

Subnational Climate Action in the Rocky Mountain West

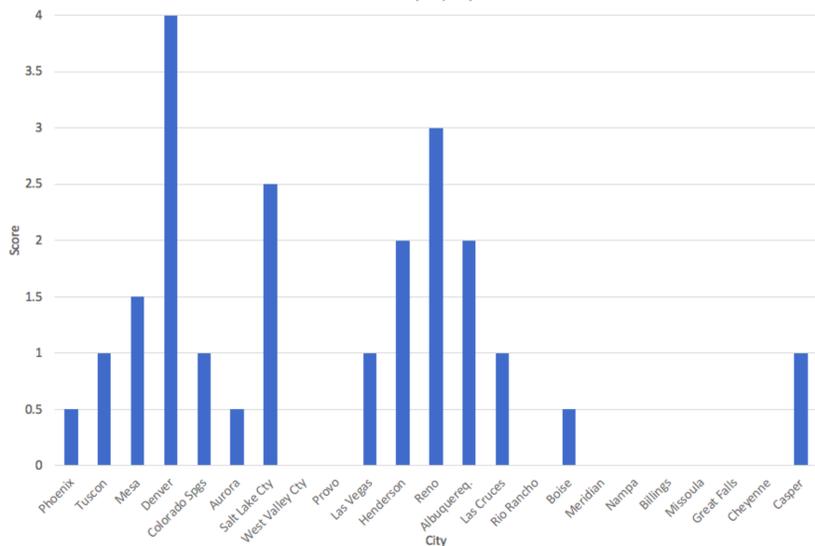
State of the Rockies Project 2020

Gracia Seeley, Matthew Luzincourt, Leah Barazani, Emma Locke, Maddy Unger, and Dr. Corina McKendry

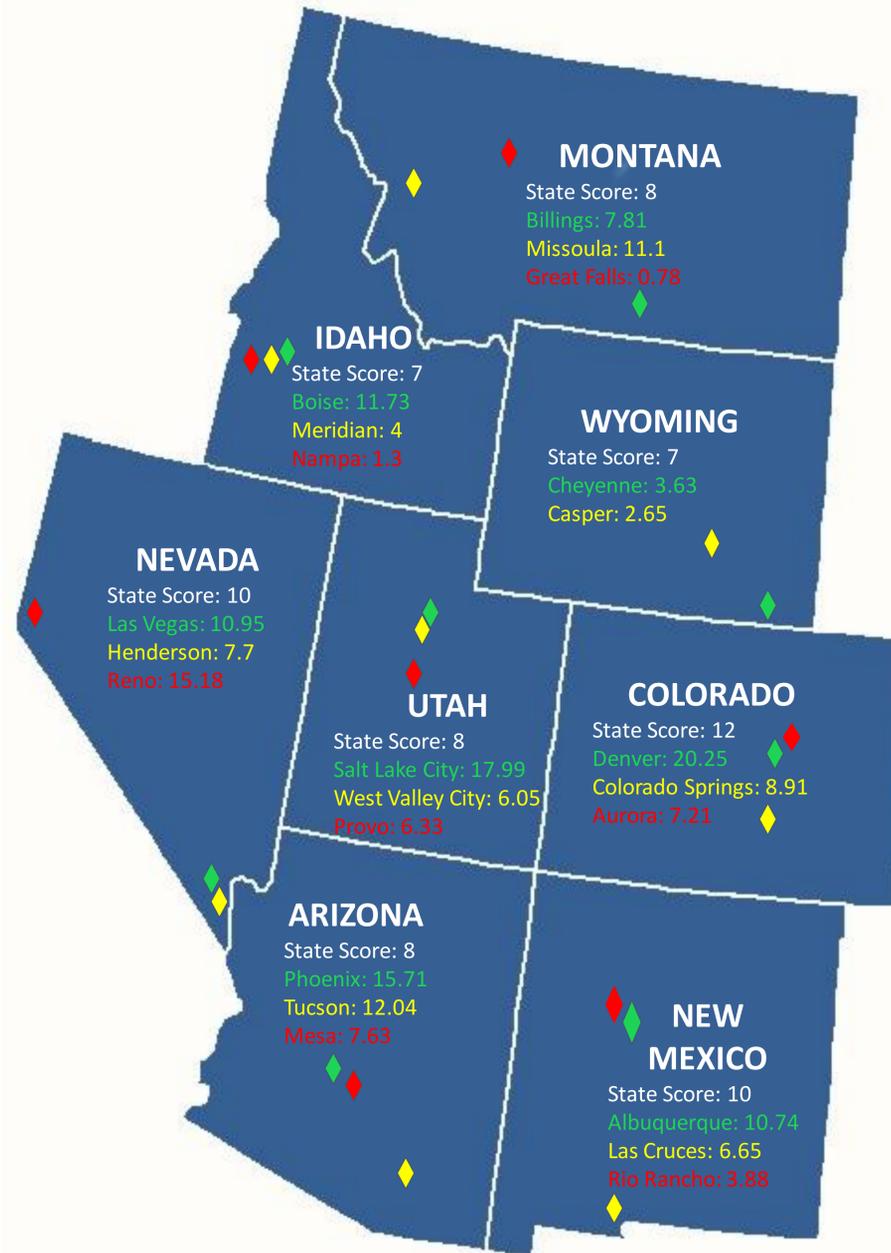
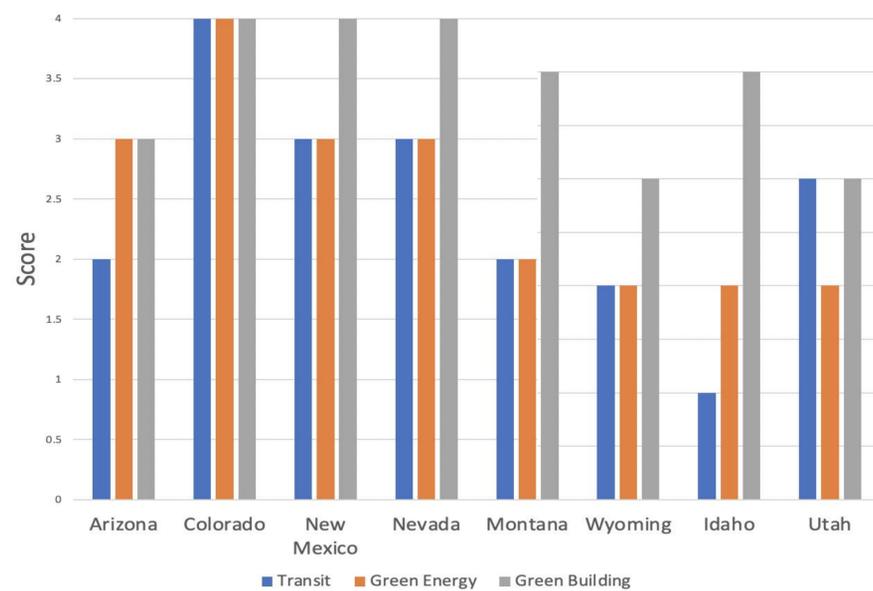
Introduction

