



TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Andrew Baumann and Nicole Jaconetty, Global Strategy Group
DATE: November 15, 2022
RE: **Colorado Exit Poll: Abortion, Trump, Election Denial, and a Strong Democratic Brand in Colorado led to CO Democrats Routing the GOP with Unaffiliateds, Voters of Color, and Suburban Women**

A Mountaineer Research exit poll from Global Strategy Group and ProgressNow Colorado shows that Colorado's Blue Tsunami was driven by multiple factors. Perhaps most important, opposition to abortion rights, excessive fealty to Trump, and overt election denial combined to convince voters that Colorado Republicans up and down the ballot were extremists who had the wrong priorities. Meanwhile, a strong Democratic brand – particularly at the top of the ticket – and the belief that Democrats had accomplished real results for regular Coloradans allowed them to hold their own on the economy and fend off GOP attacks focused on crime.

Democrats showed remarkable strength across demographics, but this rout was fueled by their ability to run up huge margins with unaffiliateds, voters of color, white college-educated voters, and white and suburban women while limiting Republican margins with white non-college voters.

The following memo, based on a survey of 800 Colorado voters, details how and why Democrats achieved their impressive 2022 victories.¹

Polis and Bennet dominated with unaffiliateds, voters of color, urban voters, and white and suburban women; younger voters came through for Democrats despite being down on Biden; and Polis picked off a substantial number of white non-college Trump voters.

Unaffiliateds were down on Biden, but they still voted for Democrats for state legislature by 17 points – and Polis and Bennet did even better. Polis demolished Ganahl, winning this key bloc two-to-one, while Bennet did nearly as well. Both statewide Democrats also hugely overperformed Biden approval with this group.

Both also ran up big margins with voters of color, suburban women, and white women, with Polis doing particularly well with the latter group. Meanwhile, voters of color and suburban women came through for legislative Democrats in a big way. Voters under 44 disapproved of Biden by a net 11 points but still preferred legislative Democrats over Republicans by 14 points – that 25-point gap was much larger than the gap with voters over 45. Similarly, younger voters showed up for Polis and Bennet.

Almost all of Polis's over-performance relative to Bennet comes from white non-college voters; but the two dominated about equally with voters of color and white college-educated voters. Bennet did well with white non-college voters, only losing them by just a point, but Polis won them by 8. Relatedly, while both Bennet and Polis picked off far more Trump voters than their opponents did Biden voters, Polis also showed more strength with Trump voters.

¹ These data were weighted on the morning of 11/14 to reflect the projected final margin of the governor, senate, and legislative ballots based on an extrapolation of margin in Denver, Boulder, and Arapahoe – where ballots remained outstanding.

DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE BY SUBGROUPS													
	Polis	Ganahl	Net	Bennet	O'Dea	Net	Net Leg	Net Biden	Polis Vs			Bennet Vs	
									Ben	Leg	Bid	Leg	Bid
All	58	38	+20	55	40	+15	+7	-7	+5	+13	+27	+8	+22
Democrats	89	7	+82	90	8	+82	+76	+74	0	+6	+8	+6	+8
Unafs/Other	64	31	+33	59	34	+25	+17	-10	+8	+16	+43	+8	+35
Republicans	15	83	-68	11	85	-74	-78	-77	+6	+10	+9	+4	+3
18-44	61	34	+27	60	36	+24	+14	-11	+3	+13	+38	+10	+35
45-64	51	44	+7	47	47	0	-4	-16	+7	+11	+23	+4	+16
65+	61	37	+24	57	38	+19	+14	+8	+5	+10	+16	+5	+11
Voters of Color	64	29	+35	63	30	+33	+21	+4	+2	+14	+31	+12	+29
White Men	51	45	+6	48	48	0	-4	-20	+6	+10	+26	+4	+20
White Women	62	35	+27	58	37	+21	+15	+2	+6	+12	+25	+6	+19
White Non-College	52	44	+8	46	47	-1	-6	-25	+9	+14	+33	+5	+24
White College	62	35	+27	61	36	+25	+18	+4	+2	+9	+23	+7	+21
Biden Voters	94	3	+91	94	3	+91	+84	+67	0	+7	+24	+7	+24
Trump Voters	11	85	-74	7	87	-80	-90	-93	+6	+16	+19	+10	+13
Urban	64	30	+34	61	33	+28	+18	+10	+6	+16	+24	+10	+18
Rural	44	52	-8	40	55	-15	-24	-33	+7	+16	+25	+9	+18
Suburban Men	52	45	+7	50	46	+4	+2	-23	+3	+5	+30	+2	+27
Suburban Women	67	31	+36	64	33	+31	+30	+10	+5	+6	+26	+1	+21

2022 saw the continued shift of white-collar metro areas away from Republicans, while Pueblo snapped back to 2016 levels for Democrats.

