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APRIL 2024

**PRICED OUT &  
FED UP**  
*Cost of Living and  
Political Dysfunction  
are Voters' Top Issues*

UTAH PRIORITIES PROJECT  
20 YEARS OF WHAT MATTERS MOST



# PRICED OUT AND FED UP COST OF LIVING AND POLITICAL DYSFUNCTION ARE VOTERS' TOP ISSUES

Special thanks to the following for providing project-based support:

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### About the Utah Foundation

Since 1945, leaders, legislators, and community members have relied upon the **illuminating, independent, and nonpartisan public-policy research** produced by the Utah Foundation to support informed decision-making on topics that matter most. As a 501(c)3 with broad community support and a 60-member board, the Utah Foundation exists to empower **civic engagement as the foundation for enhanced quality of life for Utahns.**

## INTRODUCTION

Each November, Utahns have a chance to shape government to fit their needs. Ideally, the voters' voices serve as a compass to correct the course of government and shape society. However, information gaps can preclude an ideal outcome. First, politicians and policymakers need to understand Utahns' priorities. Second, voters need relevant background on the issues that matter most. The Utah Foundation's Utah Priority Project seeks to fill those information gaps and provide that background.

This report focuses on the voters' ranking of 17 of the most important issues when considering their candidate for governor. It briefly offers context on each issue and details how demographic groups and communities order their priorities.

With the pandemic in the rearview mirror, Utah voters have refocused their attention back to issues that had been emerging pre-pandemic. In 2024, Utahns' top concerns were the cost of living and political dysfunction. Secondary issues included environmental concerns and the education system.

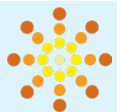
More than 60% of Utahns believe that Utah is on the wrong track and that their quality of life is worse now than five years ago. These trends should concern Utahns. Knowing voters' concerns – such as cost of living, political dysfunction, the environment, and education – will help guide the state's leaders in getting the state on the right track and improving the quality of life for all Utahns.

## 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UTAH PRIORITIES PROJECT

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 others on voters' priorities.

This first installment of a series of reports outlines voters' top concerns in 2024. Subsequent reports will further detail Utah voters' perspectives and delve into the top-ranked issues.

## KEY FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT



- The cost of living and political dysfunction topped the most important issues in 2024.
- For the first time in the Utah Priorities Project, housing affordability is the No. 1 concern.
- Secondary priorities included education and environmental concerns.
- More than 3 in 5 Utah voters think Utah is on the wrong track – the largest share observed since 2004.
- 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.
- The top four issues were often the same among subgroups, although the order varied.

## UTAH VOTERS' PRIORITIES

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 place. Both of these are strongly linked to the cost of living and wages.

In second place was *politicians 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 issues following these top items included environmental concerns with *having enough water* and *air quality* which ranked 6th and 8th respectively. These were split by *K-12 education* at 7th place. See all the issues in Figure 1.

Issues range from "most important" to "least important." While some issues were categorized with less importance, these 17 issues represent the most common ones cited out of nearly 50 issues stated in the open-ended preliminary survey.

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

Figure 1: Prioritized Voter Concerns

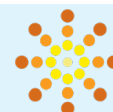
Category	Issue of concern	Average ranking	Rank range	Short name
Most Important	Housing affordability	1	1-2	Housing
	Politicians listening to voters	2	1-2	Ignoring voters
High Importance	Earning enough to pay for non-housing needs	3	3-5	Inflation
	Government overreach	4	3-5	Overreach
	Partisan politics	5	3-8	Partisanship
Important	Having enough water (other than the Great Salt Lake)	6	5-8	Water
	Kindergarten-12th grade education	7	5-8	K-12
	Air quality	8	5-10	Air quality
Medium Importance	State and local taxes	9	8-14	Taxes
	Immigration	10	7-14	Immigration
	Homelessness	11	9-14	Homelessness
	Roads and transportation	12	9-14	Roads
	Crime	13	9-14	Crime
	Abortion and women's rights	14	9-15	Women's rights
Low Importance	Crowded neighborhoods	15	14-15	Density
Least Important	The Great Salt Lake	16	16-17	Great Salt Lake
	Transgender rights and access	17	16-17	Transgender rights



Daybreak Utah Autumn Lake Village Mountain View 2017 Background, by Photo Dean under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, photo cropped

The Utah Foundation ranked these issues based on the average of a state-wide survey. As with any survey, there is some level of uncertainty. The methodology of the ranking questions does not align with the traditional plus-or-minus-some-percent style that most surveys use to express their certainty. The Utah Foundation's ranking is based on a more complex analysis and is accompanied by a range for each priority. For example, the average scores for both *housing affordability* and *politicians listening to voters* are close enough that either could be first place, though their averages are significantly higher than any of the other priorities. This means they are very likely the top two issues. The classification of issues into broader categories of importance, from "most important" to "least important," helps make this imprecision more clear. See Figure 1 on the previous page for the range of each of the priorities. See Appendix A to see which topics are significantly different from each other.

## ABOUT THE SURVEYS



In 2024, the Utah Foundation worked with Y2 Analytics to conduct two surveys. The first, in January, was an open-ended preliminary survey with two questions asking Utah voters what they considered to be 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.

