democratic but is also politically independent. Unlike Oregon and Washington, Maine voted for Republican President George H.W. Bush in the 1988 presidential election, but in the 1992 presidential election, they have voted for the Democratic candidate for President ever since. In contrast to Oregon and Washington, Maine has voted for a Republican U.S. Senator (Class 1) in the 1994, 2000, and 2006 elections, but opted for the independent candidate for U.S. Senate in the 2012 and 2018 elections. Maine has voted for a Republican U.S. Senator (Class 2) since the 1980 election. Maine has two Congressional seats with the 1st District being Democratic since the 1996 election and the 2nd District being Democratic—except

[62] "Oregon Presidential Election Voting History - 270toWin." 270toWin.com, n.d. https://www.270towin.com/states/Oregon; and "Washington Presidential Election Voting History - 270toWin." 270toWin.com, n.d. https://www.270towin.com/states/Washington.

for the Republican candidate being elected in the 2014 and 2016 elections—since the 1994 election. The following changes in party affiliation of the Governor of Maine truly reveals its electorate as possessing a politically independent spirit – 1982 election: Democratic; 1986 and 1990 elections: Republican; 1994 and 1998 elections: Independent; 2002 and 2006 elections: Democratic; 2010 and 2014 elections: Republican; and 2018 and 2022 elections: Democratic.[63]

Texas is uncontroversially a red state. Texas has voted for every Republican candidate for President since the election of President Reagan in the 1980 presidential election. Texas has voted for a Republican U.S. Senator (Class 1) since the 1993 election and has voted for a Republican U.S. Senator (Class 2) since the 1961 election. Most Congressional seats in Texas have been held by Republicans since the 2004 election. When it comes to the office of the Governor of Texas, that office has been held by a Republican since the 1994 election.[64]

Evaluating the Saliency of Fiscal Issues to Coloradans

There are three time series that are crucial to understanding the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans in national politics: (1) 1986-1992 when ballot measures akin to TABOR failed, but ultimately led to the ratification of TABOR; (2) 1996 up to 2008; and (3) 2010 to 2023, which coincides with when the five-year reprieve from TABOR—Referendum C—came to an end and TABOR refunds came back to Coloradans. Three interesting facts about the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans come to the surface in the 1986 election: first, Coloradans cared about just as much as Americans about controlling federal spending (see Figure A3.1); second, Coloradans cared less than Oregonians and about half as much as Texans about the economy when it comes

[63] "Maine Presidential Election Voting History - 270toWin." 270toWin.com, n.d. https://www.270towin.com/states/Maine.
[64] "Texas Presidential Election Voting History - 270toWin." 270toWin.com, n.d. https://www.270towin.com/states/Texas.

to the 1986 Governor's race (see Figure A3.2); and third, when it comes to taxing and spending policies of the Governor's race, Coloradans cared more about such policies compared to Pennsylvanians, Arizonans, Nevadans, Alabamians, and Illinoisans (see Figure A3.3). In the 1990 election, Coloradans cared more about the savings and loan crisis than Oregonians, Illinoisans, Iowans, Kentuckians, Texans, and Americans overall (see Figure A3.4). In the 1992 election, when given a dichotomous choice between prioritizing economic growth or the environment, Americans chose the environment whereas Californians chose economic growth, but a higher percentage of Coloradans than Californians prioritized economic growth (see Figure A3.5).[65]

These figures suggest that leading up to and including when TABOR was ratified, Coloradans were on equal footing as Americans on controlling federal spending, placed less emphasis on the economy in the Governor's race than voters from other states, focused more on taxing and spending policies in the Governor's race than voters from other states, that the savings and loan crisis was more relevant to Coloradans than Americans and voters of other states, and emphasized economic growth at the national level over the environment when compared to Americans and Californians. Aggregately, besides the saliency of the economy in the 1986 gubernatorial election, Coloradans cared deeply about fiscal issues to a very high degree.

Assessing the time series after TABOR reveals there are three fiscal issues that arose over various election cycles that will assist in evaluating the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans over time—the nation's economy, federal taxes, and the federal budget deficit (see Figures 11-13). When it comes to the saliency of the nation's economy, Coloradans and Americans cared equally about the economy in the 1986 election (see Figure 11). In the 1990 election, Coloradans

[65] I chose these states because they were the only ones that had a comparable question and answer choice to test the saliency of fiscal issues for voters to choose.

cared much more about the economy than Americans. In the 1996 and 2004 elections, Coloradans cared less about the economy than Americans. In the 2000 election, data only exists about how much Democratic Party primary voters cared about the economy, and it is indistinguishable from how much Americans cared about the economy. In the 2008 election, Coloradans cared less than the rest of the country about the economy. In the 2010 election, which coincides around the time that Referendum C came to an end, Coloradans cared greatly more than Americans about the economy. In the 2012 and 2016 elections, Coloradans cared less than the nation about the economy. However, in both the 2014 and 2020 elections, Coloradans placed considerably less emphasis on the economy than the rest of the nation. Certain fiscal issues were very salient to Coloradans before and up to the point of TABOR, but after the ratification of TABOR, Coloradans emphasis on the economy was less than the nation as a whole, except for the 2010 election, where they cared about the economy a great deal more than Americans.

We can comprehend the saliency of the federal budget deficit and federal taxes to Colorado voters by comparing these issues against voters across the nation (see Figures 12 and 13).

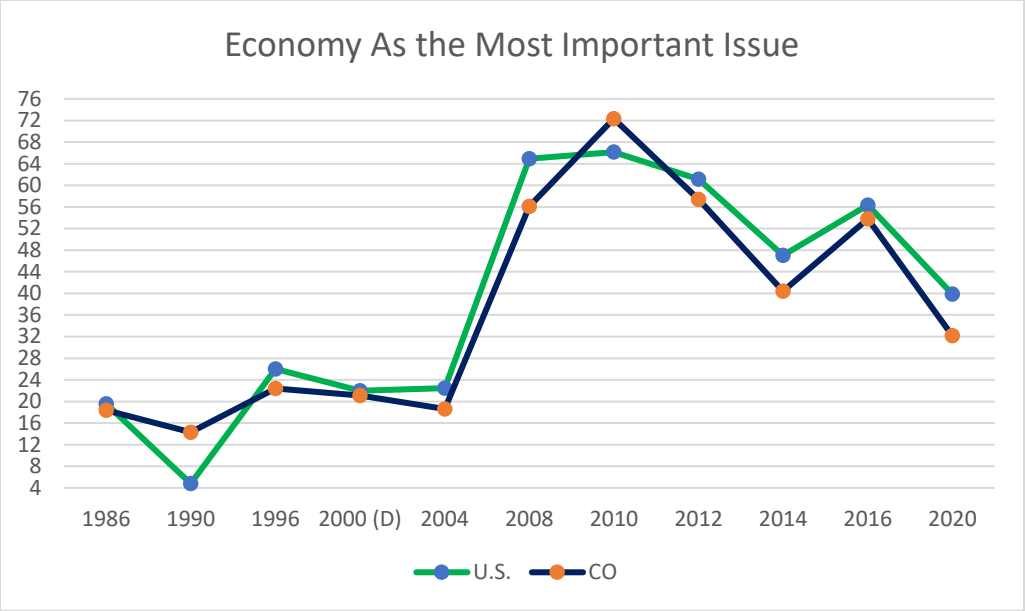

Figure 11. Saliency of the Nation's Economy from the 1986-2020 Elections

Figure 11 depicts a comparative cross-case analysis between Coloradans and Americans when it comes to the saliency of the national economy as the most important issue for voters.[66]

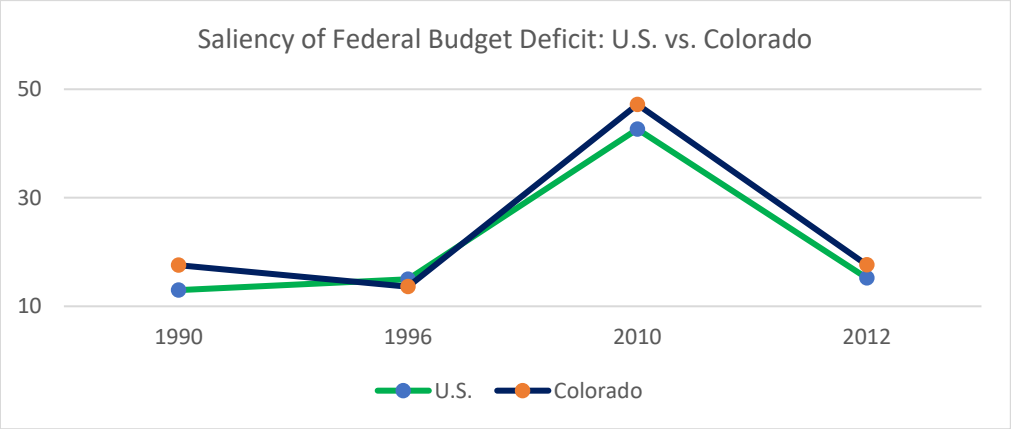

Figure 12. Saliency of the Federal Deficit from the 1990-2012 Elections

Figure 12 depicts a comparative cross-case analysis between Coloradans and Americans when it comes to the saliency of the federal budget deficit.[67]

[66] Exit Polls | Roper Center.
[67] Ibid.

