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**WHAT'S ON
UTAH'S MIND?**
Voter Issues and Concerns in 2020

UTAH PRIORITIES 2020 SERIES

PART 1

AUGUST 2020

WHAT'S ON UTAH'S MIND?

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Utah Foundation's mission is to produce objective, thorough and well-reasoned research and analysis that promotes the effective use of public resources, a thriving economy, a well-prepared workforce and a high quality of life for Utahns. Utah Foundation seeks to help decision-makers and citizens understand and address complex issues. Utah Foundation also offers constructive guidance to improve governmental policies, programs and structures.

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Research Report 778

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INTRODUCTION

Each gubernatorial election year since 2004, Utah Foundation has sought to understand what is important to voters through its Utah Priorities Project. The project uses surveys to inform candidates for elected office, elected officials, civic leaders and others on voters' priorities.

This first installment of a series of reports outlines voters' top concerns in 2020. Subsequent reports will provide further detail on Utahns' perspectives and delve into the top-ranked issues.

This year's survey is 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.

This report focuses on the results of the summer survey since the coronavirus caused a sea change in priorities, though it also includes some of the late winter findings. Utah Foundation will compare additional findings in future releases.

While the Utah Priorities Project focuses on issues according to voters' top-10 rankings, this project is placing just as much emphasis on issues' relative importance, in part because there is little difference in the importance Utahns assign to the top five priorities. In addition, there is also little difference between the ranking of the 10th and 11th ranked issues, with the most significant gap in importance not occurring until the 13th ranked issue. (See the figures in Appendix A.)

Priorities related to the coronavirus top the list of voter concerns in 2020.

Figure 1: Voter Concerns, Ordered by Priority

Most important	1. Health care (costs or accessibility)
	2. State taxes and government spending
	3. K-12 education
	4. Jobs and the economy
	5. Public health / COVID-19 pandemic
High importance	6. Politicians listening to voters
Important	7. Housing affordability
	8. Managing growth
Medium importance	9. Police (support or reform)
	10. Partisanship and division
	11. Air quality
	12. Crime
Low importance	13. Racial inequality or racism
	14. Transportation and traffic
	15. Water supply and quality
	16. Homelessness
Least important	17. Immigration
	18. Climate change

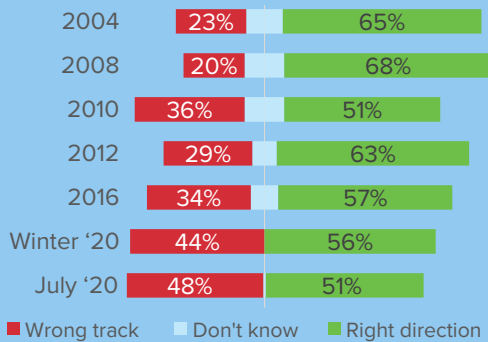


KEY FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT

- The coronavirus pandemic had a major impact on voters' prioritization of the top issues in 2020.
- The close-knit group of "most important" priorities reflects the entangled challenges thrust upon the state by the emergence of the novel coronavirus.
- *Health care (costs and accessibility)* maintains its top spot since 2016, likely due in part to Utahns' concern around the coronavirus. *State taxes and government spending*, *K-12 education*, *jobs and the economy*, and *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* round out the top five issues.
- The top two issues – *health care (costs and accessibility)* and *state taxes and government spending* – ranked high not because they were often the most important issues for Utahns in the survey, but because they were consistently important among respondents.
- *Public health / COVID-19 pandemic* was most often ranked as the top issue, but many respondents also ranked it as less important.
- The top five issues can be found in every demographic group's top-10 list.
- Of the demographic groups' top-10 lists, marital status showed the greatest differences, followed by whether respondents had any religious affiliation.
- Over the past 16 years, Utah voters have been trending toward the belief that Utah is on "the wrong track."
- More people feel that their quality of life is worse than it was five years ago compared to people who feel it is better.

An increasing share of Utahns think the state is on the wrong track.

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



* “Don’t know” was an answer option in 2020; respondents were simply more certain than in previous years.

ABOUT THE SURVEYS

In 2020, Utah Foundation worked with Y2 Analytics to carry out two series of two surveys. Each series consisted of a preliminary open-ended survey with two questions asking Utah voters what they considered to be the top two issues facing Utah about which the governor could do something. Utah Foundation then created a list of the most common responses. Utah voters rated and ranked the common responses in a second survey. Their responses were used to determine which issues were most important.

The first series of surveys was carried out in February and early March of 2020, before the coronavirus had a serious impact on the United States. The second series was carried out in June and early July, after the initial coronavirus peak and during the time many states were looking to re-energize their economies. Unless otherwise specified, the survey results mentioned in this report reflect the June and July 2020 survey results.

For more details regarding the survey methodology, see Appendix A.

