

The Costs of Reform

Seth Masket
University of Denver

*Presented at “American Gridlock: Causes, Characteristics,
and Consequences of Polarization,” American University, May 9, 2014*

The Costs of Reform

or

Stop Trying to Fix Things; You're Only Making Them Worse

Seth Masket
University of Denver

*Presented at "American Gridlock: Causes, Characteristics,
and Consequences of Polarization," American University, May 9, 2014*

Failed party reforms

Failed party reforms

- Colorado Amendment 27 (2002)

Failed party reforms

- Colorado Amendment 27 (2002)
- Nonpartisanship in Nebraska (1937-present)

Failed party reforms

- Colorado Amendment 27 (2002)
- Nonpartisanship in Nebraska (1937-present)
- Nonpartisanship in Minnesota (1913-73)

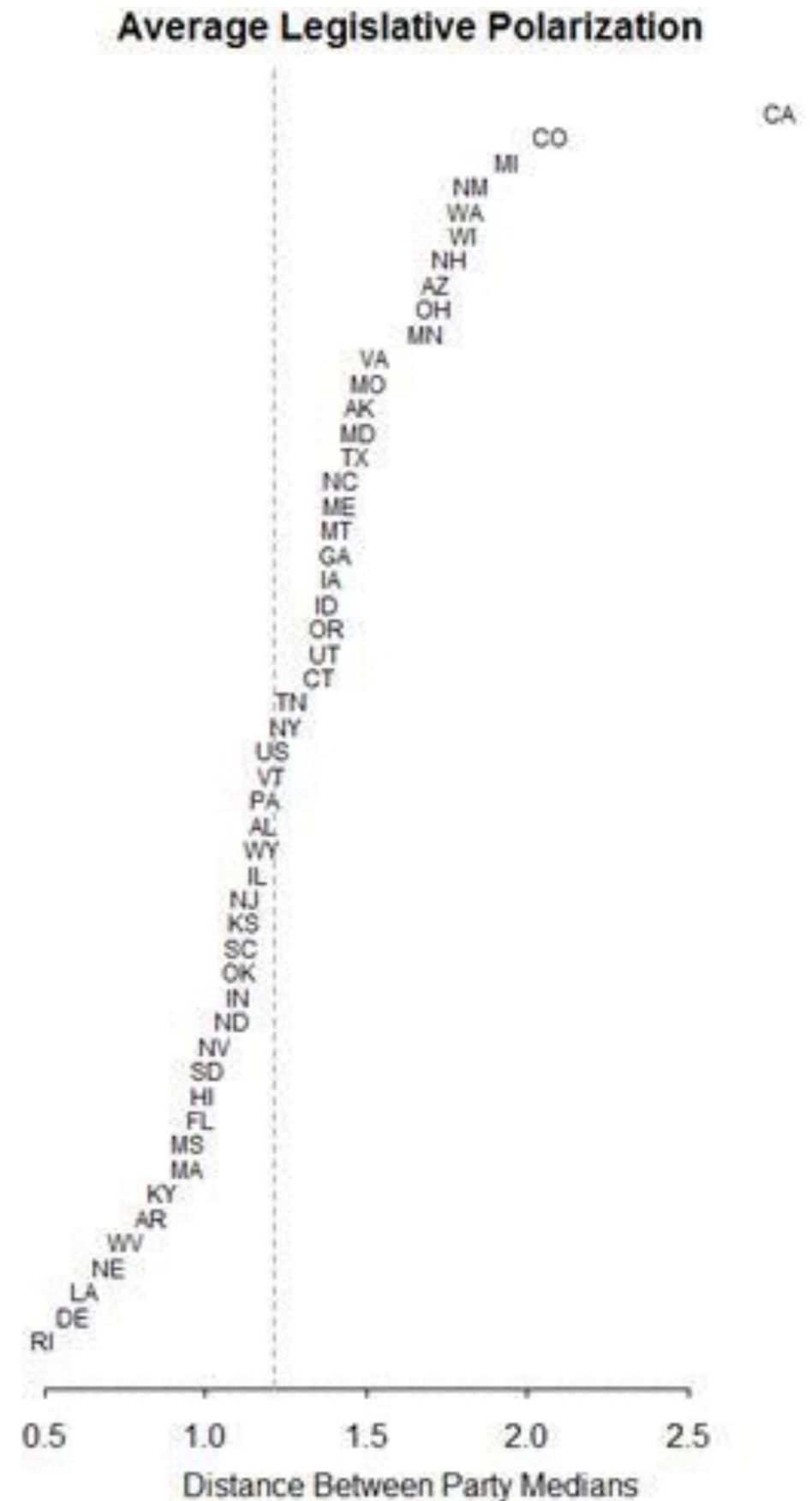
Failed party reforms