The table below shows the performance in gubernatorial and senate matchups going back to 2014 broken down by region. Between the last top-of-the-ticket GOP statewide win (by Gardner) in 2014 and Bennet's 6-point victory in 2016, Democrats made their biggest gains in both the white-collar suburban counties around Denver and Colorado Springs as well as in Pueblo. As is well-documented, during Trump's presidency, the gains in the white-collar Denver and Springs suburbs accelerated and Democratic base counties got even bluer, while the blue-collar, heavily Hispanic areas of Pueblo and the San Luis Valley (along with the very rural Eastern Plains) moved toward Republicans and blue-collar Adams moved a bit more toward Democrats (though not to the same extent of its white-collar neighbors).

This cycle, Bennet saw gains relative to Hickenlooper's 2020 margin everywhere, but they were largest in Pueblo, the Western Slope, and the former GOP bastions of El Paso and Douglas, though the Denver metro kept moving as well. The movement in Douglas and El Paso over the last 8 years is remarkable: Gardner won each by 30 points in 2014 while Bennet held each to 8- or 9-point margins and Polis held El Paso to a 4-point margin and basically

split the vote In Douglas. Meanwhile, back in 2014, the white-collar Denver burbs were true tossups, but Bennet won them by 22 points this year and Polis by 27.

TOP-TICKET DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE BY REGION ²											
Region	2022	2022	2020	2018	2016	2014	2014	SEN CHANGE			
	GOV	SEN	SEN	GOV	SEN	GOV	SEN	14->16	16->20	20->22	14->22
Statewide	19.5%	14.7%	9.3%	10.6%	5.7%	3.3%	-1.9%	7.6%	3.7%	5.4%	16.7%
Denver/Boulder	64.8%	60.4%	55.6%	56.4%	48.4%	48.6%	44.3%	4.1%	7.2%	4.8%	16.1%
JeffCo/Arap/Broom	27.3%	21.7%	16.7%	15.6%	10.2%	7.0%	0.9%	9.3%	6.5%	5.0%	20.8%
Adams	21.6%	17.2%	13.6%	14.0%	11.4%	5.7%	2.8%	8.6%	2.2%	3.6%	14.3%
Pueblo	11.7%	9.0%	0.8%	6.2%	9.5%	4.9%	0.5%	9.0%	-8.7%	8.2%	8.5%
Douglas	-0.4%	-8.0%	-14.0%	-15.6%	-20.3%	-21.4%	-30.1%	9.7%	6.3%	6.0%	22.1%
El Paso	-4.0%	-9.3%	-15.9%	-16.6%	-22.1%	-27.4%	-29.9%	7.8%	6.2%	6.6%	20.7%
Northwest	21.8%	16.7%	10.3%	12.6%	5.6%	5.8%	0.7%	4.9%	4.6%	6.4%	16.0%
Southwest	5.1%	1.9%	-7.0%	-4.3%	-8.6%	-8.3%	-13.4%	4.7%	1.6%	9.0%	15.3%
San Luis Valley	5.3%	3.9%	-2.1%	1.6%	7.0%	4.7%	0.0%	7.0%	-9.1%	6.0%	3.9%
East	-24.7%	-26.7%	-31.8%	-29.5%	-24.7%	-30.1%	-35.5%	10.8%	-7.0%	5.0%	8.8%

Late voters were more GOP-leaning and anti-Biden, but they broke hugely for Polis.

As the table below shows, voters whose ballots were received in October were more Democratic and pro-Biden than voters whose ballots were received in the final week of the election or on Election Day. While Bennet performed relatively evenly compared to both Biden’s approval and legislative Democrats, Polis massively over-performed with voters whose ballots were received on Election Day. He won these voters by 23 points, despite the fact that they disapproved of Biden by a net of 12 points and voted for legislative Democrats by a margin of just 2 points.