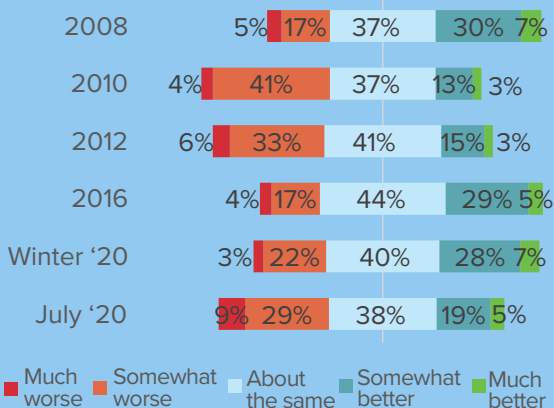
IS UTAH ON THE WRONG TRACK?

As of July 2020, 48% of Utahns reported that Utah was on the “wrong track” while 51% reported the state was “headed in the right direction.” The proportion of voters indicating that Utah was on the “wrong track” represents the highest level since the Utah Priorities Project series began.

The 51% of Utahns who think that the state is “headed in the right direction” compares to only 2 in 10 Americans that think that the U.S. is “heading in the right direction” according to a national poll in July 2020.¹

Utah voters feel more positive about their quality of life today than toward the end of the Great Recession.

Figure 3: “How would you rate the overall quality of life in Utah today, compared with five years ago? Would you say it is...”



UTAH'S QUALITY OF LIFE

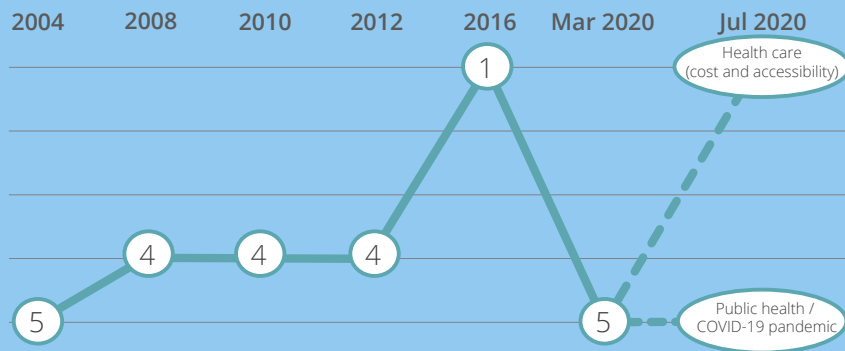
In early March 2020, Utahns’ responses about their quality of life was similar to their responses in 2016 – it tended to be the same or worse than five years before. (See Figure 3.) However, the coronavirus appears to have had a moderately negative impact, resulting in July 2020 quality of life responses that were similar to levels seen in 2012 when the Great Recession was still a recent memory. Interestingly, the July 2020 results represent the first time that more than 6% of Utahns reported that their quality of life was “much worse” that five years before – 9% of Utahns did in July, compared to a Priorities Project low of 3% in March.

MOST IMPORTANT

When Utah voters ranked the list of priorities, five issues stood out from the rest: *health care (cost and accessibility), state taxes and government spending, K-12 education, jobs and the economy, and public health / COVID-19 pandemic.* The close-knit group of “most important” priorities reflects the entangled challenges thrust upon the state by the emergence of the novel coronavirus.

Health care (costs and accessibility) is always a top-five issue.

Figure 4: Ranking of Health Care (Costs and Accessibility)



Health Care (Costs and Accessibility)

Health care (costs and accessibility) continues to hold the top spot from 2016. Impacts to the health care system have been manifold, ranging from a ramp-up of preparation to deal with the coronavirus, delays to Utahns' health care, canceled elective surgeries, and a loss of some Utahns' health insurance corresponding with a loss of employment. Furthermore, health care providers have seen a shortage of medical equipment and a sharp reduction in revenue from reduced services.

Health care has been consistently among the top five issues in past Utah Priorities Project reports. It was also the top issue for 2016. The data seem to indicate that people tended to differentiate between *health care (costs and accessibility)* and *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* due to differences in the patterns of responses. *Public health / COVID-19 pandemic* was most likely to be the top item for more than one in four voters, but support dropped suddenly; for the respondents who did not rank it first, it was just as likely to be 2nd or 3rd as it was to be 15th or 16th. However, *health care (costs and accessibility)* was not a common top preference, but of all the issues was most likely to be ranked as one of the top eight priorities.

