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INTRODUCTION

State of Change: Colorado Politics in the Twenty-First Century

Courtenay W. Daum, Robert J. Duffy, Kyle Saunders, and John A. Straayer

Over the past several decades, Colorado's political landscape has changed in many ways and in dramatic fashion. This volume identifies and focuses on these changes and seeks to provide some explanations for these shifts by placing them within the larger context of national and regional politics and shifting demographic and partisan patterns in Colorado. These developments include a shift within the Republican Party that led to the end of its dominance in most state and congressional elections, as well as increased use of direct democracy that has resulted in the implementation of term limits, significant changes in fiscal policy, major diminishment of state and local governments' taxing and spending authority, and a variety of unintended consequences of the initiative process. The result is a political landscape in the early twenty-first century that is drastically different from the Colorado politics of a few decades ago. This volume will use these changes as a starting point to present a variety of perspectives on Colorado's recent political evolution.

CONTEXT OF COLORADO ELECTIONS

In 1876 Colorado was admitted to the Union as the thirty-eighth state, and it is known as the Centennial State because its admission coincided with the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Similar to constitutions in other states, the Colorado Constitution provides for a three-branch state government that includes an executive branch, a two-house legislature, and a state judiciary (Colorado Constitution, Article III). The governor, thirty-five members of the state senate, and sixty-five members of the state house are elected by the citizens of Colorado, whereas members of the Colorado courts are selected through a hybrid appointment-election system. Judges on the Colorado Supreme Court, the Colorado Appeals Court, district courts, and county courts are initially nominated by nominating commissions and appointed by the governor to serve a provisional two-year term (Lorch 2003: 179). At the conclusion of the provisional term, the justice or judge may run for election on a noncompetitive ballot that asks simply whether the individual should be retained in office; if the public approves, he or she will serve a full term with the option of running for reelection until he or she reaches the mandatory retirement age of seventy-two (Lorch 2003: 180–181).

Yet Colorado's unique history and location have combined to influence the state government and elections in ways that are distinct from other states. For example, Colorado's geography—within the state's borders the eastern plains meet the Rocky Mountains—and abundant natural resources have affected the state's economic and political development.

Historically, the state's natural beauty and abundant natural resources have attracted individuals from out of state as both new residents and tourists; in fact, a majority of Colorado residents are natives of other states (National Journal 2010). The election of Bill Ritter as Colorado governor in 2006 was the first time a native Coloradan had been elected governor in more than thirty-five years. According to the *National Journal*:

Colorado has been reshaped, economically and politically, by its successive waves of newcomers. The conservative and boosterish Colorado of the 1960s was transformed in the 1970s by a wave of young liberal migrants who swept the state's politics by calling for environmental protections and slow growth . . . Then, in the 1990s, a new wave of migrants—tech-savvy, family-oriented cultural conservatives looking for an environment to prosper—moved Colorado's politics to the right . . . Both of these politically divergent communities have some reason to believe that they exemplify the state. Colorado elections can be viewed as contests to determine which one does. (National Journal 2010)

Early settlers migrated to Colorado after gold and silver were discovered in the Rocky Mountains in the second half of the nineteenth century; for much of Colorado's history the economy was dependent on the exploitation of its natu-

ral resources in addition to its strong agricultural tradition. Today, the state's oil and natural gas resources continue to lure businesses and individuals (National Journal 2010). The same geography that provides numerous agricultural and resource extraction opportunities also enabled the development of recreational tourism—such as skiing, rafting, hiking—and real estate as important economic drivers in recent decades. The resulting tension between the “old” and “new” economies generates some interesting politics, as exemplified by the many conflicts on Colorado's western slope over energy exploration. Individuals who rely on recreational tourism to make a living, wealthy homeowners who seek to preserve their pristine environmental surroundings, and political liberals often disagree with farming and mining communities, corporate interests, and political conservatives about environmental regulations and policies and what constitutes appropriate stewardship of Colorado's natural resources and environs (National Journal 2010). These disagreements have contributed to the fluidity in Colorado politics since the 1960s.

In recent decades Colorado, like many other states, has experienced a great deal of anti-tax fervor, which has exacerbated the state's revenue problems and added additional nuances to Colorado electoral politics and governance. These anti-tax tendencies now influence Colorado politics and policy in myriad ways. For example, a University of Colorado–Denver study noted that while Colorado ranked “49th out of 50 states in state taxes paid as a percentage of income, and 44th in state and local taxes combined,” with respect to expenditures per \$1,000 in personal income, “in 2009 the state ranked 48th in K–12 education, 48th in higher education, and 49th in Medicaid” (Fermanich 2001: i–ii).

