

# Coloradans' Perceptions of Threats to the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, 2019-2024

## Keller Center-Sponsored Items from the Annual Colorado Political Climate Surveys



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## About the Study:

The CPC is an annual, statewide, representative survey of the political and policy attitudes of Coloradans. The study is designed to gauge the public's political and partisan leanings, their opinions on a number of key issues facing the state, their attitudes toward major statewide and national political figures, and the outlook for upcoming elections. In 2019 the Keller Center sponsored items on the CPC designed to gauge Coloradans' views on threats to the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment. The Keller Center again supported the asking of these items on the 2023 survey, and APRL repeated these items on the 2024 survey to enable multiple years of comparison. This report focuses on comparisons between the 2019 and the 2024 data – i.e., on opinion across the full 5-year window between the last years of the first Trump administration and the end of the Biden administration.

## The Leroy Keller Center for the Study of the First Amendment

The Keller Center for the Study of First Amendment is housed in the department of Political Science at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The Keller Center is non-partisan academic unit, and supports and encourages teaching, research and community outreach on topics and issues relating to the nature, meaning, and contemporary standing of First Amendment rights and liberties. Through undergraduate classes, public events, and scholarly conferences, the Center seeks to educate students, faculty and the community about the protections of free speech, press, association and religion under the First Amendment. The Keller Center also seeks to inform the public about the historical, legal and philosophical foundations of First Amendment rights and about contemporary threats to those liberties. The current Director of the Keller Center is Dr. Steve Vanderheiden.

## American Politics Research Lab

The American Politics Research Lab (APRL) is housed in the Department of Political Science at the University of Colorado Boulder. APRL is a non-partisan academic unit that supports basic research, educational activities, and public engagement on issues related to American politics. Lab faculty, student fellows, and affiliates pursue scholarly activities over a broad range of topics, utilizing a wide variety of research methodologies and analysis. Current lab projects include research on political behavior, state and local politics, and political agendas and recurring legislation in the U.S. Congress. The Lab is also home to the annual Colorado Political Climate Survey. APRL hosts a seminar series that includes talks by lab associates as well as distinguished scholars doing work related to the study of American politics.

# The Colorado Political Climate Survey

In mid-to-late October 2024, the American Politics Research Lab (APRL) conducted the ninth annual Colorado Political Climate (CPC) survey. In October/November 2019, the American Politics Research Lab (APRL) conducted the fourth annual Colorado Political Climate (CPC) survey.

## Methodology

**2019:** The sample consists of 800 individual responses and has an overall simple (unweighted) margin of error of  $\pm 3.5\%$ . The margin of error for subgroups is larger due to smaller sample sizes. The sample is weighted to be representative of adult Colorado residents/the general state population. The weighted margin of error for the general population analysis is  $\pm 4.6\%$ . The number of observations used in analyses are a bit lower than 800, depending on the question.

The survey instrument was developed by APRL in the fall of 2019; it was administered online to a panel of Coloradans by the company YouGov between October 23 and November 1, 2019. YouGov selected respondents from its internet panel using sample matching. A random sample – stratified by gender, age, race, education, and region – was selected from the 2016 American Community Study. Voter registration information was included from the 2016 Current Population Survey Registration and Voting Supplement.

To generalize to Colorado residents, YouGov employed a weighting procedure based on demographics and political characteristics (specifically, gender, age, race, education and ideology). We use YouGov's weights for all analysis. The average time it took a respondent to complete the survey was approximately 10 minutes. More information on the sampling methodology employed by YouGov – similar to that used in previous years– can be found at: [https://www.colorado.edu/lab/aprl/sites/default/files/attached-files/yougov\\_sampling\\_2018.pdf](https://www.colorado.edu/lab/aprl/sites/default/files/attached-files/yougov_sampling_2018.pdf)

**2024:** The sample consists of interviews with a statewide, representative sample of 800 Colorado residents; individuals were interviewed online between October 18, 2024 and October 30, 2024. The survey was approximately 10-12 minutes in length. The survey instrument was developed by APRL in the fall of 2024, and was administered online by the company YouGov. The sample is weighted to be representative of adult Colorado residents/the general state population. The weighted margin of error for the general population analysis is  $\pm 4.41\%$ . The margin of error for additional subgroups will be larger due to smaller sample sizes. The number of observations used in analyses are a bit lower than 800, depending on the question.

As with the 2019 study, respondents were selected from YouGov's opt-in panel, and then weighted to represent adult Coloradans (general population weights). The complete

codebook can be found [here](#) – it contains additional information on how YouGov constructed the sample and weights. The original survey instrument and programming instructions can be found [here](#). Finally, additional information on the YouGov’s methodology and margin of error for similar/past CPC studies can be found [here](#).

A Note on Partisan Breakdowns: In the summary discussion and tables that follow (where we present numbers by partisanship), we construct the splits using *self-reported partisanship* collected from respondents; this was measured via a traditional 7-point scale. We then categorize “leaning partisans” in with other partisans – thus, the category of “Independents” represents a smaller number of “pure” Independents, or just the middle-category on the 7-point party identification scale. This grouping is backed by research suggesting that leaning partisans often behave similarly to stronger partisans. For more information, see <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2015/11/23/appendix-a-why-partisans-include-leaners/>.

## Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the undergraduate students in the PSCI 3155: Survey Design and Analysis class at the University of Colorado Boulder, who have provided valuable input into the development of some years of this survey. We also wish to thank the CU Boulder Department of Political Science, and (of course) the LeRoy Keller Center for the Study of the First Amendment, for financial support.

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# Coloradans are Split by Partisanship on the Status of First Amendment Freedoms

In the fall of 2019, and again in the fall of 2024, we asked samples of Coloradans about the security of different freedoms protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. In this topline report we focus on changes in the Colorado public's opinions on the status of these freedoms, both overall and when broken out by partisanship.

Regarding **press freedoms**, the numbers show more stability than change across the five year period spanning 2019 to 2024. In 2019 about half (50%) of the Coloradans we surveyed felt freedom of the press was under threat, while 42% reported it to be secure (about 9% indicated they were "not sure"). In 2024 we saw similar numbers, with about 48% of Coloradans reporting that freedom of the press was secure, and about 46% viewing it as threatened (with roughly 7% reporting "not sure").

However, these overall numbers mask substantial shifts by partisanship – shifts that are contingent on the party in control of the White House. Looking at the partisan breakdowns for freedom of the press, we see that not only do Republicans and Democrats feel differently about this issue, but that many have switched positions since the (first) Trump years. In 2019 61% of Republicans felt that these freedoms were secure (30% felt that they under threat), though the opposite pattern was in place for Democrats. However, by 2024 – with Biden having been in office for the past four years -- the pattern flipped: 54% of Colorado Democrats reported freedom of the press to be secure in the U.S., while 51% of Colorado Republicans reported it to be under threat. In a pattern repeated for all five freedoms, independents displayed the most stability across these years, moving very little in their opinions amidst shifting political winds.

We find similar results regarding Coloradans' attitudes toward **freedom of religion**. Overall, in 2019 about half of the Coloradans reported freedom of religion to be secure (50%); this increased to 58% by 2024. However, a closer inspection reveals that this is again a story about shifting partisan patterns: In 2019 60% of Coloradan Democrats responded that they felt the freedom of religion was secure in the U.S., while only 35% of Republicans in the state felt the same way. It is worth noting that these differences mirror broader, [well-documented differences](#) in religiosity and perceptions of threat among Democrats vs. Republicans. With a Democrat in the White House, by 2024 70% of Colorado Democrats reported this freedom to be secure, while roughly half of Colorado Republicans still reported it to be threatened. Once again, independents were more evenly split (and stable) in their assessments across these years.

In 2019, Coloradans (overall) felt that the **freedom of speech** was not secure in the U.S. (55% reported it to be "Threatened"). By 2024 this moved to an even split (48% threatened, 48% secure, the remainder "not sure"). Looking to the partisan breakdowns we see that in 2019 Democrats in the state actually had more positive feelings towards the security of the freedom of speech (54%) -- only 31% of Republicans and 36% of independents saw this freedom as secure. As the Biden years close, Colorado Democrats

see this freedom as more secure than they did before (63% "Secure"), though Republicans still see it as "Threatened" (62%), and independents in the state show little movement.

On the matter of the **freedom to petition** the government, we find similar results to those for other freedoms. While about half (49%) of all respondents reported the freedom to petition to be under threat in 2019, this number dropped a bit to 44% by 2024. The partisan breakdown from 2019 shows that Republicans had more positive evaluations of the security of the freedom to petition than did Democrats or independents, with 50% of Republicans evaluating this freedom as secure (versus 39% of Democrats and 42% of independents). As we have seen elsewhere, by 2024 these patterns reversed: 58% of Colorado Democrats reported this freedom as "Secure," while only 42% of Colorado Republicans also did so.