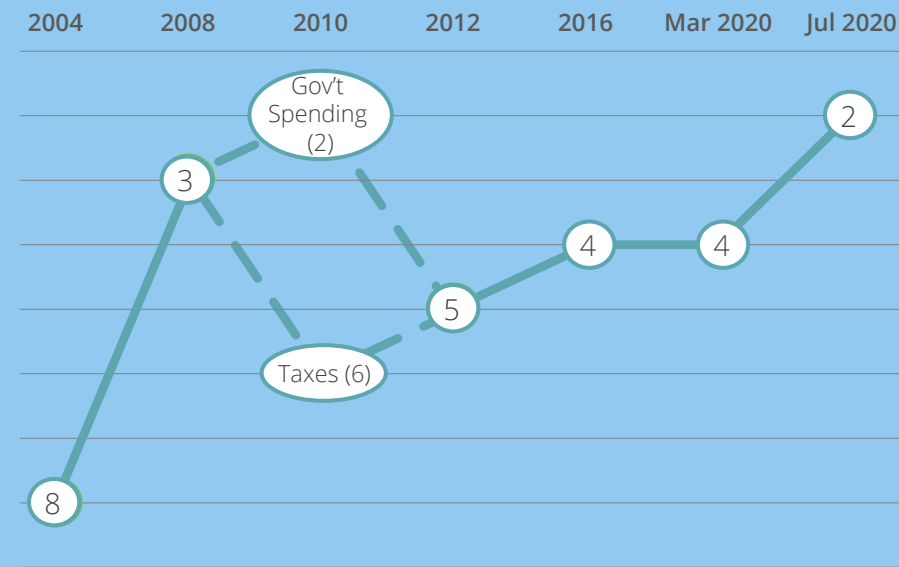
Interestingly, non-pandemic health-related issues were not a common concern in the open-ended question surveys. In the summer open-ended survey, only 2% of Utah voters mentioned health-related issues as a top concern for the state now or over the next four years.

State Taxes and Government Spending

State taxes and government spending is in 2nd place for 2020. Taxes and spending face an uncertain future as impacts to state revenues from the current crisis remain unclear. The state government has taken a role in providing assistance to counter recent economic shocks, and Utahns may be considering both how much they are paying to the state government as well as the assistance available to them. Even under normal times, *state taxes and government spending* is a top concern for Utahns, often among the top five issues. Indeed, it ranked 4th in early March 2020, still on voters' minds after the Utah tax reform and repeal of 2019-20.

State taxes and government spending is often a top-five issue.

Figure 5: Ranking of State Taxes and Government Spending



Note: In 2010, Utah Foundation divided taxes and government spending into two separate categories.

Like *health care (costs and accessibility)*, most Utah voters ranked *state taxes and government spending* among their top eight choices, although it was not commonly their first choice.

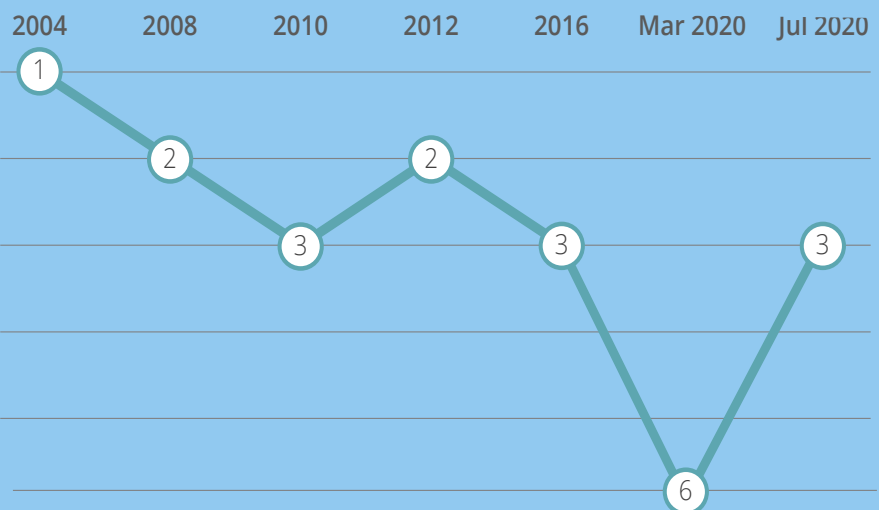
Kindergarten through 12th grade education

K-12 Education had always been among the top three issues on the Utah Priorities Project until dropping to 6th during the early March 2020 survey. However, K-12 education has bounced back up among voters' top concerns following the onset of the coronavirus and school closures. Concern is partly driven by how to safely educate children – balancing potential risks to the health, educational and social needs of students with the economic

needs of working parents. As in the past, many Utahns voiced their concern for the adequacy of funding for Utah schools.

K-12 education has consistently been a top-five priority, except in early March 2020.

Figure 6: Ranking of K-12 Education



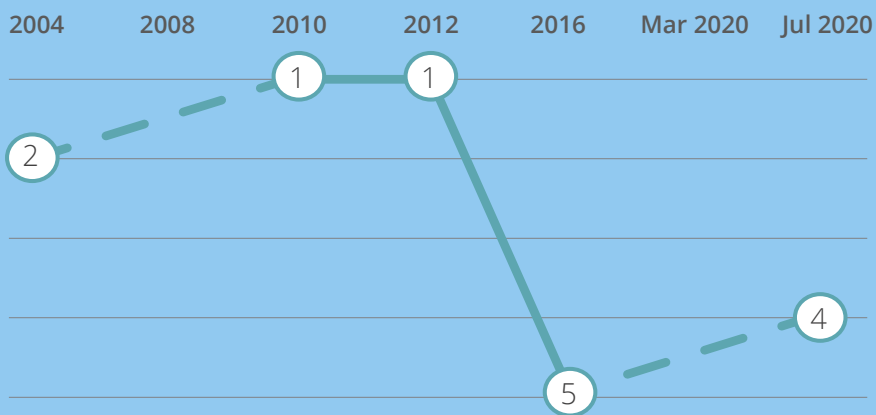
Jobs and the Economy

Jobs and the economy jumped from 13th place in March to 4th place in July following record employment losses in both Utah and the United States. The coronavirus has had an unprecedented impact on Utah's economy, shifting consumer spending patterns, limiting in-person non-essential jobs for a time, and putting more than 150,000 Utahns out of work, temporarily and permanently.