The state constitution granted the state government few taxing powers, relying instead on a decentralized local government tax system. As a result, although state taxes are low, Colorado does have relatively high local taxes, notably local property and sales taxes. Colorado ranked twelfth nationally for local taxes (\$48.09 per \$1,000 in income) in FY 2005–2006. Local sales taxes in Colorado are especially high, ranking second in the nation (Kirk 2009). In short, the state's local governments have an easier time generating revenue than the state government, despite the state's relative prosperity. The anti-tax fervor that has dominated state politics in the last twenty years has only exacerbated the state's revenue problems and added nuances to Colorado electoral politics and governing within the state.

PARTY BALANCE: A RED STATE BEGINS TO TURN BLUE?

During the more than 110 years since 1900, two-party politics in Colorado has been remarkably balanced. There have been extended periods when one party held the upper hand, to be sure, but the big picture is one of considerable party balance. That being said, during the last four decades of the twentieth

TABLE 0.1. Winners of Colorado statewide elective offices and legislature control, 1970–2008

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Governor</i> | <i>Attorney General</i> | <i>Secretary of State</i> | <i>Treasurer</i> | <i>HR Majority</i> | <i>Senate Majority</i> |
|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|
| 2008 | No election | No election | No election | No election | Democrat | Democrat |
| 2006 | Ritter-D | Suthers-R | Dennis/ Coffman-R | Kennedy-D | Democrat | Democrat |
| 2002 | Owens-R | Salazar-D | Davidson-R | Coffman-R | Republican | Republican |
| 1998 | Owens-R | Salazar-D | Davidson-R | Coffman-R | Republican | Republican |
| 1994 | Romer-D | G. Norton-R | Buckley-R | Owens-R | Republican | Republican |
| 1990 | Romer-D | G. Norton-R | Meyer-R | Schoetler-D | Republican | Republican |
| 1986 | Romer-D | Woodard-R/D | Meyer-R | Schoetler-D | Republican | Republican |
| 1982 | Lamm-D | Woodard-R | Meyer-R | Romer-D | Republican | Republican |
| 1978 | Lamm-D | MacFarlane-D | Buchanan-R | Romer-D | Republican | Republican |
| 1974 | Lamm-D | MacFarlane-D | Buchanan-R | Brown-D | Democrat | Republican |
| 1970 | Love-R | Dunbar/ Moore-R | Anderson-R | Blue-R | Republican | Republican |
| Party balance | 7-D/3-R | 4-D/6-R | 0-D/10-R | 6-D/4-R | 3-D/8-R | 2-D/9-R |

Source: Colorado Election Records.

century and the early years of the twenty-first century, politics in Colorado generally favored the Republican Party. Republican candidates dominated elections for US president, state treasurer, attorney general, and both houses of the General Assembly. In nine of the past twelve presidential elections, Colorado’s electoral votes went to the Republican candidate. The exceptions were Lyndon Johnson in 1964, Bill Clinton in 1992, and Barack Obama in 2008. As shown in table 0.1, between 1970 and 2006 the Republican candidate won every election for secretary of state and six of the ten races for attorney general. Similarly, over a forty-year period from the mid-1960s to 2004, Republicans held the majority in both houses of the General Assembly, save for a single two-year span in each chamber.

During the period of Republican dominance, Democrats did have some successes. In the four decades between 1970 and 2010, a Democrat was governor for twenty-eight of the forty years, most notably during the twenty-four-year run of Richard Lamm and Roy Romer. (See the epilogue for a discussion of Democrat John Hickenlooper’s 2010 election.) Democrats have also had the edge in the office of state treasurer, having won six of the past ten contests. In the last several election cycles, the overall tide has turned in the Democratic Party’s favor. Whereas Colorado was a red state for most of the past thirty years, it has now become a distinct shade of purple.

TABLE 0.2. Colorado senatorial elections, 1968–2008

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Senator Elected</i> | <i>Opposing Candidate</i> |
|-------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 2008 | Udall (D) 53% | Schaffer (R) 42% |
| 2004 | Salazar (D) 51% | Coors (R) 47% |
| 2002 | Allard (R) 51% | Strickland (D) 46% |
| 1998 | Campbell (R) 62% | Lamm (D) 35% |
| 1996 | Allard (R) 51% | Strickland (D) 46% |
| 1992 | Campbell (D) 52% | Considine (R) 43% |
| 1990 | Brown (R) 56% | Heath (D) 42% |
| 1986 | Wirth (D) 50% | Kramer (R) 48% |
| 1984 | Armstrong (R) 64% | Dick (D) 35% |
| 1980 | Hart (D) 50% | Buchanan (R) 49% |
| 1978 | Armstrong (R) 59% | Haskell (D) 40% |
| 1974 | Hart (D) 57% | Dominick (R) 40% |
| 1972 | Haskell (D) 49% | Allott (R) 48% |
| 1968 | Dominick (R) 59% | McNichols (D) 41% |

Source: Colorado Secretary of State.

