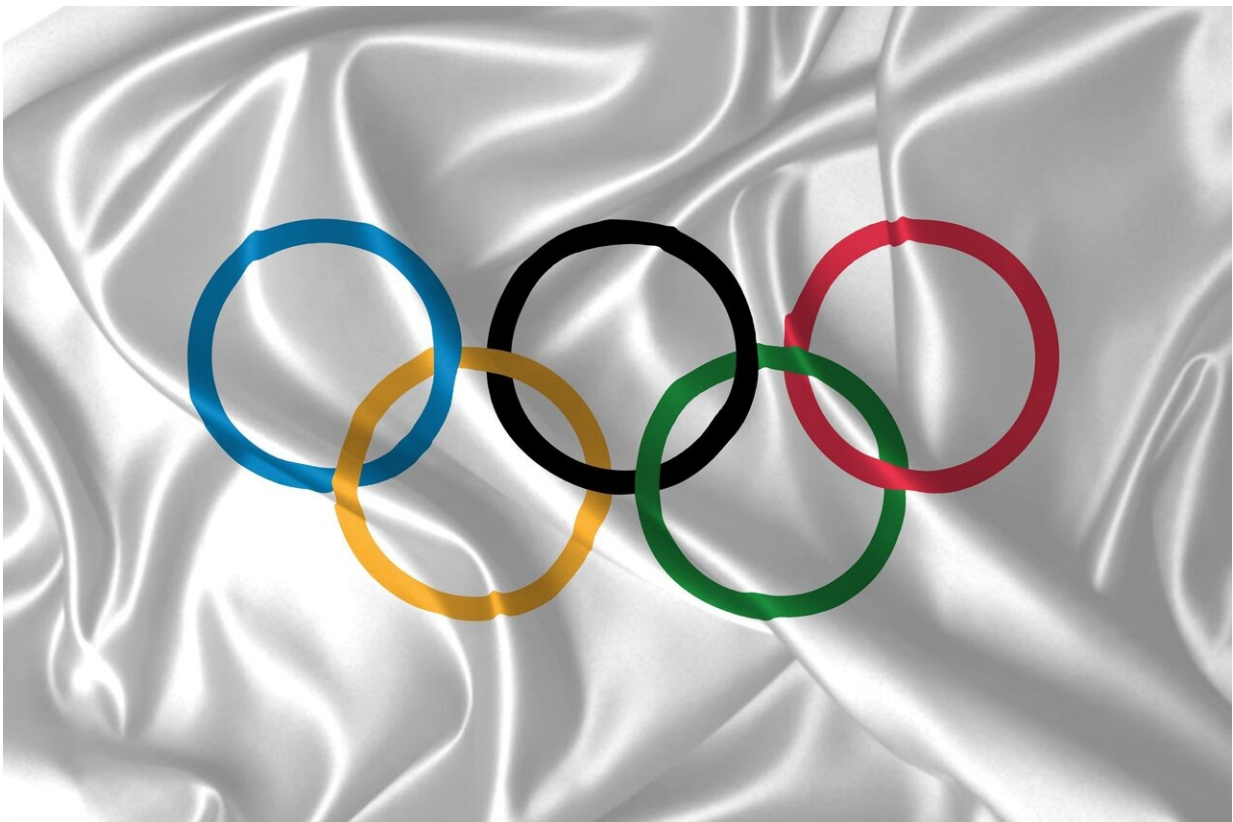


# As Paris preps for Olympics, survey finds Coloradans still feel ambivalent about hosting

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More than five decades after Denver said "thanks, but no thanks" to hosting the 1976 Winter Olympics, large numbers of Coloradans still

feel ambivalent about going for gold.

That's the conclusion of new research by CU Boulder political scientist Samantha Register. In a new study, she found that self-identified Republicans and Independents in Colorado strongly oppose Denver entering another bid to host the Olympics—that is, if such a bid would cost [taxpayer dollars](#).

The results come from the Colorado Political Climate Survey, an annual effort to gauge the pulse of the state on a number of issues. And politicians around the world may want to take note, said Register, a doctoral student in the Department of Political Science.

"If city organizers want to win [public support](#) for the Olympics," she said, "they're going to have to address: What exactly are the costs to the public, and make it clear why they think the costs will be worth it."

Register [published](#) her results in May in the journal *Urban Affairs Reviews*. The findings come as Paris is gearing up for the 2024 Olympic Games, which will kick off in July. They also highlight Colorado's own, failed attempt to bring the glitz and pageantry of the Olympics to the Rockies.

In 1970, the International Olympic Committee selected Denver to take on the 1976 Games. Initial proposals would have sent alpine skiers zipping down Mount Sniktau between Keystone and Idaho Springs, while cross-country skiers might have competed in Evergreen. But in 1972, residents from across the state voted by a hefty margin to halt those plans—in large part because of the projected costs, which would have run into the tens of millions of dollars.

In recent years, residents of other cities have increasingly spoken out against the Olympics, Register said. Hosting the global games, in other

words, may now be more contentious than the archery ranges and parallel bars themselves.

"We've seen cities like Chicago and Boston where U.S. organizers really wanted to make a bid to host the Olympics, but there was a huge backlash from city residents," she said.

## Colorado weighs in

Paris' own Olympics have not gone off without controversy. According to Reuters, city police cleared thousands of people, many of them migrants, from [informal settlements](#) in the Seine-Saint-Denis neighborhood in the lead up to the Games. It is among the poorest areas around Paris and the site of the current Olympic Village.

In the new study, Register wanted to test how Olympic politics could play out in an increasingly partisan Colorado. In 2023, she and her colleagues on the Colorado Political Climate Survey surveyed more than 750 people about the possibility of a future Denver Olympics.

In some cases, the researchers simply asked, "Do you favor or oppose Denver entering a bid to host the 2034 Winter Olympics." In others, they specifically mentioned spending tax dollars as part of the bid.

The results of the experiment varied wildly. When [public money](#) wasn't an issue, more than 68% of self-identified Democrats and Independents and 59% of Republicans favored bidding to host the Olympics. But when taxpayers had to foot the bill, support plummeted to 57% of Democrats and a slim 28% of Independents and 27% of Republicans.

"I expected that Republicans might be opposed to Olympics for what you could call 'culture war' issues, such as the high-profile athletes who have endorsed causes like Black Lives Matter," Register said. "But based

on our [survey results](#), I don't think that's what's going on. It seems to be mostly about issues related to public spending."

## Carrying the torch

What should a city with dreams of Olympic glory do? Register said the hosts of international sporting events could begin by trying to open the festivities to all locals, no matter their income levels. That might include holding free festivals or broadcasting competitions live from screens in public areas.

And not every city shares the same sentiments about Olympic glory. Surveys show that residents of Los Angeles, which will host the 2028 Olympics, and Utah, where Salt Lake City is the top contender for the 2034 Winter Olympics, mostly but not unanimously support the Games.

"If a city is hosting the Games, people want to know how that will affect the average resident," Register said. "Most people aren't going to be able to get to tickets to the sporting events or the opening and closing ceremonies."

**More information:** Samantha Register, *Red, Blue, and Going for Gold: Partisan Support for Olympic Host Bids*, *Urban Affairs Review* (2024). [DOI: 10.1177/10780874241256301](https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874241256301)

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