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Research Report

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2016 Utah Priorities Project

Part I: Survey of Voters' Issues and Concerns



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The mission of Utah Foundation is to promote a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce, and a high quality of life for Utahns by performing thorough, well-supported research that helps policymakers, business and community leaders, and citizens better understand complex issues and providing practical, well-reasoned recommendations for policy change.

2016 Utah Priorities Project

Part I: Survey of Voters' Issues and Concerns

Each gubernatorial election year since 2004, Utah Foundation has sought to understand what is important to Utah voters. The project uses surveys to compare voter priorities to candidates for Utah governor and political party delegates. For the 2016 election, Utah Foundation is again releasing the Utah Priorities Project. This first installment of a series of reports outlines voters' top concerns as well as their ideological leanings. Subsequent reports will detail the top issues of the gubernatorial candidates and the party delegates.

Jobs and the economy, the top priority in the last two gubernatorial elections (2010 and 2012), fell from first place. This year, the number one priority for Utah voters is *healthcare*. While *healthcare* has always been among the top five, two potential reasons for its rise in importance are the recent focus at the state level over Utah's possible Medicaid expansion, and the sharp increase in the cost of healthcare for many Utahns in the past few years.

K-12 education has always been among the top three priorities, and this year it took third place. Environmental concerns also dominated the top ten issues with concerns about *air quality* ranking second, *water supply and quality* ranking sixth, and concerns about *the environment* in general ranking tenth.

KEY FINDINGS:

- *Healthcare* is the top concern for Utahns this year, likely due to the extended discussion on Utah's Medicaid expansion and a sharp increase in healthcare costs (see page 3).
- While opinions of quality of life have improved since 2010, thoughts about whether the state is "on the right track" remain stagnant (see page 2).
- Utah Democrats are more liberal than their national counterparts. Unaffiliated Utahns are more conservative and Utah Republicans are as conservative as their national counterparts (see page 7).
- Democrats agree the most out of any breakout group on their top 10 list (see page 9).
- Demographic breakout groups have very different priorities. Top 10 lists for various subgroups based on gender, ethnicity, age, religion, education, employment status, party affiliation, and other categories illustrate competing priorities (see pages 9-14).
- The top five statewide issues can be found in almost every demographic breakout groups' top 10 list (see page 9).
- Women and Wasatch Front respondents most closely mirrored the statewide top 10 list (see pages 10 and 12).
- Full-time employees and Gen Xers indicated that *state taxes and government spending* was their top priority (see page 11).

This research report was written by Utah Foundation Research Analysts Mallory Bateman and Christopher Collard and Research Director Shawn Teigen. Assistance was provided by Research Intern Susan Palmer. The authors can be reached for comment at 801.355.1400.

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The Top 10 Issues for 2016

1. Healthcare
2. Air Quality
3. K-12 Education
4. State Taxes & Government Spending
5. Jobs & The Economy
6. Water Supply & Quality
7. Crime
8. Partisan Politics
9. Homelessness & Poverty
10. The Environment

INTRODUCTION

Each gubernatorial election (the same year as presidential elections, with the exception of 2010 which was a special election for governor) Utah Foundation performs a series of surveys to discover the priorities of voters, gubernatorial candidates, and state delegates. This report is based off of two surveys.

In this year’s preliminary open-response survey, Dan Jones and Associates asked 507 Utahns to report what they considered to be the top two issues facing Utah that the governor could do something about. Based off of those responses, Utah Foundation created a list of 21 priorities. Dan Jones then surveyed a group of 818 registered voters to rate their concern of these 21 priorities on a 1 to 5 scale. The priorities were then ranked based on their average score, and this ranking was used for the Utah Foundation Priorities Project top 10 list. The survey also included follow-up questions about priorities and questions about political ideology.

IS UTAH ON THE WRONG TRACK?

In 2010, 36% of Utah voters thought the state was “on the wrong track.” This was likely linked to the state’s economic woes during the Great Recession and its slow recovery. In 2012 there was a slight decrease in the number of Utahns who felt the state was on the wrong track, but this number has since increased. One possible explanation is political divisiveness at the national level, which is trickling down and having an impact at the state level. Both Republicans and Democrats were more likely to say the state is on the wrong track than in 2012.

When comparing general political leanings, those who consider themselves to be conservative, very conservative, or liberal were all more likely to say the state is on the wrong track than their counterparts four years ago. Those who identified as moderate or very liberal show little difference from 2012.

UTAH’S QUALITY OF LIFE

The share of Utahns who think that the “overall quality of life in Utah” is better than it was five years ago has returned to pre-recession levels. With quality of life and the state of the economy strongly linked, it make sense that most Utahns are feeling positive. Republicans and unaffiliated voters were more likely than Democrats to report that their quality of life was better than five years ago. Those who have lived in Utah for more than 40 years were the least likely to report that the quality of life is better than it was five years ago.

Figure 1: Is Utah “Headed in the Right Direction” or “On the Wrong Track,” by Year

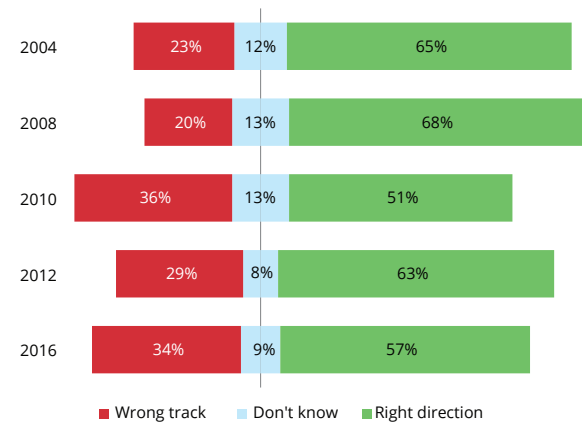
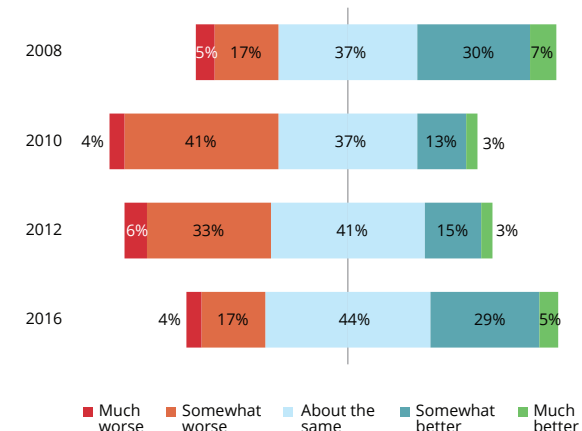


Figure 2: Quality of Life Compared with Five Years Ago, by Year



The surveys asked:

Preliminary, open-response survey of Utahns: Think for a moment about issues facing Utah that a governor could do something about... What would you say is the greatest issue facing Utah? What is the next greatest issue?