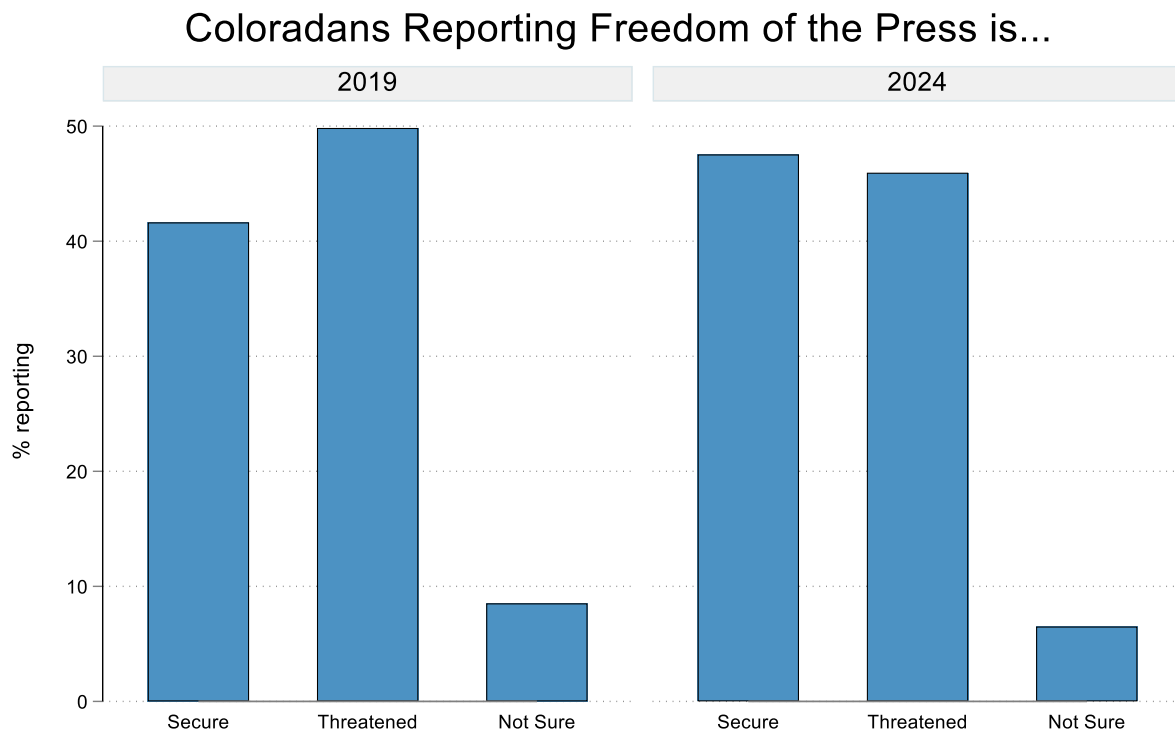
Finally, with respect to the **freedom to assemble** peaceably, in 2019, roughly half of Coloradans saw this as threatened -- a number that dipped slightly (to 46%) by 2024. Looking at the partisan splits across this interval, we again see shifts that reflect the changing political winds: in 2019 Republicans found the freedom of assembly to be less threatened than did Democrats or independents -- whereas a minority (44%) of Republicans saw this freedom as under threat, nearly half 49% of Democrats and over half of independents (53%) felt that freedom of assembly was threatened. However, by 2024 this pattern had shifted to reflect the Biden administration: 55% of Colorado Democrats reported this freedom to be "Secure," while 51% of Colorado Republicans reported it to be "Threatened."

## Perceptions of the Security of First Amendment Rights - Press

Question: Thinking about some rights that are guaranteed by the US Constitution, how secure or threatened do you think each of the following are in the United States today?<sup>1</sup>

Item 1: Freedom of the press

Note: Sample = Colorado Residents

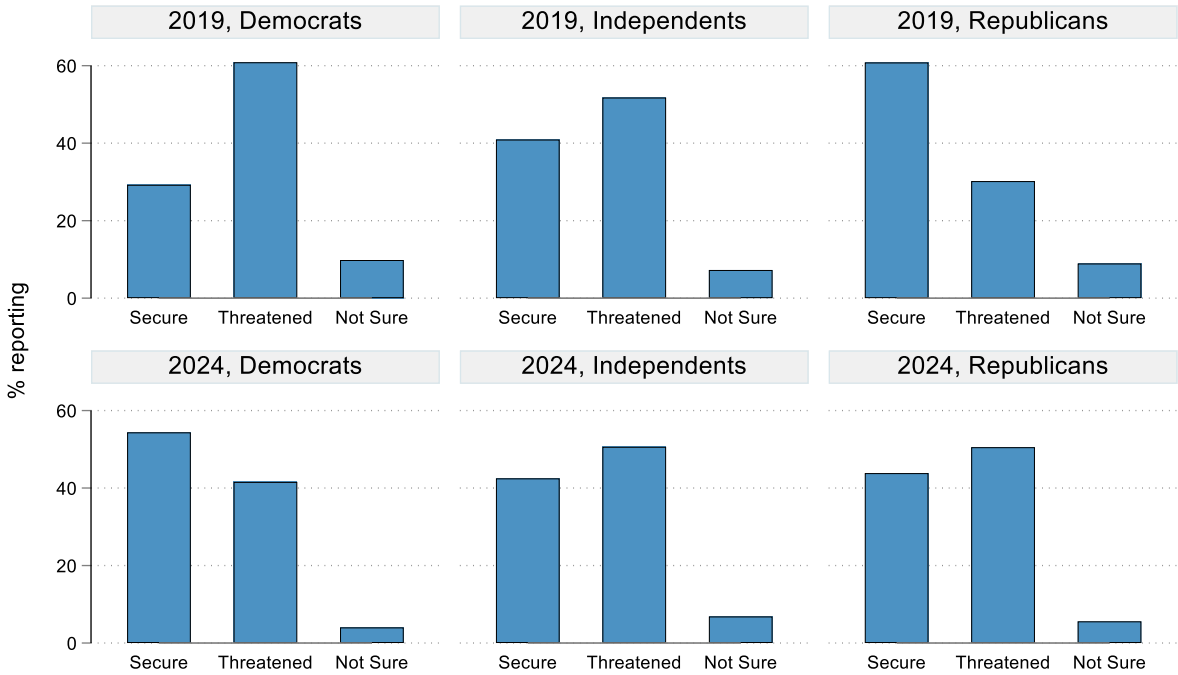


CPC Studies; N=800; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

<sup>1</sup> This question wording follows a similar item asked on a Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey in 2016 and 2017. For details, see: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/229259/college-students-less-secure-first-amendment-rights.aspx>



Coloradans - by Partisanship - Reporting Freedom of the Press is...