In response to a growing body of research which suggests that actions of subnational governments serve a central role in mitigating climate change, this project evaluates city and state government action on climate change in the Rocky Mountain West region. We studied climate policies and actions to understand the ways in which subnational governments are acting upon issues of greenhouse gas emissions, renewable energy, transportation, building standards, and climate justice.

City Equity Scores



State Scores



Total Possible State Score: 12

Total Possible City Score: 22

Methods

We utilized policy indicators based on the literature of best policy practices typically used by cities and states. The indicators assess three major areas of greenhouse gas emissions, including transportation, buildings, and energy. We also included indicators assessing equity of policies and plans. We then analyzed the 8 states comprising the Rocky Mountain West and 23 cities in total, the three largest cities in each state with a population of at least 50,000. To determine whether the state or city achieved the indicator, we reviewed city and state policies, government documents, and websites. We then gave each city and state a score based on the number of indicators they have achieved to evaluate their progress in greenhouse gas mitigation.

Results

- States tend to take more substantial climate action, as states met 73% of state indicators while cities met only 40% of city indicators.
- Every state focused heavily on setting strong green buildings standards, with an average green buildings sector score of 3.6 out of 4.
- There is 1.6 times more variation in city scores ($\sigma=5.19$) than in state scores ($\sigma=3.21$).
- City scores and state scores are only weakly positively correlated ($r=.35$). This indicates that city policy agendas are not defined by state policy agendas.
- A larger population size ($r^2=.33$) and a more liberal political leaning ($r=-0.61$) were associated with higher overall scores within cities.
- There is not a strong focus on climate equity issues within cities, as cities have an average equity score of .93 out of 4.

Discussion

It is encouraging to see Rocky Mountain states taking the lead on some ambitious climate policies, but our results show little correlation between city and state action, indicating that cities are not giving the same level of attention to issues of greenhouse gas reduction as states in this region. This project cannot fully address the question of why some cities or states are doing more than others, but we found strong positive correlations between city scores and both population size and liberal politics. We know that climate change will disproportionately impact marginalized communities and any steps taken to mitigate climate change should address this imbalance, however we found that neither cities nor states in the Rocky Mountain region prioritized issues of equity in their climate plans.

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