

## Voters in Three States Embrace Fossil Fuel Use

By Qianwen Lai, LL.M. Candidate 2019 | November 13, 2018

Washington, Colorado, and Arizona recently rejected initiatives that would have limited the use of fossil fuels. In [Washington](#), voters rejected what would have been the nation's first tax on carbon emissions. In [Colorado](#), 57 percent of voters said “no” to a proposal that would have prohibited drilling close to densely populated or environmentally vulnerable sites. In [Arizona](#), voters rejected a proposal that would have required electricity providers to use renewable energy to meet half of their needs by 2030.

Ultimately, activists could not convince voters to “go green” at the cost of higher energy prices. Scientists and environmental advocates projected that Washington's initiative would have substantially decreased greenhouse gas emissions in the state. Voters who supported Colorado's initiative believed it was necessary to reduce potential health risks from nearby oil drilling sites. Those who supported Arizona's initiative hoped that a shift to cleaner energy sources would both improve public health as well as create green jobs in the state. On the other hand, the proposals' opponents feared that they would result in higher energy prices and fewer jobs.

The voters' decision should not be surprising. Although environmentalists were able to garner significant support, their opponents had large oil and gas industries at their backs. They were able to raise a fund several times larger than that of the initiatives' supporters. In Washington, the Clean Air, Clean Energy coalition was able to raise more than [\\$15 million to advocate for the carbon fee](#). However, the Western States Petroleum Association poured more than \$31 million into the opposition. Similarly, Colorado Rising for Health and Safety raised about \$1 million, but the industry-backed group Protect Colorado raised roughly \$38 million to defeat the measure.

Behind the scenes, it is money that matters. Large oil industries were able to [invest more](#) into winning the ballot fight. However, environmentalists were able to push back hard — the vote was relatively close in all three states. Who will win in the end is still unclear. But, industry support — and spending — will surely be crucial to the outcome.