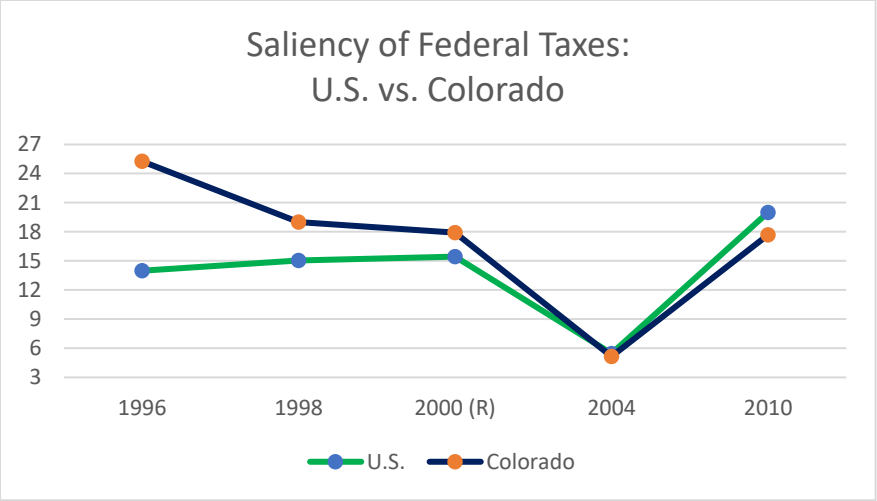

Figure 13. Saliency of Federal Taxes from the 1996-2010 Elections

Figure 13 depicts a comparative cross-case analysis between Coloradans and Americans when it comes to the saliency of federal taxes.[68]

Figure 12 shows that, in the 1990 election, Coloradans cared more than Americans about the federal budget deficit, but slightly less so than Americans in the 1996 election. In the 2010 election, Coloradans cared more about the federal budget deficit than the nation and in the 2012 election, it is still true that they cared more, but less so than in the previous election. Figure 13 shows that, when it comes to federal taxes, there is a great discrepancy between Coloradans and Americans in the 1996 election. Coloradans cared more about federal taxes, but that this gap narrowed in the 1998 election and the gap narrowed further when only the Republican Party primary voters were asked about federal taxes in the 2000 election. By the time the 2004 election rolled around, Coloradans placed about an equal amount of emphasis on the saliency of federal taxes as did the rest of Americans and by the time that the 2010 election came, even less than the rest of Americans. This data suggests that the saliency of the federal budget deficit increased

[68] Ibid.

with the 2010 and 2012 elections since the 1996 election, but that the saliency of federal taxes became less and less salient to Coloradans as time progressed.

Comparing Colorado to Other States

The last test of the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans is against two other blue states (Oregon and Washington), a blue yet politically independent state (Maine), and a red state (Texas). Figure 14 reveals that in the 1996 election, Coloradans and Washingtonians cared equally about the economy and that Oregonians cared more than voters of both states. In the 2008 election, Coloradans and Oregonians cared equally about the economy and that Washingtonians cared more than voters of both states. In the 2016 election, just as in the 1996 election, Coloradans and Washingtonians cared equally about the economy and Oregonians cared more than voters of both states. At the time of the 2020 election, Oregonians and Washingtonians cared equally about the economy and Coloradans cared more about the economy than the voters of both states.

When it comes to comparing the saliency of fiscal issues of Coloradans to Mainers and Texan, a greater depth of insight is achieved (see Figure 15). In the 1996 election, Coloradans prioritized the economy as less salient than Mainers and Texans. In the 2008 election, this remained true although the gap closed a bit. In the 2016 election, voters of these three states cared relatively equally about the economy. However, when it comes to the 2020 election, Coloradans cared a great deal less than either Mainers or Texans about the economy. By comparing the saliency of the nation's economy of Coloradans to voters of these other four states, the conclusion I reached is that while Coloradans cared about the economy less than the voters of these other four states in the 1996 election, that by the time of the 2020 election, Coloradans were more aligned with Oregonians and Washingtonians than to Mainers

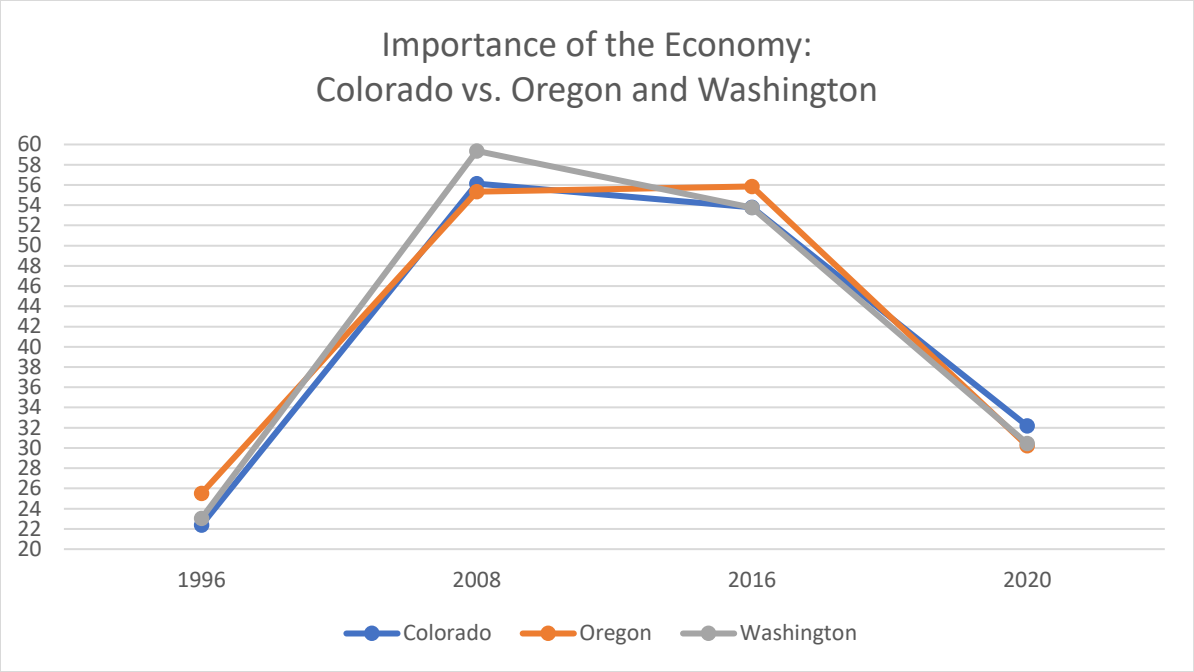

Figure 14. Saliency of the Nation's Economy: Colorado vs. Oregon and Washington

Figure 14 depicts a comparative cross-case analysis between Colorado versus Oregon and Washington when it comes to the saliency of the nation's economy.[69]

[69] Ibid.

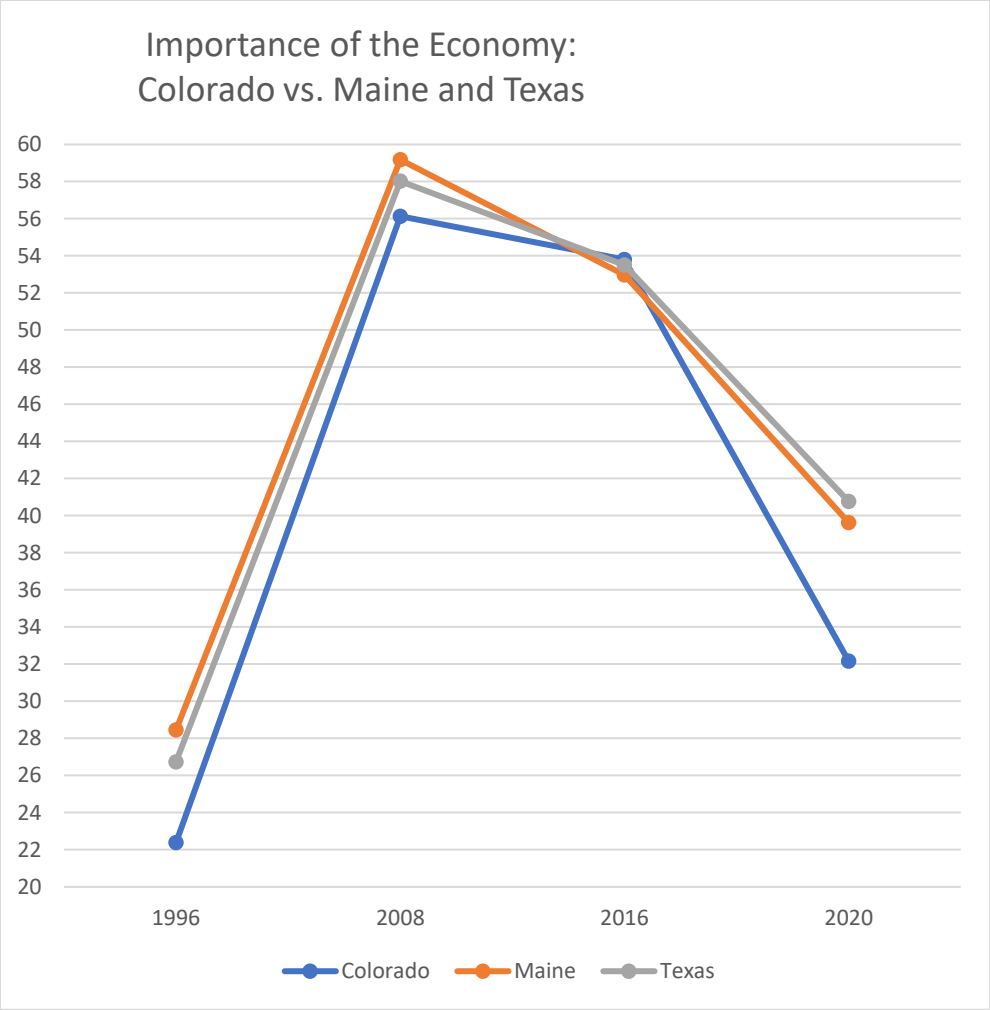

Figure 15. Saliency of the Nation's Economy: Colorado vs. Maine and Texas

Figure 15 depicts a comparative cross-case analysis between Colorado versus Maine and Texas when it comes to the saliency of the nation's economy.[70]

and Texans when it comes to the saliency of the American economy. It is reasonable to infer that, over time, Coloradans have become more concerned, but not greatly so, about the economy as compared to Oregonians and Washingtonians, but less concerned when compared to Mainers

[70] Ibid.

and Texans. This means that Colorado is not as blue as Washington and Oregon, but bluer than Maine and certainly Texas.