- Colorado Amendment 27 (2002)
- Nonpartisanship in Nebraska (1937-present)
- Nonpartisanship in Minnesota (1913-73)
- "Nonpartisan" recall in California (2003)

Failed party reforms

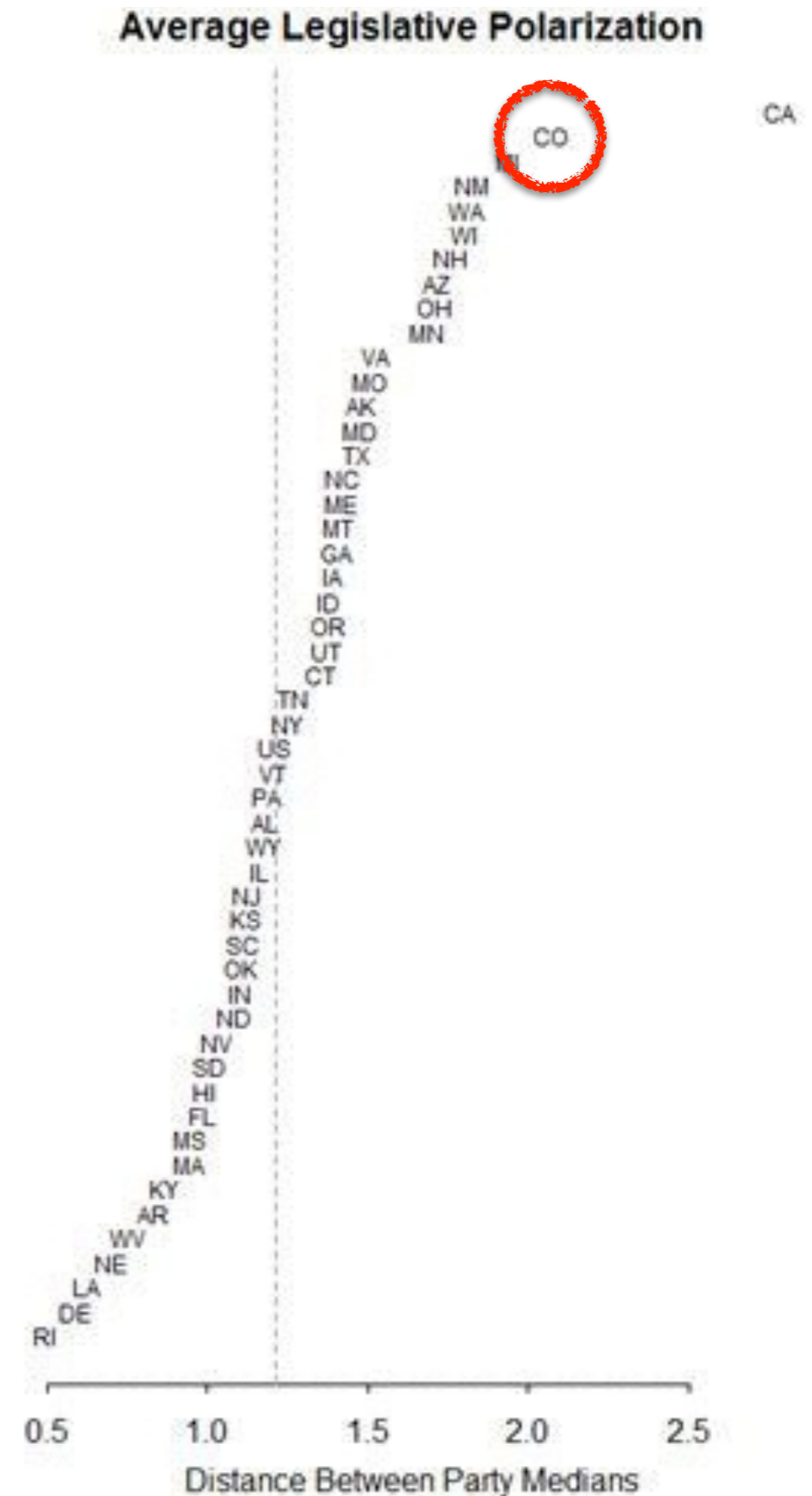
- ~~Colorado Amendment 27 (2002)~~
- ~~Nonpartisanship in Nebraska (1937-present)~~
- ~~Nonpartisanship in Minnesota (1913-73)~~
- ~~"Nonpartisan" recall in California (2003)~~

