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COLORADO'S LEGISLATIVE PACE:

2025 UPDATE

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INTRODUCTION

Colorado's legislative activity has seen an increase in both bill volume and complexity over the past decade.

While there have certainly been positive results from certain policies, the rapid expansion places growing demands on voters to stay informed and engaged. The bills passed by the state's legislature coincides with a rise in the number of citizen initiative ballot measures, signaling increased public involvement in the overall policymaking process.

KEY FINDINGS

- The growth of Colorado's legislative output since 2012 is 56%—4th-highest in the country.
- In 2025, the legislature passed 487 bills. Although this is a decrease from 2024's 527, it is still 23% more than the average between 2012 and 2018.
- The average complexity of passed legislation has increased even faster than the count. 2025 bills were, on average, 26% more complex, as measured by word counts in each year's Digest of Bills, than those passed between 2012 and 2018.
- The number of statewide ballot questions put before voters, including citizen initiatives and referred measures, quadrupled from 4 to 16 between 2012 and 2024.

OVERVIEW OF COLORADO'S LEGISLATIVE EXPANSION

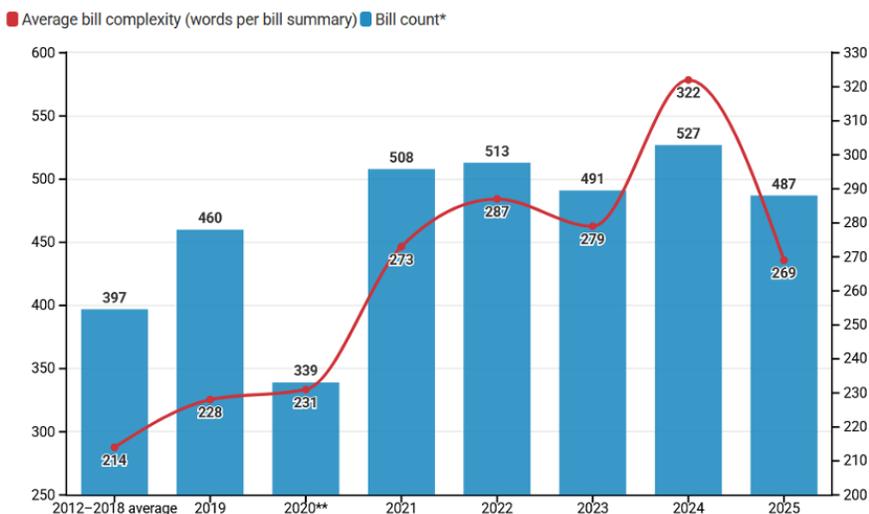
In 2024, across its regular and special sessions, the Colorado General Assembly passed 527 bills, breaking the previous record set two years before.ⁱ Even a significant reduction in 2025, to 487, fails to reverse the trend that began in 2021 but was foreshadowed as early as 2019, before which the longstanding norm was about 400. As in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, not one of these bills was sponsored solely by the legislature's minority party—26% were backed by majority-party representatives and 74% had bipartisan sponsorship.

These numbers do not represent a shift towards shorter and more focused bills; instead, the average complexity of passed legislation has increased at an even faster pace than the count. Compared to the 2012–2018 averages, 2024's count was 33% higher and its total complexity, according to word counts of each year's Digest of Bills, was double.ⁱⁱ Although total complexity decreased alongside the count of bills in 2025, the former was still 54% higher than that historical average. Average complexity (total divided by the count of bills) remains 26% higher than its previous average. Much of both forms of growth since 2019 can be traced to the passage of HB19-1261, which requires the state to achieve emissions-reduction targets through policy and has since spawned dozens of bills with that purpose.ⁱⁱⁱ

In this regard, Colorado's position is almost unique among states. Most states' legislatures have reduced their outputs; on average, states passed about 4% fewer bills in their latest sessions than they did in 2012.^{iv} Colorado, conversely, passed 56% more, which represents the 4th-highest growth in the country after Wyoming, Utah, and Montana.

FIGURE 1.

Bills Passed by the Colorado Legislature through 2024



Source: Office of Legislative Legal Services, CSI calculations • * Includes extraordinary sessions
 ** The 2020 session was truncated due to COVID-19

Even if the General Assembly had passed as many bills in 2012 as its average through 2018, its growth through 2025 would be 20% and its rank would be 9th. Colorado's population growth isn't likely responsible for the increase—the two haven't grown commensurately and, across the country, population growth is not a reliable predictor of legislative activity ($r \approx .2$).