Other Factors Considered

Colorado has many factors that help explain its political realignment over the past thirty-one years. Congressional seats have been added since 1992, which points to considerable growth in Colorado's population. On many issues, there has been a liberalization of social issues ranging from abortion to gay rights to the defelonization of drugs—the median Colorado voter has shifted to the political left. A primary cause of the political realignment of Colorado has been the evolution of Coloradans' shifting on social issues leftward in their politics and political preferences in favor of Democratic candidates for political office. From the rejection of multiple attempts at the ballot box to establish Personhood to the codification of abortion rights by the Colorado state government to the acceptance of gay marriage to the defelonization of drugs by the state government, and with the approval of voters at the ballot box to legalize marijuana (Amendment 64 in the 2012 election) and decriminalization of psychedelic plants and fungi (Proposition 122 in the 2022 election), the political attitudes, beliefs, and ideals of the median Colorado voter have changed, thus becoming more liberal in nature. In addition to these factors, Colorado is particularly unique as its voters—contrary to every other state—are equipped to make fiscal decisions exclusively at the ballot box. While the immediate electoral gains made by Republicans with the passage of TABOR and the immediate electoral gains made by Democrats with the passage of Referendum C contributes to why Colorado has undergone a political realignment, it is only part of the explanation as to why Colorado has transitioned from a purple to a blue state. The overall evidence presented in this chapter provides for mixed results and subsequently, my third hypothesis is only partially supported.

Chapter VI.

Discussion with Concluding Remarks

In this final chapter, I discuss the validity of my hypotheses, review the empirical claims that derive from my research into Colorado's political realignment, share the implications of my findings, and ponder the direction of future research.

Findings, Implications, and Direction of Future Research

In terms of testing the validity of my three hypotheses, my findings have produced data and evidence, presented in this thesis, that my hypotheses are mostly supported. The first two hypotheses are certainly supported. The third hypothesis produced mixed results and inductively, it is partially supported, but there is room for further research and exploration of the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans.

The contribution of my thesis to political realignment theory, through examining how substantial public policy decisions, made by the people at the ballot box at the state level, can affect electoral gains in subsequent elections has implications for the political realignment literature at the subnational level. If it is true, as I have argued, that electoral gains can be obtained by the majority party upon the passage of substantial public policy decisions at the ballot box—in accordance with issue ownership theory and saliency theory—then the two major political parties may compete and seek to gain an advantage over the other party by placing ballot measures that are highly salient to the electorate for their consideration. As for the future direction of research on the political realignment of states, future scholars may benefit from a

greater analysis to determine which ballot measures are substantial and salient enough to render electoral gains by the political party that supports, campaigns, and thus owns the political issue of such measures. If ballot measures can be pinpointed and identified by future scholars to determine which ones result in electoral gains, then the utilization of direct democracy by the two major political parties may cause a shift to voters having a stronger claim in the shaping of their own political destiny and increase their collective political voice over the political issues they deem to be most salient to voters of their respective political jurisdiction.

Through my research and investigation into available data and in line with the available literature on political realignment, I posit five empirical claims:

1. By observing subnational events and data, Colorado's political realignment can be traced from purple to red to blue over a thirty-one-year span.
2. The data points to TABOR and Referendum C as substantial public policy changes that were each salient political issues to Colorado voters that transformed and became engrained in the political culture of the Colorado electorate.
3. The ratifications of TABOR and Referendum C, as substantial public policy changes made via direct democracy, were critical elections that correlated with and reasonably caused electoral gains over several succeeding elections for the political party that owned the respective political issue.
4. Electoral gains over several succeeding elections mark a critical election, but as time progresses, the political issue becomes less salient to voters and consequently, there becomes a diminishing rate of return for the political party that originally owned the issue.

5. Critical elections at the subnational level resulting from substantial public policy changes by the electorate can lead to electoral gains that can contribute to the overall political realignment of a state.

Cumulatively, these five empirical claims, in consideration of my research questions, leads to my overarching argument for my thesis: TABOR and Referendum C—as substantial policy decisions approved by the Colorado electorate—while having immediate, albeit temporary, electoral gains for the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, these policies were ultimately engrained in Colorado's political culture rendering such political issues as less salient to Coloradans over time, thus permitting other political factors to contribute to Colorado's realignment as a blue state.

Concluding Remarks

The data strongly supports the five empirical claims postulated in this thesis and such claims advance my overarching argument. The argument put forward for your consideration is backed mostly by these empirical claims alongside the extent to which my hypotheses are valid. My argument, when combined with theory, has potentially illuminating power to political realignment theory, but also other applicability to the study and furtherance of the power of direct democracy in states throughout the United States.

While Yale Professor David Mayhew's critique on the national political realignment literature is thorough and compelling, my thesis on the study of political realignment at the subnational level provides an illuminative power as my argument and theory—even if probabilistically true—should have great and significant importance to the study of the political realignment of states. The answer to my two research questions—can examining subnational

events and data lead us to understanding and predicting future political realignments of states and how can political realignment of states be predicted and enrich our understanding of how substantial public policy can aid in predicting future electoral and political behavior—can bring about real political implications. The inability to predict future political realignments successfully on the national stage has been a legitimate critique of realignment theory. However, predicting future electoral behavior may just be simpler on the state level. If voter-approved substantial public policy decisions, manifested directly by the will of the electorate accompany immediate, albeit temporary electoral gains, then it may in fact be possible to predict future political realignment at the subnational level in certain cases. If there is truth in my argument and theory—as I believe there is—then the major political parties in America may, by placing substantial policy decisions that are salient to the electorate for their consideration in a critical election, gain the voters' political support by the people of that state in the succeeding elections thereafter.

Appendix 1.

TABOR and TABOR-related Ballot Measures

TABOR (1992)

Shall there be an amendment to the Colorado Constitution to require voter approval for certain state and local government tax revenue increases and debt; to restrict property, income, and other taxes; to limit the rate of increase in state and local government spending; to allow additional initiative and referendum elections; and to provide for the mailing of information to registered voters.[71]

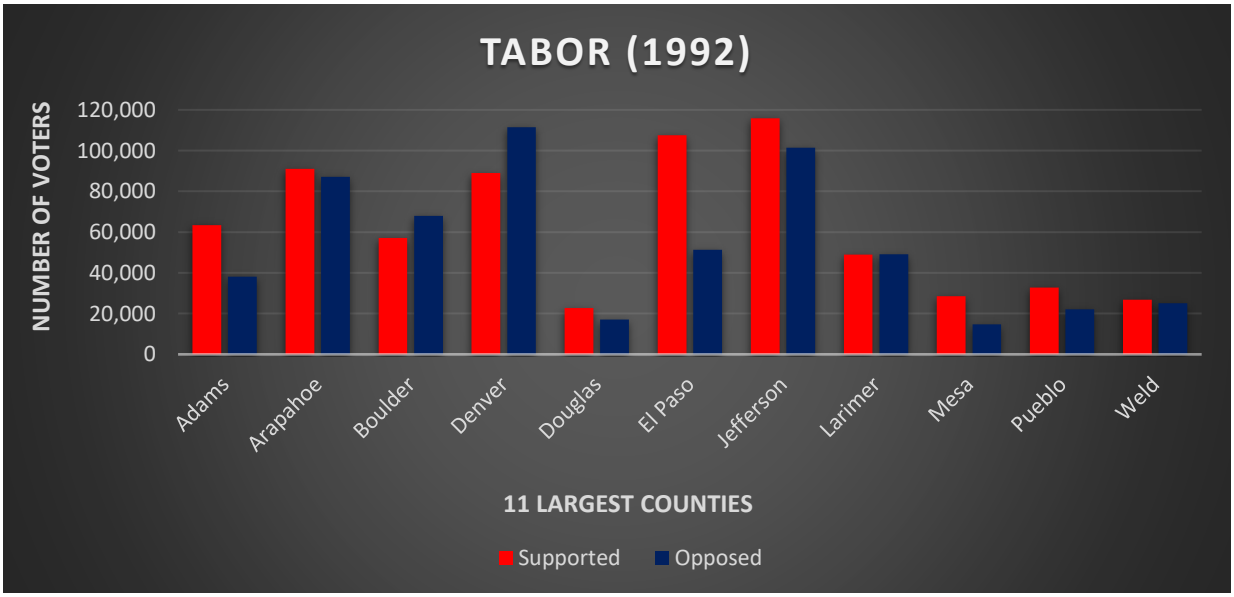

Figure A1.1. TABOR – 11 Largest Counties in the 1992 Election

Figure A1.1 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for TABOR within the largest counties of Colorado in the 1992 election.

[71] State of Colorado: Constitutional Amendment: Tax Limitations.

