

TO: Interested Parties
FR: Kevin Ingham, Aspect Strategic
RE: Key Findings from a Recent Colorado Poll



A newly released survey, conducted by Aspect Strategic on behalf of the State Innovation Exchange (SIX), reveals a Colorado electorate looking for bold action from state leaders to address key challenges facing the state. Further, voters signal an urgent mandate to address affordability issues, especially on housing and worker pay, and offer broad support for several key policies to address these issues. Coloradans also indicate a preference for the state to center prevention, treatment, and root causes when addressing public safety, including both crime and the opioid crisis. Finally, voters express overwhelming support for an independent commission to review and recommend the salaries of state elected officials.

Demand for Bold Action

Voters want state leaders to take bold action to address the state’s pressing challenges. This includes strong demand for action among those who are currently lukewarm towards state leaders.

- By a wide margin, voters prefer that the state government plays a more active role in addressing problems and helping Coloradans. In total, 53% say they prefer a state government that does more to help people and address problems facing the state. In contrast, only 38% say they prefer a smaller state government with lower taxes, less regulation, and less spending. (See slide 5)
- While fewer than four-in-ten are outright critical of state leaders, there are many who believe the governor and legislature could be doing better on issues they care about most. In total, 28% say state leaders are doing a *good job* addressing the issues which are most important to them, 31% give a rating of *fair*, and 38% say state leaders are doing a *bad job*. (See slide 6)
- Voters who believe there is room for the governor and legislature to improve strongly favor the state playing a more active role in addressing problems. Two-thirds (67%) of those giving state leaders a rating of *fair* say they prefer a state government that does more to help people and address problems, versus only 25% who say they prefer a smaller state government. (See slide 6)

A Mandate for Action on Affordability

There is an urgent mandate for action on affordability, especially on housing and pay. Policies like “Just Cause” and flat TABOR rebates offer broadly popular options for addressing these concerns.

- Affordability issues are the top concerns for voters across the demographic and political spectrum. A stunning 60% of voters describe themselves as “very worried” about the affordability of housing in Colorado (an additional 28% are *somewhat* worried). Similarly, a majority (52%) say they are “very worried” about jobs not paying enough for a family to afford to live in Colorado, with an additional 31% stating they are *somewhat* worried. Voters also point to concerns about the cost of healthcare: 46% say they are very worried about the affordability of healthcare and prescription drugs in Colorado (an additional 38% are somewhat concerned). (See slide 8)
- In addition to affordability, voters also have concerns about public schools and gun violence. Overall, 75% are worried about schools being underfunded and teachers being underpaid (including 42% who are very worried). Similarly, 75% say they are worried about the amount of gun violence and shootings in Colorado (39% are very worried about this). (See slide 10)

- Housing affordability and low worker pay are singled out as the most urgent problems for state leaders to address. When asked to rate a range of issues as an urgent priority, important but not urgent, or a lower priority, housing and low pay were clearly seen as the most pressing. Fifty-nine percent (59%) called housing affordability an “urgent priority” to address, while a similar number (50%) said the same of low worker pay. (See slide 14)
- Large, bipartisan majorities favor a “Just Cause” law to protect renters from eviction and keep them in their homes. Fully 61% of voters say they support a requirement that landlords can only evict a tenant or not renew their lease for certain reasons, such as lease violations, nonpayment of rent, or when a unit is taken off the market. Support extends to Democrats (70%), Republicans (58%), and Independents (56%). (See slide 17)
- By a 30-point margin, voters favor increasing the amount of money that low- and middle-income families get in their TABOR rebates, even if that means reducing the amount higher income people get in their rebates. Support is strongest among Democrats (75%) and Independents (62%), but even a sizable minority of Republicans (39%) favor flat rebates. This policy is also very popular (72% support) with households making less than \$100,000 per year, a segment of the electorate which is particularly concerned about affordability. (See slides 20-21)

Messaging on Public Safety

Public safety is always a messaging challenge for progressives. But voters are receptive to messages which concede a need for action while centering crime prevention, addiction treatment, root causes, and cracking down on dealers rather than users.

- When it comes to addressing public safety, voters prefer an approach which centers crime prevention programs with a focus on addressing the root causes of crime, like poverty and lack of opportunity. In total, 59% favored this approach, while only 38% favored increasing punishments, hiring more police, and arresting criminals to get them off the streets. Notably, intensity of opinion was tilted decidedly in favor of the progressive approach. (See slide 23)
- We observed similar trends in attitudes towards the opioid crisis. Sixty-one percent (61%) favored prioritizing addiction treatment, reducing overdoses, and focusing policing on dealers rather than users. In contrast, only 35% favored making any use and possession of fentanyl a felony while cracking down on people openly using drugs in the streets. Once again, the intensity of opinion was heavily tilted towards the progressive approach. (See slide 24)

Strong Support for an Independent State Elected Official Pay Commission

Voters of all political stripes are overwhelmingly supportive of establishing an independent commission to recommend salaries for state officials.

- More than three-quarters (77%) of Colorado voters favor establishing a citizens-only commission to review and recommend the salaries of state elected officials, including state legislators and officials like the governor. Not only is support broad, but it is also quite intense, with 38% saying they would *strongly* favor such a commission. (See slide 26)
- Moreover, supermajorities in every major demographic and political category favor establishing a pay commission. This includes Democrats (74%), Republicans (79%), Independents (78%), younger (80%) and older (72%) voters, men (80%) and women (73%), and white voters (80%) and voters of color (72%). (See slide 27)

Voters resonate strongly with messages that center on removing conflicts of interest in determining elected officials' pay. However, voters are more skeptical of messages citing low legislator salaries.

- When shown messages in favor of a pay commission, a majority (54%) said they found a conflict of interest message to be a “very convincing” reason to support a commission. This was the top-testing message among all voters, especially Independents. (See slides 29-30)
- However, the message stating that current legislator salaries are “not enough for most families to live on” performed much worse. In fact, not only was this the worst testing message in the survey, but there is also evidence that messages which signal that a pay commission would increase elected officials' salaries may weaken support for an otherwise popular concept. (See slides 31-37)

About the Survey

This analysis is based on an online survey of 500 registered voters in Colorado conducted by Aspect Strategic on behalf of State Innovation Exchange. Interviews were conducted January 2-7, 2024. The sample includes a combination of respondents sourced via SMS-to-web and web panel. The margin of error is $\pm 4.4\%$ at the 95% confidence level. The margin of error is higher for subsamples.