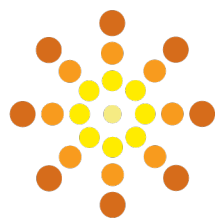
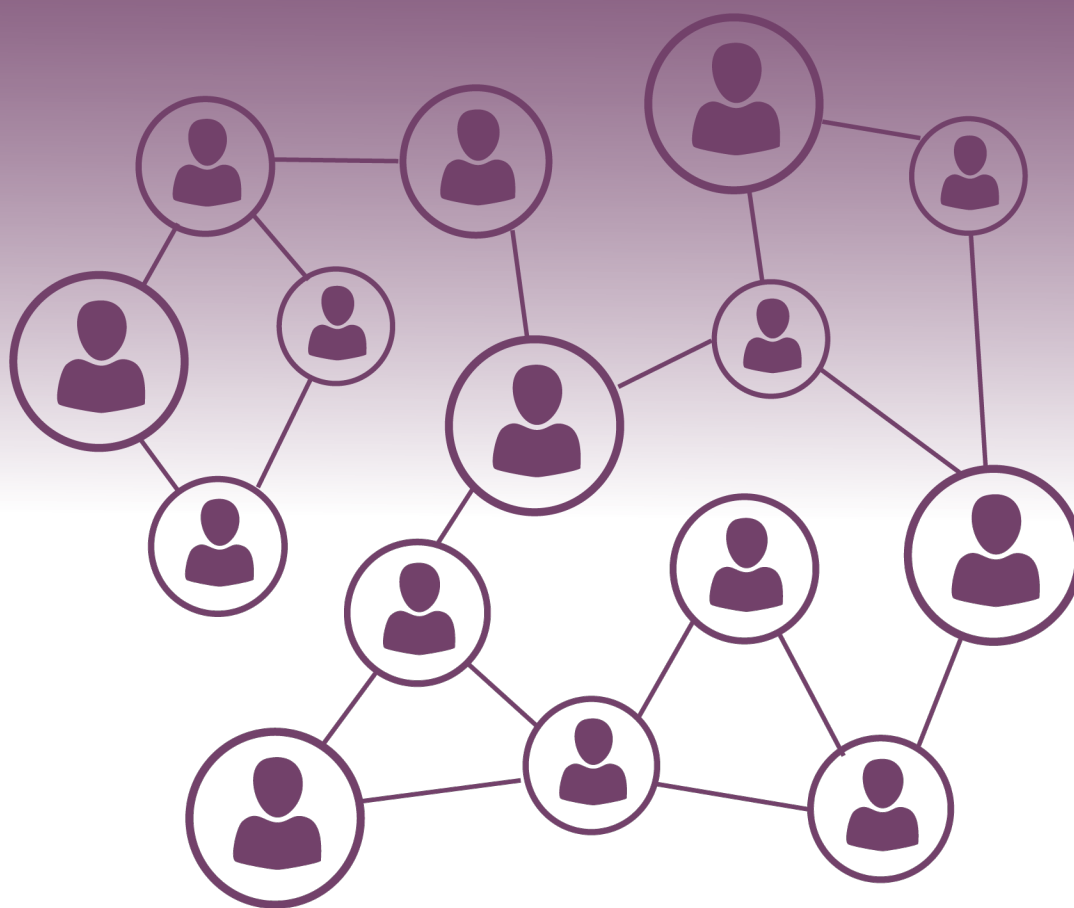


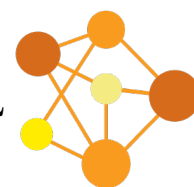
Connections and Collaborations

How Civic Participation Plugs into Social Capital



UTAH FOUNDATION
RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

**SOCIAL
CAPITAL
INDEX**



CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

HOW CIVIC PARTICIPATION PLUGS INTO SOCIAL CAPITAL

This series was sponsored by:



THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
FOUNDATION

LAWRENCE T. & JANET T.
DEE FOUNDATION

GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES
F O U N D A T I O N

Utah Foundation Board of Trustees

*Kelly Mendenhall, Chair**
*Carlton Christensen, Vice Chair**
*Benjamin Brown, Treasurer**
*Annalisa Holcombe, Previous Chair**

Nathan Anderson
Ryan Andrus
Scott Barlow
Mayor Dirk Burton*
Jonathan Campbell*
Silvia Castro
David Connelly
J. Philip Cook
Cameron Cowan
Bill Crim
Chris Dallin
Aaron Dekeyzer*
Cameron Diehl
Michael DiOrio

Denise Dragoo*
Alex Eaton
Mark Edgley
Stephanie Frohman
Shawn Frye
Bryson Garbett
David Gessel
Michael Gregory*
Kris Griffith
Andrew Gruber*
Andrew Haaland
Julie Hatchett*
Brandon Hendrickson
Ben Horsley
Suzanne Hyland
Perna Jain
Michelle Judd
Catherine Kanter*
Derek Kearl

Geoff Landward
Drew Maggelet
Peter Mann
Nate McDonald
Susan McLeod
Brad Mortensen*
Angie Osguthorpe
Scott Parson*
Bryn Ramjoue'
Jennifer Robinson*
David Rowley
Tim Sheehan
Harris Simmons
Dominic Spaethling
Nick Starn
Henrie Walton
Chad Westover*
Thomas Young

** Executive Board members*

Utah Foundation Report Staff

Laura Pacheco, *Research Intern, author*
Kyler Zarate, *Research Intern, data analyst*
Christopher Collard, *Research Director, author*
Lauren Withers, *Research Intern*
Anna Stine Jergensen, *Research Intern*
Cathrine Love, *Research Intern*
Shawn Teigen, *President*

Research Report 830

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

One aspect of social capital involves how individuals and groups utilize their social connections to shape the governance of their communities. There are many avenues for individuals to do so. They can act collectively by voting. They can participate in get-out-the-vote efforts – rallying their connections for a specific candidate or outcome. They can organize into groups to push for specific policies or causes. They can attend public meetings and ensure their voices are heard. Generally, these actions can be summarized as civic engagement.