Note: Totals may not add up to 100%, as minor party candidates are not included; percentages rounded to nearest integer.

Regarding party fortunes in congressional races, Colorado’s US Senate elections have been competitive and rather cyclical (see table 0.2). From 1958 to 1998, one of the state’s Senate seats was held by a Democrat and the other by a Republican. The Republican Party gained control of both Senate seats in 1998 when Senator Ben “Nighthorse” Campbell switched parties and became a Republican. When Campbell retired in 2004, Democrat Ken Salazar won election to the Senate, and in 2008 Democrat Mark Udall won the state’s other Senate seat.

Colorado’s delegation to the US House of Representatives has varied dramatically over the years. The state’s rapid population growth moved it from a five-seat delegation in 1973 to a seven-seat delegation beginning with the 2003 redistricting. While Colorado did not gain another seat for the 2012 redistricting, some congressional district lines will likely change. The geography of the current congressional districts can be seen in figure 0.1; a more detailed description of each of the districts can be found in the sidebar on p.7.

Clear patterns have emerged in many of the districts: two are very safe Republican districts (the Fifth and Sixth) and two are very safe Democratic districts (the First and Second). As the sidebar on p. 7 illustrates, Colorado’s remaining three congressional seats—the Third, Fourth, and Seventh—can be deemed



0.1. Colorado’s current congressional districts. Source: Colorado Board of Education: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeboard/images/map.gif>.

“competitive.” Table 0.3 shows the election results from these three districts during the years 2002–2008.

STATEWIDE REGISTRATION TRENDS

Much of Democrats’ success in recent federal elections in Colorado can be traced to registration and turnout trends over the past decade. For four decades beginning around 1970, a clear majority of affiliated voters—roughly one-third of Colorado voters identify as unaffiliated—were Republican. As table 0.4 indicates, the Republican advantage persisted through the 1990s and into the next decade. In fact, Republicans enjoyed an advantage of nearly 180,000 voters as recently as 2004. By the 2008 presidential election, however, the two parties were at near parity, and unaffiliated voters made up the single largest bloc in the state. Currently, Democrats, Republicans, and unaffiliated voters each constitute one-third of the electorate. Much of the statewide gains for Democrats and the growth in the number of unaffiliated voters have taken place in competi-

First District (2010 Cook Partisan Voting Index¹ D+21, D 1973–present). The First District encompasses much of urban Denver and the surrounding area. Democrat Diana DeGette has held the seat since 1997; it is by far the most Democratic district in Colorado.

Second District (2010 Cook PVI: D+11; R 1973–1975, D 1975–present). The Second District encompasses the northwestern suburbs of Denver, the city of Boulder, and mountain towns such as Vail, Grand Lake, and Idaho Springs. The seat, now held by freshman Jared Polis, has been held by a Democrat since 1975.

Third District (2010 Cook PVI: R+5; D 1973–1985, 1987–1993, 2005–present, R 1985–1987, 1993–2005). The Third District is located in western and south-central Colorado and includes most of the rural western slope, including the cities of Grand Junction and Durango, as well as southern portions of Colorado’s eastern plains including the city of Pueblo. Despite its Republican tilt, the seat has been held by Democrat John Salazar since 2004.

Fourth District (2010 Cook PVI: R+6; R 1973–2009, D 2009–present). The sprawling Fourth District is located in eastern Colorado. It includes most of the state’s rural eastern plains as well as the larger cities of Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland and Longmont along Colorado’s Front Range. The seat is now held by freshman Democrat Betsy Markey, who was the first Democrat to hold the seat since 1973. Republicans who previously held this seat include former Colorado Senators Hank Brown and Wayne Allard as well as socially conservative firebrands Bob Schaffer and Marilyn Musgrave. This will likely be the most competitive congressional district in 2010.

Fifth District (2010 Cook PVI: R+14; R 1973–present). The Fifth District lies in the center of the state and encompasses Colorado Springs and surrounding areas. The Fifth District is held by Republican Doug Lamborn, who has represented the district since 2007. It is by far the most Republican district in Colorado.