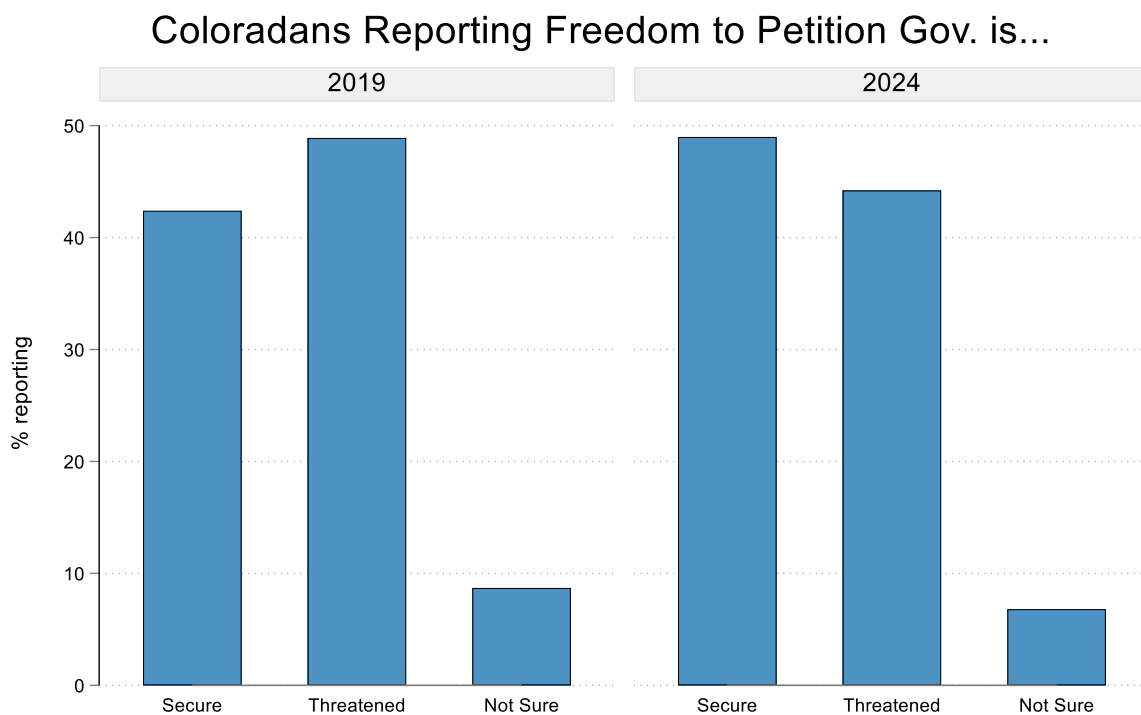
CPC Studies; N~770; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Perceptions of the Security of First Amendment Rights - Petition

Question: Thinking about some rights that are guaranteed by the US Constitution, how secure or threatened do you think each of the following are in the United States today?