In the early 2000s, concerns about declining civic engagement intensified, particularly following the publication of Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*.¹ His book highlighted a decline in civic life participation. Research links societies with high levels of civic engagement to a greater willingness among individuals to work collectively and coordinate efforts to address neighborhood issues.²

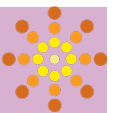
This report offers a comprehensive examination of civic engagement, a key component of the Utah Foundation’s Social Capital Index. It presents data and analysis on three key measures: voter turnout; resident attendance at public meetings; and funds received by advocacy organizations. This report examines recent trends in Utah and compares them to those in the Mountain States and the rest of the nation to assess whether Utahns should be concerned.

1 Greenberg, Alva, Thomas P. Gullotta, and Martin Bloom, “The Role of Social Capital to American Democracy and the Creation of Serve Here CT” in *Social Capital and Community Well-Being: The Serve Here Initiative*, p. 1, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jill-Sinha/publication/305661291_Millennials_and_Social_Capital_Explorations_in_Re-inventing_the_American_Dream/links/5cc1e6f7299bf120977f74ed/Millennials-and-Social-Capital-Explorations-in-Re-inventing-the-American-Dream.pdf.

2 Collins, Charles R., Jennifer Watling Neal and Zachary P. Neal, “Transforming Individual Civic Engagement into Community Collective Efficacy: The Role of Bonding Social Capital,” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 54, No. 6, pp. 328-336, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9675-x>.

Social Capital

Simply put, social capital refers to the ways in which people utilize networks and social connections to benefit themselves and their communities. Social capital has numerous direct and indirect benefits, as highlighted in the introductory report of the Utah Foundation’s Social Capital Index project: *Foundations and Frameworks: A Primer on Social Capital and Why It’s Important*.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS REPORT

- Across the Utah Foundation’s indicators of civic engagement, Utah ranks among the top ten for one measure, among the median for another measure, and among the bottom ten for a third measure.
- Voter turnout in Utah improved markedly with the adoption of universal mail-in voting, rising from 44th in 2014 to 13th in 2018. Utah may revert to among the lowest of states with the removal of universal mail-in voting scheduled for 2029.
- Resident attendance at public meetings is a strong point for Utah, although Utah has slipped in recent years from 3rd in the nation in 2019 to 10th.
- When it comes to advocacy funds per \$1,000 of personal income, Utah has consistently trended below the nation during the past decade, ranking 43rd.
- Across all three measures of civic engagement, Colorado appears to be the best positioned and Nevada seems to be the worst positioned among the Mountain States.

BACKGROUND

Robust citizen engagement in both the democratic process and civic improvement has long been seen as a barometer of the vitality of the American republic. At the state and local levels, civic engagement has significant implications for the effectiveness and efficiency of government, the quality of services it delivers, and the responsiveness of public officials to the public's priorities. Individuals who exhibit a high degree of civic engagement also tend to be accustomed to collaborating to achieve common goals. A decline in civic engagement, by contrast, can reduce the accountability of the public sector and produce a negative public spirit.³

Some social scientists have attributed ways in which civic engagement increases through social capital. For example, bonding social capital, which is the networks created by those with common characteristics, amplifies the desires of individual prosperity into collective gain. Therefore, bonding social capital serves as a conduit for individuals to collaborate and address common issues.

Furthermore, civic engagement not only helps citizens work to achieve common goals, but it also fosters trust.⁴

Additionally, organizations and associations offer opportunities for individuals to share their concerns and translate them into action.⁵ An example of an organization doing so is the League of Women Voters of Salt Lake, a local chapter of a national organization committed to expanding and protecting democracy and voting rights. The organization's efforts build social capital within the community by hosting public events that promote civic education, such as small-group sessions.⁶ Research indicates that states with higher levels of social capital tend to have lower levels of civic and economic inequality.⁷ Civic groups, such as the League of Women Voters, provide a starting point for collective efficacy and strong community ties.

3 When looking at differences across regions in Italy, Robert Putnam, a social scientist who has studied social capital extensively, has concluded, "Citizens in civic communities demand more effective public services ... and they are prepared to act collectively to achieve their shared goals. Their counterparts in less civic regions more commonly assume the role of alienated and cynical supplicants." Putnam, R., Leonardi, R., and Nanetti, R., *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 182, https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691037387/making-democracy-work?srltid=AfmBOop2aFXktLKmH_ndtPAia6lx9D5stfYxk2HIL89PtzZQfhvki06a.

4 Collins, Charles R., Jennifer Watling Neal, and Zachary P. Neal, "Transforming Individual Civic Engagement into Community Collective Efficacy: The Role of Bonding Social Capital," *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 54, pp. 328-36, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9675-x>.

5 Greenberg, Alva, Thomas P. Gullotta, and Martin Bloom, "The Role of Social Capital to American Democracy and the Creation of Serve Here CT" in *Social Capital and Community Well-Being: The Serve Here Initiative*, p. 1, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jill-Sinha/publication/305661291_Millennials_and_Social_Capital_Explorations_in_Re-inventing_the_American_Dream/links/5cc1e6f7299bf120977f74ed/Millennials-and-Social-Capital-Explorations-in-Re-inventing-the-American-Dream.pdf.

6 League of Women Voters' of Salt Lake, <https://www.lwvsl.org/>.

7 Putnam, Robert D., "Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences," *Isuma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research* Vol. 2, pp. 41-51, <https://smg.media.mit.edu/library/putnam.pdf>.