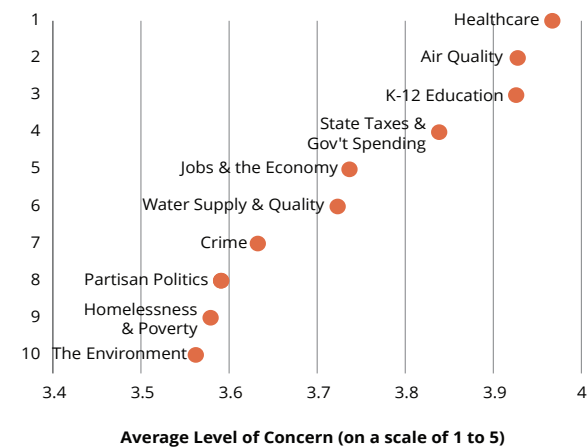
Priorities survey of Utah registered voters: Thinking about issues facing Utah, please rate how concerned you are about each of the following issues. Use a 1-5 scale with one meaning you are “not at all concerned” and five meaning you are “very concerned.”

*Additional priorities poll questions are listed in Appendix A.

TOP TEN ISSUES FACING UTAH

As mentioned previously, Utah Foundation used preliminary survey data to create a list of 21 issues, which were then used to create the Utah Priorities Project voter survey. Respondents were asked to rate their level of concern for each of the 21 topics on a 1 to 5 scale. Those with the greatest average rating became the Utah Priorities Project top ten issues. This list and their average scores are shown in Figure 3. The following section features a brief discussion about each of the top ten topics, citing comments provided in the preliminary survey.

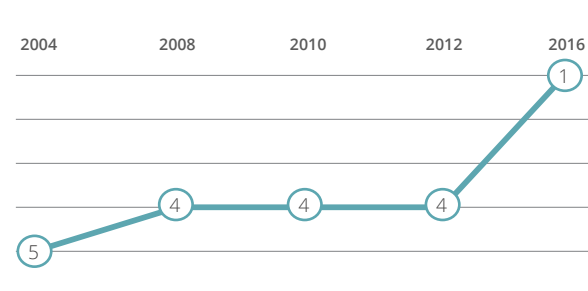
Figure 3: Utah Priorities Project Top 10 List, 2016



Priority 1. Healthcare

Since the very first Utah Priorities Project in 2004, *healthcare* has always been among the top five priorities (see Figure 4). It held steady at fourth place in 2008, 2010, and 2012, but jumped to first place in 2016. This jump is likely in response to the extended discussion on Medicaid expansion in Utah, as well as the recent, sharp increases in the cost of healthcare.

Figure 4: Healthcare Position in Utah Priorities Project



In the preliminary open-response survey, 9% comments indicated that healthcare was a top concern for the respondent. Of these, 82% identified a specific aspect of healthcare or health insurance. The majority of these specific comments were related to the state’s Medicaid expansion issue or to getting coverage for low-income or all Utahns. Cost was the next largest response, with a handful of respondents indicating they generally felt healthcare costs were not affordable. Other respondents noted that they saw the Affordable Care Act, commonly referred to as “Obamacare,” as a failure.

Priority 2. Air Quality

In the past, Utah Foundation combined the topics of *air quality* and *the environment*. For this year’s preliminary open-response survey, the overwhelming number of “air quality” answers demonstrated the need to break it out as its own topic. Indeed, *air quality* ranked second among the top priorities of Utah’s registered voters.

The preliminary open-response survey used to create the list of potential priorities took place during the state's highest winter pollution levels in years.¹ Although the voters survey which ranked the 21 priorities took place a month later, the memory of the winter inversion levels likely influenced air quality's placement as a top priority.

Of the open-response survey respondents, 11% indicated that air quality was a top concern. A handful of respondents highlighted health impacts created by the poor air quality. Another small portion of respondents talked about sources of pollution such as transportation or industry. Some of these responses also suggested solutions to the issue, which included better public transportation and stricter laws and regulations for polluters that do not meet state and federal standards.

Priority 3. K-12 Education

Since 2004, *K-12 education* has always been one of the top three priorities. This high ranking is likely because issues related to K-12 education consistently make the headlines in Utah's media. Funding and legislative session activities also make the news, particularly since the largest proportion of Utah's budget is spent on education and the Utah Legislature sees over one hundred education bills each year. Further, education is something most registered voters have a lot of contact with since they have been in school themselves, may have children or grandchildren in school, and may be working in education.

In the open-response survey, the overwhelming theme regarding K-12 education was funding. Two-thirds of comments about education included specific issues or topics. Of those comments, 66% identified education funding as an important concern. In a further breakdown of the funding comments, about one-quarter cited teacher salaries as being too low to either get good teachers or retain existing teachers. Several topics – quality of schools, class size, and Common Core – received a small number of comments.

Priority 4. State Taxes and Government Spending

State taxes and government spending has inhabited one of the top ten spots for Utah voter concerns in every Utah Priorities Project, often a top five spot. Taxes represent the principal form of interaction between Utah voters and state and local government. Since the government controls taxes, so it is no wonder this topic is a perennial concern.

Seven percent of respondents from the open-response survey mentioned either taxes or government spending as one of their top two concerns. Three-quarters of respondents mentioned taxes, most stating that they were

Figure 5: The Environment and Air Quality Position in Utah Priorities Project

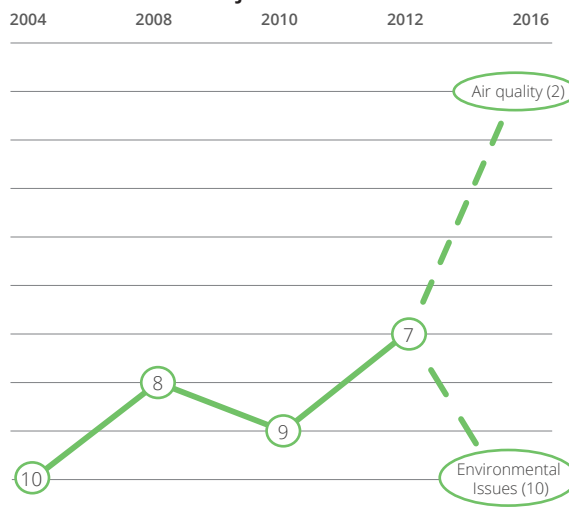
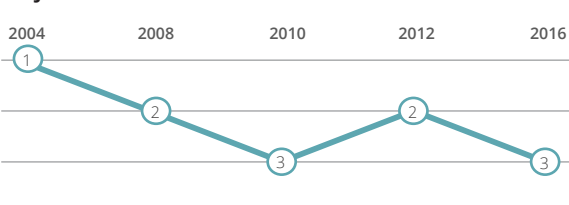