DEMOCRATIC PERFORMANCE BY SUBGROUPS ³													
	Polis	Ganahl	Net	Bennet	O'Dea	Net	Net Leg	Net Biden	Polis Vs			Bennet Vs	
									Ben	Leg	Bid	Leg	Bid
1 to 3 Weeks Out	58	39	+19	56	39	+17	+12	+1	+2	+7	+18	+5	+16
Last Week	56	41	+15	54	42	+12	+6	-8	+3	+9	+23	+6	+20
Election Day	60	37	+23	51	45	+6	+2	-12	+17	+21	+35	+4	+18

² 2022 result as of the morning of 11/14. Statewide margins for Polis and Bennet have been projected based upon the expected results from outstanding ballots in Denver, Arapahoe, and Boulder Counties.

³ This table is based on the 85% of our sample for which we have data on when ballots were received.

Abortion, Trump, and election denial doomed the GOP ticket.

As our research has consistently shown for the past two years, the GOP brand in Colorado is terrible – largely thanks to the albatross that is Donald Trump (whose ratings are far underwater at 37% favorable/61% unfavorable according to our pre-election poll). Our polling over the last year has also consistently shown the GOP’s anti-abortion position and support for election deniers to be huge electoral liabilities – with concerns about Republican support for abortion bans significantly outweighing concerns about Biden and the economy as a vote mover. All of that played out in this election.

About 20% of the electorate do not consider themselves strong Democrats but still voted straight Democrat for governor, senate, and legislature. When we asked them why in their own words, the dominant refrain was a dislike for Donald Trump and election deniers.

In a few words, why did you vote for Democrats for Governor, U.S. Senate, and state legislature?



But even more important was abortion. When we asked people to name the most important issues to their vote in an open-ended question, abortion and the economy (either inflation/cost of living or the economy and jobs generally) were, unsurprisingly, the two dominant issues, **with 37% citing abortion as one of their top two issues and a similar 37% citing inflation or the economy. Importantly, 8% of voters picked both** – as we have been telling our clients all year, the idea that campaigns needed to focus on one or the other was a false choice, both mattered (more on the economy in a bit).

MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE IN THE 2022 ELECTION													
<i>Thinking about all of the elections for candidates up and down the ballot this year, which two issues were most important in how you decided who to vote for?</i>													
	First	Top Two											
		Total	Dem.	Unaf.	Rep.	18-44	45-64	65+	POC	White		Suburban	
										men	wom.	men	wom.
Abortion	17	37	48	40	20	42	34	34	31	30	45	31	47
Economy/Jobs	11	20	12	19	29	17	22	20	14	24	18	24	17
Inflation/Cost of living	10	19	10	21	28	20	22	16	17	25	15	27	14
Immigration/Border	4	14	3	13	28	8	19	17	14	14	15	12	16
Democracy/Voting Rights	6	11	21	9	3	9	10	14	6	14	9	15	7
Crime/Safety/Drugs	2	8	4	10	12	8	11	6	8	9	8	7	7
Taxes	4	8	5	6	15	10	6	8	15	7	7	6	5
Climate/Environment	3	7	9	5	6	7	7	6	6	6	8	6	9
<i>Economy OR Inflation</i>	21	37	19	39	53	36	41	34	31	45	32	46	31

As the table shows, the 37% of voters who cited abortion as one of their top two issues leaned Democratic on Party self-identification by 54 points. Polis, Bennet, and legislative Democrats overperformed that partisanship by nets of 19, 9, and 6 points, respectively.

Meanwhile, the 37% of voters who cited inflation or the economy as one of their top two issues leaned Republican by 40 points. While legislative Republicans overperformed partisanship by a net 7 points among this group, O’Dea only overperformed partisanship by a net 2 and Ganahl underperformed partisanship by a net 8 points. **Abortion voters went for Polis and Bennet much stronger than partisanship would suggest, but O’Dea and Ganahl got very little (or even negative, in Ganahl’s case) boost above partisanship among inflation and economy voters.**

Similarly, the 11% of voters who cited Democracy or voting rights as a top issue were VERY Democratic but gave Democrats up and the down a ticket even more of their votes, while the 14% of voters who cited immigration or the border gave very little boost to Republicans (and actually gave Polis a significant boost). Crime did boost legislative Republicans (but not O’Dea or Ganahl), but since only 8% of voters cited it as a top issue, its role was muted.