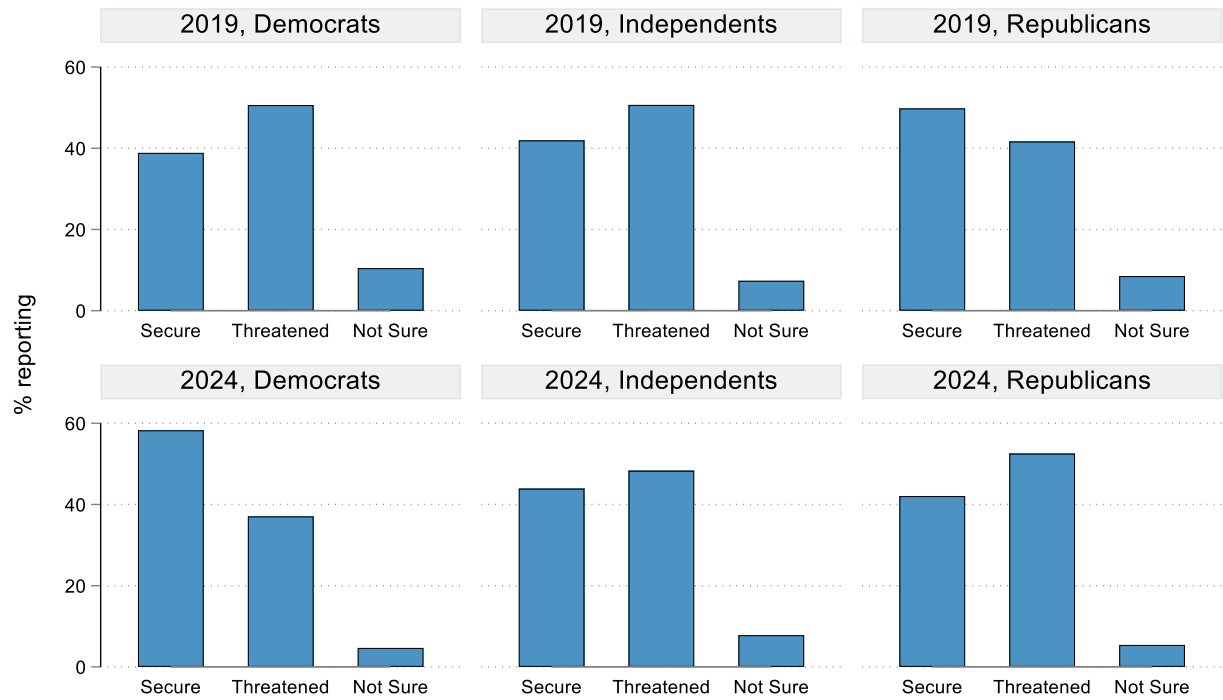
Item 2: Freedom to petition the government, meaning presenting requests to the government without fear of punishment.

Note: Sample = Colorado Residents



CPC Studies; N=800; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Coloradans - by Party ID - Reporting Freedom to Petition Gov. is...



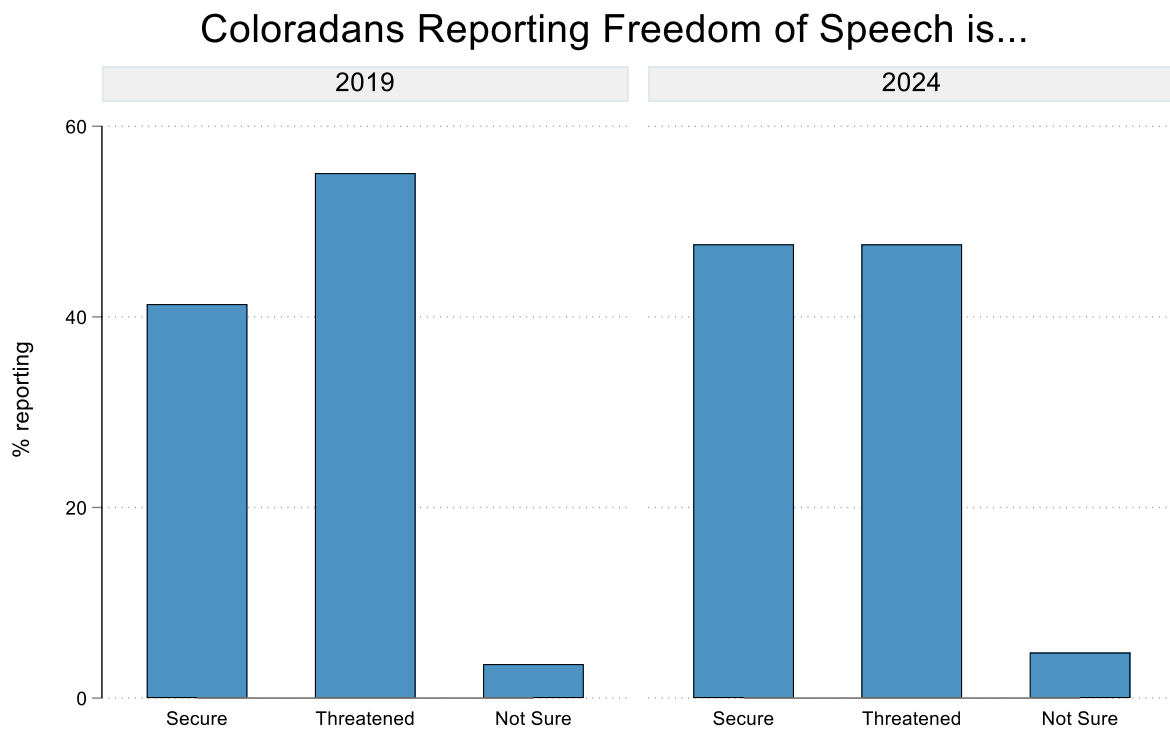
CPC Studies; N~770; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Perceptions of the Security of First Amendment Rights - Speech

Question: Thinking about some rights that are guaranteed by the US Constitution, how secure or threatened do you think each of the following are in the United States today?