Utahns' concerns around *jobs and the economy* was clearly one of the two most common summer open-ended survey responses. *Jobs and the economy* and *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* each accounted for about 20% of all responses. However, for the prioritization survey, other issues became more competitive when compared directly with one another.

Jobs and the economy has been a top-five issue except in 2008 and early March 2020.

Figure 7: Ranking of *Jobs and the Economy*



Note: Figure only shows surveys when *jobs and the economy* was among the top 10 priorities; in 2008 it was 11th and in early March 2020 it was 13th.

Public Health / COVID-19 Pandemic

Public health / COVID-19 pandemic is a new category for the July 2020 survey. As mentioned, addressing the coronavirus pandemic was overwhelmingly one of the top two priorities in Utah Foundation's summer open-ended survey. However, other topics were more competitive when compared in a list. That said, it is clear that the effects of the coronavirus are driving all of the most important priorities. As noted, while *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* had the highest rating for more than 25% of respondents, among all other voters it was equally likely to end up in 3rd, 9th or 15th place.

As Utah and the country at large have wrestled with the rapid spread of the coronavirus, governments have faced a unique challenge in juggling public health, personal liberty and economic livelihood concerns. In fact, while one in five voters listed the coronavirus as a primary concern, one in three made a reference in the open-ended survey to the coronavirus or its impact on other priorities, such as "cut the state budget to make up for loss of tax revenue," "reopening the economy" or "safely educate children."

HIGH IMPORTANCE

Politicians Listening to Voters

Politicians listening to voters is a new priority beginning early March 2020 as citizens increasingly perceived that elected officials are paying too little attention to voters in favor of corporations, religious organizations, the well-connected or special interest groups. It also encapsulates sentiments regarding legislative changes to ballot initiatives – given that every ballot measure that passed in 2018 was altered by the Utah Legislature. When prioritized among other issues in early March 2020, it ranked as the top choice by a substantial margin. However, since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, *politicians listening to voters* dropped to 6th. Utah Foundation categorized it as “high importance” because, while distinct from the top five issues, it stood substantially above the remaining issues.

IMPORTANT

Housing Affordability

Housing affordability was the second most important issue in early March 2020. While Utah Foundation had asked about housing prices in its 2008, 2010 and 2012 surveys, it had never been one of the top-10 issues. However, with the emergence of the coronavirus, concerns about *housing affordability* dropped to 7th.

In the winter open-ended survey, 9% of respondents identified *housing affordability* as one of the two most important issues facing Utah; it was the 5th most common response. By the summer open-ended survey, only 1% of Utahns listed it as their most important issue; it was the 14th most common response. However, when prompted to think about the next four years, housing picked up again with 4% of Utah voters listing it as their most important issue; it was the 8th most common response.

Managing Growth

While issues regarding population growth often are at the top of issues identified in Utah Foundation’s open-ended survey, it tends to rank lower when Utah voters start prioritizing the most important issues. 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, Utah Foundation modified the question to reflect that concerns are less about population per se, but more about how to manage growth and its impacts on other issues such as transportation, infrastructure, population, education, the economy and even water. In early March 2020, *managing growth* ranked 10th and by July had risen to 8th. Yet when prompted to think about challenges facing Utah over the next four years in the open-ended survey, managing population growth was the second most common response.

MEDIUM IMPORTANCE

Police (support or reform)

Police (support or reform) is a new topic respondents brought up in the summer 2020 open-ended survey after the nation saw large protests decrying police brutality, as well as rioting. Respondents both made statements to reform the police and to protect police departments.

Partisanship and Division

Partisanship and division has been a common topic under the Priorities Project, but has been expressed differently in past versions of the survey. Variations have included Utah politics, ethics in politics and partisan politics. It has varied in im-

portance over time and in early March 2020 ranked 8th, but has since dropped to 10th place. An upcoming report will dive into Utah's partisan divide and see how it compares to previous years and the nation at large.

Air Quality

Before 2016, Utah Foundation combined *environment* and *air quality* into a single issue; it regularly appeared in 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 has been reprioritized to 11th place since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic.

Air quality is one of the few issues that – rather than being exacerbated by the coronavirus – actually saw benefits from reduced road traffic in March and April.² In early March 2020, 10% of respondents identified *air quality* as one of the two most important issues facing Utah; it was the 4th most common response. By summer 2020, only 2% listed it as their most important issue; it was the 12th most common response. However, when prompted to think about the next four years, air quality picked up again with 9% of Utah voters listing it as their most important issue; it was the 4th most common response.