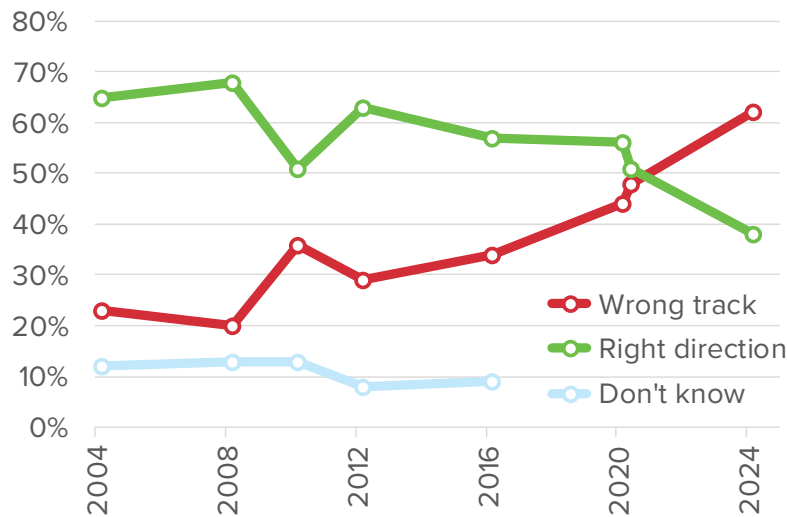
This list of 17 issues was included in the second survey of Utah voters in February and March. Since it is challenging to rank so many issues simultaneously, the survey asked respondents to choose the most and least important among groups of four issues. Each group's four issues were randomly selected from the full list of 17. Respondents made their selections a total of eight times. Using a statistical model, their responses were used to determine a relative ranking for each issue. For more details regarding the survey methodology, see Appendix B.

The Utah Priorities Project includes data from every gubernatorial election year since 2004, as well as 2010, which was a special election year to fill the remainder of Governor Jon Huntsman's term. In addition, please note that the 2020 survey was unique in that it was undertaken twice: once in late winter before the impact of the coronavirus had been realized across the United States and again in the summer after the initial peak of the virus.



## Three in five Utah voters consider the state to be on the wrong track – the highest share in over 20 years of the Utah Priorities Project.

Figure 2: Responses to the question, “Would you say things in the State of Utah are headed in the right direction or have they gotten off on the wrong track?”



## IS UTAH ON THE WRONG TRACK?

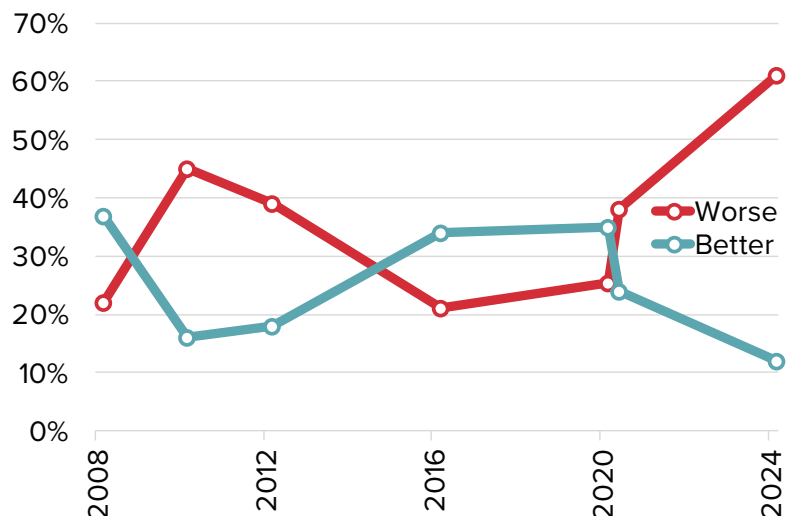
As of 2024, 62% of Utah voters reported that Utah was on the “wrong track,” while 38% reported the state was “headed in the right direction.” (See Figure 2.) The proportion of voters indicating that Utah was on the “wrong track” represents the highest level since the Utah Priorities Project series began. While 38% of Utah voters think the state is “headed in the right direction,” only 20% of Americans believe the same about the United States as of October 2023.<sup>1</sup>

## UTAH’S QUALITY OF LIFE

Most Utah voters say their quality of life is worse than it was five years before. (See Figure 3.) Disconcertingly, the 2024 Utah Priorities Project saw the largest proportion of Utahns reporting that their quality of life was “much worse” than five years before – a whopping 16%. This is perhaps surprising since this includes those respondents surveyed during the pandemic in July 2020.

## Three in five Utah voters state they are worse off now than five years ago – higher than during the Great Recession or early in the pandemic.

Figure 3: Share of Utah Voters who reported “Somewhat Worse” or “Much Worse” compared to those who responded “Somewhat better” or “Much better” when responding to the question “How would you rate the overall quality of life in Utah today, compared with five years ago? Would you say it is...”



## MOST IMPORTANT

Two priorities are clearly at the top of the 2024 Utah Priorities Project. While the survey results leave some ambiguity regarding which is more important than the other, they can unambiguously state that these two items are more important than any of the remaining 15.