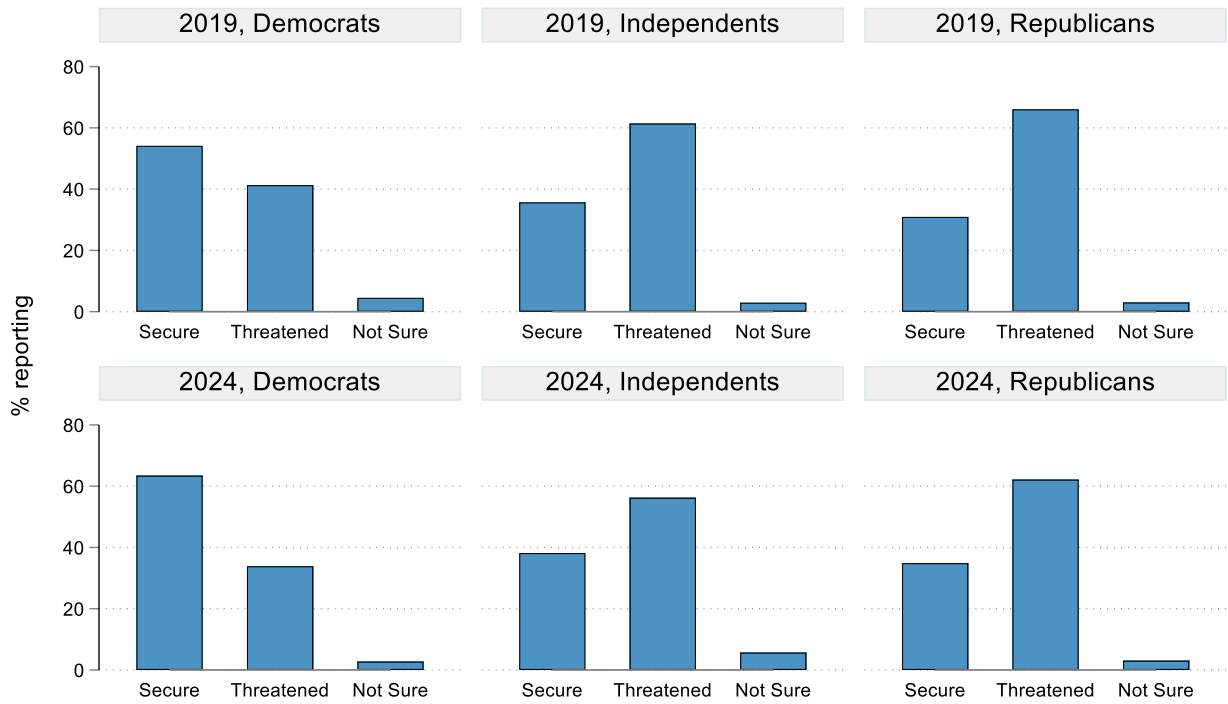
Item 3: Freedom of speech

Note: Sample = Colorado Residents



CPC Studies; N=800; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Coloradans - by Partisanship - Reporting Freedom of Speech is...



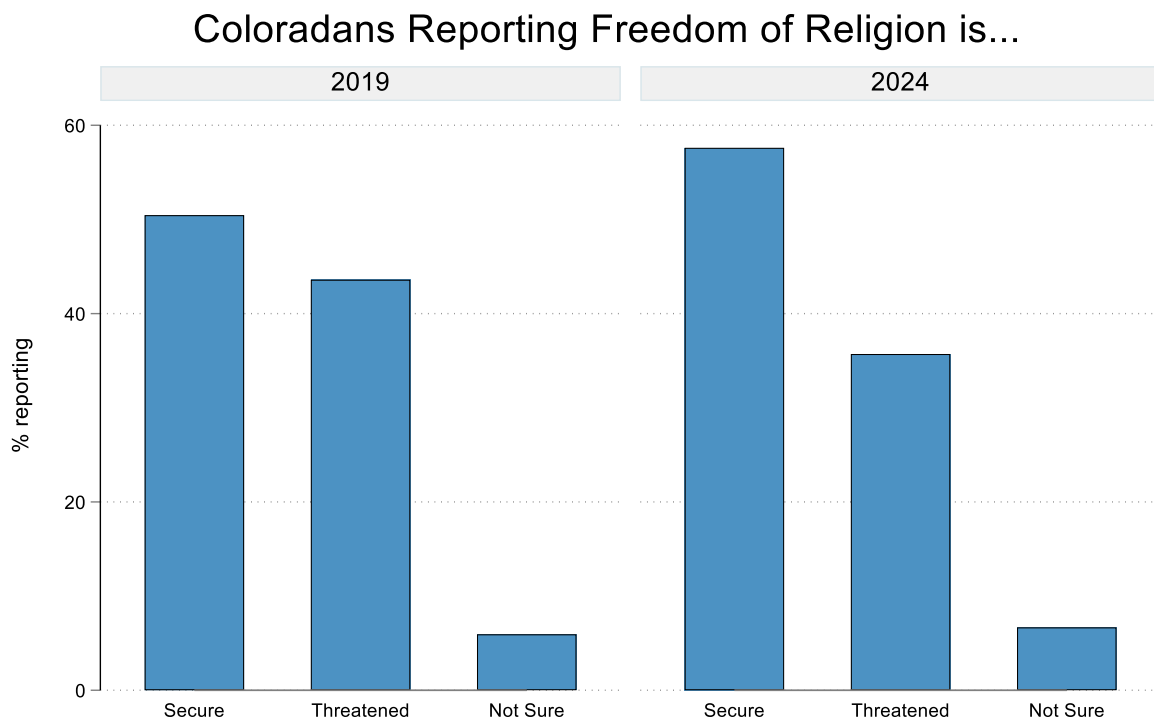
CPC Studies; N~770; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Perceptions of the Security of First Amendment Rights - Religion

Question: Thinking about some rights that are guaranteed by the US Constitution, how secure or threatened do you think each of the following are in the United States today?