Referendum C (2005)

Without raising taxes and in order to pay for education; health care; roads, bridges, and other strategic transportation projects; and retirement plans for firefighters and police officers, shall the state be authorized to retain and spend all state revenues in excess of the constitutional limitation on state fiscal year spending for the next five fiscal years beginning with the 2005-06 fiscal year, and to retain and spend an amount of state revenues in excess of such limitation for the 2010-11 fiscal year and for each succeeding fiscal year up to the excess state revenues cap, as defined by this measure?[72]

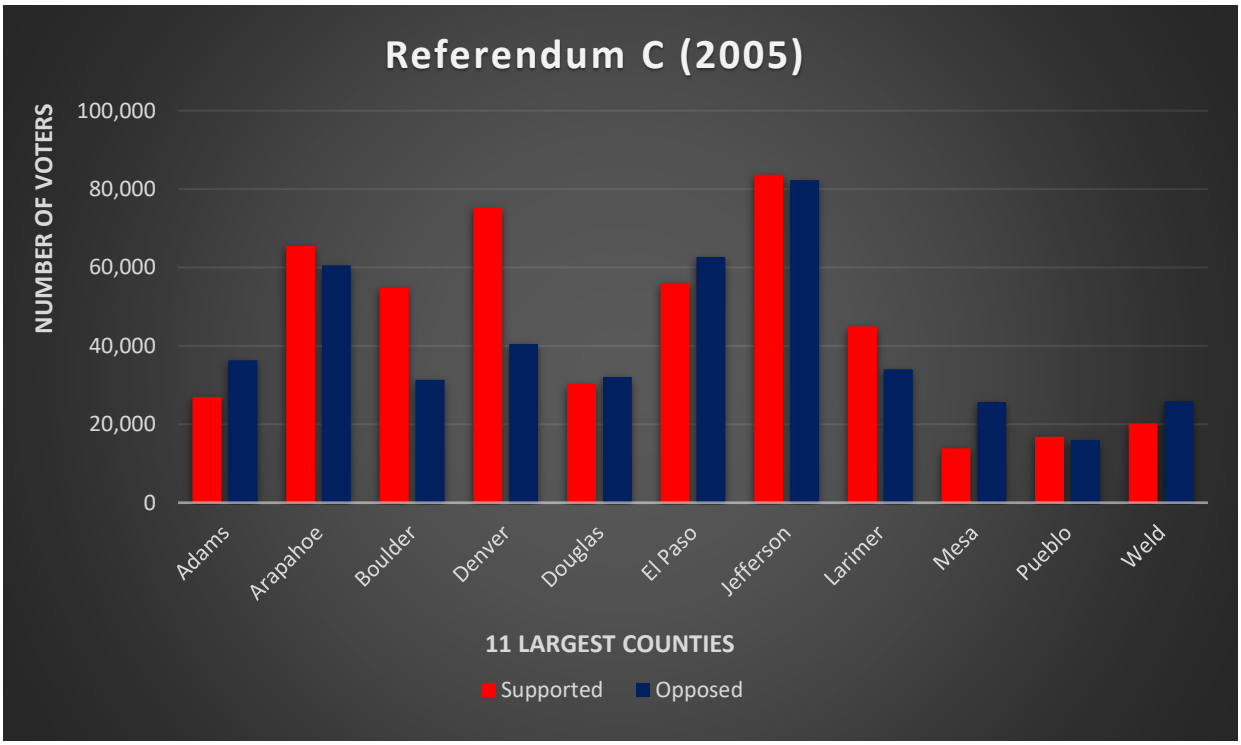

Figure A1.2. Referendum C – 11 Largest Counties in the 2005 Election

Figure A1.2 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for Referendum C within the largest counties of Colorado in the 2005 election.

[72] State of Colorado: Referendum C.

Proposition CC (2019)

Without raising taxes and to better fund public schools, higher education, and roads, bridges, and transit, within a balanced budget, may the state keep and spend all the revenue it annually collects after June 30, 2019, but is not currently allowed to keep and spend under Colorado law, with an annual independent audit to show how the retained revenues are spent?[73]

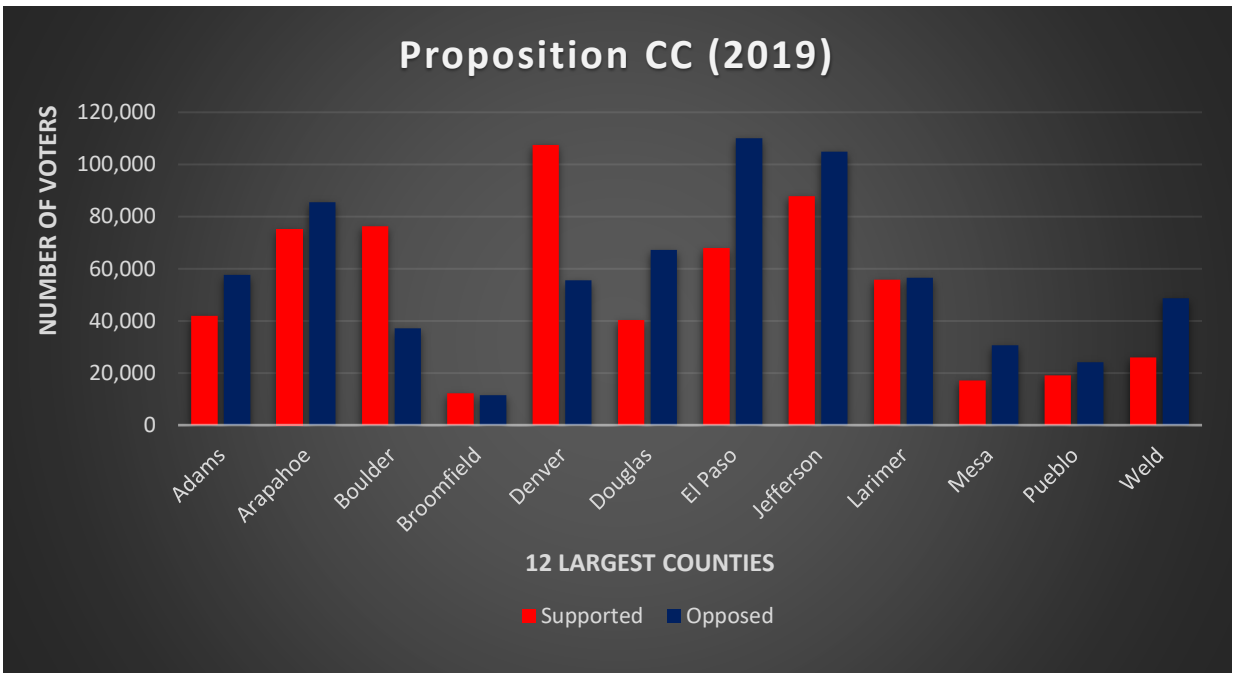

Figure A1.3. Proposition CC – 12 Largest Counties in the 2019 Election

Figure A1.3 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for Proposition CC within the largest counties of Colorado in the 2019 election.

[73] "2019 Nov 5: State of Colorado: Statutory: Proposition CC: Retain State Government Revenue." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/3496/.

Proposition 117 (2020)

Shall there be a change to the Colorado Revised Statutes requiring statewide voter approval at the next even-year election of any newly created or qualified state enterprise that is exempt from the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, Article X, Section 20 of the Colorado constitution, if the projected or actual combined revenue from fees and surcharges of the enterprise, and all other enterprises created within the last five years that serve primarily the same purpose, is greater than $100 million within the first five fiscal years of the creation or qualification of the new enterprise?[74]

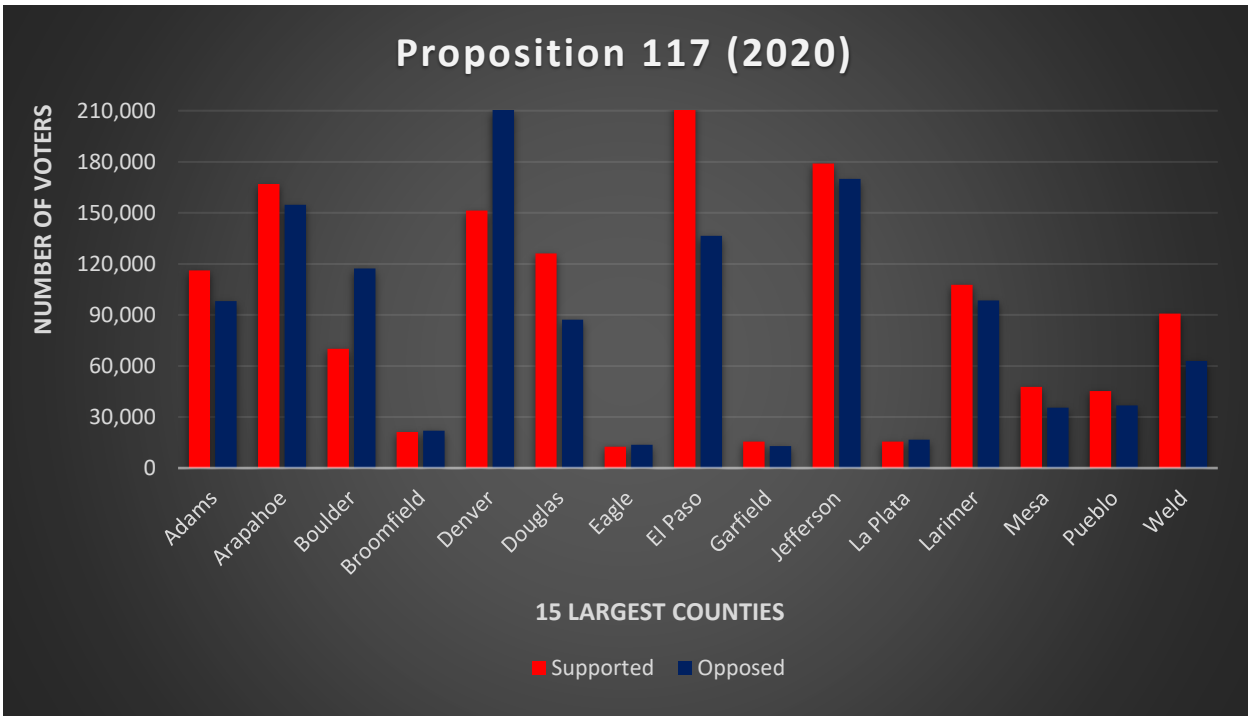

Figure A1.4. Proposition 117 – 15 Largest Counties in the 2020 Election

Figure A1.4 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for Proposition 117 within the largest counties of Colorado in the 2020.