Colorado: 2nd most polarized legislature in nation



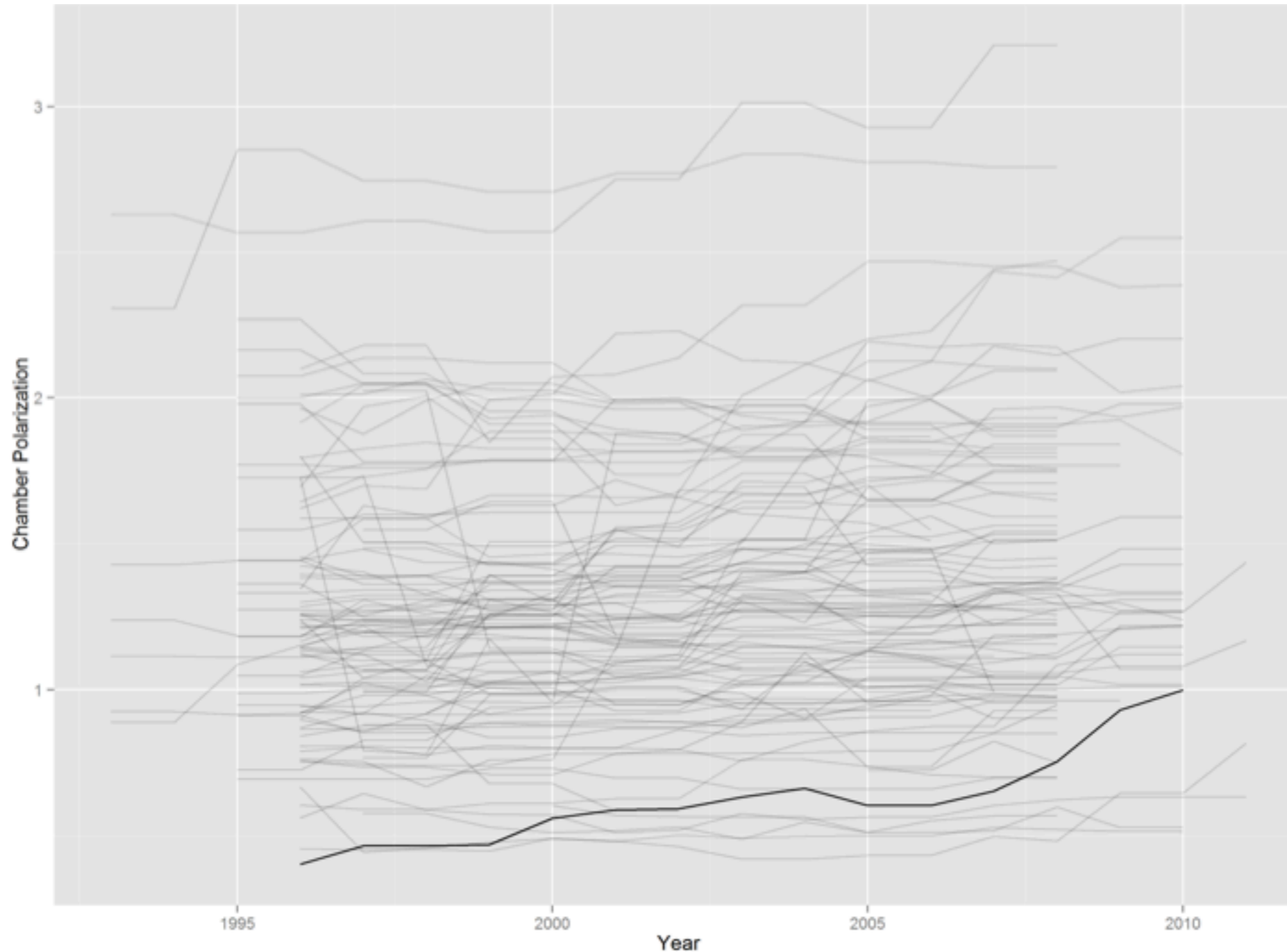
Source: Boris Shor

Colorado: 2nd most