Figure 6: K-12 Education Position in Utah Priorities Project



too high. One commenter thought they were too low – especially for “polluting companies” – and several respondents recommended restructuring the tax burden in one way or another. The other quarter of respondents addressed government spending. Most commenters who explained themselves wanted tax revenue spent more efficiently, avoiding “dumb people causing us to [waste] money we could use for other things that the state needs” rather than reducing or increasing spending.

Priority 5. Jobs and the Economy

It is no surprise that *jobs and the economy* has topped the list the previous two election cycles. The anemic economic recovery kept the spotlight on the lack of good jobs for an extended time. Since 2012, Utah’s economy has emerged as one of the best in the nation, with one of the lowest unemployment rates and highest job growth rates. Business is going so well in Utah that many companies are reporting employee shortages.² But despite the low unemployment rate and recent signs of increasing wages, jobs and the economy are still a concern for many Utah voters.³

In the open-response survey, one-third of respondents identified jobs or the economy in some way, whether that was wages, jobs, business environment, cost of living, or encouraging economic growth. Of these respondents, 11% listed different economic issues as a first or second priority. Half of these comments focused on there being enough jobs for those who need them. Many of those who focused on jobs commented that they should be “quality” or “high paying” jobs. Out of the comments focusing on the economy, 12% mentioned low wages and 10% referred to the cost of living.

Priority 6. Water Supply and Quality

Water supply and quality barely missed out on the top ten list in 2010 and 2012 (it ranked eleventh), but it has been a consistent concern for Utah voters. Not only are voters concerned about a limited quantity of water in the face of Utah’s growing population and news of the California drought, but recent events highlight the vulnerability of clean water sources. The 2015 Gold King Mine waste water spill into the Colorado River and the lead pollution water crisis in Flint, Michigan have also highlighted a population’s need for a clean water source.

Of the 3% of respondents that identified water as a top concern in the open-response survey, 81% were concerned about water conservation. Respondents were also concerned about future population growth. One respondent replied “the development of Utah depends on how much water we have.”

Figure 7: Taxes and Government Spending Position in Utah Priorities Project

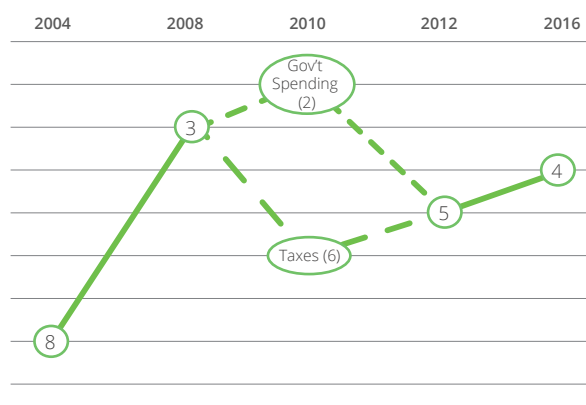
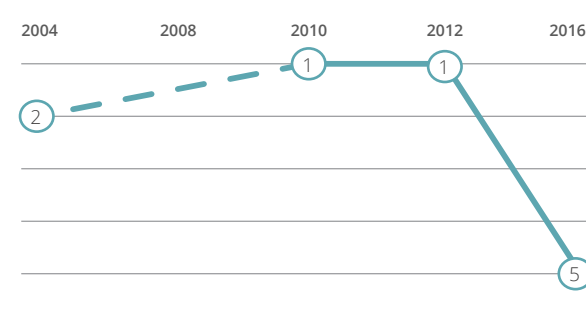


Figure 8: Jobs and the Economy Position in Utah Priorities Project



Priority 7. Crime

Crime – which ranked sixth in 2004 and 2008 – returned to seventh place after a two cycle hiatus. Since 2011, “safety and security from crime” has been the most important aspect for quality of life according to Utah Foundation’s biennial Quality of Life Index.⁴ While Utahns have given their communities relatively high quality ratings for safety and security from crime since 2011, the measure has slipped in recent years.

In the open-response survey, 6% of people mentioned crime or safety. These responses came in the form of crime (42%), justice reform (29%), and illicit drug use (29%). Responses for crime typically showed concern for lowering violence and crime in general; however, some respondents were more specific, stating safety in schools, theft, gang problems, sexual assault, “escaping prisoners,” and murder. Half of justice reform comments focused on raising public opinion of police officers, and there were two comments specifically mentioning the criminal justice/prison system reform.

Priority 8. Partisan Politics

Partisan politics first emerged as a Utah Priorities Project issue in 2012, landing at number eight. In 2016 partisan politics remains on the list at number eight. In 2012, only a few respondents listed partisan politics as one of the top two issues facing Utah that the governor could do something about. Despite the issue not coming to mind when individuals listed their top two concerns, Utah Foundation included it on the survey list that year and it made the top ten list.

Similarly, in 2016 only a small percentage of respondents of the open-response issues poll (about 3%) noted some form of political dysfunction as a top issue in Utah. Of these comments, nearly half mentioned a lack of political diversity in Utah’s government. A handful of remaining comments described divisiveness in the political arena, or incompetence/inexperience of politicians as being a concern.

Priority 9. Homelessness and Poverty

A new issue making its way to the top ten in 2012 was *poverty*. This year, in response to increased comments about homelessness, the concern was renamed *homelessness and poverty*. In the open-response survey, 6% of Utahns identified homelessness and/or poverty as the greatest issue facing Utah. Of these respondents, 84% specifically mentioned homelessness while the remaining 16% mentioned poverty. Most respondents did not articulate a particular problem related to homelessness. The few who did, mentioned annoyance with panhandling or a desire for greater efforts to aid the homeless. Only one respondent mentioned increasing the minimum wage to assist with poverty, while others did not elaborate.