[74] "2020 Nov 3: State of Colorado: Statutory: Proposition 117: Voter Approval for Certain New State Enterprises." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/3502/.

Proposition 120 (2021)

Shall there be a change to the Colorado Revised Statutes concerning property tax reductions, and, in connection therewith, reducing property tax revenue by an estimated $1.03 billion in 2023 and by comparable amounts thereafter by reducing the residential property tax assessment rate from 7.15% to 6.5% and reducing the property tax assessment rate for all other property, excluding producing mines and lands for leaseholds producing oil or gas, from 29% to 26.4% and allowing the state to annually retain and spend up to $25 million of excess state revenue, if any, for state fiscal year 2022-23 through 2026-27 as a voter-approved revenue change to offset lost revenue resulting from the property tax rate reductions and to reimburse local governments for revenue lost due to the homestead exemptions for qualifying seniors and disabled veterans?"[75]

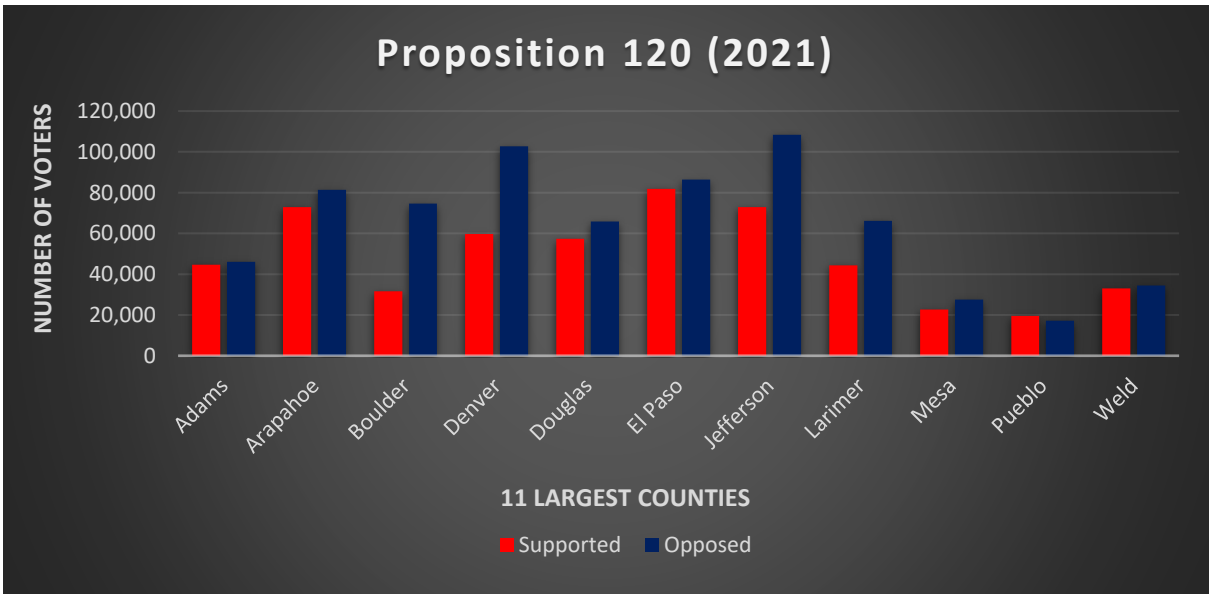

Figure A1.5. Proposition 120 – 11 Largest Counties in the 2021 Election

Figure A1.5 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for Proposition 120 within the largest counties of Colorado in the 2021 election.

[75] "2021 Nov 2: State of Colorado: Proposition 120: Statutory: Proposition 120: Property Tax Assessment Rate Reduction." State of Colorado Elections Database, https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/25366/.

Proposition HH (2023)

Shall the state reduce property taxes for homes and businesses, including expanding property tax relief for seniors, and backfill counties, water districts, fire districts, ambulance and hospital districts, and other local governments and fund school districts by using a portion of the state surplus up to the proposition HH cap as defined in this measure?"[76]

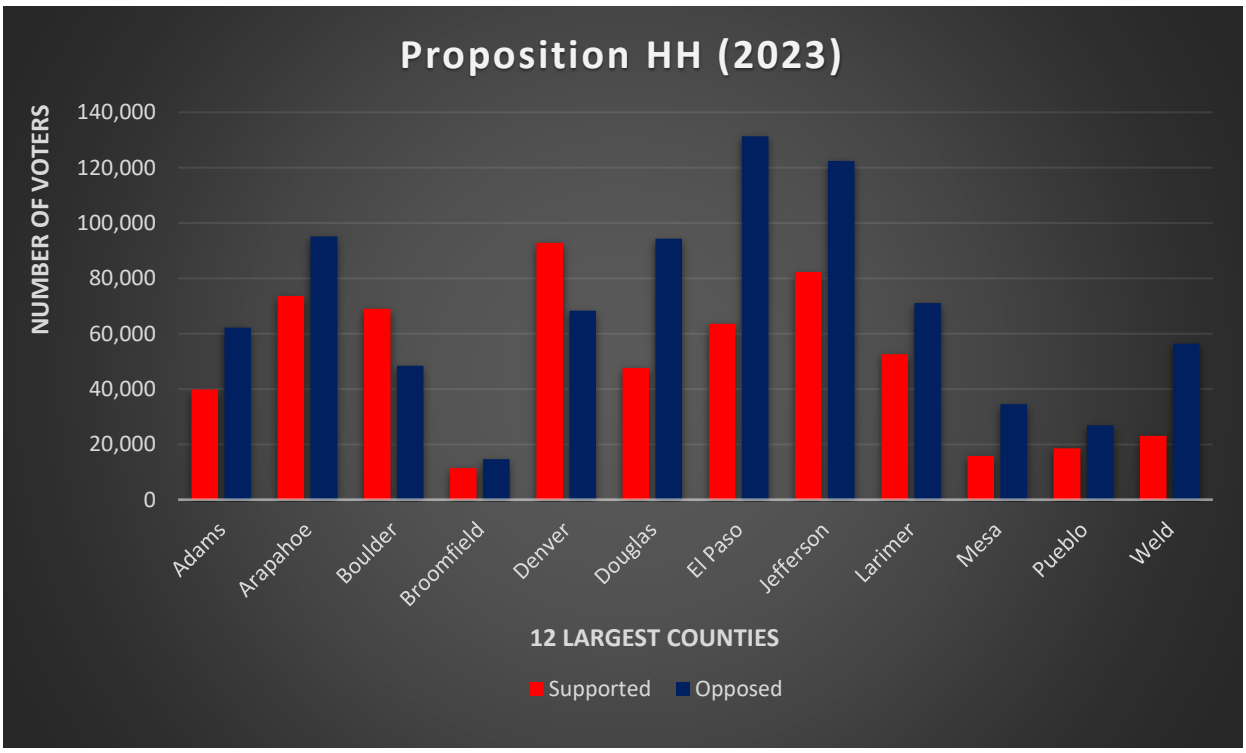

Figure A1.6. Proposition HH – 12 Largest Counties in the 2023 Election

Figure A1.6 depicts the voters' political support and opposition for Proposition HH within the largest counties of Colorado in the 2023 election.

[76] "2023 Nov 7: State of Colorado: Statutory: Proposition HH." State of Colorado Elections Database, n.d. https://historicalelectiondata.coloradosos.gov/eng/ballot_questions/view/25991/.

Appendix 2.

Exit Polls: Testing Saliency[77]

November 4, 1986: CBS News/New York Times Poll – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 4, 1986: CBS News Poll – Alabama, Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington Election Day Surveys

U.S. Saliency Question D: "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For U.S. House? (Check Up To Two Boxes)"

U.S. Answer Choices: (1) Competition From Foreign Goods, (2) Controlling Federal Spending, (3) Nuclear or Toxic wastes, (4) Helping the Poor, (5) Defense/Arms Control, (6) Social Security, (7) The Economy, (8) Family Values, and (9) Illegal Drugs.

Colorado, Oregon, & Washington Saliency Question D: "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For U.S. Senate? (Check up to Two Boxes)"

Colorado Answer Choices: (1) Defense/Arms Control, 2) Social Security, (3) Competition from Foreign Goods, (4) Controlling Federal Spending, (5) Family Values, (6) Environmental Problems, (7) Condition of the Economy, and (8) Telephone Deregulation.

Oregon Answer Choices: (1) Strong National Defense, (2) Social Security, (3) Competition from Foreign Goods, (4) Controlling Federal Spending, (5) Family Values, (6) Nuclear Wastes, (7) Condition of the Economy, and (8) Illegal Drugs.

Washington Answer Choices: (1) Defense/Arms Control, (2) Social Security, (3) Competition from Foreign Goods, (4) Controlling Federal Spending, (5) Family Values, (6) Nuclear Waste Disposal, (7) Condition of the Economy, and (8) Helping the Poor.

[77] Exit Polls | Roper Center.

U.S. Sample Size: 8,994	U.S. – The Economy: 2,561 / 13,088 = 19.57%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,233	Colorado – Condition of the Economy: 257 / 1,398 = 18.38%
Oregon Sample Size: 790	Oregon – Condition of the Economy: 210 / 842 = 24.94%
Washington Sample Size: 935	Washington – Condition of the Economy: 148 / 1,112 = 13.31%
	U.S. – Controlling Federal Spending: 2,596 / 13,088 = 19.83%
	Colorado – Controlling Federal Spending: 281 / 1,398 = 20.10%
	Oregon – Controlling Federal Spending: 198 / 842 = 23.52%
	Washington – Controlling Federal Spending: 161 / 1,112 = 14.48%

Colorado, Nevada, Oregon, Pennsylvania, & Texas Saliency Question I, I, I, I, & D: "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Governor? (Check up to Two Boxes)"

Colorado Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Not Too Extreme, (4) Environmental Policies, (5) Taxing and Spending Policies, (6) Leadership and Management Ability, (7) Character and Moral Values, and (8) The Condition of the Economy.