polarized legislature in nation



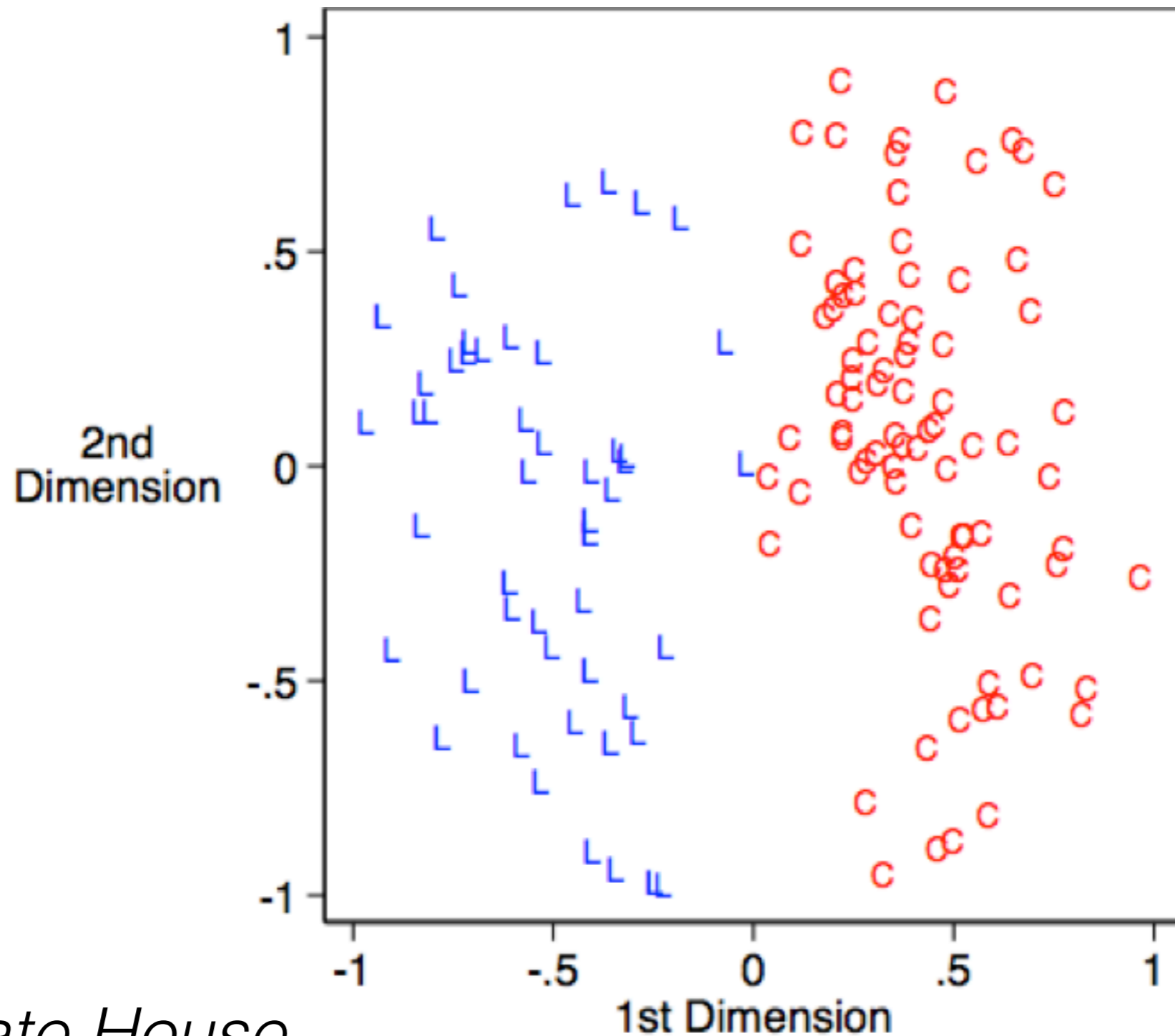
Source: Boris Shor

Nebraska: Most rapid polarization in nation