1 AP-NORC, “The October 2023 AP-NORC Center Poll,” <https://apnorc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Topline-Oct2023-Biden.pdf>.



Corner Canyon Area, Draper, Utah, by Ken Lund under CC BY-SA 2.0

## Housing Affordability

*Housing affordability* was the most important issue in 2024. The Utah Foundation had asked about housing prices in its 2008, 2010, and 2012 surveys, but it had never been among the top-10 issues. However, the issue rose to second place in March 2020. With the emergence of the coronavirus, concerns about *housing affordability* dropped to seventh place in July 2020.

## Politicians Listening to Voters

*Politicians listening to voters* was the second most important issue in 2024. When Utahns commented on this issue, they often focused on how elected officials pay too little attention to voters in favor of corporations, religious organizations, the well-connected, or special interest groups.

*Politicians listening to voters* was the most important issue in pre-pandemic 2020. This captured sentiments regarding legislative changes to ballot initiatives – given that the Utah Legislature altered every ballot measure that passed in 2018.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, after the emergence of the coronavirus pandemic, *politicians listening to voters* dropped to sixth. While the pandemic took center stage for voters, the issue resurfaced to the top in 2024.

<sup>2</sup> The Utah Foundation, “Utah Priorities 2020 | What’s on Utah’s Mind: Voter Issues and Concerns in 2020,” August 2020, <https://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/whats-on-utahs-mind-voter-issues-and-concerns-in-2020/>.



## HIGH IMPORTANCE

The “high importance” issues stand above the rest of the 2024 Utah Priorities Project list, though they are only slightly more important than the “important” issues. *Partisan politics* bridges both categories, but because of its similarity to *politicians listening to voters* and *government overreach*, the Utah Foundation classified it in the category nearest those two similar topics.

### Earning Enough to Pay for Non-Housing Needs

Utah’s economy is robust when considering unemployment rates and economic growth. Utahns have also experienced first-in-the-nation growth in personal income in recent years. However, consumer sentiment is still below its pre-pandemic level.<sup>3</sup> While the nation’s annual inflation rate has fallen from record highs, several factors suggest that consumers have not yet adjusted to higher prices.<sup>4</sup>

Previous editions of the Utah Priorities Project survey focused on *jobs and the economy*. In early 2020, *jobs and the economy* was ranked twelfth place. After the pandemic, concerns related to how the pandemic would affect the economy pushed *jobs and the economy* to fourth place. The 2024 open-ended survey revealed that cost of living, not the economy at large, was the respondents’ key issue. Accordingly, *earning enough to pay for non-housing needs* replaced *jobs and the economy* as an option for survey respondents in 2024.



3 University of Michigan, “Survey of Consumers,” <http://www.sca.isr.umich.edu/files/chicsr.pdf>.

4 The Utah Foundation, “Inflation in Utah,” <https://www.utahfoundation.org/inflation/>.



## Government Overreach

*Government overreach* was a new priority in 2024. Like all issues, this was included due to responses from the open-ended preliminary survey. Some of the responses were very specific, such as licensing and OSHA requirements, while most were more general, such as:

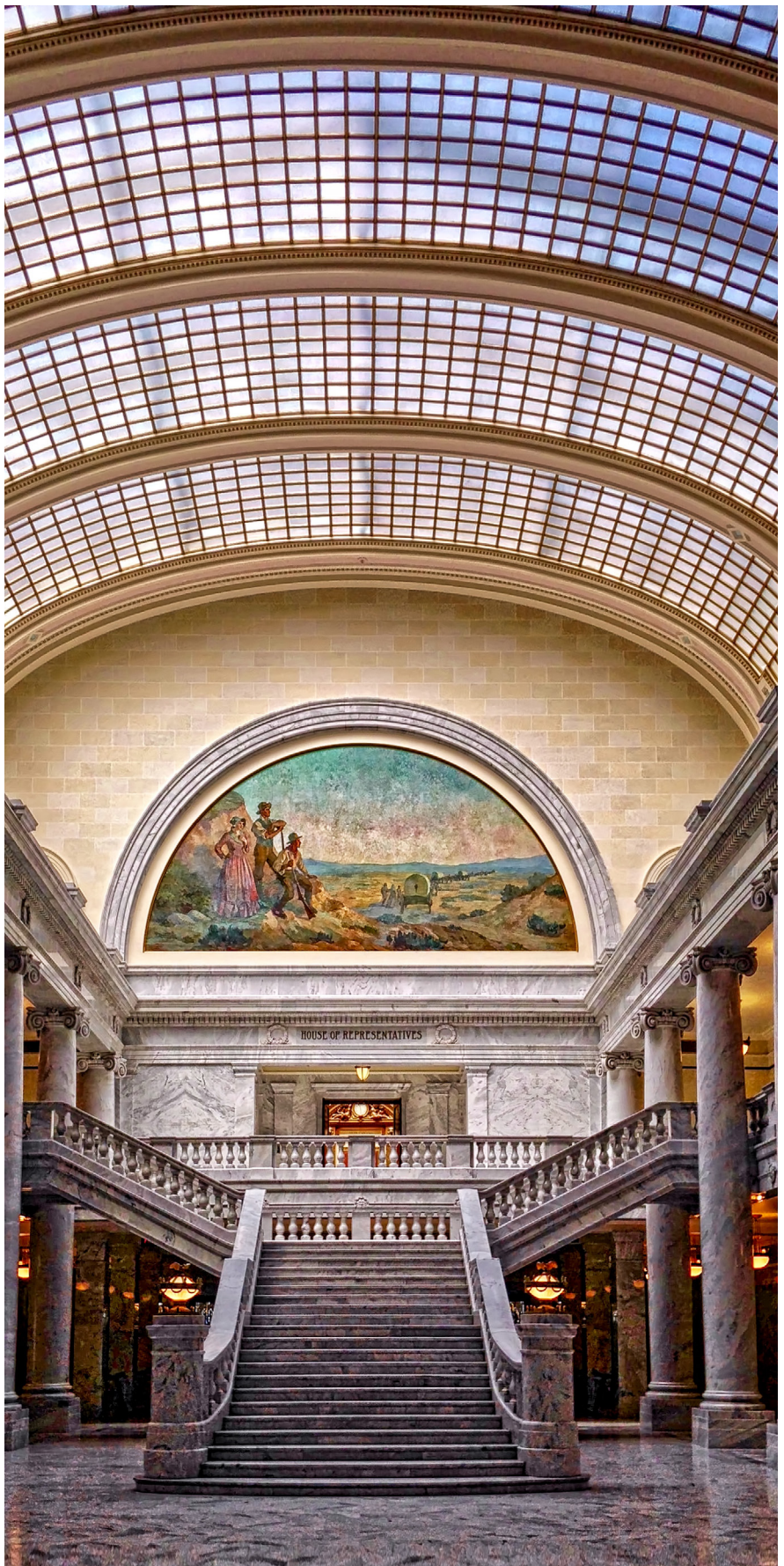
- Federal government overreach.
- Utah State government overreach.
- Legislators' overreach.
- Managing bureaucracy.
- Allowing businesses to grow without government interference.