Crime

Crime is a topic that is less likely to be chosen by Utah voters when responding to open-ended questions but sometimes rates a little higher when compared against other priorities. In 2016 *crime* was among the top 10 for the first time since 2008. In early March 2020, *crime* ranked 13th place, and by July it ranked 11th. Based on some of the comments in the open-ended survey, this may be driven by additional concerns regarding violent protests and rioting that occurred in Utah beginning May 30th in response to the death of George Floyd in police custody in Minnesota on May 25th.

LOW IMPORTANCE

Racial inequality or racism

Racial inequality or racism is another category connected to recent protests. It is a new Priorities Project category; it had never been mentioned enough in previous open-ended surveys for Utah Foundation to include it on the list. Among those identifying their most important topic in the summer 2020 open-ended survey, 4% of Utah voters focused on race and inequality – the seventh most common concern. Overall, *racial inequality or racism* ranked 13th among 18 items.

Transportation and Traffic

Past Utah Foundation survey research on quality of life has found that *transportation and traffic* is an issue that does not matter to a lot of Utahns, but to those for whom it does matter, it is a significant concern. In early March 2020, Utah voters ranked the issue 9th. It was also ranked 9th in 2008, and while it is an issue that has been surveyed every year, has only been a top-10 issue those two years. In July 2020, the issue had fallen to 14th place.

Water Supply and Quality

Water supply and quality seems to make it into the top-10 priorities as often as not. It reached 6th place in 2016. This was perhaps a result of the Gold King Mine spill that contaminated Utah waterways or the toxic algal blooms in Utah Lake – on top of Utah being one of the driest states in the nation. However, it ranked 12th in early March 2020 and 15th in July 2020.

Homelessness

Homelessness and poverty ranked 9th in 2012 and 2016. In 2020, Utah Foundation focused exclusively on *homelessness* based on findings from the initial open-ended survey. In early March 2020, it ranked 9th, but in the subsequent 2020 survey, it had fallen to 16th place.

LEAST IMPORTANCE

Immigration

Immigration has appeared in every iteration of its Utah Priorities Project. In 2008, it peaked at 5th place, but dropped to 10th in 2010 and 2012. Since then it ranged from 14th to 17th in 2016 and both surveys in 2020.

Climate Change

Based on past iterations of the Utah Priorities Project’s open-ended responses, Utah Foundation had lumped climate change concerns in with *environment* or *environment and air quality*. However, when analyzing open-ended responses, it became clear that, aside from water quality and air quality issues, a large majority of the remaining environmental-type responses highlighted climate change. While the *environment* ranked 10th of 21 issues in 2016, *climate change* ranked last or second to last in both 2020 surveys.

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 issues can be found in every demographic group’s top-10 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 list. This section details many of the differences in the demographic groups.

Figure 8: Top 10 Priorities of Utah Voters, Women and Men

Men		Women
Public health / pandemic	1	K-12 education
Taxes and gov’t spending	2	Health care
Health care	3	Taxes and gov’t spending
Jobs and the economy	4	Jobs and the economy
Politicians listening to voters	5	Public health / pandemic
K-12 education	6	Housing affordability
Managing growth	7	Politicians listening to voters
Partisanship and division	8	Police (support or reform)
Housing affordability	9	Managing growth
Air quality	10	Racial inequality or racism

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

Men and Women

While their lists are very similar to the overall Priorities Project list, men replace *police (support or reform)* with *air quality* while women replace *partisanship and division* with *racial inequality or racism*.

It is interesting to note that *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* is the top issue for men, but not for women. This is because women concentrated their concerns on the top four issues.

Race/Ethnicity

While non-white populations in Utah may have a different set of priorities than the larger white population, the survey data did not yield firm conclusions. However, there were

certain topics in which Hispanic/Latino populations did differ from the rest of the population to a noteworthy degree.

Utah’s Hispanic/Latino registered voters tended to be less concerned about *water supply and quality*; on average, the likelihood of a Hispanic/Latino voter ranking *water supply and quality* as most important is 1% compared to a 4% likelihood for non-Hispanic/Latino voters.

Hispanic/Latino voters were twice as likely to rank *homelessness* and *racial inequality or racism* as their top priority when compared to other voters. *Homelessness* had a likelihood of topping the list of 7% for Hispanic/Latino voters and a 3% likelihood for other voters. Similarly, *racial inequality or racism* had a likelihood of topping the list for 8% of Hispanic/Latino voters and a 3% likelihood for non-Hispanic/Latino voters.

Religion

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints form a large proportion of Utah’s registered voters (58%), and they have a different set of priorities than other Utahns. LDS Church members’ top-10 priorities include *managing growth* and *crime*, whereas their non-LDS counterparts prioritized *air quality* and *racial inequality or racism*.