Priority 10. The Environment

During the past 12 years, the environment has always been on the lower end of the top 10 list of Utah voters, demonstrating a consistent but maybe not acute concern about their surroundings. Historically, air quality and the environment were a combined topic. This year, due to the high number of comments regarding air quality specifically, the topics were split in two. Figure 5 highlights what that split looked like in the overall list of priorities.

In the preliminary, open-response poll, a small number of respondents indicated that the environment was the greatest issue facing Utah. While most of these respondents did not go into detail about what that meant for them, several respondents indicated climate change and pollution.

UTAH'S IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE

For the 2016 Utah Priorities Project, Utah Foundation included survey questions to measure Utahns' ideological consistency. These questions followed methodology developed and used by the Pew Research Center since 1994. Survey respondents were asked whether they identified more with a typically conservative or liberal position on several issues. Responses were used to create a scale from negative ten to positive ten, or "consistently liberal" to "consistently conservative." More information on this methodology can be found in Appendix B.

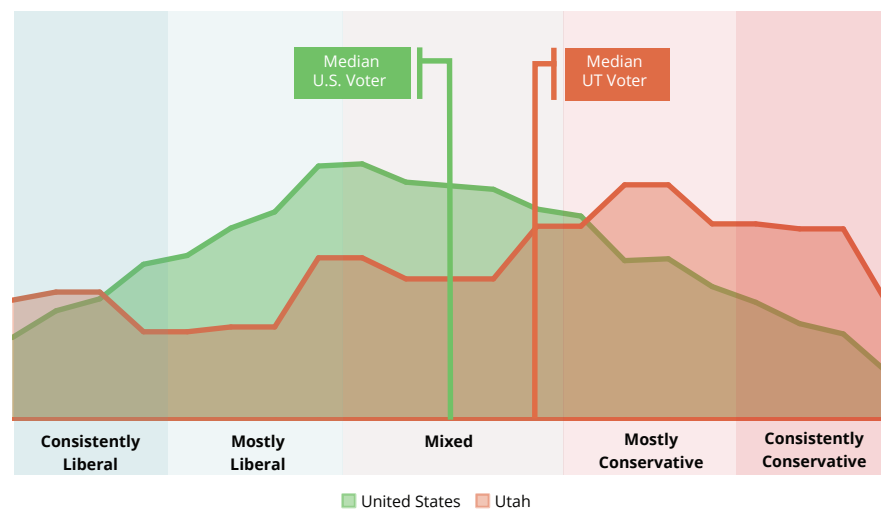
When comparing all registered voters nationally to registered voters in Utah, Utah voters are clearly more conservative (see Figure 9). Both the median U.S. and Utah voter fall within the "mixed" category, but the median Utah voter ends up being slightly more conservative (see Figure 9).

In Pew's national study of over 10,000 individuals, findings indicated that political parties have become more politically divided over the past decade, with the median – or middle – voters for each party growing further apart. When the most recent national data (2014) is compared to Utah voters (2016), it is apparent that political parties in Utah are even more divided than their national counterparts (see Figures 10 and 11).

Utah Republicans look similar to Republicans nationwide. On the ideological consistency scale, the median Republican voters both nationally and in Utah are "mostly conservative." The median unaffiliated voters nationally and in the state are both "mixed" in their liberal and conservative positions. However, the median unaffiliated Utah voter is slightly more conservative. The national and state difference is the largest for Democrats. While the median Democrat nationally is "mostly liberal," Utah's median Democrat is "consistently liberal."

When comparing the distributions of the parties across the ideological scale, it is apparent that while Utah Republicans have a slightly more conservative distribution than their national counterparts, Utah Democrats are much more liberal. Utah Democrats' liberalism might be a reaction to the fact that Utah voters overall tend to be more conservative. Another possibility is that many Utahns who might be "mostly liberal" or "mixed" on the ideological scale choose not to identify with the Democratic Party because of the conflict between the party's platform and their personal religious beliefs on issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage. Consequently, they chose to remain unaffiliated or identified with another party. Thus, only Utahns who agree with nearly all of the Democratic Party's platform – those who have a "consistently liberal" ideologically – identified with the Democratic Party, leaving a larger divide between the median Republican and the median Democrat.

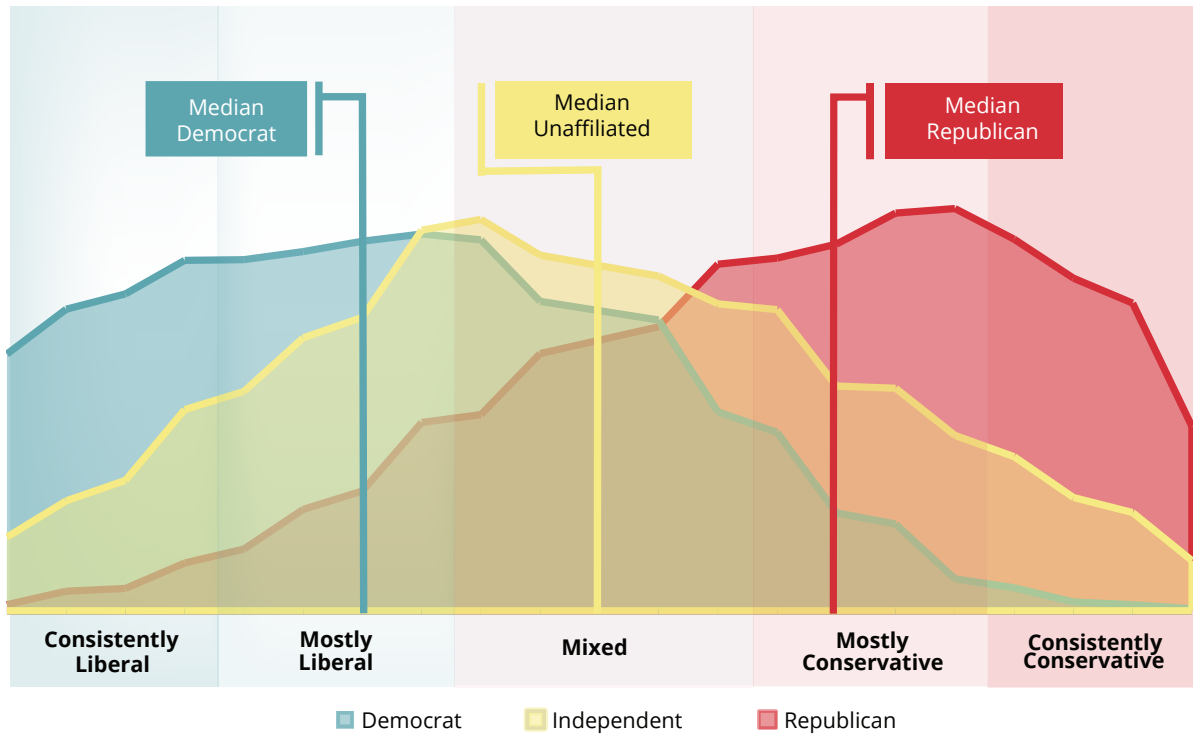
Figure 9: Ideological Consistency, U.S. Compared to Utah



Source: Pew Research Center and Utah Foundation.