Nevada Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Candidate's Sex, (4) Handling Nuclear Waste, (5) Taxing and Spending Policies, (6) Leadership and Management, (7) Character and Moral Values, and (8) Nevada's Economy.

Oregon Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Cares About My Part of Oregon, (4) My Candidate's Sex, (5) Handling Environmental Problems, (6) Leadership and Management Ability, (7) Condition of the Economy, and (8) Character and Moral Values.

Pennsylvania Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Will Do More for Education, (4) His Position on Abortion, (5) Condition of the Economy, (6) Taxing and Spending Policies, (7) Leadership and Management Ability, and (8) His Character and Moral Values.

Texas Answer Choices: (1) State Budget Deficit, (2) Education Policies, (3) Jobs and the Texas Economy, (4) State Taxes, (5) Oil and Gas Policies, (6) Agricultural Problems, (7) Helping Poor People, and (8) Dealing with Immigrants.

Alabama & Arizona Saliency Question I: "Which Factors Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Governor? (Check up to Two Boxes)"

Arizona Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Not Too Extreme, (4) Candidate's Sex, (5) Taxing and Spending Policies, (6) Leadership and Management Ability, (7) Character and Moral Values, (8) The Condition of the Economy, and (9) I Don't Like the Other Candidates.

Alabama Answer Choices: (1) Past Performance, (2) My Party's Candidate, (3) Not Too Extreme, (4) Handling of Democratic Primary, (5) Taxing and Spending Policies, (6) Leadership and Management Ability, (7) Character and Moral Values, and (8) Alabama's Economy.

Illinois Saliency Question I: "Which Factors Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted In The Governor's Election? (Check up to Two Boxes)"

Illinois Answer Choices: (1) My Party's Candidate, (2) Past Performance, (3) Leadership and Management Ability, (4) The Illinois Economy, (5) Cares About People Like Me, (6) The Democratic Primary, (7) Taxing and Spending Policies, (8) Education, and (9) I Don't Like the Other Candidates.

Colorado Sample Size: 1,233	Colorado – Condition of the Economy: 152 / 1,458 = 10.43%
Texas Sample Size: 1,481	Texas – Jobs and the Texas Economy: 330 / 1,408 = 23.44%
Oregon Sample Size: 790	Oregon – Condition of the Economy: 130 / 1,015 = 12.81%
	Colorado – Taxing and Spending Policies: 180 / 1,458 = 12.35%
Pennsylvania Sample Size: 1,407	Pennsylvania – Taxing and Spending Policies: 145 / 1,343 = 10.80%
Arizona Sample Size: 1,107	Arizona – Taxing and Spending Policies: 101 / 1,433 = 7.05%
Nevada Sample Size: 1,048	Nevada – Taxing and Spending Policies: 94 / 1,414 = 6.65%
Alabama Sample Size: 1,300	Alabama – Taxing and Spending Policies: 95 / 1,626 = 5.84%
Illinois Sample Size: 1,088	Illinois – Taxing and Spending Policies: 44 / 901 = 4.88%

November 6, 1990: Voter Research & Surveys (Survey Sponsors – ABC News; CBS News; NBC News; and CNN) – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 6, 1990: Voter Research & Surveys – Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Oregon, and Texas Election Day Exit Polls

U.S. Saliency Question E: "Which 1 or 2 Issues Mattered Most When You Voted Today For Congress:"

U.S. Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Education, (3) Crime/drugs, (4) Federal budget deficit plan, (5) Abortion, (6) Federal taxes, (7) Iraq/Persian Gulf, (8) Savings & Loan, and (9) National economy.

Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, & Oregon Saliency Question D: "Which 1 Or 2 Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Senator?"

Colorado Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Education, (3) Nuclear power, (4) Abortion, (5) Federal budget deficit plan, (6) Savings & Loan, (7) Defense spending, (8) Iraq/Persian Gulf, and (9) National economy.

Illinois Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Education, (3) Crime/drugs, (4) Abortion, (5) Federal budget deficit plan, (6) Savings & Loan, (7) Iraq/Persian Gulf, (8) Federal taxes, and (9) National economy.

Iowa Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Crime/drugs, (3) Energy supply, (4) Savings & Loan, (5) Federal budget deficit plan, (6) Abortion, (7) Federal taxes, (8) Iraq/Persian Gulf, and (9) National economy.

Kentucky Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Health care, (3) Defense spending, (4) Abortion, (5) Federal budget deficit plan, (6) Savings & Loan, (7) Federal taxes, (8) Iraq/Persian Gulf, and (9) National economy.

Oregon Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Iraq/Persian Gulf, (3) Savings & Loan, (4) Jobs, (5) Federal budget deficit plan, (6) Abortion, (7) Federal taxes, (8) Timber industry, and (9) National economy.

Texas Saliency Question D: "Which 1 Or 2 Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Governor?"

Texas Answer Choices: (1) Education, (2) Ethics, (3) Gun control, (4) Abortion, (5) Savings & Loan, (6) Insurance reform, (7) Crime/drugs, (8) States taxes, and (9) State economy.

U.S. Sample Size: 19,888	U.S. – National Economy: 1,521 / 31,594 = 4.81%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,557	Colorado – National Economy: 314 / 2,194 = 14.31%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,029	Oregon – National Economy: 181 / 1,485 = 12.19%
Texas Sample Size: 2,832	Texas – State Economy: 464 / 4,026 = 11.53%
	U.S. – Federal budget deficit plan: 4,100 / 31,594 = 12.98%
	Colorado – Federal budget deficit plan: 385 / 2,194 = 17.55%
	Oregon – Federal budget deficit plan: 214 / 1,485 = 14.41%
	U.S. – Savings & Loan: 439 / 31,594 = 1.39%
	Colorado – Savings & Loan: 171 / 2,194 = 7.79%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,029	Oregon – Savings & Loan: 92 / 1,485 = 6.20%
Illinois Sample Size: 3,144	Illinois – Savings & Loan: 271 / 4,481 = 6.05%
Iowa Sample Size: 1,781	Iowa – Savings & Loan: 135 / 2,606 = 5.18%
Kentucky Sample Size: 1,345	Kentucky – Savings & Loan: 77 / 1,732 = 4.45%
Texas Sample Size: 2,832	Texas – Savings & Loan: 105 / 4,026 = 2.61%

November 3, 1992: Voter Research & Surveys – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 3, 1992: Voter Research & Surveys – California and Colorado Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., California, & Colorado Saliency Question S, P, & J: "When A Choice Has To Be Made, Which Should Be Of Higher Priority?"

U.S. & California Answer Choices: (1) Protecting the environment or (2) Encouraging economic growth.

Colorado Answer Choices: (1) Protecting the environment or (2) Stimulating economic growth.

U.S. Sample Size: 15,490	U.S. – Economic Growth: 1,330 / 2,721 = 48.88%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,197	Colorado – Economic Growth: 592 / 963 = 61.47%
California Sample Size: 2,296	California – Economic Growth: 376 / 694 = 54.18%

November 5, 1996: Voter News Service (VNS is an association of ABC News, CNN, CBS News, FOX News, NBC News and the Associated Press) – National Exit Poll
November 5, 1996: Voter News Service – Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, and Washington State Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, & Washington Saliency Question D: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for President?"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Taxes, (2) Medicare/Social Security, (3) Foreign Policy, (4) Federal Budget Deficit, (5) Economy/Jobs, (6) Education, and (7) Crime/Drugs.

U.S. Sample Size: 16,637
Colorado Sample Size: 1,266
Maine Sample Size: 1,444
Texas Sample Size: 2,423
Oregon Sample Size: 1,737
Washington Sample Size: 1,895

U.S. – Economy/Jobs: 26%
Colorado – Economy/Jobs: 194 / 867 = 22.38%
Maine – Economy/Jobs: 334 / 1,174 = 28.45%
Texas – Economy/Jobs: 422 / 1,578 = 26.74%
Oregon – Economy/Jobs: 315 / 1,235 = 25.51%
Washington – Economy/Jobs: 338 / 1,467 = 23.04%

U.S. – Taxes: 14%
Colorado – Taxes: 219 / 867 = 25.26%
Texas – Taxes: 310 / 1,578 = 19.65%
Oregon – Taxes: 239 / 1,235 = 19.35%
Washington – Taxes: 278 / 1,467 = 18.95%
Maine – Taxes: 198 / 1,174 = 16.87%

U.S. – Federal budget deficit: 15%
Colorado – Federal budget deficit: 118 / 867 = 13.61%
Washington – Federal budget deficit: 224 / 1,467 = 15.27%
Texas – Federal budget deficit: 193 / 1,578 = 12.23%
Oregon – Federal budget deficit: 146 / 1,235 = 11.82%
Maine – Federal budget deficit: 137 / 1,174 = 11.67%

November 3, 1998: VNS – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 3, 1998: VNS – Colorado, Texas, and Washington State Election Day Exit Polls

U.S. Saliency Question K: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for U.S. House? (Check only one)"

U.S. Answer Choices: (1) Education, (2) Taxes, (3) Clinton/Lewinsky, (4) Social Security, (5) Health care, (6) Moral/Ethical, and (7) Economy/Jobs.

Colorado & Washington Saliency Question D: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for U.S. Senator? (Check only one)"

Colorado Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Health care, (3) Social Security, (4) The Clinton/Lewinsky matter, (5) Abortion, (6) Taxes, and (7) Education.