VOTER TURNOUT

The U.S. Declaration of Independence claimed that governments derive their “just powers from the consent of the governed.” While voting does not directly illustrate social ties, it is the most fundamental method of political participation in a democracy, and many studies draw connections between citizens’ activity in the political sphere and their activity in the community sphere.⁸ While there is some debate on whether social capital improves voter turnout or whether voter turnout improves social capital, the links between the two make voting a good measure of a community’s social capital.⁹

Perhaps more importantly, when electoral participation declines, it can indicate disengagement from the local community and society.¹⁰ Since the 1970s, there have been significant national declines both in the share of the voting age population registered to vote and in voting rates.¹¹

The Utah Foundation analyzed U.S. Census Bureau data on voter turnout for federal elections. See the Appendix for complete details.

When looking at voter turnout over several cycles, there is a clear pattern of higher turnout in presidential election years and lower levels of turnout during midterm elections (known as surge and decline in political science).¹² This pattern holds in Utah. Presidential election years should be compared primarily to presidential years, and midterm elections to midterm elections. It is interesting to note that, since the 2020 elections, the rise and fall in turnout between midterm and presidential elections has been much more subdued (see Figure 1.1).

8 Milner, H., “Social Capital, Civic Literacy and Political Participation: Explaining Differences in Voter Turnout,” In: Dowding K., Hughes J., Margetts H. (eds.), *Challenges to Democracy. Political Studies Association Yearbook*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2001. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230502185_6; Verba, S., Scholzman, K., and Brady, H., *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1pnc1k7>.

9 For the link between volunteering and voting see Clark, Jeremy, Abel François and Olivier Gergaud, 2020, “Electoral Turnout and Social Capital,” *Working Papers in Economics*, University of Canterbury, Department of Economics and Finance, 2013. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/cbt/econwp/20-13.html>; For links between voluntary activity and voting, see Lee, Aie-Rie, 2010, “The Quality of Social Capital and Political Participation in South Korea,” *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. 10 No. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1598240800003702>.

10 Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 35, <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Bowling-Alone-Revised-and-Updated/Robert-D-Putnam/9781982130848>.

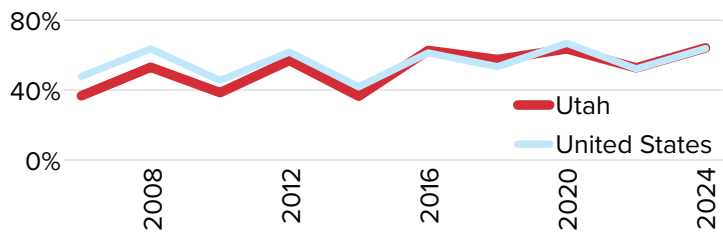
11 The Joint Economic Committee, *An Overview of Social Capital in America*, 2021, p. 30, https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/8cb559c4-3764-4706-9009-b4d8565ec820/scp-volume-1-digital-final.pdf

12 Misra, J., “Voter Turnout Rates Among All Voting Age and Major Racial and Ethnic Groups Were Higher Than in 2014,” U.S. Census Bureau, April 23, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/04/behind-2018-united-states-midterm-election-turnout.html>.

VOTER TURNOUT DASHBOARD

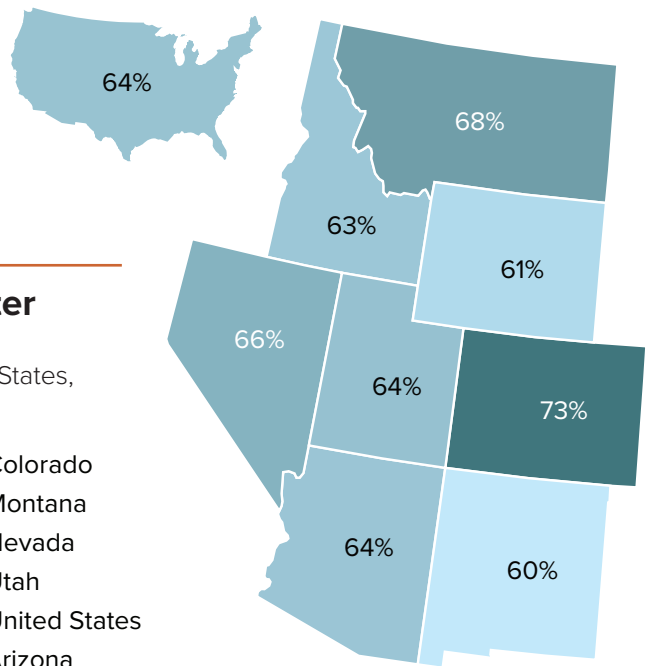
Utah’s voter turnout has seen markedly higher turnout since 2016.

Figure 1.1: Voter Turnout among Eligible Voters, Utah and the United States, 2006-2024



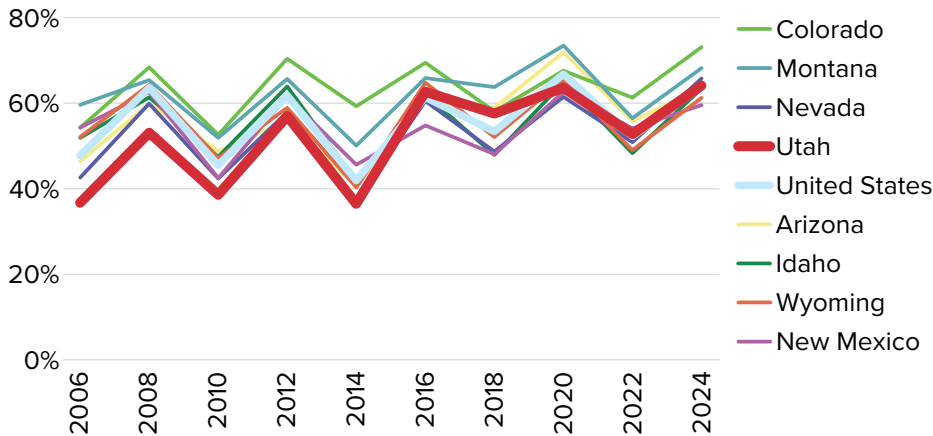
In 2024, Utah ranked fourth, alongside Arizona, among the Mountain States in voter turnout.