Note: The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here.

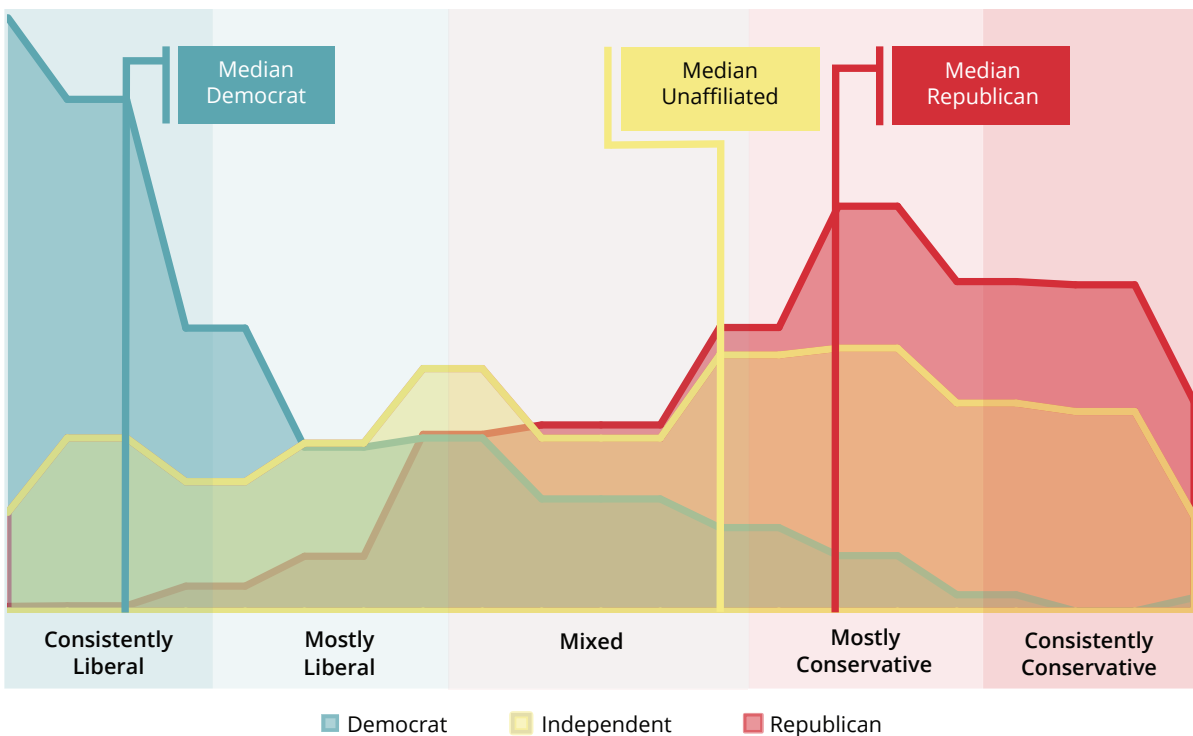
Figure 10: 2014 Political Party Polarization of the United States



Source: The Pew Research Center.

Note: The Pew Research Center bears no responsibility for the analyses or interpretations of the data presented here.

Figure 11: 2016 Political Party Polarization of Utah



Source: Utah Foundation.

Another notable difference between Utah and the nation is that unaffiliated voters nationally tend to be more “mixed” in their ideology (i.e. their distribution peaks in the middle of the ideological spectrum and tapers near the extremes). Utah unaffiliated voters, while more conservative than their national counterparts, are much more spread out across the ideological spectrum.

While Utah’s Democrats are more “consistently liberal” than their national counterparts as seen in Figures 10 and 11, “consistently liberal” Utahns represent a much smaller fraction of Utah’s population (as seen in Figure 9). As a result, much of the gridlock that forms because of the partisan divide at the national level does not occur in Utah. The presence of the Republican supermajority pushes decisions on many laws and policies into the Republican caucus rather than being part of a discussion among all lawmakers.

COMPETING PRIORITIES

Utah Foundation has identified the top priorities among Utah voters, but not all demographic groups agree on what is most important. Nonetheless, the top five statewide issues can be found in almost every demographic breakout groups’ top ten list. These are issues with broad support that affect a large number of individuals, and this broad consensus causes issues to rise to the top of the statewide list. This section details many of the differences in the demographic groups.

Political Party Affiliation

Reflecting on the previous discussion regarding ideology, differences between political parties are to be expected. Since the majority of Utahns who identify with a political party are Republican, it should be no surprise that the Republican list is quite reflective of the statewide priorities. Notable variations include *states’ rights*, *public lands*, and *immigration* being higher priorities for Utah Republicans than the general public. All of these topics follow with the Republican platform in the West. While the appearance of immigration on the top 10 list for Republicans is not surprising, the fact that it was not on the statewide list is surprising. Immigration was a top ten issue overall in 2012, and is currently a hot topic for the presidential candidates in 2016.

Figure 12: Top 10 Priorities of Utahns, Political Party Identification

Republicans	Democrats	Unaffiliated
Healthcare	Air quality	K-12 education
K-12 education	Healthcare	Healthcare
State taxes & gov’t spending	The environment	Air quality
Crime	Partisan politics	State taxes & gov’t spending
Jobs & the economy	Religion in politics	Water supply & quality
States’ rights	Homelessness & poverty	Partisan politics
Air quality	K-12 education	Jobs & the economy
Water supply & quality	Water supply & quality	Energy issues
Immigration	Equal protection for LGBTQ people	The environment
Public lands	Higher education	Homelessness & poverty

■ Unique to Breakout Group
 ■ Two Breakout Groups

Democrats, on the other hand, have one of the most unique lists of priorities, both in content and the average rating for each topic. Not only does *air quality* take first place by a large margin, but *the environment* jumps to third place. *Partisan politics* also rises in importance, likely a fact of being a minority party for the past 40 years. Democrats rank *religion in politics* the highest out of any breakout group, potentially due to the public role the LDS Church played during the 2016 legislative session. Democrats are also the only breakout group to identify *equal protection for LGBTQ people* and *higher education* as top ten priorities. An additional remarkable fact about the Democrats’ priority list is the unity in responses. Among all Utah voters, *healthcare* was the number one issue, scoring an average of 3.97 on a five-point scale. Among Democrats, their top seven issues were rated above 3.97, reflecting a high level of agreement in their priorities.