The bottom three rows show the total net percentage of votes gained or lost by Polis, Bennet, and legislative Democrats relative to partisanship when factoring in the percent of voters who cited each issue as important. **The takeaway is that abortion clearly helped Democrats gain votes at each level, while the economy, immigration, and crime failed to make much of an impact for Republicans, particularly above the legislative level (and actually lost Ganahl votes at the gubernatorial level).**

VOTE AND PERFORMANCE VS. TOP ISSUE						
	Total	Abortion	Economy/ Inflation	Immigration	Democracy/ Voting Rights	Crime
% of Electorate	100	37	37	14	11	8
Vote						
Gov	+20	+73	-32	-54	+94	-59
Senate	+15	+63	-42	-71	+96	-62
Leg	+7	+60	-47	-73	+93	-71
PID	+8	+54	-40	-69	+82	-58
Performance vs PID						
Gov	+12	+19	+8	+15	+12	-1
Senate	+7	+9	-2	-2	+14	-4
Leg	-1	+6	-7	-4	+11	-13
Net Gain vs PID						
Gov	+12	+7	+3	+2	+1	0
Senate	+7	+3	-1	-0	+2	0
Leg	-1	+2	-3	-1	+1	-1

There is plenty more evidence that abortion was a dominant issue for Democrats. Democrats won on the issue by 27 points, including by 44 points among unaffiliateds. By a 61-24 margin, voters believed that Republicans would try to ban abortion if they took power, including a 43-point margin among unaffiliateds. By a 47-38 margin, voters believed that Republicans care more about banning abortion than improving the economy, including a 15-point margin by unaffiliateds.

Perhaps more telling, by a 61-33 margin, voters said that they couldn't vote for a candidate who wanted to ban abortion even if they agreed with them on other issues like the economy. (We see no difference if we included "without exceptions for rape and incest" or not. Either way, candidates wanting to ban abortion was a deal breaker for 61% of voters.) The margin was especially large for the groups that ended up breaking heavily for Democrats.

In this election, I could not vote for a candidate who wanted to ban abortion (with no exceptions for rape or incest) even if I agreed with them on other issues like the economy.

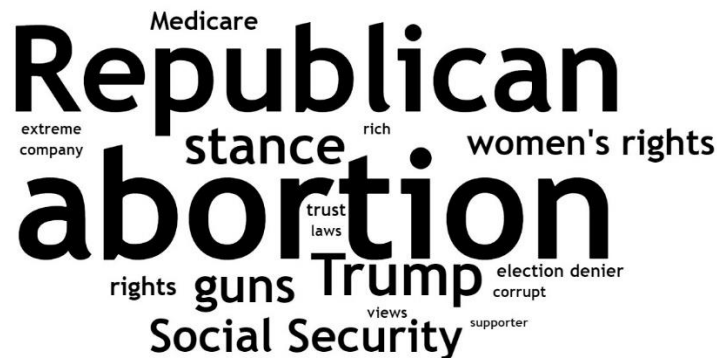
	Total	Dem.	Unaf.	Rep.	POC	White				Urban	Rural	Suburban	
						Men	Women	Non-col	College			Men	Women
Agree	61	82	68	29	66	55	65	60	60	66	54	54	66
Disagree	33	13	26	64	28	36	31	33	34	29	38	39	29
Net	+28	+69	+42	-35	+38	+19	+34	+27	+26	+37	+16	+15	+37

Perhaps most important, abortion was a dominate reason Polis voters voted against Ganahl and Bennet voters voted against O'Dea.

What were the one or two things about Heidi Ganahl that most made you want to vote AGAINST her?



What were the one or two things about Joe O'Dea that most made you want to vote AGAINST him?



As a result, Republicans were viewed as extreme and having the wrong priorities.

We asked voters to tell us if they thought a series of statements described the Democratic and Republican candidates up and down the ballot, with some items specific to one party or the other and some asked about both.

As the table below shows, Colorado voters viewed Republicans as “extreme” by a 11-point margin, while they rejected that label for Democrats by a 20-point bigger margin. Tellingly, the gap was even larger among unaffiliateds. This wasn’t just a problem for Republicans in 2022; it will continue to be a big problem for them into the future. By a 57% to 39% margin, voters agreed that “Republicans have embraced Donald Trump, Lauren Boebert, and MAGA extremism so much that I will have a hard time voting for them in the future.” That includes an overwhelming 63% to 33% margin among unaffiliated voters, while even 18% of registered Republican voters agree. Meanwhile, by a sizeable margin voters thought Republicans cared more about pleasing Trump than doing what’s right for Colorado – but did not say the same about Democrats and Biden.