Sixth District (2010 Cook PVI: R+8; R 1983–present). The Sixth District is located in central Colorado; it includes much of the southern part of metropolitan Denver and surrounding areas. The Sixth District is represented by Republican Mike Coffman, former Colorado Secretary of State. The seat has been held by a Republican since its creation after the 1980 Census.

Seventh District (2010 Cook PVI: D+4; R 2003–2007, D 2007–present). The Seventh District, the state’s most competitive, encompasses much of the northern counties surrounding Denver. The district is currently represented by Democrat Ed Perlmutter, now serving his second term.

tive congressional districts that contain urban areas, which has contributed to Democratic success in those districts.

As table 0.5 illustrates, this trend is readily apparent if we look at the registration totals in Colorado’s five largest counties. Democratic gains were most pronounced in Jefferson and Arapahoe Counties, which had been Republican-dominated; Democrats’ advantages also increased in Denver and Boulder Counties. Except for El Paso County, which is strongly Republican, Democrats added to their numbers at rates above the statewide average of 20 percent in

TABLE 0.3. Colorado house elections, 2002–2008

| Year | 3rd District | 4th District | 7th District |
|------|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| 2008 | Salazar (D) 62% Wolf (R) 38% | Markey (D) 55% Musgrave (R) 45% | Perlmutter (D) 63% Lerew (R) 37% |
| 2006 | Salazar (D) 61% Tipton (R) 37% | Musgrave (R) 46% Paccione (D) 43% | Perlmutter (D) 55% O'Donnell (R) 42% |
| 2004 | Salazar (D) 50% Walcher (R) 47% | Musgrave (R) 51% Matsunaka (D) 45% | Beauprez (R) 55% Thomas (D) 43% |
| 2002 | McInnis (R) 66% Berckefeldt (D) 31% | Musgrave (R) 55% Matsunaka (D) 42% | Beauprez (R) 47%* Feeley (D) 47% |

* Beauprez won the 7th District in 2002.

Source: Colorado Secretary of State 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008.

Note: Totals may not add up to 100%, as minor party candidates are not included; percentages rounded to nearest integer.

TABLE 0.4. Colorado voter registration trends, 1996–2008

| | Democrats | | Republicans | | Unaffiliated | | Total |
|-----------------|-----------|--------------------|-------------|--------------------|--------------|--------------------|-----------|
| | | Chg. 2004–2008 (%) | | Chg. 2004–2008 (%) | | Chg. 2004–2008 (%) | |
| 2008 | 1,051,643 | 12 | 1,063,347 | –5 | 1,069,294 | 3 | 3,184,284 |
| 2006 | 904,767 | | 1,070,190 | | 1,013,177 | | 2,988,134 |
| 2004 | 942,025 | | 1,118,597 | | 1,024,973 | | 3,085,595 |
| 2000 | 863,749 | | 1,022,019 | | 998,189 | | 2,883,957 |
| 1996 | 719,230 | | 824,222 | | 742,051 | | 2,285,503 |
| 2008 Proportion | 33.00% | | 33.40% | | 33.60% | | |

Sources: Colorado Secretary of State 2004, 2006, 2008; telephone call to secretary of state's office by Kyle Saunders, data unknown.

three of these five counties between 2002 and 2008. At the same time, the numbers of Republicans declined precipitously in four of those counties, well below the flat trend illustrated in table 0.4. Even in El Paso County, where Republicans added just over 7 percent to their rolls between 2002 and 2008, Democrats outpaced them twofold, at just over 15 percent. In sum, over the time period 2002 to 2008, Democrats gained in each of these five counties and grew by leaps and bounds in Adams, Larimer, and Weld Counties.