Men and Women

In general, men are more likely to be concerned about property and sovereignty issues – *states' rights*, *public lands*, and *energy issues* – than women. These topics fall off the top 10 list for women, who are more concerned about social issues – *homelessness and poverty*, *crime*, and *the environment*.

Interestingly, women's top ten issues are the same as those on the Utah Priorities Project, though the issues are ranked differently. For instance, *crime* was fifth for women compared to seventh on the overall top 10 list. This higher concern of women regarding crime mirrors the findings of Utah Foundation's Quality of Life Index survey in which "safety and security from crime" was more important for women than men when thinking about their quality of life.⁵

Religion

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints form a large proportion of Utah's population and have a different set of priorities than Utahns overall. LDS Church members' top ten priorities include *states' rights*, *public lands*, and *energy issues*, which makes them more similar to registered voters off of the Wasatch Front, men, and respondents with less than a Bachelor's degree.

Although there were not enough respondents to break out top 10 lists for all religious groups, there were some significant differences between those who were religiously affiliated and those who were not (atheist, agnostic, and those who did not identify with any religion in particular). The religiously unaffiliated were less likely to rate *immigration*, *states' rights*, and *taxes and government spending* as important. Rather they put an increased level of concern on *equal protection for LGBTQ people*, with 35% rating the issue as a 5 on the 1 to 5 scale, compared to 14% of the religiously affiliated. The religiously unaffiliated also placed an increased importance on *the environment*, with the share who rated it as a 5 nearly double the religiously affiliated (44% to 23% respectively). Understandably, the religiously unaffiliated were also much more concerned about *religion in politics*, with 54% rating the topic as a 5 while only 28% of their counterparts gave the same rating.

Race/Ethnicity

While non-white populations in Utah are likely to have a different set of priorities than the larger white population, Utah Foundation was unable to reach enough non-white or Hispanic/Latino individuals to develop a separate top 10 list. However, there were some topics in which Hispanic/Latino populations did differ from the larger population. Some of these differences are likely due to the larger populations of

Figure 13: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters, Women and Men

Men		Women	
Healthcare	1	K-12 education	1
Air quality	2	Healthcare	2
State taxes & gov't spending	3	Air quality	3
K-12 education	4	State taxes & gov't spending	4
Jobs & the economy	5	Crime	5
Water supply & quality	6	Homelessness & poverty	6
Public lands	7	Water supply & quality	7
States' rights	8	Jobs & the economy	8
Partisan politics	9	The environment	9
Energy issues	10	Partisan politics	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group

Figure 14: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters, Overall and Members of the LDS Church

Members of the LDS Church		Utahns Overall	
K-12 education	1	Healthcare	1
Healthcare	2	Air quality	2
State taxes & gov't spending	3	K-12 education	3
Air quality	4	State taxes & gov't spending	4
Jobs & the economy	5	Jobs & the economy	5
States' rights	6	Water supply & quality	6
Crime	7	Crime	7
Water supply & quality	8	Partisan politics	8
Public lands	9	Homelessness and poverty	9
Energy issues	10	The environment	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group

Hispanic/Latino Utahns in urban areas (see Wasatch Front of Non-Wasatch Front section below). Utah's Hispanic/Latino registered voters tended to be less concerned about *states' rights*; only 27% rated the issue a 4 or 5, while 55% of their non-Hispanic/Latino counterparts issued the same rating. When it came to the sister issue of *public lands*, the differences were very similar.

Utah Hispanic/Latino respondents were more concerned with *the environment* and *air quality*. While only 25% of non-Hispanic/Latinos rated *the environment* as a 5, 56% of Hispanic/Latinos rated the issue as a 5. When it came to air quality, nearly three quarters (73%) of Hispanic/Latinos rated the issue a 5 while only 41% of non-Hispanic/Latinos provided the same rating.

Homelessness and poverty was an important issue to Hispanic/Latinos, with 58% rating the issue a 5 while only 23% of non-Hispanic/Latinos rated the priority similarly. Considering that Hispanic/Latinos make up a greater share of Utah's homeless population (22% of Utah's homeless population is Hispanic/Latino while only 13% of Utahns are Hispanic/Latino) and that Utah's Hispanic/Latino poverty rate is 2.7 times larger than the white, non-Hispanic/Latino population (26.4% to 9.7%), it is quite understandable why these issues are a higher concern.⁶

While 13% of Utahns identify as Hispanic or Latino and 9% of Utahns are non-white, there is a lack of research into the priorities and concerns of Utah's non-white population.⁷ These groups are projected to make up a growing proportion of Utah's population over the next 30 years, and recognition of their opinions and differences merit additional focus.

Education

Although in different places, the top four issues for Utah voters with a bachelor's degree and those without were the same. Also of note, for Utah voters with less than a bachelor's degree, *crime*, *states' rights*, and *public lands* were more important than they were for Utahns with bachelor's degrees or more. The emphasis on *state's rights* and *public lands*, two issues that are high priorities for Utahns living off of the Wasatch Front, could be due in part to the larger proportion of the population in more-rural counties having less than a bachelor's degree.⁸ Those with a bachelor's degree or more identified *partisan politics*, *the environment*, and *energy issues* as the remaining issues on their top 10 list.

Employment

Registered voters were asked if they were full-time, part-time, self-employed, homemaker, retired, or unemployed. Only two employment-related groups had large enough samples for analysis of differences: full-time employees and retired individuals. Those who are employed full-time indicated that *state taxes and government spending* was their top priority. It should come as no surprise that this is an issue for the employed who see taxes taken from each paycheck.