Washington Answer Choices: (1) Environment, (2) Social Security, (3) International trade, (4) The Clinton/Lewinsky matter, (5) Taxes, (6) Education, and (7) Economy/Jobs.

Texas Saliency Question D: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for Governor? (Check only one)"

Texas Answer Choices: (1) International trade, (2) Welfare, (3) State budget surplus, (4) Crime/Drugs, (5) Taxes, (6) Education, and (7) Economy/Jobs.

U.S. Sample Size: 11,387	U.S. – Taxes: 751 / 4,988 = 15.06%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,438	Colorado – Taxes: 185 / 973 = 19.01%
Washington Sample Size: 1,526	Washington – Taxes: 205 / 1,193 = 17.18%
Texas Sample Size: 1,267	Texas – Taxes: 105 / 766 = 13.71%

November 7, 2000: VNS – National Election Day Exit Poll
March 7, 2000: VNS – State Primary Election – Maine Democratic Election Day Exit Poll
March 7, 2000: VNS – State Primary Election – Maine Republican Election Day Exit Poll
March 10, 2000: VNS – State Primary Election – Colorado Democratic Election Day Exit Poll
March 10, 2000: VNS – State Primary Election – Colorado Republican Election Day Exit Poll

U.S. Saliency Question D: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president? (Check only one)"

U.S. Answer Choices: (1) World affairs, (2) Medicare/prescription drugs, (3) Health care, (4) Economy/Jobs, (5) Taxes, (6) Education, and (7) Social Security.

Colorado Democratic & Maine Democratic Saliency Question E: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted? (Check only one)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Campaign finance reform, (2) Race relations, (3) Social Security/Medicare, (4) Education, (5) Health care, (6) Abortion, and (7) Economy/Jobs.

Colorado Republican and Maine Republican Saliency Question D: "Which one issue mattered most in deciding how you voted? (Check only one)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) World affairs, (2) Campaign finance reform, (3) Abortion, (4) Social Security/Medicare, (5) Moral values, (6) Taxes, and (7) Education.

U.S. Sample Size: 13,225	U.S. – Economy/Jobs: 1,271 / 5,785 = 21.97%
CO Democratic Sample Size: 362	CO Democratic – Economy/Jobs: 64 / 303 = 21.12%
ME Democratic Sample Size: 760	ME Democratic – Economy/Jobs: 106 / 634 = 16.72%

U.S. Sample Size: 13,225	US – Taxes: 893 / 5,785 = 15.44%
CO Republican Sample Size: 889	CO Republican – Taxes: 142 / 792 = 17.93%
ME Republican Sample Size: 987	ME Republican – Taxes: 105 / 889 = 11.81%

November 2, 2004: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
October 22-31, 2004: National Election Pool – Oregon Election Day Exit Poll
November 2, 2004: National Election Pool – Colorado, Maine, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, Maine, Oregon, & Washington Same Saliency Question E, L, H, (B)3, & L: "Which ONE issue mattered most in deciding how you voted for president? (Check only one)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Taxes, (2) Education, (3) Iraq, (4) Terrorism, (5) Economy/Jobs, (6) Moral values, and (7) Health care.

U.S. Sample Size: 13,719
Colorado Sample Size: 2,576
Oregon Sample Size: 1,086
Maine Sample Size: 1,992
Washington Sample Size: 2,201

U.S. – Economy/Jobs: 1,460 / 6,503 = 22.45%
Colorado – Economy/Jobs: 419 / 2,248 = 18.64%
Oregon – Economy/Jobs: 200 / 948 = 21.10%
Maine – Economy/Jobs: 349 / 1,762 = 19.81%
Washington – Economy/Jobs: 361 / 1,963 = 18.39%

U.S. – Taxes: 355 / 6,503 = 5.46%
Colorado – Taxes: 116 / 2,248 = 5.16%
Maine – Taxes: 121 / 1,762 = 6.87%
Washington – Taxes: 77 / 1,963 = 3.92%
Oregon – Taxes: 34 / 948 = 3.59%

November 4, 2008: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 4, 2008: National Election Pool – Maine and Texas Election Day Exit Polls
October 24, 2008-November 2, 2008 – Colorado, Oregon, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Maine, & Texas Saliency Question O, M, & K: "Which ONE of these five issues is the most important facing the country? (CHECK ONLY ONE)"

Colorado, Oregon, & Washington Saliency Question (VP)C4: "Which ONE of the following five issues is the most important facing the country?"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Energy policy, (2) The war in Iraq, (3) The economy, (4) Terrorism, and (5) Health care.

U.S. Sample Size: 18,018	U.S. – The Economy: 5,483 / 8,445 = 64.93%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,295	Colorado – The Economy: 668 / 1,190 = 56.13%
Washington Sample Size: 1,328	Washington – The Economy: 726 / 1,223 = 59.36%
Maine Sample Size: 1,578	Maine – The Economy: 864 / 1,460 = 59.18%
Texas Sample Size: 2,131	Texas – The Economy: 973 / 1,677 = 58.02%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,279	Oregon – The Economy: 669 / 1,209 = 55.33%

November 2, 2010: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll and Texas Election Day Poll
October 22-31, 2010: National Election Pool – Colorado, Oregon, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S. & Texas Question K & L: "Which ONE of these four issues is the most important facing the country? (CHECK ONLY ONE)"

Colorado, Oregon, & Washington Saliency Question H, F, & G: "Which ONE of following four issues is the most important facing the country?"

Same Answer Choices: (1) The war in Afghanistan, (2) Health care, (3) The economy, and (4) Illegal immigration.

Colorado, Oregon, & Washington Saliency Question P, M, & N: "Which ONE of the following should be the highest priority for the next Congress?"

U.S. & Texas Saliency Question Q & K: "Which should be the highest priority for the next Congress?"

U.S., Colorado, Oregon, Texas, & Washington Same Answer Choices: (1) Cutting taxes, (2) Reducing the budget deficit, and (3) Spending to create jobs.

U.S. Sample Size: 18,132
Colorado Sample Size: 1,095
Washington Sample Size: 1,131
Oregon Sample Size: 1,089
Texas Sample Size: 2,742

U.S. – The Economy: 5,766 / 8,716 = 66.15%
Colorado – The Economy: 735 / 1,016 = 72.34%
Washington – The Economy: 737 / 1,030 = 71.55%
Oregon – The Economy: 687 / 1,007 = 68.22%
Texas – The Economy: 815 / 1,302 = 62.60%

U.S. – Cutting taxes: 847 / 4,235 = 20.00%
Colorado – Cutting taxes: 173 / 979 = 17.67%
Texas – Cutting taxes: 251 / 1,087 = 23.09%
Washington – Cutting taxes: 164 / 994 = 16.50%
Oregon – Cutting taxes: 159 / 964 = 16.49%

U.S. – Reducing the budget deficit: 1,806 / 4,235 = 42.64%
Colorado – Reducing the budget deficit: 462 / 979 = 47.19%
Washington – Reducing the budget deficit: 445 / 994 = 44.77%
Oregon – Reducing the budget deficit: 430 / 964 = 44.61%
Texas – Reducing the budget deficit: 447 / 1,087 = 41.12%

U.S. – Spending to create jobs: 1,582 / 4,235 = 37.36%
Colorado – Spending to create jobs: 344 / 979 = 35.14%
Oregon – Spending to create jobs: 375 / 964 = 38.90%
Washington – Spending to create jobs: 385 / 994 = 38.73%
Texas – Spending to create jobs: 389 / 1,087 = 35.79%

November 6, 2012: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 6, 2012: National Election Pool – Colorado, Maine, Oregon, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, Maine, Oregon, & Washington Saliency Question K, M, K, M, & N: "Which ONE of these four issues is the most important facing the country? (CHECK ONLY ONE)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Foreign policy, (2) Federal budget deficit, (3) The economy, and (4) Health care.

U.S. Sample Size: 26,872	U.S. – The Economy: 6,498 / 10,595 = 61.33%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,070	Colorado – The Economy: 537 / 935 = 57.43%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,525	Oregon – The Economy: 793 / 1,383 = 57.34%
Maine Sample Size: 2,310	Maine – The Economy: 1,195 / 2,097 = 56.99%
Washington Sample Size: 1,493	Washington – The Economy: 742 / 1,317 = 56.34%
	U.S. – Federal budget deficit: 1,609 / 10,595: 15.19%
	Colorado – Federal budget deficit: 165 / 935 = 17.65%
	Washington – Federal budget deficit: 243 / 1,317 = 18.45%
	Oregon – Federal budget deficit: 241 / 1,383 = 17.43%
	Maine – Federal budget deficit: 319 / 2,097 = 15.21%

November 4, 2014: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 4, 2014: National Election Pool – Colorado and Oregon Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, & Oregon Saliency Question J, K, & K: "Which ONE of these four issues is the most important facing the country? (CHECK ONLY ONE)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Foreign policy, (2) Health care, (3) The economy, and (4) Illegal immigration.

U.S.: Sample Size: 20,168	U.S. – The Economy: 3,604 / 7,664 = 47.03%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,059	Colorado – The Economy: 361 / 893 = 40.43%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,038	Oregon – The Economy: 377 / 901 = 41.84%

November 8, 2016: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
November 8, 2016: National Election Pool – Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, & Washington Saliency Question K, C6, K, C6, K, & C6: "Which ONE of these four issues is the most important facing the country? (Check only one)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Foreign policy, (2) Immigration, (3) The economy, and (4) Terrorism.