Like *politicians listening to voters*, this issue was not particularly important during the open-ended preliminary survey in 2024. Surprisingly, it jumped up the list of priorities when measured against other issues.

## Partisan Politics

*Partisan politics* has been a common topic under the Utah Priorities Project but has been expressed differently in past survey versions. Based on responses to the open-ended preliminary surveys, variations have included *partisanship & division*. It has varied in importance over time, reaching its highest point in 2024 at fifth place.

In the 2024 open-ended preliminary survey, respondents expressed frustration with political extremism, how political opponents press their agendas, the lack of compromise, and the increasingly divisive nature of a two-party system.



Inside Utah State Capitol, by Wikipedia user EGryk under CC BY-SA 4.0.



## IMPORTANT

The “important” issues are nearly indistinguishable in terms of their respective ratings. They are likely somewhere between 5th and 8th place.

### Having Enough Water (other than the Great Salt Lake)

Water-related questions have been regularly included in the Utah Priorities Project but have been expressed as *water supply and quality* in past versions of the survey. However, the 2024 open-ended preliminary survey suggested that Utahns are not, in fact, concerned about water quality. Based on those preliminary responses, the Utah Foundation separated out *the Great Salt Lake* from *having enough water*. The open-ended survey responses were nearly always one or the other: water supply in general or the Great Salt Lake very specifically. Rarely did respondents mention both.

### Kindergarten through 12th Grade Education

*Kindergarten through 12th grade education* had always been among the top three issues on the Utah Priorities Project until dropping to 6th place during the pre-pandemic March 2020 survey. However, *kindergarten through 12th grade education* bounced back up among voters’ top concerns following the onset of the coronavirus and related school closures. Interestingly, 2024 saw education at its lowest ranking in 20 years.



The View 4,290 feet Above Where I Parked the Car, by Brandon Rasmussen under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0, photo cropped



Smelter Smoketack Detail, by TimeScience under CC BY-NC 2.0

## Air Quality

Before 2016, the Utah Foundation had combined the *environment* and *air quality* into a single issue. It regularly appeared at the lower end of the top-ten list. After separating the issues in 2016, *air quality* jumped to second place. In early March 2020, it dropped slightly to third place but was re-prioritized to 11th place in July 2020. Concern increased back to eighth place in 2024.

## MEDIUM IMPORTANCE

The “medium importance” group has the most items. Interestingly, these items tend to fall into two categories. The first includes items where Utah voters agree that the issues are of medium importance: *state and local taxes*, *homelessness*, and *roads and transportation*. The second category consists of those where some voters think the issue is a high priority while others think the issue is a low priority – which gave the issue an overall medium importance. Utah voters were much more split regarding the importance of *immigration*, *crime*, and *abortion and women’s rights*.

## State and Local Taxes

The Utah Priorities Project has regularly included tax-related issues, usually listed as *state taxes and government spending*. In 2010, the issue was separated into *government spending* and *taxes*. The 2024 open-ended preliminary survey responses focused almost exclusively on taxes, not spending. The topic had always been eighth place or above, topping out at second place in mid-2020. In 2024, it dipped to a “medium importance” issue at ninth place.