TABLE 0.5. Registration trends in Colorado's five largest counties, 2002–2008

| Arapahoe | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------|-----------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | Democrats | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Republicans | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Unaffiliated | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Democrats-Republicans |
| 2008 | 119,454 | 34.95 | 31.74 | 114,078 | 33.37 | -6.33 | 108,283 | 31.68 | 2.61 | 5,376 |
| 2006 | 100,476 | | | 120,179 | | | 109,109 | | | -19,703 |
| 2004 | 106,690 | | | 133,885 | | | 122,970 | | | -27,195 |
| 2002 | 90,674 | 28.52 | | 121,786 | 38.30 | | 105,526 | 33.19 | | -31,112 |
| Boulder | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Democrats | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Republicans | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Unaffiliated | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Democrats-Republicans |
| 2008 | 90,382 | 41.85 | 26.87 | 44,377 | 20.55 | -16.63 | 81,207 | 37.60 | 5.63 | 46,005 |
| 2006 | 77,481 | | | 48,311 | | | 82,633 | | | 29,170 |
| 2004 | 77,717 | | | 51,924 | | | 83,527 | | | 25,793 |
| 2002 | 71,240 | 35.38 | | 53,231 | 26.44 | | 76,878 | 38.18 | | 18,009 |
| Denver | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Democrats | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Republicans | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Unaffiliated | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Democrats-Republicans |
| 2008 | 200,988 | 48.89 | 30.32 | 71,736 | 17.45 | -8.34 | 138,386 | 33.66 | 25.58 | 129,252 |
| 2006 | 159,597 | | | 70,380 | | | 127,231 | | | 89,217 |
| 2004 | 169,584 | | | 79,074 | | | 132,115 | | | 90,510 |
| 2002 | 154,228 | 45.01 | | 78,267 | 22.84 | | 110,195 | 32.16 | | 75,961 |

continued on next page

TABLE 0.5—continued

| <i>El Paso</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|-----------|------------|-----------------|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| | Democrats | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Republicans | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Unaffiliated | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Democrats-Republicans |
| 2008 | 85,259 | 22.92 | 15.30 | 165,916 | 44.60 | 7.13 | 120,833 | 32.48 | 12.30 | -80,657 |
| 2006 | 73,478 | | | 162,934 | | | 113,052 | | | -89,456 |
| 2004 | 77,485 | | | 164,884 | | | 112,149 | | | -87,399 |
| 2002 | 73,943 | 21.98 | | 154,867 | 46.04 | | 107,599 | 31.98 | | -80,924 |
| <i>Jefferson</i> | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Democrats | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Republicans | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Unaffiliated | % of total | % chg from 2002 | Democrats-Republicans |
| 2008 | 118,114 | 32.01 | 13.66 | 127,215 | 34.48 | -9.53 | 123,615 | 33.51 | 4.64 | -9,101 |
| 2006 | 105,950 | | | 132,978 | | | 119,159 | | | -27,028 |
| 2004 | 110,016 | | | 142,925 | | | 122,213 | | | -32,909 |
| 2002 | 103,920 | 28.65 | | 140,610 | 38.77 | | 118,137 | 32.57 | | -36,690 |

Source: Colorado Secretary of State 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008.

POPULATION GROWTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

The Democratic registration gains were the result of a number of factors, including rapid population growth, demographic changes, and aggressive voter identification and registration campaigns by the party, affiliated interest groups, and candidates. These factors and others will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 2 of this volume.

Colorado's population has boomed in recent decades, increasing by 50 percent since 1990. From 2000–2009, Colorado's population grew by 16.8 percent, making it the seventh-fastest-growing state in the nation (US Census Bureau 2009a). Most of this explosive growth has been concentrated in the increasingly urbanized Front Range communities that stretch between Colorado Springs to the south and Fort Collins to the north. Just over half of the state's population resides in the Denver metropolitan area, the state's largest. Overall, the Denver area grew by 12 percent from 2000–2007, but by far the most explosive growth was in Denver's outer suburbs (Douglas, Elbert, Park, Gilpin, Clear Creek, and Broomfield Counties), which increased by nearly 42 percent, making it the state's fastest-growing region. The city of Denver and its inner suburbs (Adams, Arapahoe, and Jefferson Counties) grew at much lower rates; Colorado Springs, the state's second-largest metropolitan area, has increased by 12.8 percent since 2000; while Boulder, the third-largest, has grown by just 6.8 percent during that period. The population of the sixteen counties in the western and northern parts of the state—including the Fort Collins–Loveland, Greeley, and Grand Junction metropolitan areas—increased by 18.8 percent; this region is now home to approximately one-fifth of the state's residents (Frey and Teixeira 2008: 9–10).

Like other rapidly growing states in the region, Colorado's growth has resulted from a number of developments. About half of the total increase since 2000 was attributable to the number of births exceeding that of deaths, approximately 30 percent resulted from migration from other states, and immigration from other nations accounted for the remainder (US Census Bureau 2009b). As one might expect, the state has thus become more racially and ethnically diverse. In 1990, whites constituted nearly 81 percent of the state's population; by 2008, that figure had shrunk to 71 percent. Conversely, Hispanics increased from 12.9 percent to nearly 20 percent of the state's total population (US Census Bureau 2008). In fact, in the period 2000–2006, the state's minority population grew by 17 percent, nearly double the rate for whites. In Denver's outer suburbs, the state's fastest-growing region, the minority share of eligible voters increased by 66 percent. Moreover, the Hispanic growth rate was much higher in Denver's outer suburbs (a phenomenal 61 percent), Denver's inner suburbs (24 percent), and the state's western and northern regions (23 percent) (Frey and Teixeira 2008: 13; State of Colorado Division of Local Government 2010). In short, the

minority vote has steadily grown as a share of the state's eligible voters, while the white vote has declined.