U.S. Sample Size: 25,034	U.S. – The Economy: 5,335 / 9,481 = 56.37%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,383	Colorado – The Economy: 658 / 1,223 = 53.80%
Oregon Sample Size: 1,169	Oregon – The Economy: 568 / 1,017 = 55.85%
Washington Sample Size: 1,069	Washington – The Economy: 453 / 843 = 53.74%
Texas Sample Size: 2,840	Texas – The Economy: 671 / 1,254 = 53.51%
Maine Sample Size: 2,142	Maine – The Economy: 1,018 / 1,922 = 52.97%

October 13, 2020: November 3, 2020: National Election Pool – National Election Day Exit Poll
October 13, 2020: November 3, 2020: Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, and Washington Election Day Exit Polls

U.S., Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Texas, & Washington Same Saliency Question J, L, I, C4, & J: "Which one of these five issues mattered most in deciding how you voted for president? (CHECK ONLY ONE)"

Same Answer Choices: (1) Racial inequality, (2) The coronavirus pandemic, (3) The economy (4) Crime and safety, and (5) Health care policy.

U.S.: Sample Size: 15,351	U.S. – The Economy: 1,418 / 3,558 = 39.85%
Colorado Sample Size: 1,722	Colorado – The Economy: 472 / 1,467 = 32.17%
Texas Sample Size: 4,817	Texas – The Economy: 834 / 2,046 = 40.76%
Maine Sample Size: 1,439	Maine – The Economy: 256 / 646 = 39.63%
Washington Sample Size: 741	Washington – The Economy: 172 / 565 = 30.44%
Oregon Sample Size: 682	Oregon – The Economy: 172 / 569 = 30.23%

Appendix 3.

Evaluating the Saliency of Fiscal Issues to Coloradans

The following figures detail the data used to evaluate the saliency of fiscal issues to Coloradans in the 1986, 1990, and 1992 elections. All data was gathered from the Roper Center database on exit polls.[78]

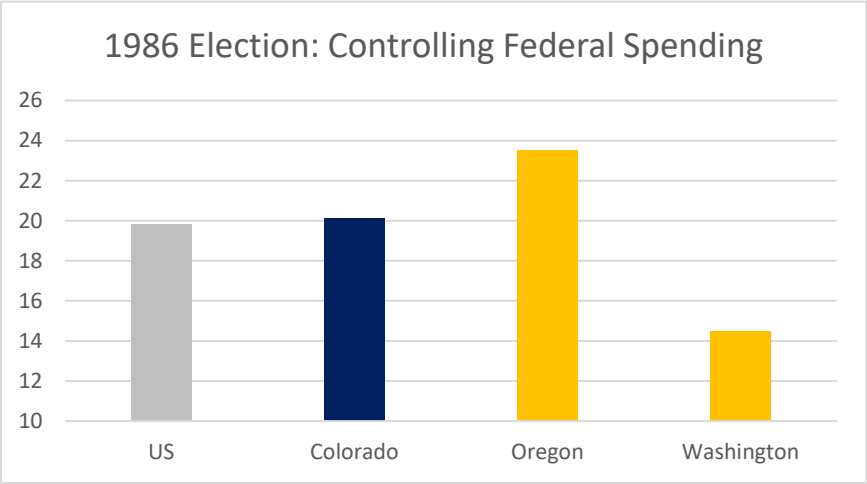

Figure A3.1. Saliency of Controlling Federal Spending in the 1986 Election

Figure A3.1 shows the percentage of answer choices chosen by respondents who answered the exit poll question "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For…? (Check up to two boxes)" as "Controlling Federal Spending." The sample sizes for the U.S., Colorado, Oregon, and Washington were 8,994; 1,233; 790; and 935, respectively.

[78] Exit Polls | Roper Center.

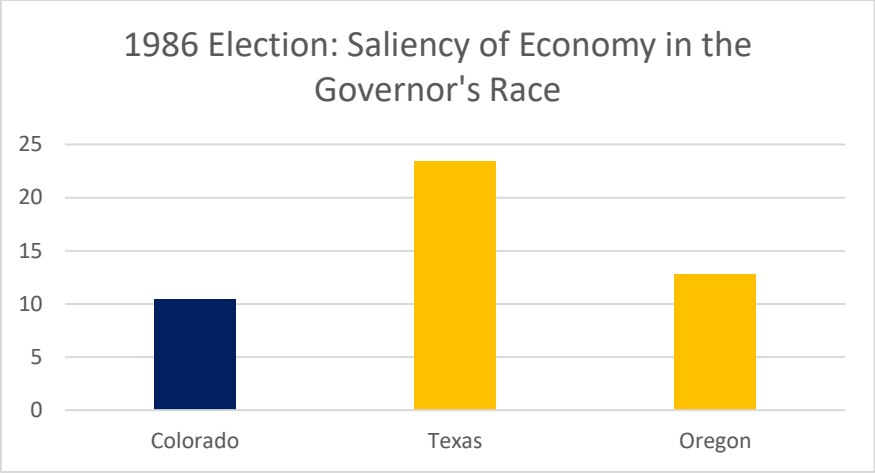

Figure A3.2. Saliency of Economy in the Governor's Race

Figure A3.2 shows the percentage of answer choices chosen by respondents who answered the exit poll question "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Governor?" with an option related to the economy. The sample sizes for Colorado, Texas, and Oregon were 1,233; 1,481; and 790, respectively.

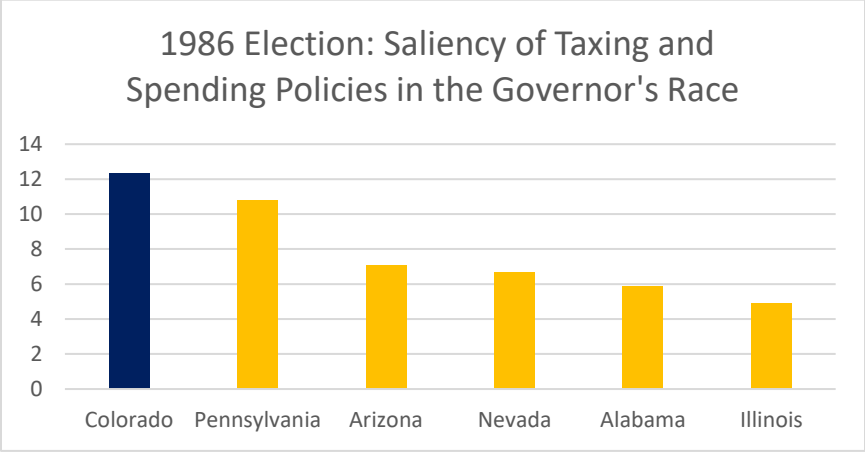

Figure A3.3. Saliency of Taxing and Spending Policies in the Governor's Race

Figure A3.3 shows the percentage of answer choices chosen by respondents who answered the exit poll question "Which Issues Mattered Most In Deciding How You Voted For Governor?" with an option related to prioritizing taxing and spending policies in the Governor's race. The sample sizes for Colorado, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Nevada, Alabama, and Illinois were 1,233; 1,407; 1,107; 1,048; 1,300; and 1,088, respectively.

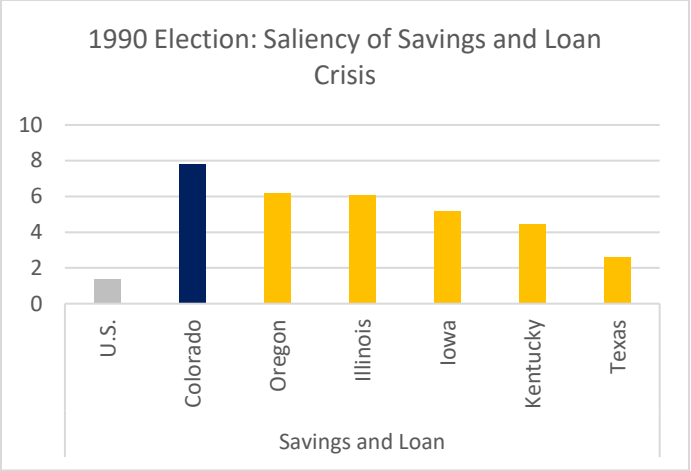

Figure A3.4. Saliency of the Savings and Loan Crisis

Figure A3.4 shows the percentage of answer choices chosen by respondents who answered exit poll questions about which 1 or 2 issues mattered most in deciding how they voted with an option related to the savings and loan crisis. The sample sizes for the U.S., Colorado, Oregon, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, and Texas were 19,888; 1,557; 1,029; 1,088; 1,781; 1,345; and 2,832, respectively.

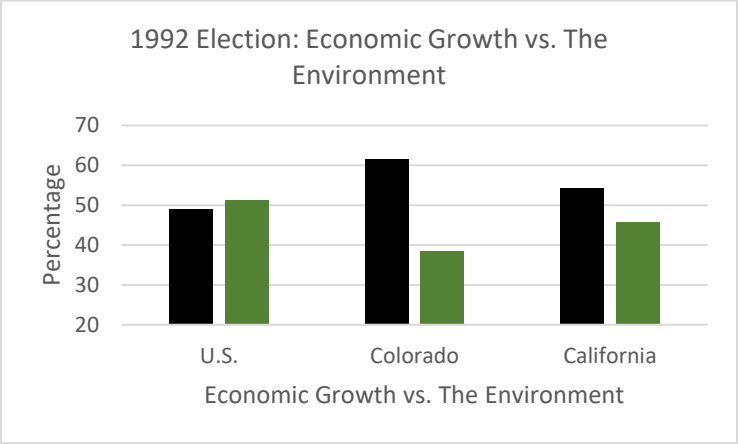

Figure A3.5. Economic Growth vs. the Environment

Figure A3.5 shows the percentage of answer choices chosen by respondents who answered the exit poll question "When A Choice Has To Be Made, Which Should Be Of Higher Priority?" between 1) the environment or 2) economic growth. The sample sizes for the U.S., Colorado, and California were 15,490; 1,197; and 2,296, respectively.

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