## Immigration

*Immigration* has appeared in every iteration of the Utah Priorities Project. In 2008, it peaked at fifth place but dropped to 10th in 2010 and 2012. It ranged from 14th to 17th in 2016 and both surveys in 2020. It is now back up to 10th place in 2024, likely due partly to the spike in border crossings and Congress's failure to address the issue.<sup>5</sup>

## Homelessness

*Homelessness and poverty* made its way on the Utah Priorities Project in 2012 and 2016, coming in at ninth place each year. In 2020, the Utah Foundation focused exclusively on *homelessness* based on findings from that year's open-ended preliminary survey. In early March 2020, it ranked ninth, but in the subsequent 2020 pandemic survey, it had fallen to 16th place. By 2024, voters grew more concerned about the issue with it coming in at 11th place.

## Roads and Transportation

This issue saw one of the highest levels of agreement among Utah voters, solidly ranking it in the "medium importance" range. *Roads and transportation* is an issue that has been surveyed with every Utah Priorities Project in some form, but has only been a top-10 list twice. In 2024, it was in 12<sup>th</sup> place.

## Crime

*Crime* is a topic that is less likely to be chosen by Utah voters when responding to open-ended questions but often ranks a little higher when compared with other priorities. In 2016, *crime* was among the top 10 for the first time since 2008. In early March 2020, *crime* ranked 13th; by July 2020, it ranked 11th. In 2024, it has again landed in 13th place.

## Abortion and Women's Rights

*Abortion* has not been a Utah Priorities Project issue since 2004. Its current level of relevance in open-ended survey responses is likely related to the Supreme Court's Dobbs ruling in 2022.<sup>6</sup> Abortion legalization is now left primarily up to states. While the topic was likely a key player in the nation's 2022 election season, it only came in at 14th place in the 2024 Utah Priorities Project.<sup>7</sup> However, this issue saw the most variation among Utah voters by a substantial margin. This issue was among the most important for some

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5 Pew Research, "Migrant encounters at the U.S.-Mexico border hit a record high at the end of 2023," February 15, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/15/migrant-encounters-at-the-us-mexico-border-hit-a-record-high-at-the-end-of-2023/>. And Brookings, "The collapse of bipartisan immigration reform: A guide for the perplexed," February 8, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-collapse-of-bipartisan-immigration-reform-a-guide-for-the-perplexed/>.

6 Brennan Center for Justice, "Roe v. Wade and Supreme Court Abortion Cases," September 28, 2022, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/roe-v-wade-and-supreme-court-abortion-cases>.

7 National Library of Medicine, "Persuadable voters decided the 2022 midterm: Abortion rights and issues-based frameworks for studying election outcomes." January 19, 2024, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10798438/>.





Approaching Salt Lake International Airport, West Valley City, Utah, by Ken Lund under CC BY-SA 2.0

demographic groups – such as Democrats. However, it was among the least important for others – including Republicans. This split landed it in the “medium importance” category.

## LOW IMPORTANCE

The Utah Foundation’s methodology for prioritizing issues is designed to highlight issues at the extremes: the top priorities and the lowest priorities. As a result, the “low importance” category has only a single item.

### Crowded Neighborhoods

While *population growth* is often at the top of issues identified in the Utah Foundation’s open-ended survey, it tends to rank lower when Utah voters start prioritizing issues. The Utah Foundation asked about *population growth* in four of the five past surveys, but it has not ranked among the top 10 since 2008. In 2020, the Utah Foundation modified the question to reflect that concerns are less about population growth, but more about managing that growth and its impacts on other issues such as transportation, infrastructure, population, education, the economy, and even water. The topic – included as *managing growth* in 2020 – finally broke the top-10 list during the height of the pandemic. After analyzing the 2024 open-ended preliminary survey responses, the Utah Foundation again modified the question. This one – *crowded neighborhoods* – landed in 15th place.

## LEAST IMPORTANCE

While it is not clear which of these issues is truly the lowest priority, both of these remaining issues have an unambiguously lower average than the other 15 items. While the Utah Foundation may rate these as the least important of the 17 items, that is not to say that they are not important at all. These items are at the top of the list for many Utah voters. Yet their average ranking is substantially below the rest. Further, it is crucial to remember that while these two issues may be the least of the 17 issues ranked, they were among the 17 most common issues of nearly 50 mentioned by respondents in the open-ended preliminary survey.

### The Great Salt Lake

*Having enough water (other than the Great Salt Lake)* came in as an “important” issue at sixth place, but *the Great Salt Lake* as a separate item came in – perhaps surprisingly – as one of the “least important” issues in 16th place. While the issue was important during the open-ended preliminary survey, coming in as a top-five issue, it seems likely that its slip to 16th may be because it is more of a regional issue. Utah voters in counties other than Weber, Davis, and Salt Lake may not feel like this is an issue relevant to them. Moreover, even within these counties, there is not necessarily agreement on the severity of the issue.

### Transgender Rights and Access

Transgender issues were a hot topic during the 2024 Utah General Session.<sup>8</sup> The issue was on the Utah Priorities Project for the first time in 2024, given its top concern by many respondents in the open-ended preliminary survey. The issues perhaps came to mind for many respondents since the open-ended preliminary survey was being fielded during the Utah Legislature’s intense discussion of transgender access to medical treatment and public facilities. Nonetheless, when ranked against other issues in the main survey, it was among the least important of the 17 top issues, on average.