Source: Boris Shor

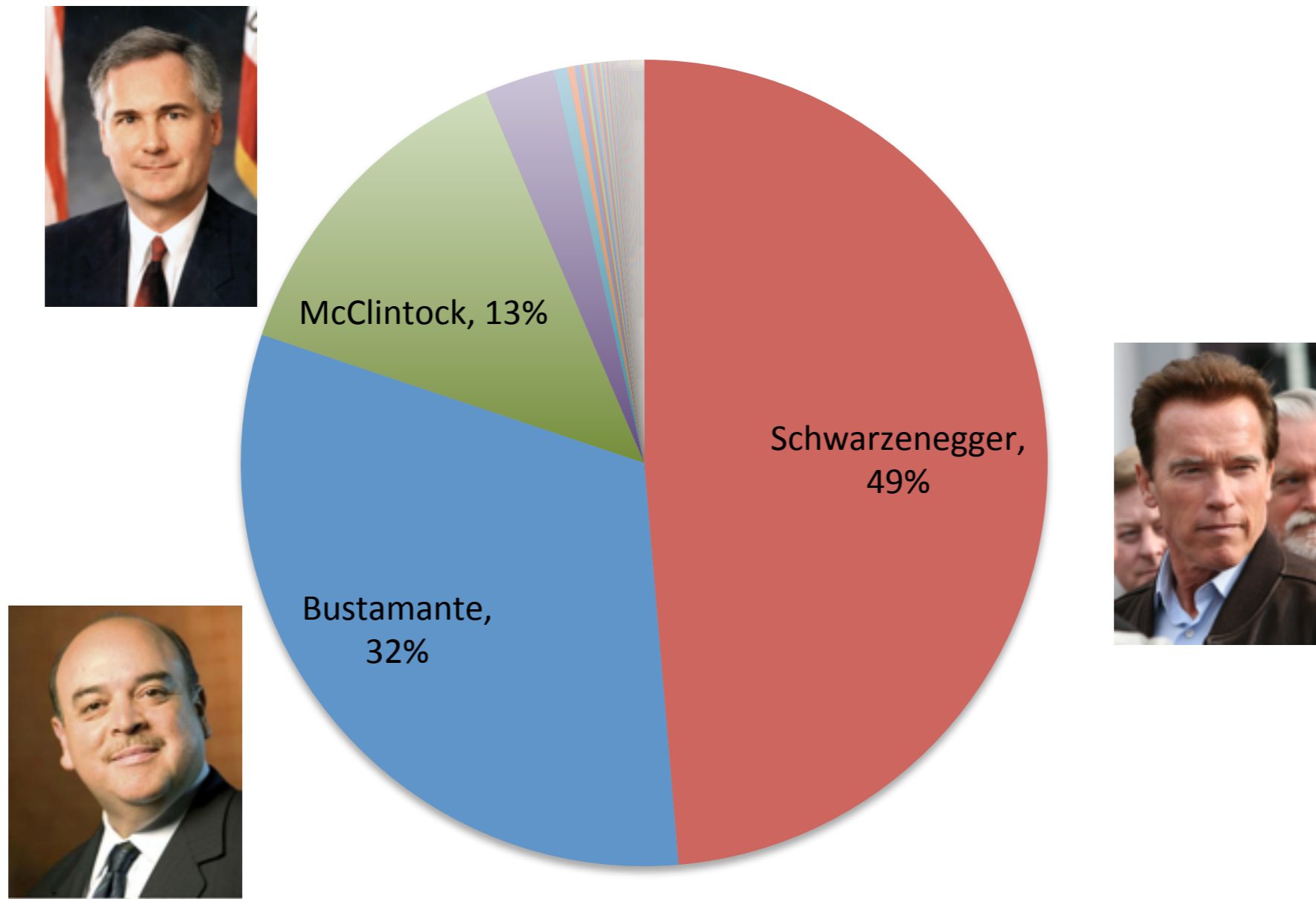
Minnesota: Achieved "partisanship" even before parties appeared on ballot