The state's economy has changed as well over the past twenty years. Employment in agriculture and in resource extractive industries such as mining and logging has declined, while tourism, information technology, energy, health and financial services, and real estate have fueled the state's population growth (Lang, Sarzynski, and Muro 2008: 22). As a result, the state's economy is more diversified than in the past. Growth in these industries has contributed to increased demand for educated workers. Census figures (2008) show that the share of the population with at least a bachelor's degree has grown and now constitutes approximately one-third of voting-age residents. In fact, Colorado ranks fourth nationally in the percentage of the population with at least a bachelor's degree (Frey and Teixeira 2008: 5). Statewide, since 2000 the number of white college graduates has increased by 16 percent; the growth has been most pronounced in Denver's outer suburbs, the western and northern regions, and Colorado Springs (Frey and Teixeira 2008: 7). In contrast, the growth rate among the white working class has been much lower, and that group's share of eligible voters has actually declined.

Why does this matter politically? Because the state's population and demographic shifts can partially explain changes in voter registration figures and election results. Part of the reason Colorado has shifted toward the Democrats in recent years is because of rapid population growth in specific counties and demographic groups. The areas of the state that have been growing the fastest have also been experiencing the largest net registration gains for Democrats, in part because of the high growth rates for Hispanics and white college graduates in these areas. In contrast, the demographic group that has been most supportive of Republicans in recent years—white working-class voters—has declined as a share of the state's eligible voters, especially in the aforementioned counties (Frey and Teixeira 2008).

Republicans have done best in the sparsely populated counties on the eastern plains that contain less than 7 percent of the state's population. This region had the lowest population growth rate in the state during the years 2000–2007; in fact, half of the counties in this region registered population declines. Moreover, the eastern part of the state was the only region where the percentage of white working-class voters increased during that same period. According to William Frey and Ruy Teixeira (2008: 20), "One clear pattern is that a good chunk of the counties that gave the GOP big margin gains between 1988 and 2004 are also counties that are losing population . . . In fact, every shrinking county, with a couple of minor exceptions, moved sharply toward the Republicans over this time period."

The fastest-growing groups in the heavily populated and rapidly growing areas around the Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins–Loveland metropolitan

- Colorado's population is primarily concentrated in its metropolitan areas; in fact, just over half of the state's voters reside in the Denver metropolitan area. Nearly 80 percent of its estimated 5 million residents live in the rapidly growing urban corridor along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains, most within a two-hour drive of Denver.
- Areas of Democratic strength include: the City of Denver; the college towns of Fort Collins and Boulder; Pueblo; and a few western ski resort counties. The Republicans are strongest in: Colorado Springs, the headquarters of numerous Christian organizations, including Focus on the Family; some Denver suburbs; the sparsely populated rural eastern third of the state; and the rapidly growing metropolitan areas near Greeley and Grand Junction.
- The most hotly contested areas of the state are the populous suburbs surrounding Denver; many of these have trended Democratic in recent elections.
- Colorado's population has increased 50 percent since 1990; only 41.1 percent of current residents were born in state.
- The median income in Colorado is \$55,517, twelfth highest in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).
- Colorado is relatively well-educated, ranking second in percentage of college graduates (32.7 percent) (U.S. Census Bureau 2008).
- Like most states in the Mountain West, Colorado is disproportionately white (71 percent), but the rapidly growing Hispanic population now constitutes 20 percent of the state's overall population. In fact, Colorado has one of the highest proportions of Hispanic citizens of any U.S. state; only five states have a higher percentage.
- Colorado is home to a large proportion of military veterans, who constitute 14 percent of the population.
- Colorado's overall population, like many other Western states, is predominantly Christian (65 percent). Of this group, a plurality (44 percent) is Protestant, 23 percent are evangelicals, 19 percent are Catholic, and nearly one third express no religious affiliation (Pew Forum 2008, The Association of Religion Data Archives 2000). The Catholic population has increased in recent years as the Hispanic share of population has grown.
- Just 10.3 percent of the state's population is over the age of 65, ranking the state 47th nationally (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). The median age in Colorado is 35.8, making it the tenth youngest state.
- Colorado's economy is diverse, but is focused primarily on white-collar technology and energy jobs. 64.5 percent of the Colorado work force is employed in white-collar positions, while 21 percent is employed in blue collar and 14.5 percent in gray collar jobs. The public sector in Colorado is relatively small, constituting just 14 percent of the population. The most prevalent industrial sectors of Colorado's economy include professional (29 percent), trade (15 percent), and manufacturing (14 percent). Construction, finance, and agriculture also play important roles in Colorado's economy.