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 (77%) and those who were atheist, agnostic or who did not identify with any religion in particular. The religiously non-affiliated were more likely to rate *air quality*, *racial inequality or racism* and *climate change* as important. Those respondents who

Figure 9: Top 10 Priorities of Members of the LDS Church and Non-Members

Non-LDS		LDS
Health care	1	Jobs and the economy
Politicians listening to voters	2	Taxes and gov’t spending
Public health / pandemic	3	K-12 education
K-12 education	4	Health care
Taxes and gov’t spending	5	Public health / pandemic
Jobs and the economy	6	Housing affordability
Air quality	7	Managing growth
Police (support or reform)	8	Politicians listening to voters
Housing affordability	9	Police (support or reform)
Racial inequality or racism	10	Crime

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

Figure 10: Top 10 Priorities of Religiously Affiliated and Non-Religiously Affiliated Utahns

Non-Affiliated		Religiously Affiliated
Health care	1	Taxes and gov’t spending
Public health / pandemic	2	Jobs and the economy
Politicians listening to voters	3	Health care
K-12 education	4	K-12 education
Air quality	5	Public health / pandemic
Racial inequality or racism	6	Politicians listening to voters
Jobs and the economy	7	Housing affordability
Taxes and gov’t spending	8	Managing growth
Climate change	9	Police (support or reform)
Housing affordability	10	Partisanship and division

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

Figure 11: Top 10 Priorities of Utahns by Time Living in the State

0-20 years		21-40 years		More than 40 years	
Public health / pandemic	1	Health care	1	Taxes and gov't spending	
K-12 education	2	K-12 education	2	Jobs and the economy	
Health care	3	Taxes and gov't spending	3	Public health / pandemic	
Jobs and the economy	4	Jobs and the economy	4	Health care	
Politicians listening to voters	5	Politicians listening to voters	5	K-12 education	
Taxes and gov't spending	6	Housing affordability	6	Politicians listening to voters	
Housing affordability	7	Public health / pandemic	7	Managing growth	
Racial inequality or racism	8	Managing growth	8	Crime	
Air quality	9	Police (support or reform)	9	Housing affordability	
Managing growth	10	Partisanship and division	10	Police (support or reform)	

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded. Items that are shared by two demographic groups are bolded.

Figure 12: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns by their Education Level

Less than a bachelor's degree		Bachelor's degree or higher	
Health care	1	Public health / pandemic	
Taxes and gov't spending	2	K-12 education	
Jobs and the economy	3	Taxes and gov't spending	
K-12 education	4	Jobs and the economy	
Politicians listening to voters	5	Health care	
Public health / pandemic	6	Managing growth	
Housing affordability	7	Politicians listening to voters	
Police (support or reform)	8	Housing affordability	
Managing growth	9	Partisanship and division	
Crime	10	Air quality	

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

were religiously affiliated were more concerned about *managing growth*, *police (support or reform)* and *partisanship and division*.

Time in Utah

Interesting differences can be seen between groups categorized by their time of residency in Utah. For relative newcomers to the state (those who have been in Utah less than 20 years), *racial inequality or racism* and *air quality* are in their top 10. For those who have lived in Utah two to four decades, *police (support or reform)* and *partisanship and division* are top-10 issues. For long-time Utahns (more than 40 years), the principal difference is the addition of both *crime*.

Education

For Utah voters with less than a bachelor's degree, *police (support or report)* and *crime* were

more important than they were for Utahns with bachelor's degrees or more. Those with a bachelor's degree or more identified *partisanship and division* and *air quality* as the issues different from those with less than bachelor's degrees. See Figure 12 on the previous page.

Employment

Registered voters were asked if they were a full-time or part-time employee, self-employed, a 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 *housing affordability* and *air quality* were top-10 priorities. For retired individuals, *crime* and *police (support or reform)* are top issues – much like those who have lived in Utah for 40 or more years.

Children in School

It is no surprise that the group that provided *K-12 education* with its highest mean prioritization was parents with children in the Kindergarten through 12th-grade education system. However, *K-12 education* remained an important issue for those without children in the K-12 education system (sixth place). While it makes sense that those involved in the educational system care the most about it, *K-12 education* is a top-six priority for every breakout group analyzed.

Marital Status

Married voters had the same top-10 issues as Utah voters overall – albeit slightly reordered. Single voters, however, focused on *racial inequality or racism*, *homelessness*, *air quality* and *immigration*, at the

Figure 13: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns by Employment

Full-time		Retired
Health care	1	Public health / pandemic
K-12 education	2	Taxes and gov't spending
Taxes and gov't spending	3	Politicians listening to voters
Jobs and the economy	4	Health care
Public health / pandemic	5	Jobs and the economy
Housing affordability	6	K-12 education
Politicians listening to voters	7	Crime
Managing growth	8	Police (support or reform)
Air quality	9	Managing growth
Partisanship and Division	10	Partisanship and Division

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

Figure 14: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns Based on Whether they have Children

Yes		No
K-12 education	1	Health care
Jobs and the economy	2	Taxes and gov't spending
Taxes and gov't spending	3	Jobs and the economy
Health care	4	Public health / pandemic
Public health / pandemic	5	Politicians listening to voters
Politicians listening to voters	6	K-12 education
Housing affordability	7	Housing affordability
Managing growth	8	Managing growth
Partisanship and Division	9	Police (support or reform)
Air Quality	10	Partisanship and Division