1969 State House

California “nonpartisan” recall: 134 candidates enter, 3 candidates split 94% of vote

Vote Shares in 2003 California Gubernatorial Recall



Reason for failure?

Reason for failure?

- Network nature of parties.

Reason for failure?

- Network nature of parties.
- Not hierarchical monoliths. Instead: coalitions of interest groups, activists, officeholders, candidates, donors, journalists, etc.

Reason for failure?

- Network nature of parties.
- Not hierarchical monoliths. Instead: coalitions of interest groups, activists, officeholders, candidates, donors, journalists, etc.
- Networks can adapt to many impediments.

Reason for failure?

- Network nature of parties.
- Not hierarchical monoliths. Instead: coalitions of interest groups, activists, officeholders, candidates, donors, journalists, etc.
- Networks can adapt to many impediments.
- Reactions to campaign finance reform, primary rules are evidence that broader parties can still be very active.

It gets worse

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.

It gets worse

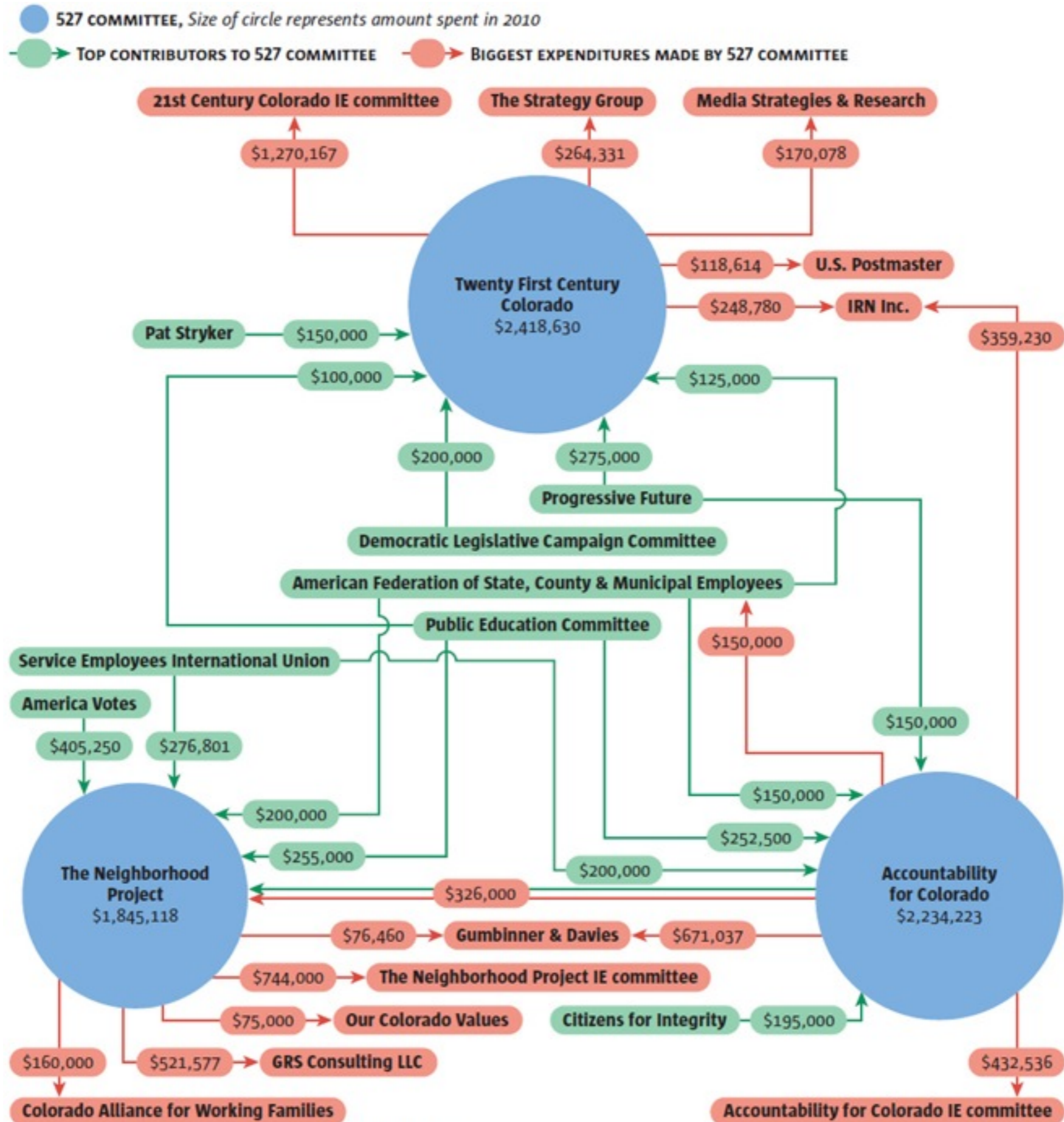
- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *campaign finance reform*.

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *campaign finance reform*.
- Policy demanders in Colorado got around limitations by building 527s, independent expenditure committees.

