

VOICES OF THE VOTERS

4 CORNERS, 2 SIDES

Polarized electorate digs in its heels in a southwest rural, urban divide



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A farmer outside of Cortez tends to his land on a Sunday morning in August. Smoke from the Western Slope wildfires fills the sky above him.

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Editor's Note: This story is part of an occasional series to capture views among Coloradans.

In the deep southwest pocket of the state, where the corners of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah come together, voters are divided.

With few bridges left connecting rural and urban life, the region's two largest counties split along party lines: one with the intent to preserve the past, the other pushing for progress.

In Montezuma County, where ranchers and farmers have lived for generations, Democrats

historically have struggled to gain more than 35% of the vote in big-ticket races. About 59% of voters backed Republican Walker Stapleton over Jared Polis in the 2018 gubernatorial race; 61% turned out for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election; and nearly 60% voted for Cory Gardner of Yuma in the 2014 U.S. Senate race.

La Plata County, Montezuma County's next-door neighbor to the east, has more than twice its population size at around 56,200, according to the census. Home to the small, but steadily growing city of Durango and a public liberal arts college, La Plata County leans left. About 56% of voters picked Polis for governor in 2018; Hillary Clinton beat Trump by 9 percentage points

four years ago; and nearly 52% backed Democrat Mark Udall of Boulder over Gardner in the 2014 senate race.

This year, voters in both counties say they won't waver much. The heels of an already polarized electorate, faced with a highly polarized election, have only been dug in deeper.

But common ground, albeit dwindling, can still be found in Colorado's dry, dusty desert. The heart of politics in the state's Four Corners, no matter which side of the aisle you're on, remains family, freedom and how the future shapes the two.

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