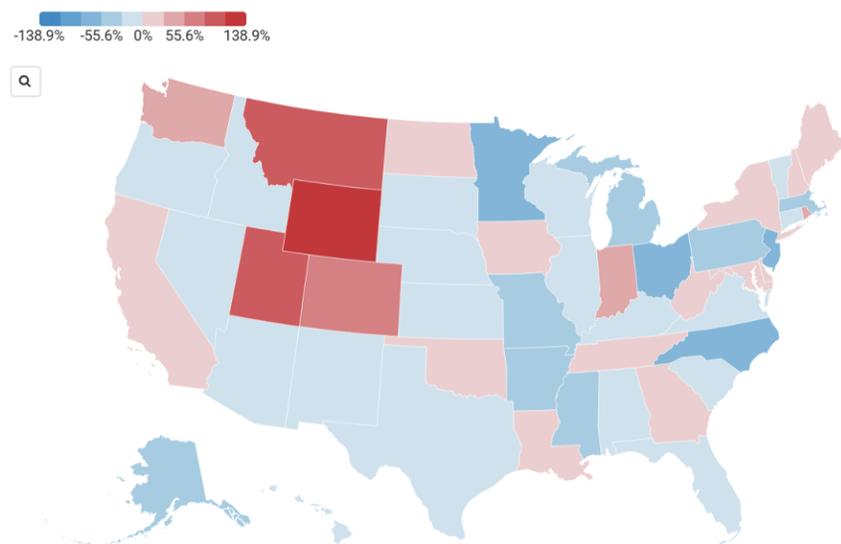
Also unlike most other states (all but 16), Colorado allows private citizens and organizations to place constitutional amendments on the statewide ballot; this offers residents a

means, particularly during periods of dominant-party control, of opposing actions taken by the state legislature. As expected, then, rising counts and complexity of legislation over the last decade appear to have intensified the citizen initiative process. Whereas there were only four statewide ballot questions, of which three were citizen-initiated, in the 2011–12 cycle, the 2023–24 cycle produced 16 questions, seven of which came from citizens.^v Although the 2025–26 cycle is far from complete, there are already seven unique citizen initiatives in late stages of the approval process and dozens more progressing through earlier steps.^{vi}

FIGURE 2.

Growths of the Numbers of Bills Passed by State Legislatures (2012–2025)

Some states, particularly those on two-year legislative cycles, are measured from 2013



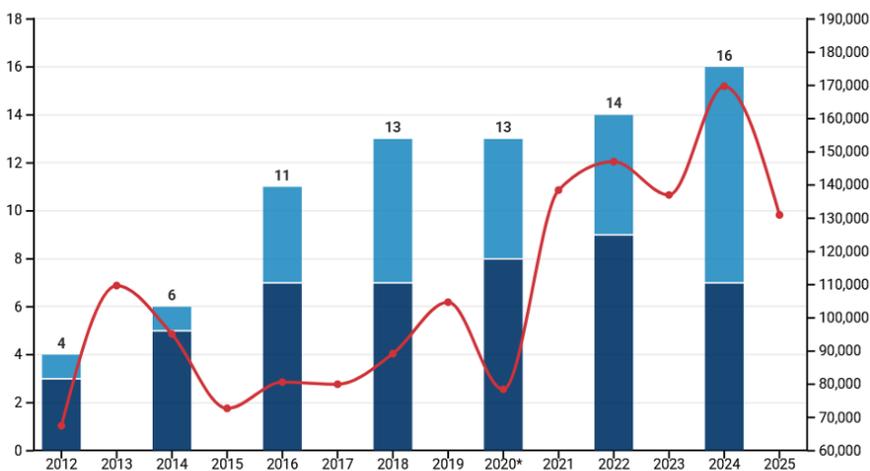
Source: BillTrack50, CSI calculations • * Measured from 2013 through 2023 because its 2025 biennial session is ongoing

FIGURE 3.

Growth of Ballot Measures and Legislative Action since 2012

Ballot measures are generated in two-year cycles represented here by their second years

■ Total complexity of passed legislation (words in bill summaries) ■ Citizen initiatives ■ Referred measures



Source: Office of Legislative Legal Services, CSI calculations • * The 2020 session was truncated due to COVID-19

If there is, as it seems, a relationship between legislation and ballot initiatives, we can expect each to continue generating demand for the other, causing both to accelerate growth in size and scope. Examples of that phenomenon are already evident in ongoing battles over income tax rates, property taxes, and TABOR. This will place ever more strain on voters' abilities to inform themselves in advance of elections.

CONCLUSION

The Colorado legislature has significantly increased its policymaking activity over the last 12 years and especially the last five. While some policies have likely led to positive outcomes for the state, the sheer increase in volume likely creates complexities in compliance and navigation in understanding numerous changes for individuals and businesses. While the total count of bills from 2024 to 2025 decreased, it is still 23% more than the average between 2012 and 2018. The increase in policymaking is an important trend for Coloradans to monitor closely.

SOURCES

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