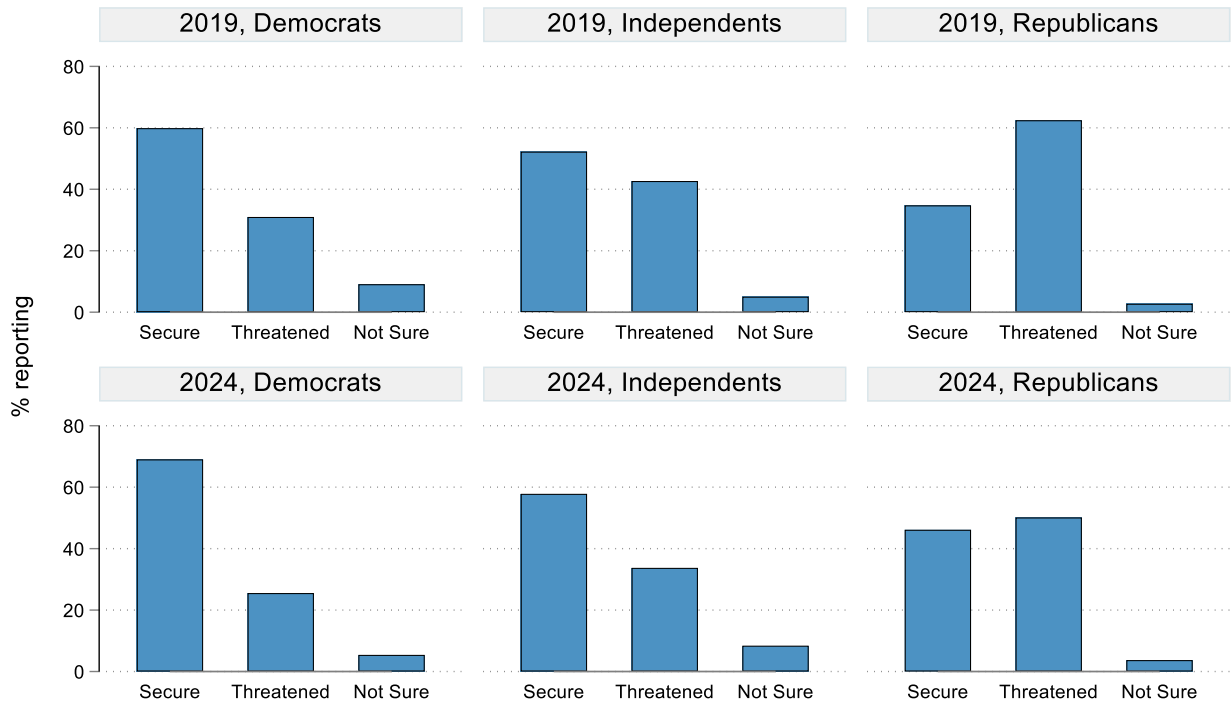
Item 4: Freedom of religion

Note: Sample = Colorado Residents



CPC Studies; N=800; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Coloradans - by Partisanship - Reporting Freedom of Religion is...