Source: All information, except where noted, is from Barone and Cohen's *Almanac of American Politics* 2008 on Colorado.

areas are Hispanics and white college graduates (sidebar, p. 13). These are the regions in which voter registration figures have changed dramatically in recent years, at least in part because of demographic shifts. These are also areas where Republicans used to be dominant.

There are other reasons for the shift in party control, some dating back several decades. In the mid-1970s Republican voters began sending increasingly conservative members to the state legislature. An early group of these members was self-identified as the House “crazies.” The “crazies” were libertarian in political orientation and pressed relentlessly for ever smaller government. Over several decades this cadre of conservatives grew in number, melded a taste for social and cultural conservatism with its fiscal libertarianism, and eventually dominated the Colorado Republican Party. Over time, these individuals’ growing influence became increasingly troublesome for the Republican Party, as reflected in the tension between the party’s moderate wing and conservatives who pressed for a social-cultural agenda. Primary battles within the party became nasty and damaged the political fortunes of Republican candidates in general elections. Further, as the state faced increasingly difficult budgetary problems, the fiscal stance of the party’s dominant conservative element rendered it incapable of developing a forward-looking agenda for the state.

DIRECT DEMOCRACY, FISCAL POLICY, AND MORE

Paralleling this transformation in party control has been the increasing use of Colorado’s initiative process and voter adoption of measures that have altered both the state’s policies and its institutions. Paramount among the changes produced by direct democracy are constitutional measures that have impacted state and local finances as well as term limits, especially as they have affected the General Assembly.

Colorado’s constitution has provided for the initiative, referendum, and recall since 1910. For some years following the addition of these procedures to the constitution, the initiative was employed with some frequency, but by the late 1920s its use had dropped off considerably. Then, beginning around 1970, political activists seemed to rediscover the process, and 51 percent of initiated measures have been on the ballot since that date. Every general election ballot now includes a string of citizen-initiated proposals.

Post-1970s ballot measures that have affected fiscal policy include the Gallagher Amendment, TABOR, and Amendment 23 addressing K–12 school funding. Collectively, these and other measures with less impact have made budgeting increasingly complicated and difficult. Term limits—adopted for state legislative and executive positions in 1990 and expanded to local governments in 1994—have weakened political leaders, most notably in the General Assembly.

Indeed, one might argue that the combination of popularly enacted fiscal limitations and term limits has stripped Colorado government of its republican character and pushed the lawmaking process into the hands of a 4.5 million-member committee.

This recent use of direct democracy's initiative process has diminished the authority of the state legislature, limited tenure for elected officials in the legislative and executive branches of both the state and local governments, and shifted control of fiscal policy from representative institutions to the broader public. The consequences of these changes have, in the eyes of most close observers of Colorado's government and politics, been damaging and have undermined representative government.

Perhaps in a few years, Colorado's politics will again change in significant fashion. What is clear is that Colorado politics and government today in no way resemble the Colorado of three or four decades ago. The purpose of this volume is to provide a portrait of contemporary Colorado politics and government and place it in the context of the changes that have occurred over the past several decades.

CONTENTS OF THE BOOK

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The chapters in this volume focus on several dimensions of the state's politics. Broadly, they address Colorado's apparent shift from a "red" to a "blue" state, the underlying demographic and political forces that help explain this trend, institutional changes produced by increasing use of the initiative process, and the political and institutional consequences of these myriad developments. By situating contemporary events in their historical context, the authors of each chapter are able to go beyond simply describing and analyzing the current state of affairs in favor of explanations rooted in the history of Colorado politics. In addition, this approach makes it clear that the current state of affairs analyzed and discussed by the volume's contributors is certain to change yet again.

The first five chapters examine Colorado elections. In the opening chapter, Robert Loevy paints the broad picture of Colorado's political landscape by tracking partisan shifts over time in both state and national offices. Loevy notes that, on balance, Republicans enjoyed an advantage for several decades—until 2004. Robert Duffy and Kyle Saunders's discussion of federal elections in chapter 2 shows that demographic changes and associated voter registration patterns have subsequently shifted the advantage to the Democrats; they also argue that a Republican move to the political right and a superior Democratic political strategy help explain the current Democratic dominance of Colorado's elective federal offices. In chapter 3, Seth Masket looks at the 2008 presidential race in Colorado through the lens of the state's caucus system and the Obama and Clinton campaigns' quest for Democratic delegates. Masket concludes that the

distinction between the Obama and Clinton strategies in the race for delegates is reflected in the vast differences in the number of field offices the two campaigns opened in Colorado. He calls attention to the shifting political winds nationally and the resultant national focus on the Mountain West and Colorado in particular.