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<sup>8</sup> Salt Lake Tribune, “Utah Legislature passed a record number of bills in 2024. Here’s how they’ll change your life.” March 2, 2024, <https://www.sltrib.com/news/politics/2024/03/02/utah-legislature-passed-hundreds/>.



Sunset - Great Salt Lake, by R. Nial Bradshaw under CC BY 2.0

## OTHER PRIORITIES IN 2024

Many issues did not rise above the threshold in the open-ended survey, but they are still very important to many Utahns. Several issues fell off the 2020 Utah Priorities Project list. Based on an analysis of the open-ended preliminary survey data, five issues from the July 2020 iteration of the project did not make the cut:

- *Health care (costs and accessibility)*
- *Public health / COVID-19 pandemic*
- *Police (support or reform)*
- *Racial inequality or racism*
- *Climate change*

The most surprising was *health care*. It has been a top-five issue in every other iteration of the Utah Priorities Project, including as the top issue in 2016 and during the pandemic in 2020. In addition, *public health* was with *health care* as a top-five issue in 2020 – each of which was deemed “most important” that year.

*Police (support or reform)* was a new topic in the summer of 2020 open-ended survey after the nation saw large protests decrying police brutality, rioting, and vocal support to both reform the police and protect police departments. *Racial inequality or racism* was another category connected to the 2020 protests. It had never been mentioned enough in open-ended preliminary surveys for the Utah Foundation to include it on the list, nor was it sufficiently mentioned in 2024. These issues are an excellent example of how current events can affect the Utah Priorities Project.

*Climate change* ranked last or second to last in both 2020 surveys and was simply not sufficiently mentioned in the 2024 open-ended preliminary survey to make it onto the main survey.

Other issues that came up in the open-ended survey but did not gain enough support to make the cutoff included *promoting family and marriage*, *mental health*, *individual freedom*, *public transportation*, *gun rights*, *cannabis accessibility*, *religious freedom*, and *liquor laws*.



## COMPETING PRIORITIES

The Utah Foundation has identified the top priorities among Utah voters, but not all demographic groups agree on what is most important. This section details many of the differences in the demographic groups.

### Men and Women

Like most groups, the top two issues for women and men look the same. While their lists are similar to the overall Utah Priorities Project list, women prioritized *homelessness* among their top-ten lists.<sup>9</sup> After accounting for other demographic factors, women were more likely to prioritize *abortion and women's rights*, while men were more likely to prioritize *crime* and *immigration*.

#### Women and men have very similar top-10 lists.

Figure 4: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters by Women and Men

Women		Men
Housing	1	Housing
Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters
Inflation	3	Overreach
Overreach	4	Inflation
Partisanship	5	Immigration
K-12	6	Water
Water	7	Partisanship
Air quality	8	K-12
Homelessness	9	Taxes
Taxes	10	Air quality

Unique to breakout group

### Religion and Spirituality

When asked about the role of religion in their lives, many Utahns responded that they were “an actively religious person” (43%) or they “identify with a religion but don’t actively participate” (12%). Those who identified as “spiritual but not religious” and those who responded that “spirituality and religion do not play an important part in my life” each represented 22% of survey respondents.

While the groups had numerous differences, a few priorities stand out. This is particularly the case for those who did not identify as spiritual or religious. (See Figure 5.)

After accounting for other demographic factors, those who did not identify as spiritual or religious were more concerned about *abortion and women's rights* and *the Great Salt Lake*. They were less likely to be concerned about *earning enough to pay for non-housing needs* and *roads and transportation* compared to the other groups.

#### Non-religious, non-spiritual voters are the most unique.

Figure 5: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters by Religion and Spirituality

Religiously active		Inactive		Spiritual		Not important
Housing	1	Housing	1	Housing	1	Women's rights
Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters
Inflation	3	Inflation	3	Inflation	3	Air quality
Overreach	4	Immigration	4	Overreach	4	Partisanship
Immigration	5	Overreach	5	Taxes	5	Housing
K-12	6	K-12	6	Partisanship	6	Water
Taxes	7	Water	7	Water	7	Overreach
Water	8	Crime	8	Air quality	8	K-12
Partisanship	9	Partisanship	9	K-12	9	Homelessness
Crime	10	Taxes	10	Immigration	10	Great Salt Lake

Unique to breakout group

Shared with two breakout groups

Shared with three breakout groups

Those who identified with a religion but were not actively participating were more likely to prioritize *immigration* and less likely to prioritize *partisan politics* than the other three groups, after accounting for other demographic factors.

<sup>9</sup> Demographic factors were: gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level, income level, region/spirituality, owning/renting, party affiliation, political ideology.



## Housing

The Utah Foundation asked respondents to select what best describes where they rent or own their home. Those living with parents or relatives or in other living arrangements were a small portion of the survey and were not big enough to detect differences from the other groups. The biggest observable differences were between owners and renters. After accounting for other demographic factors, owners ranked *immigration, crime, and kindergarten through 12th-grade education* higher than renters. On the other hand, renters ranked *abortion and women's rights* and *housing affordability* higher than owners.