Figure 15: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns, Education Level

Less than Bachelor's Degree		Bachelor's Degree or More	
Healthcare	1	K-12 education	1
State taxes & gov't spending	2	Air quality	2
Air quality	3	Healthcare	3
K-12 education	4	State taxes & gov't spending	4
Jobs & the economy	5	Water supply & quality	5
Crime	6	Partisan politics	6
Water supply & quality	7	Jobs & the economy	7
States' rights	8	The environment	8
Homelessness & poverty	9	Energy issues	9
Public lands	10	Homelessness & poverty	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group

Figure 16: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns, Selected Employment Status

Full-Time Employees		Retired	
State taxes & gov't spending	1	Air quality	1
Air quality	2	Partisan politics	2
Healthcare	3	Crime	3
K-12 education	4	Healthcare	4
Jobs & the economy	5	K-12 education	5
Water supply & quality	6	Water supply & quality	6
Energy issues	7	State taxes & gov't spending	7
The environment	8	Public lands	8
Partisan politics	9	Homelessness & poverty	9
Homelessness & poverty	10	The environment	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group

For retired individuals, *jobs and the economy* drops off their top ten list of concerns, making them one of three breakout groups analyzed that did not include this topic as a priority (the other being Democrats and the Silent Generation). The number one concern for retired individuals, *air quality*, was also seen as a top concern for Democrats and for people living on the Wasatch Front. *Crime* ranked high, as it did for the Silent Generation (see the Generations subsection, below, for more details).

Wasatch Front or Non-Wasatch Front

Utah Foundation’s 2015 Quality of Life Index report highlighted a number of topics in which there was a stark division between Utah’s more rural and more urban counties.⁹ A similar situation occurred with the Utah Priorities Project.

Wasatch Front registered voters (living in Weber, Davis, Salt Lake and Utah counties) gave a high priority to *air quality*, a problem that primarily impacts the Wasatch Front. *Homelessness and poverty*, another largely urban problem ranking high for urban Utahns, was not a priority for Utahns not living on the Wasatch Front. Conversely, Utahns not living on the Wasatch Front gave a higher priority to *jobs and the economy* than their Wasatch Front peers. This could be due to the fact that many rural Utahns’ jobs are dependent on commodity prices that have decreased sharply since 2014. Additionally, rural economies have a higher number of low-wage and seasonal tourism jobs, and generally have higher levels of unemployment. *States’ rights* and *public lands* were also on the top 10 list for non-Wasatch Front Utahns, who face these issues much more frequently than their more-urban counterparts. *Energy prices* and *immigration* are also concerns the more rural Utahns have, which are not shared by their more urban counterparts. The top ten issues of the Utah Priorities Project share the same priorities as those who live on the Wasatch Front, though the issues are ranked differently. This is likely due to the larger proportion of survey respondents living on the Wasatch Front.

Figure 17: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns, Wasatch Front and Non-Wasatch Front

Non-Wasatch Front		Wasatch Front	
K-12 education	1	Air quality	1
State taxes & gov't spending	2	Healthcare	2
Jobs & the economy	3	K-12 education	3
Healthcare	4	State taxes & gov't spending	4
Public lands	5	Water supply & quality	5
States' rights	6	Jobs & the economy	6
Water supply & quality	7	Crime	7
Crime	8	Homelessness & poverty	8
Energy issues	9	Partisan politics	9
Immigration	10	The environment	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group

Time in Utah

Interesting differences can be seen between groups categorized by their time of residency in Utah. For those who have been in Utah less than 20 years, *state’s rights*, *energy issues*, and *religion in politics* are in their top ten. For those who have lived in Utah two to four decades, *immigration* is a top ten issue. For long-time Utahns (more than 40 years), the principal difference is the addition of *public lands*, perhaps due to their extended ties to the state.

Figure 18: Top 10 Priorities of Utahns, Time in Residency

Less than 20 years		20-40 years		Over 40 years	
K-12 Education	1	Healthcare	1	Healthcare	1
Air quality	2	Air quality	2	K-12 Education	2
State taxes and gov't spending	3	K-12 Education	3	Air quality	3
Healthcare	4	State taxes and gov't spending	4	Crime	4
Jobs and the economy	5	Jobs and the economy	5	State taxes and gov't spending	5
Water supply and quality	6	Water supply and quality	6	Public lands	6
States' rights	7	The environment	7	Water supply and quality	7
Energy issues	8	Homelessness and poverty	8	Partisan politics	8
Religion in politics	9	Partisan politics	9	Jobs and the economy	9
Crime	10	Immigration	10	Homelessness and poverty	10

■ Unique to Breakout Group ■ Two Breakout Groups

Children in the Public School System

It is no surprise that the group that provided *K-12 education* with its highest mean score was parents with children in the public education system. However, *K-12 education* remained an important issue for those without children in the public education system (fourth place). Similar shifts in priority position were seen between married and single Utahns. While it makes sense that those involved in the education system care the most about it, K-12 education is a high priority for almost every breakout group analyzed.

Generations

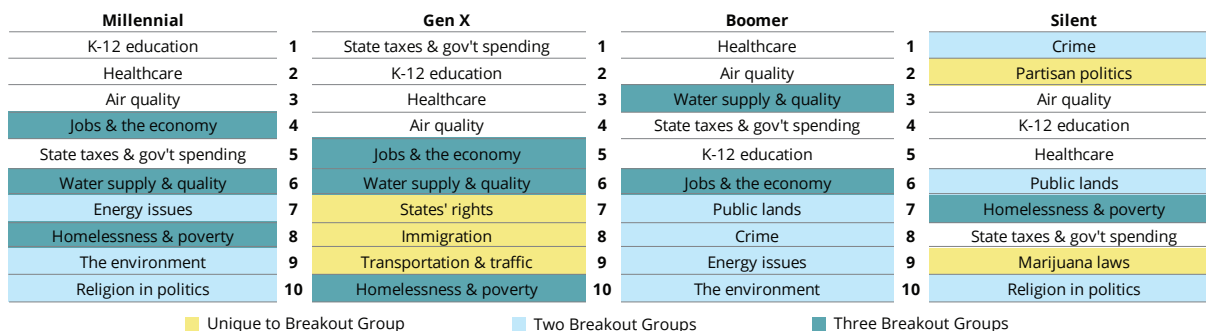
K-12 education was the top priority for Utah Millennials. This is particularly interesting since only 30% of Millennial respondents had children in the public education system. The high ranking might be due to the fact that some Millennials who do not currently have children in the public education system have very young children or plan on having children. An alternative explanation is that having been part of the system themselves more recently, they place higher priority on the issue. Alternatively, it could be that the Utah’s Millennial voters have diverse interests and *K-12 education* was one of the topics that had the broadest support among all Millennials.

While nearly 75% of Gen-X Utahns had children in the public education system, *state taxes and government spending* edged out *K-12 education* for first place. This could be due to Gen-X Utahns having the highest proportion of full-time workers (nearly 60%). *Traffic and transportation* also made it among their top ten issues, making them the only breakout group analyzed to have this topic in their top 10 list.