As noted above, by a sizeable margin voters thought Republicans cared more banning abortion than improving the economy, but they did not think that Democrats were more focused on a woke ideology than the economy.

Further, by a sizeable margin, voters thought Republicans cared more about corporations than working families and that Democrats were mostly focused on the right things (but were split about Republicans on this description). Relatedly, voters narrowly thought Democrats cared about people like them, while they thought that was NOT true about Republicans, with unaffiliateds particularly convinced that Republicans didn’t care about them.

PARTY DESCRIPTIONS											
	Democrats					Republicans				Ds-Rs	
	Well	Not	Net	Unf		Well	Not	Net	Unf	All	Unf
Negative											
Too Extreme	35	55	-20	-20		49	38	+11	+16	-31	-36
Care more about Biden/Trump than CO	38	47	-9	-13		48	34	+14	+17	-23	-30
Care more about wokeness/abortion than econ	42	49	-7	-6		47	38	+9	+15	-16	-21
Would try to ban abortion if they took power	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		61	24	+37	+43	N/A	N/A
Care more about corporations than families	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		49	37	+12	+16	N/A	N/A
Support socialist economic policies	45	40	+5	-5		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Soft on crime and easy on criminals	37	50	-13	-13		N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Positive											
Mostly focused on the right things	51	44	+7	+10		45	46	-1	-8	+8	+18
Have taken/would take real action to save fams \$	45	43	+2	0		41	44	-3	-3	+5	+3
Have gotten/would get results for CO	49	42	+7	+15		43	45	-2	-7	+9	+22
Care about people like me	47	43	+4	+3		37	50	-13	-19	+17	+22

The Democratic Party, Bennet, and Polis have a much stronger brand in Colorado than Democrats do nationally – and that helped them hold their own on the economy and fend off attacks on crime.

Joe Biden’s approval was underwater by 7 points among the Colorado electorate (46/53), and just 26% of Colorado voters think that the country is heading in the right direction. So how was a shellacking like this even possible?

As discussed above, the dismal GOP brand was a big part of it, but the rout in Colorado wasn’t all about Republicans faceplanting. Led by the governor, Democrats in Colorado also have a much stronger brand than they do nationally. Almost twice as many voters (49%) believe that Colorado is headed in the right direction and while that isn’t great, it’s certainly an indication that Colorado voters don’t share the same negative sentiment about the state that Republican candidates expressed.

Meanwhile, our pre-election [survey](#) showed Polis with a strong 58%/37% approval rating and Bennet with a very solid 47%/33% favorability rating. And while Democratic candidates up and down the ballot didn’t light up the scoreboard on these metrics, as the table above shows, majorities or pluralities of voters believe that Democrats are mostly focused on the right things, have gotten results for Colorado, care about people like them, and have taken real action to save families money.

Despite Republicans’ consistent focus on inflation, voters didn’t believe Republican candidates had a solution on the issue – voters were actually less likely to believe that they would take real action to save families money. As a result, Democrats more than held their own on the economy. In the end, Republicans could not muster a lead on either the cost of living or the economy and jobs – and Democrats earned a decisive advantage on looking out for working-and middle-class Coloradans.

It is worth noting one potential future warning sign for Democrats, however. A 45% to 40% plurality of voters did believe that Democratic candidates “supported left-wing, socialist policies.” Though that numbers was lower among unaffiliateds and clearly wasn’t enough to move votes.

WHICH PARTY DO YOU TRUST MORE TO HANDLE EACH ISSUE?					
	Dem	Rep	DK	Net	Unaf
Reducing air pollution and addressing climate change	62	28	10	+34	+45
Dealing with the issue of abortion	58	31	10	+27	+44
Bringing down the cost of health care and RX drugs	53	36	11	+17	+33
Protecting Colorado’s public lands	52	38	10	+14	+25
Looking out for working- and middle-class Coloradans	52	40	7	+12	+16
Improving public education for Colorado’s children	49	39	12	+10	+25
Improving the economy and creating good-paying jobs	47	45	7	+2	+2
Addressing Colorado's rising cost of living	45	44	11	+1	+4
Reducing crime and protecting public safety	41	46	12	-5	-3

Meanwhile, Democrats either won handily or dominated on nearly every other issue tested, with their biggest margin coming on reducing air pollution and addressing climate change. The only issue on which voters preferred Republicans was crime and public safety, but even here the margin was small. Moreover, as the table in the previous section showed, despite millions of dollars in attacks on crime, voters ended up rejecting that Democrats were “soft on crime and easy on criminals.” And, as shown above, few voters based their choices on crime.