Figure 1.2: Voter Turnout among Eligible Voters in the Mountain States, 2024



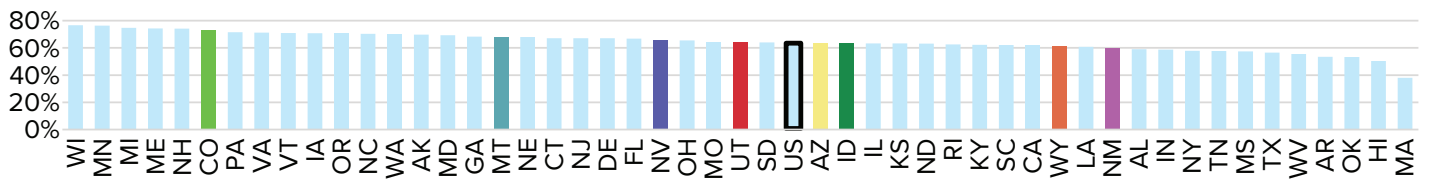
Utah has experienced a significant surge in voter turnout compared to other states.

Figure 1.3: Voter Turnout among Eligible Voters, Utah and the United States, 2006-2024



Despite relatively high voter turnout, Utah ranks only in the middle compared to other states.

Figure 1.4: Voter Turnout among Eligible Voters by State, 2024



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Utah Turnout Over Time

Utah's voter turnout has seen some marked increases since 2014 (see Figure 1.1). This is likely due in part to Utah's expansion of vote-by-mail. Beginning in 2015, Utah municipalities began adopting vote-by-mail elections, and a subsequent report by the Utah Foundation documented substantially higher turnouts among these municipalities.¹³ While the expansion of vote-by-mail elections seems to be responsible for boosting turnout, H.B. 300 passed in 2025 would roll back the automatic vote-by-mail enrollment starting in 2029.¹⁴ This may cause Utah to revert to pre-2016 voter turnout levels.

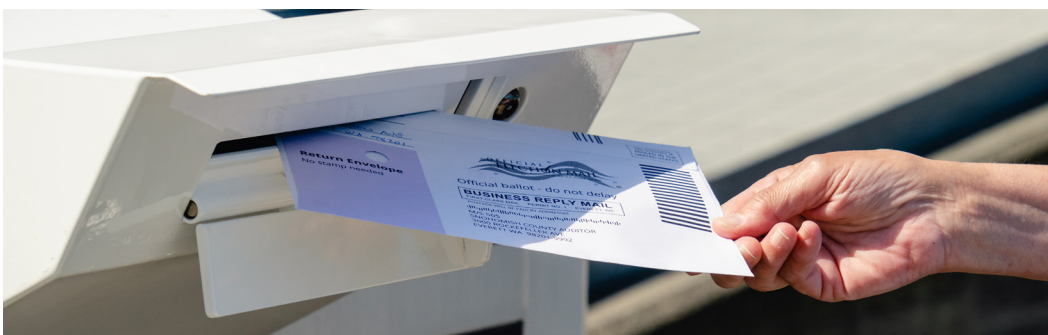
From 2006 to 2016, turnout in presidential and mid-term elections in Utah had generally been stable. However, in 2018, voter turnout was exceptionally high. That year, turnout was 57%, up from 37% four years earlier. The 2018 midterm surpassed even the presidential election cycles of 2008 and 2012 (see Figure 1.1). One reason for the higher level of turnout may have been high-profile propositions on the ballot, covering topics such as medical use of marijuana (Proposition 2), Medicaid expansion (Proposition 3), and the creation of an independent redistricting commission (Proposition 4), all of which passed.¹⁵

In 2020, Utah experienced turnout below the national average, despite surpassing the U.S. turnout in 2016 and 2018. Utah voter turnout in the subsequent midterm and presidential elections was slightly higher than the national average (see Figure 1.1). The overall trend indicates a significant increase in voter turnout in both midterm and presidential elections compared to pre 2016 levels.

13 Utah Foundation, *Voting in Utah: Analyzing Current Practices and Future Options for Utah Voters*, 2015, www.utahfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/rr735.pdf. In 2016, 21 of Utah's 29 counties administered their votes entirely by mail (with in-person options). Voter turnout was again higher in the counties that adopted the protocol. See Showalter, Amelia, "Utah 2016: Evidence for the Positive Turnout Effects of 'Vote at Home' in Participating Counties" *Pantheon Analytics*, 2018, <https://voteathome.org/portfolio/utah-2016-evidence-for-the-positive-turnout-effects-of-vote-at-home-in-participating-counties/>. By 2018, all counties were administering votes primarily through mail.

14 H.B. 300, 2025 General Session, <https://le.utah.gov/~2025/bills/static/HB0300.html>,

15 Ballotpedia, "Utah 2018 Ballot Measures," https://ballotpedia.org/Utah_2018_ballot_measures; Henderson, Tim. "How Voter Access Laws and Passion Brought People to the Polls," Republished by *Route Fifty* under license CC-BY-NC-ND, originally published by Stateline, an initiative of the Pew Charitable Trusts. May 8, 2019, <https://www.route-fifty.com/management/2019/05/how-voter-access-laws-and-passion-brought-people-polls/156913/>.



