



Utah Priorities Project Summary

October 15, 2024

The Survey

Each gubernatorial election year since 2004, the Utah Foundation has sought to understand what matters most to voters through its Utah Priorities Project. The project uses surveys to inform elected officials, candidates for elected office, civic leaders, and all other Utahns about voters’ priorities.

In 2024, the Utah Foundation conducted two surveys. The first, in January, was an open-ended preliminary survey with questions asking Utah voters what they considered the two most important state or local issues for the next Utah governor to address. The Utah Foundation used these responses to create a list of the 17 most common issues. In February and March, the second survey had voters prioritize these most common issues and respond to various other survey questions.

How Utah Voters Feel

Utah voters report that the past five years have been relatively difficult. More than 3 in 5 Utah voters consider themselves worse off than five years ago – higher than during the Great Recession or early in the pandemic. Moreover, they do not seem optimistic about Utah’s future prospects. More than 3 in 5 Utah voters think Utah is on the “wrong track” – the largest share observed since 2004. While the Utah Foundation survey did not specifically investigate why voters were feeling so negative, part of the explanation is likely found in voters’ concerns about the most important issues.

Most Important 17 Issues

Issues related to the cost of living and political dysfunction topped Utah voters’ priority list in 2024. Housing affordability was the most important issue while earning enough to pay for non-housing needs was third. Both of these issues are strongly linked to the cost of living and wages.

In second place was politicians not listening to voters, while the fourth and fifth places were occupied by government overreach and partisan politics. These three topics can be summarized as voters being concerned about the political process, individual representation, and political power. To put it succinctly, this can be defined as “political dysfunction.”

The Priorities Project’s top issues were rounded out with environmental concerns – which are having enough water and good air quality – as well as K-12 education. The least important of the top 17 issues: the Great Salt Lake and a “culture war” issue.

Cost of living and political dysfunction encapsulate five top voter concerns in 2024.

Figure 1: Prioritized Voter Concerns

Category	Issue of concern
Most Important	Housing affordability
	Politicians listening to voters
High Importance	Earning enough to pay for non-housing needs
	Government overreach
	Partisan politics
Important	Having enough water (other than the Great Salt Lake)
	Kindergarten-12th grade education
	Air quality
Medium Importance	State and local taxes
	Immigration
	Homelessness
	Roads and transportation
	Crime
Low Importance	Abortion and women's rights
	Crowded neighborhoods
Least Important	The Great Salt Lake
	Transgender rights and access

Source: Utah Foundation survey.

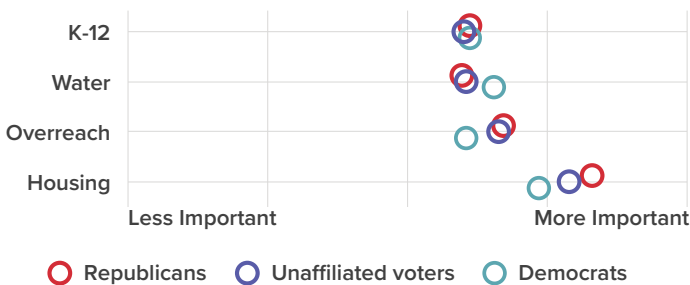
Issues that Unite

Voter priorities by political affiliation reveal far more differences than other demographic subgroups. That said, when it comes to the issues Utahns think are most important, Utahns agree more than disagree. For example, Republicans and Democrats are statistically indistinguishable concerning housing affordability, government overreach, having enough water, and Kindergarten through 12th grade education. (See Figure 2.) Of the four issues, housing affordability is “most important” for all political subgroups in the 2024 Utah Priorities Project.

Utahns were also unified on a number of issues surrounding their views on politics. More than 70% agreed that “politicians are too beholden to business, religious, or other special interest groups and ignore the will of the people.” (See Figure 3.)

K-12 education, having enough water, government overreach, and housing affordability are prioritized very similarly across political parties.

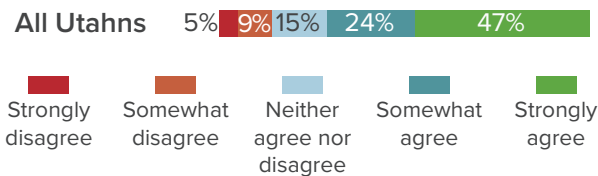
Figure 2: List of Priorities of Utah Voters by Political Affiliation



Source: Utah Foundation survey.

Voters think politicians ignore them.

Figure 3: “Utah’s politicians are too beholden to business, religious, or other special interests and ignore the will of the people.”



Source: Utah Foundation survey.

More than 70% of voters also agreed that religion should be separate from government, and more than 70% agreed that the economic system is not fair. About 60% of voters considered the government to be wasteful and inefficient. Three-quarters agreed that political compromise is important – it is how things get things done.

Utahns were also united around several other important issues. Utah voters were quite united regarding the cost of living. When looking at expenses other than housing, 70% of voters agreed that the price increases in groceries affected their household budget the most. Utahns were also relatively unified on one of the survey’s trade-off questions. Over 50% expressed willingness to remove 50% of their lawn or let it brown over the summer to save water infrastructure costs.

Issues that Divide

While united on some issues, Utahns often prefer different solutions. Regarding housing, Republicans are most concerned about first-time home-buyers, while Democrats want to focus on housing for low-income Utahns.

When asked about voters’ top K-12 education concern, one-third of voters pointed to teacher pay as the big issue, while slightly more respondents pointed to “what students are taught in school.” Liberal voters tended to focus on pay, while conservative voters were more likely to focus on class content. The final third of voters tended to focus on the need for more counselors and support services and on reducing class sizes.

In another of the survey’s trade-off questions, Utahns were divided on efforts to reduce air pollution. Liberal voters agreed to pay 5% more in taxes and on goods in order to improve air quality by 5%. Conservatives were much less likely to desire this trade-off.

Summary

Utah voters are frustrated with their government and the direction of the state. They are most concerned about the cost of living, political dysfunction, the environment, and education. Voters are fairly unified in their concern of some of these top priorities. However, they are more divided when considering how they think government should address these priorities.

The Utah Priorities Project reports and research briefs detail all demographic differences. **Scan here** for the Utah Foundation’s full research reports and research briefs on each priority topic.

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