It gets worse

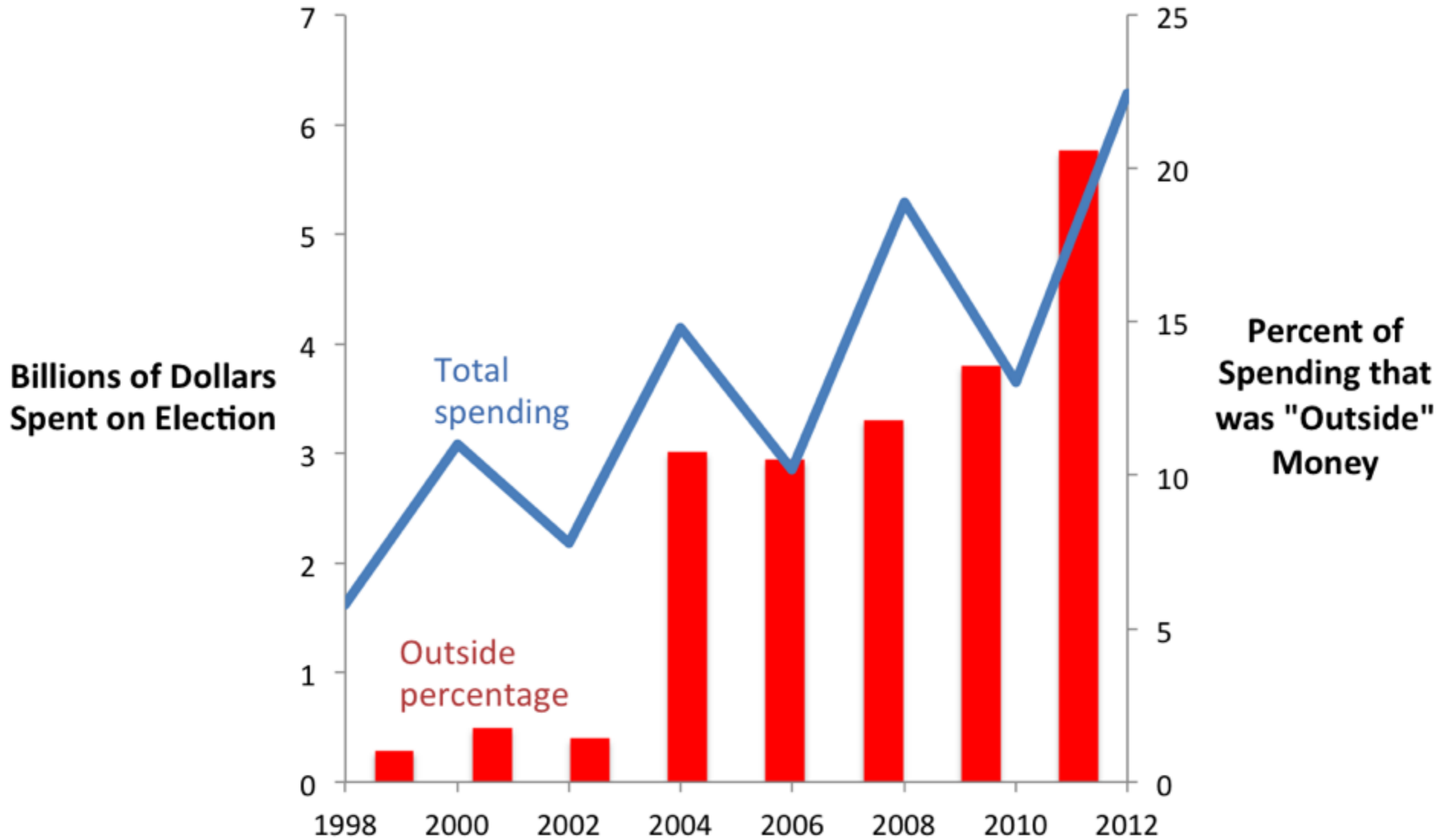
- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *campaign finance reform*.
 - Policy demanders in Colorado got around limitations by building 527s, independent expenditure committees.
 - Money now nearly impossible to follow.



Source: Denver Post analysis of Colorado secretary of state data

Karen Crummy and Thomas McKay, The Denver Post

The Dark Money Rises



Source: Open Secrets

It gets worse

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *nonpartisan elections*.

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *nonpartisan elections*.
 - Evidence from Minnesota: Under nonpartisanship, there was greater voter confusion, lower turnout, greater incumbency advantage.

It gets worse

- Many reforms impose costs on voters, political observers.
- Example: *nonpartisan elections*.
 - Evidence from Minnesota: Under nonpartisanship, there was greater voter confusion, lower turnout, greater incumbency advantage.
 - Evidence from California under cross-filing: Less organized legislative voting, greater lobbyist power, greater corruption.

Why undermine parties?

- Deeply unpopular
- Best tool we've developed for improving voter knowledge, promoting turnout, organizing elections and giving them meaning, organization legislatures, etc.