## Education

The survey asked respondents about the last level of formal education that they completed. All groups put *housing affordability* at the top of the list. For those with less than a bachelor's degree, *earning enough to pay for non-housing needs* came in second place, just edging out *politicians listening to voters*. (See Figure 6.)

After accounting for other demographic factors, Utah voters with higher levels of education were more likely to prioritize *air quality, partisan politics, and the Great Salt Lake* and less likely to prioritize *crime and immigration* when compared to those with lower levels of education.

### The greatest differences by education appear between those with less than a bachelor's degree and those with more.

Figure 6: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters by Education

High school or some college		Voc., tech., or associates*		Bachelor's degree		Graduate degree	
Housing	1	Housing	1	Housing	1	Housing	
Inflation	2	Inflation	2	Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	
Ignoring voters	3	Ignoring voters	3	Partisanship	3	Partisanship	
Overreach	4	Overreach	4	Overreach	4	K-12	
Immigration	5	Taxes	5	Air quality	5	Overreach	
Taxes	6	Water	6	Water	6	Inflation	
Crime	7	Immigration	7	K-12	7	Water	
Water	8	K-12	8	Inflation	8	Air quality	
K-12	9	Crime	9	Women's rights	9	Taxes	
Partisanship	10	Roads	10	Homelessness	10	Homelessness	
Unique to breakout group		Shared with two breakout groups		Shared with three breakout groups			

## Income

The survey asked respondents about their household income within five categories that roughly align with five equal proportions of Utah's population. These five categories broke at \$40,000, \$70,000, \$104,000, and \$156,000.

The Utah Priorities Project's top four concerns were – in varying order – the top four concerns for all of the income groups except those earning more than \$156,000 per year. For those higher-income voters, *kindergarten through 12th grade education* made the top four, replacing *earning enough to pay for non-housing needs*.

After accounting for other demographic factors, Utah voters with higher levels of income were more likely to prioritize *abortion and women's rights*, *air quality*, and *the Great Salt Lake* and less likely to prioritize *crime*, *crowded neighborhoods*, *state and local taxes*, and *housing affordability* when compared to those with lower levels of income.

## Generations

*Housing affordability* is the top issue for all age groups except those 65 and older. *Politicians listening to voters* is a top-two issue for all age groups. (See Figure 7)

After accounting for other demographic factors, younger voters tended to prioritize *crowded neighborhoods*, *earning enough to pay for non-housing needs*, *housing affordability*, and *kindergarten through 12th grade education* when compared to older voters. Older voters prioritized *abortion and women's rights*, *air quality*, *partisan politics*, and *politicians listening to voters* when compared to younger voters, after accounting for other demographic variables.

### The top three issues are the same for all groups except those 65 and over.

Figure 7: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters by Age

Younger than 35		35-44		45-54		55-64		65 and older	
Housing	1	Housing	1	Housing	1	Housing	1	Ignoring voters	1
Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	2	Ignoring voters	2	Overreach	2
Inflation	3	Inflation	3	Inflation	3	Inflation	3	Housing	3
K-12	4	K-12	4	Overreach	4	Overreach	4	Partisanship	4
Partisanship	5	Overreach	5	K-12	5	Water	5	Immigration	5
Overreach	6	Water	6	Immigration	6	Immigration	6	Water	6
Water	7	Partisanship	7	Water	7	Taxes	7	Crime	7
Air quality	8	Air quality	8	Partisanship	8	Partisanship	8	Taxes	8
Women's rights	9	Immigration	9	Taxes	9	Crime	9	Air quality	9
Homelessness	10	Taxes	10	Crime	10	Air quality	10	Inflation	10

Unique to breakout group

Shared with three breakout groups

Shared with four breakout groups

Race and Ethnicity

While Utahns’ priorities differed by race and ethnicity, the top four issues for the overall Utah Priorities Project were found in each demographic group’s top four. Survey results did not show a measurable difference between Hispanic voters and their non-Hispanic counterparts on any issue. This is likely due in part to the limitations of the sample size. However, the Utah Foundation found differences when comparing white voters with non-Hispanic non-white voters. The former group tended to care more about *air quality, having enough water, and the Great Salt Lake*, but less about *government overreach, politicians listening to voters, and state and local taxes*.

Political Affiliation and Ideology

Voter priorities lists by political affiliation are far different than any other voter subgroups. The most apparent difference is in Democrats’ ranking *abortion and women’s rights* as the top issue. Interestingly, unlike the other subgroups, all three categorizations for political affiliation see a statistically significant difference on most of the issues, with the most remarkable difference, by far, on *abortion and women’s rights*. *Crime, the Great Salt Lake, and transgender rights and access* also showed large gaps. (See Figure 8.)

While Utah’s unaffiliated voters are very different than Republicans and Democrats on most issues, they appear to be more aligned with Republicans on nearly all the 17 issues, except perhaps *housing affordability, politicians listening to voters, partisan politics, and kindergarten through 12th grade education*. In fact, the level of importance for *kindergarten through 12th grade education* is nearly indistinguishable across political affiliations.