Everett, WA - USA / 07/30/2020: Dropping Mail in Ballot into mail box, Credit: Flicker User 'Cindy Shebley', under license (CC BY 2.0)



Library Branches, Credit: Flickr User 'makelessnoise' under license (CC BY 2.0)

Turnout in the Mountain States

In 2024, Utah was fourth, among the eight Mountain States for voter turnout (see Figure 1.2). Before 2015, Utah consistently ranked among the lowest, but since 2016, it has shown improvement (see Figure 1.3). Utah has also seen one of the most significant surges in turnout among the Mountain States in recent cycles. Montana and Colorado are consistently among the top Mountain States. Wyoming and New Mexico now have the lowest turnout in the region.

Utah and the Nation

Utah's 2024 turnout (64%) was slightly higher than the national average, placing Utah 26th among the 50 states (see Figure 1.4). Before 2016, Utah's voter participation was among the lowest in the nation – never higher than 45th. However, since the expansion of vote-by-mail, Utah's voter turnout has improved, reaching a high of 13th among the states in 2018.

ATTENDANCE AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

Due to various practical and political factors influencing voting, turnout numbers may overstate the extent to which citizens participate in public life, particularly given that Utah voters can now cast their ballots by mail from the comfort of their own homes.¹⁶ A more robust measure of political participation is whether individuals make their voices heard in local forums, such as public meetings and town halls. At the local level, at least, public meetings can be seen as a core component of the democratic process.¹⁷ They allow residents the opportunity to convey information directly to local officials. Participation in local public meetings can be a significant indicator of a community's level of engagement in political and community life, as well as the degree of connection between individual residents and their local leaders.

To measure meeting participation, the Utah Foundation relied on data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau through the Public Community Survey. Data were available beginning in 2010, but they have undergone small changes in frequency of collection and the questions asked. See the Appendix for complete details.

16 Krishna, Anirudh, *Enhancing Political Participation in Democracies: What is the Role of Social Capital?* Duke University, 2001, <https://sites.duke.edu/krishna/files/2013/10/Enhancing-Political-Participation.doc>.

17 Adams, B, "Public Meetings and the Democratic Process," *JSTOR* 64, No. 1, 2004, pp. 43-54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2004.00345.x>.

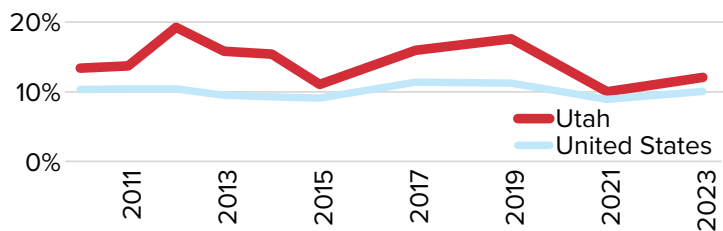


Heileman, Tammy. 'Secretary Ken Salazar in Salt Lake City, Utah for public meeting on AGO Initiative', National Archives Catalog, 112

ATTENDANCE AT PUBLIC MEETINGS DASHBOARD

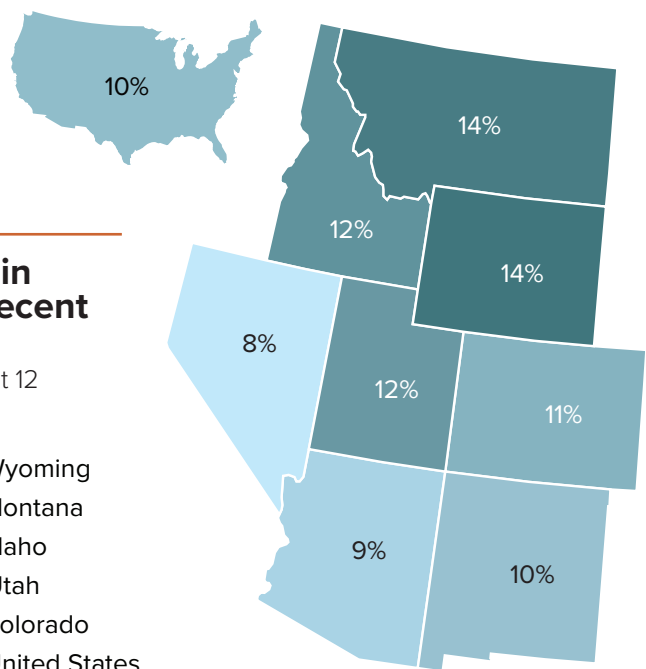
Attendance at public meetings in Utah has trended closer to the national average since 2019.

Figure 2.1: Share of Population Attending a Public Meeting in the Past 12 Months, Utah and the United States, 2010-2023



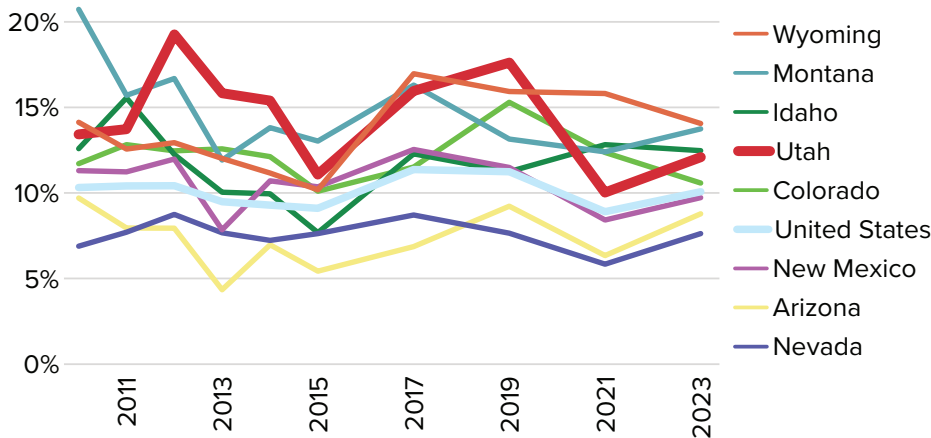
Utahns rank among the top four Mountain States for public meeting attendance.