Bennet and, especially, Polis successfully defined themselves in a positive way, but O’Dea and Ganahl never did. That was one reason the two Republicans were never even in the game.

We asked voters who supported all four candidates to give us reasons, in their own words, why they voted FOR each.

As these word clouds show, both Bennet and, especially, Polis had good positive definitions. Polis voters cited the fact that he had done a good job along with his position on abortion and his COVID leadership. Bennet’s positives were a bit less defined than Polis’s, but still much more defined than O’Dea’s. Bennet voters cited his portions on abortion and a smattering of other issues along with the fact that he’s done a good job and the need to keep control of the Senate in Democratic hands.

What were the one or two things about Jared Polis that most made you want to vote FOR him?

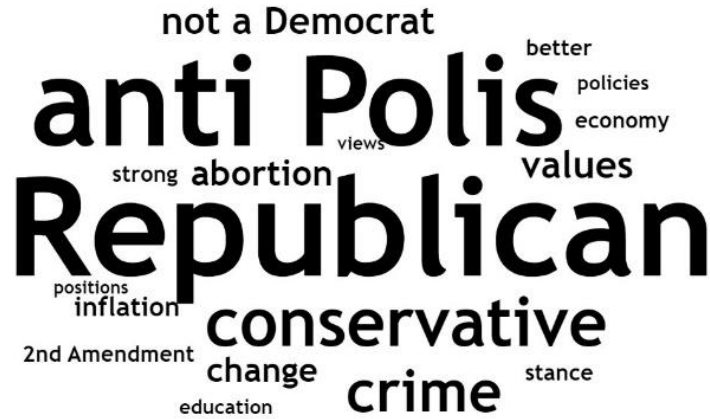


What were the one or two things about Michael Bennet that most made you want to vote FOR him?

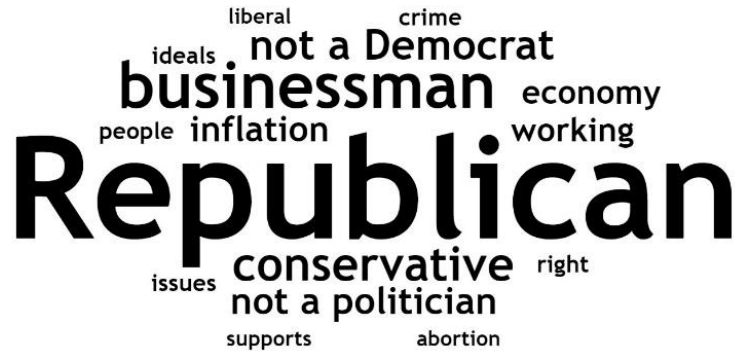


Meanwhile, O’Dea and, especially, Ganahl has very little positive definition. Ganahl voters really only cited the fact that she was a Republican and not Polis. Very few could actually come up with a positive about Ganahl herself as a reason why they supported her. Some O’Dea voters did cite the fact that he is a businessman or not a politician, but the dominant response was simply that he’s a Republican.

What were the one or two things about Heidi Ganahl that most made you want to vote FOR her?



What were the one or two things about Joe O'Dea that most made you want to vote FOR him?



Given all of this, it's not that surprising that we were right in our assertions for the last year and more that Republicans never had a shot in either the governor or senate races. While 63% of Colorado voters either voted for Polis or considered voting for him, only 42% ever even considered voting for Ganahl. And while 58% of Colorado voters either voted for Bennet or considered voting for him, only 45% ever even considered voting for O'Dea. **In both races, a majority of voters spent the entire race dead set against voting for the Republican.**

ABOUT THIS POLL

Global Strategy Group conducted a multi-channel survey using phone, text-to-web, and online methodology from November 7 to November 10, 2022, among 800 Coloradans who voted in the 2022 election. The margin of error at the 95% confidence level is +/-3.5%. Care has been taken to ensure the geographic and demographic divisions of the expected electorate properly represent the final electorate.