In chapter 4, Daniel Smith paints a historical picture of Colorado's use of the initiative process. He describes the state's adoption of direct democracy in the Progressive Era, the impact of its use on minority citizens, and the impact of money on ballot issues. Finally, he provides an interesting look at Douglas Bruce, arguably the best-known user of the initiative in Colorado. Chapter 5, by Larimer County clerk and recorder Scott Doyle, his staff, and John Straayer, examines the logistical changes in the election system at the local level with an in-depth discussion of the development of "vote centers." Vote centers have replaced precincts as voting locations; combined with the increased use of mail balloting and opportunities for voters to submit their ballots early, they have changed campaign tactics and election day routines for local officials.

The next three chapters examine changes in the Colorado legislature. In chapter 6, John Straayer tracks more than two decades of change in the General Assembly and demonstrates how term limits have weakened leadership, increased partisanship, and stripped the legislature of its institutional and policy history; how successful citizen initiatives have removed much of the legislature's fiscal authority; and how Republican domination came to an end. In addition to term limits and successful citizen initiatives, an internal reform known as GAVEL (Give a Vote to Every Legislator) has changed the internal operation of the General Assembly. Mike Binder, Vladimir Kogan, and Thad Kousser describe and analyze the adoption and consequences of GAVEL in chapter 7. They demonstrate that GAVEL has weakened party caucuses and leadership and opened the door for "mavericks" in both parties to join forces and push legislation in a moderate direction. In chapter 8, Courtenay Daum examines the effect of term limits on the composition of the General Assembly. Contrary to expectations, term limits did not result in the election of substantially more women to the General Assembly, but the distribution of women legislators by political party did change dramatically. Daum explains that the rightward ideological migration of the Republican Party appears to have interacted with term limits to decrease the number of female Republicans, while the number of female Democrats increased significantly.

The final two chapters examine Colorado fiscal policy. In chapter 9, John Straayer analyzes the ways increased use of citizen-initiated ballot measures interacted with legislative action to produce contradictory policies and what he calls a "fiscal train wreck." Straayer concludes that current political alignments may preclude any "repair" of the system and the return of fiscal authority to the

state legislature. In contrast, chapter 10 casts state fiscal policy in a different light. Scott Moore focuses attention on two specific policy areas—the development of highway funding policy and the Great Outdoors Colorado program—to demonstrate how the “architecture” of Colorado’s fiscal policy has developed piece by piece as a result of political victories by a parade of self-interest coalitions. The result is an array of earmarked funding streams that will likely continue to proliferate in coming years.

The volume concludes with a brief epilogue by the editors that discusses and evaluates the results of the 2010 election. That election proved to be significant at both the national and state levels, and the epilogue revisits and updates many of the chapter authors’ contributions in light of these latest political and electoral developments.

This volume demonstrates that changes are afoot in Colorado politics, but this story is not over. Just as twenty-four years of Democratic control of the governorship ended with the election of Republican Bill Owens in 1998 and the forty-year Republican reign in the General Assembly ended in 2004, the events and patterns described in this volume will give way to new developments. Indeed, in the context of continued wars, deep divisions over federal spending, health care, and severe state budget problems here in Colorado, the political winds continue to swirl. The key question is whether the changes noted here have enhanced or detracted from our political institutions’ ability to address serious issues.

NOTES

1. The Cook Partisan Voting Index (CPVI), sometimes referred to simply as the Partisan Voting Index (PVI), is a measurement of how strongly an American congressional district or state leans toward one political party compared to the nation as a whole. It was developed in 1997 by Charlie Cook of the *Cook Political Report*, a nonpartisan political newsletter, working with Polidata, a political statistics analysis firm. The index for each congressional district is derived by averaging its results from the prior two presidential elections and comparing them to national results. The index indicates which party’s candidate was more successful in that district, as well as the number of percentage points by which its results exceeded the national average. The index is formatted as a letter + a number; for example, in a district whose CPVI score is R+2, recent Republican presidential candidates received 2 percentage points more votes than the national average. Likewise, a CPVI score of D+3 shows that the Democrats received 3 percentage points more votes than the national average.

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