Among Boomers and members of the Silent Generation, *K-12 education* drops in importance, likely due to the fact that only 15% and 6% of these voters, respectively, have a member of their households in the public education system. Boomers also have a higher focus on *public lands* and *energy issues*.

Among members of the Silent Generation, *crime* was the highest concern, and it had the highest average score of all the groups analyzed. This might be due to the fact that they represent a group that is often targeted by criminals. Members of the Silent Generation were also the most concerned of any group analyzed about *marijuana laws*. It is unclear whether they support heightened cannabis laws based on a perceived tie to crime, their highest concern, or if members of the Silent Generation support medical marijuana to aid them with ailments associated with advanced age. While 48% of the Silent Generation support the statement that “legalizing marijuana for medicinal purposes would have a positive impact on society,” 34% disagree with the statement.

Figure 19: Top 10 Priorities for Utah Voters, Generations



Members of the Silent Generation also gave *partisan politics* a higher priority than all other breakout groups. Nearly 50% of these individuals agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that “politicians should stand for the principles they believe in rather than compromise to get things done.” Perhaps members of the Silent Generation rate *partisan politics* as such an important issue because they do not believe that politicians are sticking to their principles.

CONCLUSION

With Utah’s economy in full swing, *jobs and the economy* is no longer the top concern of Utah’s voters. *Healthcare* has claimed the top spot on the Utah Priorities Project’s list, driven principally by both the state discussion on Medicaid expansion and by recent jumps in the cost of healthcare. Three environmentally-related topics – *air quality*, *water supply and quality*, and *the environment* – made it on the top ten list of Utah voters.

Differences in priorities across various breakout groups help to create a more robust view of what is important to Utah voters. Democrats were highly unified in their assignment of priorities (resulting in high ratings for all of their top issues), parents with children and married Utahns placed the highest importance on *K-12 education*, and women and Wasatch Front respondents were the groups that mirrored the Utah Priorities Project top ten list the most closely.

Utah voters are also more widely divided in their ideological views than the nation. However, unlike at the national level, the partisan divide results in little gridlock because of the Republican supermajority in the State Legislature.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The preliminary survey was fielded by Dan Jones from February 1, 2016 to February 16, 2016. This survey asked two open-response questions asking respondents what they thought were the top issues facing Utah today that the government could do something about. This survey reached 507 Utahns by land line (42%), cell phone (17%), and online (41%) who unlike the second survey, were not required to be registered voters to participate in the survey. It should be noted that this survey was attached as part of Zions Bank's monthly survey of consumer sentiment.

Based on those responses, Utah Foundation created a list of 21 priorities that would be ranked on a scale from one to five in a second survey. Additional follow up questions were formulated for most priorities to help gain a better understanding of what aspects of the priority Utah voters were actually concerned about. From February 26 to March 7, 2016, Dan Jones reached 818 registered Utah voters by land line (50%), cell phone (23%) and online (27%).

This survey consisted of the following types of questions:

1. Ranking each priority on a scale of 1-5.
“Thinking about issues facing Utah, please rate how concerned you are about each of the following issues. Use a 1-5 scale with one meaning you are “not at all concerned” and five meaning you are “very concerned.””
2. A series of statements related to a priority topic to gauge the position of Utah voters on a particular topic.
“On a scale of one to five where one is strongly disagree and five is strongly agree, how would you rank the following statements? I would be willing to pay more taxes to increase money for public schools”
3. A series of sub-priorities to help identify what were the most important topics in each priority.
“When thinking about healthcare, what is your top priority? Cost of health insurance, insurance for low-income people or choosing the doctor I want.”
4. A series of questions that encouraged respondents to take a traditional liberal or conservative position which would then be aggregated to generate an ideological scale.
“I’m going to read you some pairs of statements that will help us understand how you feel about a number of things. As I read each pair, tell me whether the FIRST statement or the SECOND statement comes closer to your own views — even if neither is exactly right. The first pair is: the government today can’t afford to do much more to help the needy, OR the government should do more to help needy Americans, even if it means going deeper into debt.”

The responses from the questions like those in 3 and 4 will be included in subsequent Utah Foundation reports.

APPENDIX B: IDEOLOGICAL SCALE METHODOLOGY

As part of the voters survey, a series of ten questions were posed to respondents. These questions asked respondents whether they would take a traditionally conservative position or a traditionally liberal position on a number of issues. If a respondent selected the liberal position they would receive -1 point (to make them appear on the left of the graph) if a respondent selected the conservative position, they would receive +1 point (to make them appear on the right of the graph). Respondents were categorized into the following five groups:

Category	Score Range	Description
Consistently Liberal	-10 to -7	At least 9 liberal positions
Mostly Liberal	-6 to -3	Between 8 liberal positions with 2 conservative positions, and 7 liberal positions with 3 conservative positions
Mixed	-2 to 2	Between 6 liberal positions with 4 conservative positions and 4 liberal positions with 6 conservative positions
Mostly Conservative	3 to 6	Between 7 conservative positions with 3 liberal positions, and 8 conservative positions with 2 liberal positions
Consistently Conservative	7 to 10	At least 9 conservative positions

It was possible to rate an odd number on the scale only if respondents skipped or refused to answer a question. This was an uncommon occurrence in the national survey and it only happened once in the Utah survey. Again, adopting Pew's methodology, the graph was smoothed by showing the average of two consecutive points on the scale.

While these data and results are interesting it should be noted that this methodology is built to measure a conservative-liberal axis. It is the most commonly used form of identifying how voters will act beyond party identification which can be problematic with unaffiliated voters. At the same time, it misses some of the nuances, which might be important in this election as there are candidates at the state and national levels that do not adhere strictly to traditional liberal-conservative ideological scale.

ENDNOTES

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2. Collard, Christopher. 2015. "Is this the place? A survey of Utah Employers" accessed on March 21, 2016 at [http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/is-this-the-place-survey-of-utah-employers/Source of increasing wages](http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/is-this-the-place-survey-of-utah-employers/Source%20of%20increasing%20wages)
3. Bureau of Labor Statistics' Current Employment Statistics. Calculated by Utah Foundation.
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7. U.S. Census Bureau. 2014. "QuickFacts: Utah" accessed March 21, 2016 at <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/49>.
8. U.S. Census Bureau 2014 "ACS 5-Year Estimates table S1501: Educational Attainment."
9. Teigen, "Utah Foundation Quality of Life Index: 2015" (see note 4).

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