The Utah Foundation analyzed Utah Priorities Project issues by voter ideology. This was based on a self-identification of respondents revealing how they consider themselves when addressing political issues – very conservative, somewhat conservative, moderate, somewhat liberal, very liberal.

When combining the “somewhat” and “very” groups, Utah voters’ ideology aligns with their political party on the top-ten priorities lists. Like independents, “moderates” more closely align with conservatives, particularly with those who consider themselves “somewhat conservative.” Finally, like the level of importance by political affiliation, *kindergarten through 12th grade education* is nearly indistinguishable across ideology.

Priorities by political party are very different, particularly between Democrats and Republicans.



## CONCLUSION

This report represents the first phase of the 2024 Utah Priorities Project. It helps policymakers – and all Utahns – understand what matters most to Utah voters.

While voters are concerned about environmental and educational issues, they seem to be most concerned about their cost of living and political dysfunction. The top issues in 2024 are:

- *Housing affordability*
- *Politicians listening to voters*
- *Earning enough to pay for non-housing needs*
- *Government overreach*
- *Partisan politics*

Utah voters voice their serious concerns about the state’s political and economic environment. Their concerns are affecting their perception of well-being. In 2022, the Utah Foundation highlighted a decreasing quality of life for Utahns. The 2024 data support the idea that this is still a problem. More than 60% of Utahns believe Utah is on the wrong track and that their quality of life is worse now than five years ago.

If politicians want to carry out their duties as representatives of the people, they need to know the will of the people they represent. Knowing voters’ concerns – such as cost of living, political dysfunction, the environment, and education – will help guide the state’s leaders in getting the state on the right track and improving the quality of life for all Utahns. The Utah Priorities Project provides that information.



Utah State Capitol, by mirsasha under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0, photo cropped



## APPENDIX A

This matrix illustrates which issues are significantly more or less important. It describes the relationship of the issues along the left with the issues along the top. For example, *state and local taxes* is less important than *government overreach*, equivalent to *air quality* and more important than *the Great Salt Lake*.

Figure A1: Matrix of Significant Differences Across Priorities

Rank	Priority	Housing	Ignoring Voters	Inflation	Overreach	Partisanship	Water	K-12	Air quality	Taxes	Immigration	Homelessness	Roads	Crime	Women's Rights	Density	Great Salt Lake	Transgender rights
1	Housing	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
2	Ignoring Voters	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
3	Inflation	L	L	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
4	Overreach	L	L	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
5	Partisanship	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
6	Water	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
7	K-12	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	M	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
8	Air quality	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
9	Taxes	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
10	Immigration	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
11	Homelessness	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
12	Roads	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
13	Crime	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M	M
14	Women's Rights	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	E	E	E	E	E	M	M
15	Density	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E	M	M
16	Great Salt Lake	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E
17	Transgender rights	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	L	E	E

Less important

Equivalent to

More important

## APPENDIX B

### Overall Structure of Project

The Utah Foundation's Priorities Project is built around two surveys. The initial survey simply asks respondents to answer two open-ended questions:

- "What would you say is the most important state or local issue for Utah's governor to address?"
- "What is the next most important issue?"

These responses are categorized based on voters' first issue mentioned. The categories determined from an open-ended survey become the issues prioritized in a second survey.

The second survey includes the following elements:

- Asks voters about their quality of life and if the state is headed in the right direction.
- Has voters prioritize issues.
- Has voters prioritize sub-categories of issues likely to be among the top 10, such as:
  - "When thinking about housing affordability, what is your top priority?"
    - Affordable housing for low-income Utahns
    - Affordable housing for myself
    - Affordable housing for first-time home buyers"
- Gauges the direction of sentiments of issues likely to be among the top 10, such as:
  - "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Utah should invest more in roads, even if I have to pay more taxes."
- Has voters report demographic information to ensure a representative sample and to be used in examining group trends.

In 2024, the Utah Foundation partnered with Y2 Analytics to conduct the surveys. Y2 Analytics conducted the two-question, open-ended preliminary survey from January 20 to January 31, 2024, for which 709 individuals responded out of 29,149 individuals invited, with an estimated response rate of 2.4%.

For the main survey, Y2 Analytics created the sample by randomly drawing from a complete list of registered voters in Utah. Y2 Analytics emailed and texted potential respondents several times to increase participation. They conducted the main survey from February 24 to March 24, 2024, where 656 individuals responded out of 57,403 individuals invited, with an estimated response rate of 1.1%.

## Prioritization Methodology

The Utah Foundation prioritized issues using the best-worst scaling technique, also known as MaxDiff. With this methodology, long ranking lists are broken up into shorter sections. In this instance, voters were presented with a list of four topics. Voters identified which of the four topics they were most concerned about and which they were least concerned about. Voters were shown a series of eight questions, allowing them to see the same item several times and rank it against different items.

The resulting data were analyzed using a hierarchical Bayesian model, which looks at overall trends and assigns a coefficient for each topic with each individual. That coefficient can then be transformed into a probability scale that indicates the probability the voter would rank that particular issue first out of the 17 topics. Issues were ranked by their average coefficient value.

Voters in the survey were weighted based on age, race and ethnicity, and gender to conform with the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau report of registered voters in Utah. Missing data were imputed using a hot-deck method.



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