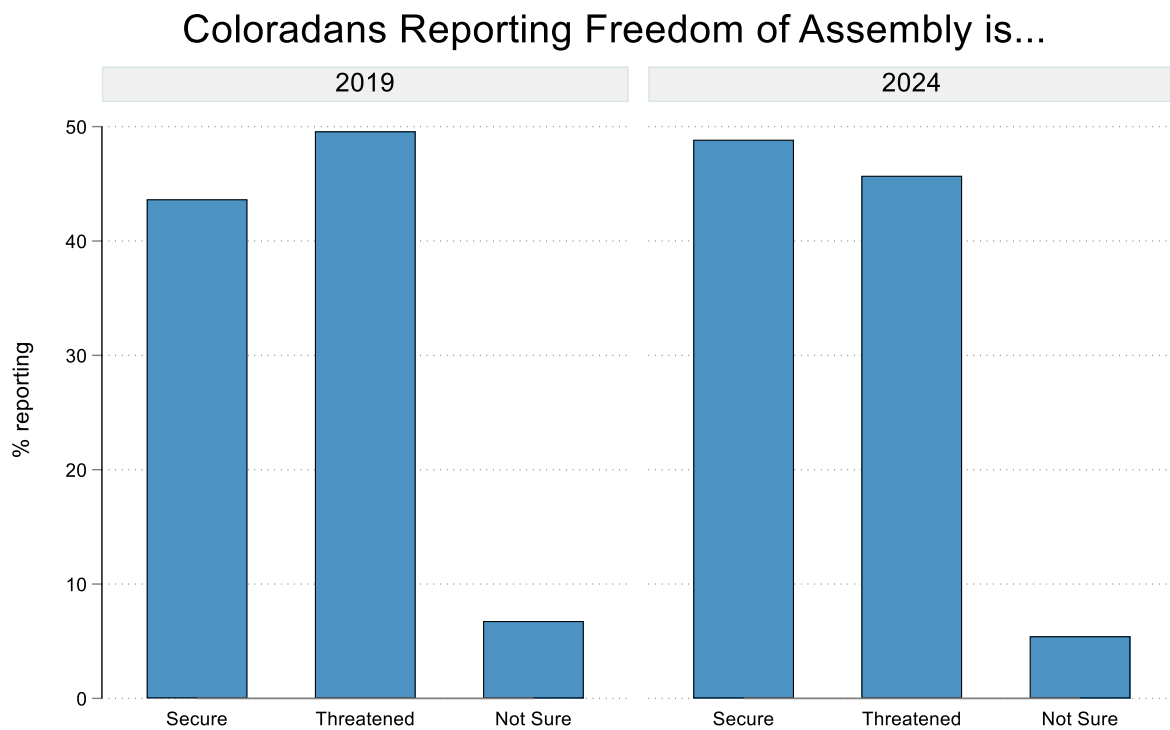
CPC Studies; N~770; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined

## Perceptions of the Security of First Amendment Rights - Assembly

Question: Thinking about some rights that are guaranteed by the US Constitution, how secure or threatened do you think each of the following are in the United States today?

Item 5: Freedom for people to assemble peacefully

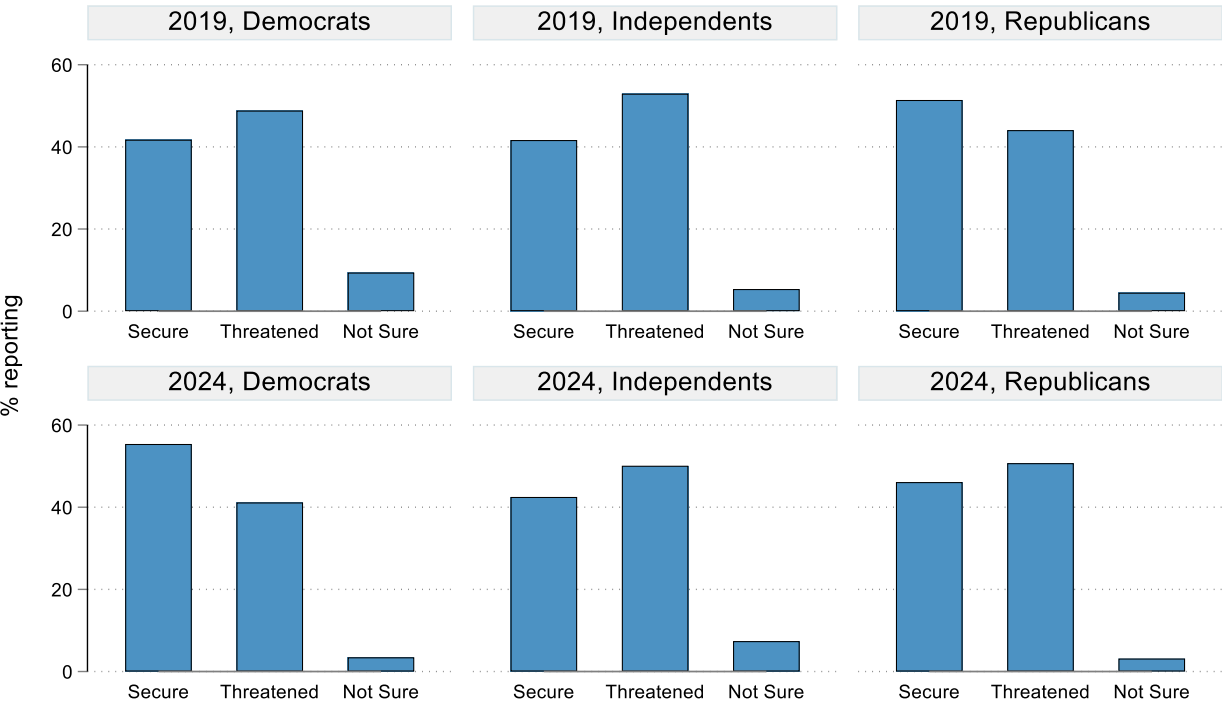
Note: Sample = Colorado Residents (not just registered voters)



CPC Studies; N=800; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined



Coloradans - by Partisanship - Reporting Freedom of Assembly is...



CPC Studies; N~770; Weighted Data; 'Very' and 'Somewhat' Categories Combined