Figure 2.2: Share of Population Attending a Public Meeting in the Past 12 Months in the Mountain States, 2023



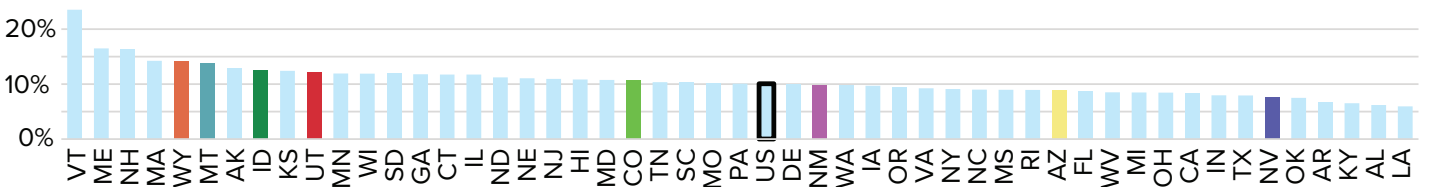
Historically, Utah has consistently ranked high in public meeting attendance. That has fallen in recent years.

Figure 2.4: Share of Population Attending a Public Meeting in the Past 12 Months, Utah and the Mountain States, 2010-2023



Utah ranks tenth nationally in attending public meetings.

Figure 2.4: Share of Population Attending a Public Meeting in the Past 12 Months by State, 2023



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Utah Meeting Attendance Over Time

The share of individuals reporting attendance at a public meeting (in the previous 12 months) varies from year to year. Since 2010, approximately 15% of Utahns, on average, have reported attending public meetings each year (see Figure 2.1). Utah's high-performing years were 2012 and 2019. During 2021 to 2023, the state share fell to slightly above the national average.

Meeting Attendance in the Mountain States

In 2019, a greater share of Utahns (18%) reported attending public meetings than in any other Mountain State (see Figure 2.2). However, in 2023, three other Mountain States – Wyoming, Montana, and Idaho – surpassed Utah (see Figure 2.3). By contrast, only 8% of Nevadans report attending public meetings, ranking it 45th among states.

Utah and the Nation

Around 10% of Americans report having attended public meetings (in the previous 12 months) (see Figure 2.4). Utah regularly reports higher levels of participation. In 2019, Utah reported the third-highest level of participation in public meetings, just after Vermont and Maine. However, in 2023, Utah reported the tenth highest level of participation in public meetings.



Heileman, Tammy. "Secretary Ken Salazar in Salt Lake City, Utah for public meeting on AGO Initiative", National Archives Catalog, 113

ADVOCACY FUNDS PER \$1,000

Advocacy organizations represent one of the primary methods for turning social capital into political capital through grassroots mobilization and lobbying of policymakers.¹⁸ Individuals can rally around common concerns by raising awareness, gathering resources, and working to effect change.

The Utah Foundation measures the strength of advocacy organizations based on income. Generally speaking, an organization with higher income reflects a larger network to raise funds and resources for its cause.

The Utah Foundation compares the income of advocacy organizations to the personal income of the population at large, or per \$1,000 of personal income. This ensures that large states do not rank higher just because they have more advocacy organizations. To understand this metric, it means that out of every \$1,000 a Utahn earns, an average of \$0.30 would be donated to or raised by an advocacy organization. This calculation is based on tax records published by the Internal Revenue Service and the Bureau of Economic Analysis. See the Appendix for more details on how the information was collected and the caveats associated with the data.

One limitation of this dataset is that not all advocacy organizations are created equal. Many will have local chapters that bring people together for meetings and discussions regarding local political engagement. Others may have more hands-off interactions. While people in the latter type of organization may share common ideals, their connections to one another are more tenuous.¹⁹ Moreover, the income of an organization may not represent local social capital. Specific issues often raise funding from out-of-state sponsors.

18 Boris, Elizabeth, and Maronick, Matthew, "Civic Participation and Advocacy," in Saamon, Lester M. (ed.) *The State of Nonprofit America*, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2012, pp. 394-422, <https://www.brookings.edu/books/the-state-of-nonprofit-america/>.

19 Putnam, Robert D., *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, p. 35, <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Bowling-Alone-Revised-and-Updated/Robert-D-Putnam/9781982130848>.

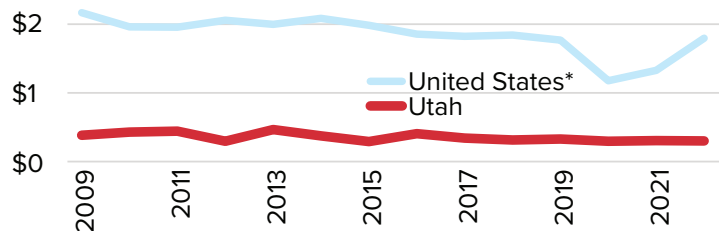


4T7A9521 Credit: Flickr User 'KristineL761', under license (CC BY 2.0)

ADVOCACY FUNDS PER \$1,000 DASHBOARD

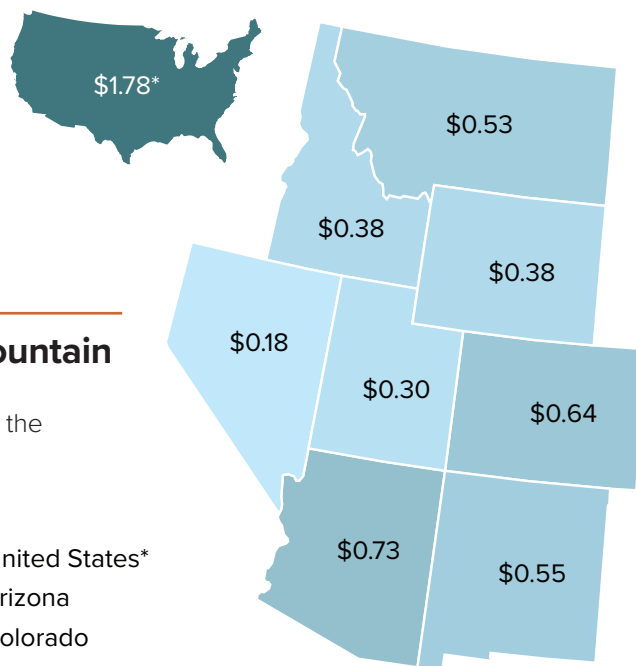
Utah's advocacy funds have remained fairly stable.