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

Figure 15: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns Based on Marital Status

Married		Single	
Jobs and the Economy	1	K-12 education	
Health care	2	Health care	
Taxes and gov't spending	3	Public health / pandemic	
K-12 education	4	Housing affordability	
Public health / pandemic	5	Racial inequality or racism	
Politicians listening to voters	6	Homelessness	
Managing growth	7	Taxes and gov't spending	
Housing affordability	8	Jobs and the Economy	
Police (support or reform)	9	Air Quality	
Partisanship and Division	10	Immigration	

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic are highlighted and bolded.

expense of *politicians listening to voters, managing growth, police (support or reform) and partisanship and division.*

Generations

K-12 education is one of the two top priorities for Utah Millennials and Gen-Xers. This seems logical, with these two generations most likely to have school-aged children.

Among Boomers and members of the Silent Generation, *K-12 education* drops in importance. Boomers and members of the Silent Generation also list *crime* as a higher concern.

Members of the Silent Generation were the most concerned of any generational group about *public health / COVID-19 pandemic*. Since they are aged 75 and over, the coronavirus does pose a particular danger to their demo-

graphic, and in many ways they are reliant on the community to limit the spread.

Members of the Silent Generation also gave *politicians listening to voters* a high priority than each of the other breakout groups, as well as both *crime* and *police (support and reform)*.

Figure 16: Top 10 Priorities for Utahns Based on Generation

Millennials		Gen-Xers		Boomers		Silent Generation	
Health care	1	K-12 education	1	Taxes and gov't spending	1	Public health / pandemic	
K-12 education	2	Jobs and the Economy	2	Jobs and the Economy	2	Taxes and gov't spending	
Public health / pandemic	3	Health care	3	Health care	3	Politicians listening to voters	
Jobs and the Economy	4	Taxes and gov't spending	4	Public health / pandemic	4	K-12 education	
Taxes and gov't spending	5	Public health / pandemic	5	Politicians listening to voters	5	Crime	
Politicians listening to voters	6	Managing growth	6	K-12 education	6	Jobs and the Economy	
Housing affordability	7	Housing affordability	7	Managing growth	7	Police (support or reform)	
Partisanship and Division	8	Politicians listening to voters	8	Police (support or reform)	8	Managing growth	
Managing growth	9	Air Quality	9	Crime	9	Partisanship and Division	
Police (support or reform)	10	Police (support or reform)	10	Partisanship and Division	10	Health care	

Note: Items that are unique to a demographic group are highlighted in yellow and bolded. Items that are unique to two demographic groups are highlighted in blue and bolded. Items that are shared by three demographic groups are bolded.

CONCLUSION

The 2020 Utah Priorities Project is particularly interesting since its two separate survey periods allow Utah Foundation to glimpse the major impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on voters' issue prioritization.

The top issues are:

- *Health care (costs and accessibility)*
- *State taxes and government spending*
- *K-12 education*
- *Jobs and the economy*
- *Public health / COVID-19 pandemic*

The top two issues – *health care (costs and accessibility)* and *state taxes and government spending* – ranked high not because they were often the most important issues for Utahns in the survey, but because they were *consistently* important among respondents. In fact, *public health / COVID-19 pandemic* was most often ranked as the top issue, but many respondents also ranked it as less important.

Nonetheless, the top five issues can be found in every demographic group's top-10 list.

For the summer 2020 survey, 48% of Utahns reported that Utah was on the “wrong track.” Utah voters have been trending that direction over the past 16 years. In addition, more people feel that their quality of life is worse than it was five years ago compared to people who feel it is better. And for the first time, more than 6% of Utahns reported that their quality of life was “much worse” than five years before – 9% of Utahns did in early July of 2020, compared to a Priorities Project low of 3% in early March of 2020.

Subsequent reports and briefs will further inform candidates for elected office, elected officials, civic leaders and others on voters' priorities, while providing further detail on Utahns' perspectives and delving into the top-ranked issues.

APPENDIX

Overall Structure of Project

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

1. “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?”
2. “What is the next greatest 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:

1. Asks voters about their quality of life and if the state is headed in the right direction.
2. Has voters prioritize issues.
3. Has voters prioritize sub-categories of issues likely to be among the top 10, such as:
 - a. “When thinking about homelessness, what is your top priority?”
 - i. “Homeless support like shelter and mental health services.”
 - ii. “Keeping homeless people from camping or loitering in public spaces.”
4. Gauges the direction of sentiments of issues likely to be among the top 10, such as:
 - a. “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.”
5. Has voters report demographic information to ensure a representative sample and to be used in examining group trends.

In 2020, Utah Foundation partnered with Y2 Analytics to carry out two series of these surveys. Y2 created the sample by randomly drawing from a complete list of registered voters in Utah. Y2 purchased email addresses for that list and sent an email invitation to participate in the online survey. Surveys were open for about two weeks and respondents were repeatedly invited to respond.