Figure 3.1: Advocacy Funds per \$1,000 of personal income, Utah and the United States; 2009-2022



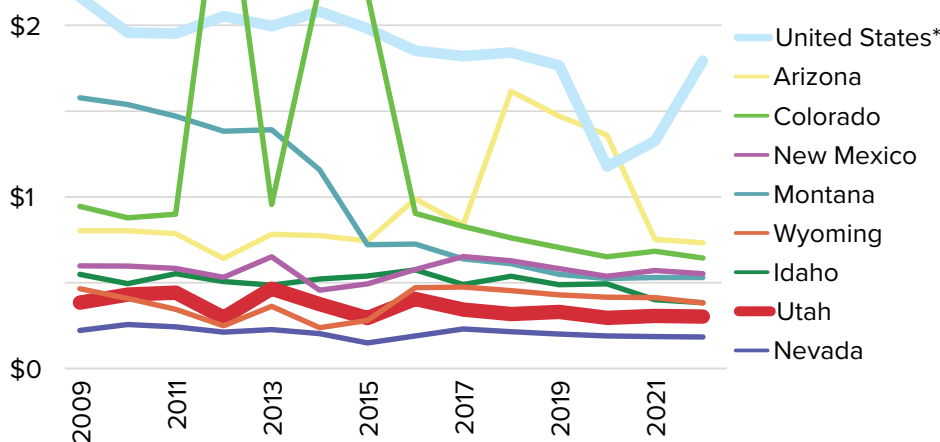
Utah has one of the lowest shares of advocacy funds in the Mountain States.

Figure 3.2: Advocacy funds per \$1,000 of personal income in the Mountain States; 2022



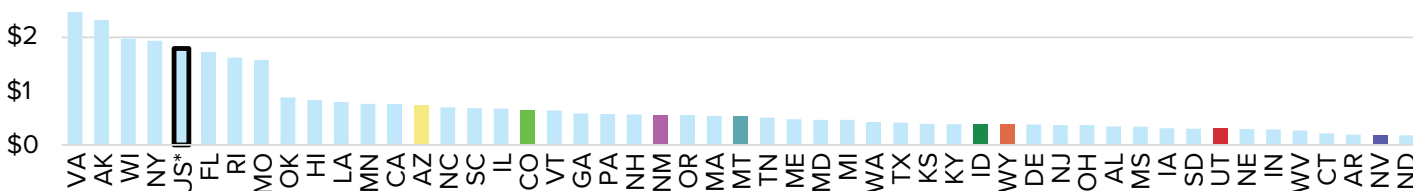
Utah is consistently among the lowest of the Mountain States in advocacy funds.

Figure 3.3: Advocacy funds per \$1,000 of personal income, Utah and the Mountain States; 2009-2022



Utah is among the states with the lowest share of advocacy funds.

Figure 3.4: Advocacy Funds per \$1,000 of personal income by state, 2022



* Please note that Washington D.C. skews the average due to its \$57.20 in advocacy funds per \$1,000 of personal income.

For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Utah Advocacy Funds Over Time

Since 2009, Utah's share of advocacy funds has consistently remained well below the national average (see Figure 3.1). On average, advocacy organizations in Utah receive just \$0.30 for every \$1,000 earned by residents. From 2009 to 2022, the share of funds raised by advocacy organizations in Utah has been relatively stable, fluctuating between \$0.47 and \$0.29 for every \$1,000 of personal income.

Advocacy Funds in the Mountain States

The Mountain States appear bifurcated. Nevada, Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho rank among the bottom half of states. In 2022, Utah had the second-lowest number of advocacy funds per \$1,000 of personal income out of the eight states (see Figure 3.2). In contrast, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, and Montana rank among the top half of states. Arizona, with \$0.70 per \$1,000 of personal income, is ranked among the top 15 states in the nation.

Utah and the Nation

In 2022, Utah ranked 43rd in the nation. Since the national average accounts for all states. This includes Washington D.C. — the lobbying hub of the nation — with a whopping \$57.20 per \$1,000 of personal income going to advocacy groups. Because of this, only four states — Virginia, Alaska, Wisconsin, and New York — exceed the national average (see Figure 3.4). The national average has been slowly declining since 2009 (see Figure 3.1). It has averaged around \$1.86 per \$1,000 of personal income, though it dipped to just \$1.18 in 2020.



4T7A9583 Credit: Flickr User 'KristineL761', under license (CC BY 2.0)

CONCLUSION

When it comes to civic engagement, Utah has lost significant ground on two measures in recent years. Moreover, on a third measure of civic engagement, it is among the worst-performing states.

Utah has lost ground in voter turnout after rising to 13th in the nation in 2018. However, its most recent level of voter turnout – 26th in the nation – remains much higher than its pre-2016 level, where it never ranked higher than 43rd in the nation. Still, among the eight Mountain States, Utah ranked fourth in 2024, just above Arizona. However, the Beehive State has seen one of the region’s most significant increases in turnout in recent years, following the adoption of mail-in voting in 2016. But that progress may be lost given that automatic vote-by-mail enrollment is set to be revoked in 2029.

While Utah is ranked 10th in the nation in terms of resident attendance at public meetings, it has fallen from 3rd place in 2019. At that time, it was also first among the Mountain States. Since then, three other Mountain States – Montana, Wyoming, and Idaho – have led the region in public meeting attendance.

When it comes to the number of advocacy funds, Utah has consistently trended below the national average during the past decade. Furthermore,



Election Day 2020, Credit: Flickr User 'Phil Roeder', under license (CC BY 2.0)

the amount of such funds per \$1,000 of personal income has not grown significantly during that time. In 2022, Utah's \$0.30 per \$1,000 of personal income ranked 43rd in the nation. Among the Mountain States, Utah lags behind Nevada, which ranks 49th in the nation. This contrasts sharply with other Mountain States, particularly Arizona and Colorado, which tend to rank in the top half nationally.

Across all three measures, Colorado may be the best-positioned, ranking first among the Mountain States for voter turnout, second for advocacy funds, and fourth for public meetings. Meanwhile, Nevada may be the lowest performer, ranking last in public attendance and advocacy funds. However, Nevada is average in terms of voter turnout (likely due to it being a swing state).

The measures of civic engagement in Utah reveal subpar performance. The state may be able to look with satisfaction on having some of the nation's most robust meeting attendance – but it has lost significant ground since 2019. While voter turnout in Utah is above the national average and shows significantly higher rates compared to pre-2016, the state ranks only in the middle compared to others. Additionally, the relatively small amount of funds to advocacy organizations merits closer study to determine both the underlying reasons and the implications for civic life and social capital.



4T7A9510 Credit: Flickr User 'KristineL761', under license (CC BY 2.0)

APPENDIX: TECHNICAL DATA

Voter Turnout

The U.S. Census Bureau collects data on voter registration and participation for every presidential and midterm election.²⁰ As 2024 turnout data have not been published, data from the University of Florida Election Lab for 2024 were used.²¹ The Utah Foundation analysis focused on the data regarding the share of U.S. citizens who voted, rather than the share of the population that voted, because the number of citizens represents the theoretical maximum of individuals eligible to participate in the voting process.²²

Share of Citizens Reporting Public Meeting Attendance in the Past 12 Months

The U.S. Census Bureau gathers public meeting attendance data through a supplementary section of the Current Population Survey (CPS). The supplement was issued annually from 2010 to 2015, and biannually since 2015. 2023 represents the latest data available. Before 2016, the question was worded “In the past 12 months, did you attend a public meeting, such as a zoning or school board meeting, to discuss a local issue?” After 2016, the question was changed to “Now I’d like to ask about some of your involvement in your community. Since September 1st [the previous year], have you attended any public meetings in which there was discussion of community affairs?” The data were gathered from the CPS microsample. Respondents could reply “yes,” “no,” “do not know,” “refuse,” or simply provide no answer. The Utah Foundation calculations posed the share attending as the share who replied “yes” out of all these available responses.

20 U.S. Census Bureau, “Voting and Registration in the Election of November 2018,” <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/voting-and-registration/p20-583.html>.

21 University of Florida Election Lab, 2025, “2024 general election turnout,” <https://election.lab.ufl.edu/2024-general-election-turnout/>.

22 McDonald, Michael, “United States Elections Project,” 2024, <https://www.electproject.org/2024g>.

The Number of Advocacy Funds Per \$1,000 Personal Income

Information on advocacy organizations is gathered from the IRS Business Master File, which lists nonprofit organizations registered or active with the IRS. The Utah Foundation used the files hosted by the Urban Institute.²³ To ensure that we counted only active organizations, we restricted the count to nonprofits that filed within the previous two years and those with gross receipts exceeding \$0.²⁴ Nonprofit organizations are categorized based on the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) code. To look at just advocacy organizations, we restricted the count to those where the first NTEE digit is “R” which represents “Civil Rights, Social Action, Advocacy” organizations, and organizations where the second and third digit is “01” which represents “Alliances & Advocacy” organizations across other major group areas. In 2017, several states were missing data. In these cases, the data were calculated by averaging their 2016 and 2018 numbers.

The NTEE classification used to identify the type of organization is not complete in the IRS file, so the NCCS systematically created a version of the NTEE classification to fill in the gaps. Because the organizations themselves did not report these, there is a possibility of misclassification.

These tax records report the income of each organization. This is compared against the personal income data produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis.²⁵

23 Urban Institute, 2020, IRS Business Master Files, <https://urbaninstitute.github.io/nccs/datasets/bmf/>.

24 Urban Institute, 2018, “Beginner’s Guide to Using NCCS Data,” <https://nccs.urban.org/pubs/nccs-data-guide.pdf>.

25 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2025, “Personal income by state,” <https://www.bea.gov/data/income-saving/personal-income-by-state>.



UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

PLATINUM MEMBERS

The **Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley** Foundation



GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES
FOUNDATION



THE CHURCH OF
JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS
FOUNDATION

GOLD MEMBERS



LAWRENCE T. & JANET T.
DEE FOUNDATION



SILVER MEMBERS

**American-Pacific Corp.
Deloitte
Fidelity Investments
Garbett Family Foundation**

**Intermountain Health
The Kanter Family Foundation
Molina Healthcare**

**Northrup Grumman
Staker Parson Companies
WCF Insurance
Wells Fargo**

BRONZE MEMBERS

Brigham Young University
Community Foundation of Utah
Cottonwood Heights
Davis County Chamber
Denise Dragoo
Granite School District
HDR Engineering
Holland & Hart
J Philip Cook, LLC

Magnum Development
my529
Revere Health
Ronna Cohen & Stan Rosenzweig
Salt Lake Chamber
Salt Lake Community College
Sandy City
Snow College
Suazo Business Center
University of Utah

Utah Hospital Association
Utah Promise
Utah State University
Utah System of Higher Education
Utah Tech University
Utah Valley University
Wasatch Front Regional Council
Weber State University
West Jordan