The first series of surveys was carried out in February and March of 2020, before the coronavirus had a serious impact on the United States. The second series was carried out in June and July, after the initial coronavirus peak and during the time many states were looking to re-energize their economies. The results in this survey largely come from June and July surveys.

Utah Foundation carried out these two surveys because it became clear that the rapid onset of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States as well as

Figure A: Details of Surveys and Respondents

Survey	Time	Respondents	Total Response Rate	Completed Response Rate
First series				
Open-ended	February 2020	2,292		
Prioritization	Early March 2020	1,154	4.5%	3.8%
Second Series				
Open-ended	June 2020	1,188		
Prioritization	Early July 2020	780	2.6%	1.9%

nationwide protests may have shuffled the importance of priorities as reported in February and March.

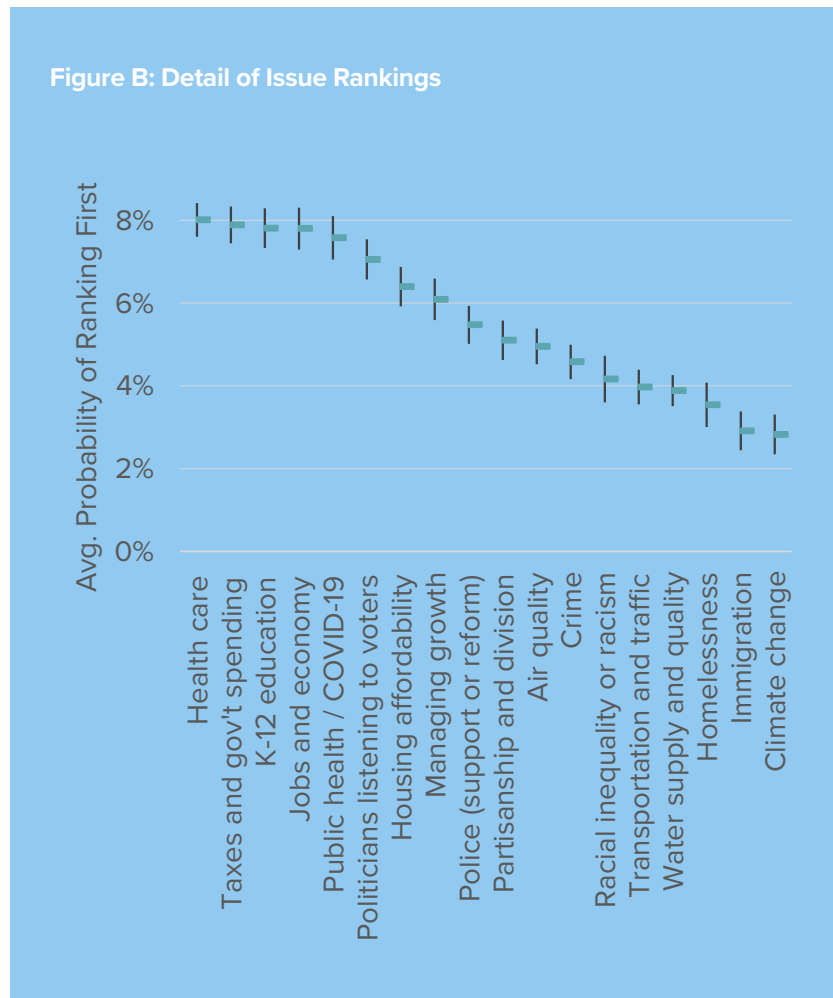
Utah Foundation made one slight alteration to the initial open-ended survey, replacing “What is the next greatest issue” in the second question for “When thinking ahead over the next four years, what would you say is the greatest issue facing Utah?” This was done to try to gauge the permanence of issues with regard to then-current events (such as the coronavirus and nationwide focus on race and police brutality) as voters considered a longer term (the full gubernatorial term).

Prioritization Methodology

Prior to 2020, Utah Foundation prioritized issues by asking votes to rate each issue from one to five, and ranking the average scores. In 2020, Utah Foundation began a shift to a different methodology, Best-Worst Scaling (BWS), also known as maxdiff. With this methodology, voters are presented with a short list of four topics. Voters identified which of the topic they were most concerned about, and out of the remaining three topics, which they were least concerned about. Voters were shown a series of nine 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 18 topics. Those voter probability scores were then averaged to rank the issues.

Voters in the second survey were weighted based on age, gender and race to conform with the 2018 U.S. Census report of registered voters in Utah. Missing data were imputed using a hot-deck method.



ENDNOTES

1. Julie Pace and Hannah Fingerhut, “AP-NORC poll: US course at record low, Trump sinks on virus,” July 26, 2020, <https://apnews.com/43a096bc2bcf376de04b696c5143ee99>.
2. Logan Mitchell, “2020 Air quality improvements during the March-April COVID-19 lockdown,” *University of Utah, Department of Atmospheric Sciences*, https://atmos.utah.edu/air-quality/covid-19_air_quality.php.



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