

The
CAUCUS
System



by Daryl Acumen

The Caucus System: The History of Utah's Caucus-Convention System & Republican Voter Sentiment of the 2024 Presidential Preference Poll

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History of the Caucus-Convention System

The origin of caucuses

Boston in the 18th century was as pure a democracy as the world has seen since ancient Greece. Residents gathered in town halls to make decisions and there were free and open elections for important town positions. Like most towns in the early republic, all votes were by voice.¹



Figure 1 - Early caucuses were held in local pubs like The Green Dragon.

Offsetting this democratic tendency however were developed secret groups of elite residents who gathered to influence elections and meetings for their own designs. The most famous of these clubs was called the “caucus”². In local taverns over much beer and alcohol, rich and powerful men gathered and conspired to elect their allies and friends to important town positions³.

In the early years of the nation, fathers were dubious of faction. Washington warned of the dangers of faction⁴ and though Adams believed that factions and eventually parties

¹ (Ware, 2002, p. 34)

² (Warden, 1970)

³ (Sismondo, 2011)

⁴ *"All combinations and associations under whatever plausible character with the real design to direct, control, counteract, or awe the regular deliberation and action of the constituted authorities, are destructive...and of fatal tendency. They serve to organize faction; to give it an artificial and extraordinary force; to put in the place of the delegated will of the nation the will of a party, often a small but artful and enterprising minority of the community; and, according to the alternate triumphs of different parties, to make the public administration the mirror of the ill concerted and incongruous projects of faction, rather than the organ of consistent and wholesome plans digested by common councils and modified by mutual interests. However combinations or associations of the above description may now and then answer popular ends, they are likely, in the course of time and things, to become potent engines by which cunning, ambitious, and unprincipled men will be enabled to subvert the power of the people and to usurp for themselves the reins of government, destroying afterwards the very engines which have lifted them to unjust dominion."* – President George Washington (Washington, 1796)

were inevitable, he nonetheless warned of their dangers⁵. Despite these warnings and misgivings, interest groups, factions and eventually political parties inevitably emerged.

Interest groups are a given in political life. Immigrant populations, regional clusters, business interests and people with similar priorities will tend to find each other and become interest groups. These groups will over time coalesce into factions, as described by the founding fathers, and these factions can coalesce into coalitions for governance. Although American political coalitions are persistent, great the influx of new immigrant groups, the emergence of new demographic groups and industries mean that the coalitions themselves are always in a state of flux. In addition, national challenges like the Great Depression and the civil rights movement can cause tectonic shifts in these coalitions.⁶ The presence of the electoral college caused early factions to merge into two opposing coalitions which eventually involved into the “parties” we know today.

The first two dominant coalitions were the Democratic-Republicans which advocated states rights and pro revolutionary French policy, and the Federalists favoring strong national government and more aligned with Great Britain.⁷

Nominations in the early days were handled by newspaper. Friends of candidates would anonymously post nominations in the newspaper. It was believed at the time that anyone had the right to nominate candidates. Later, there were so many nominees that

⁵*“There is nothing which I dread so much as a division of the republic into two great parties, each arranged under its leader, and concentrating measures in opposition to each other. This, in my humble apprehension, is to be dreaded as the greatest political evil under our constitution.”* – John Adams
(Adams, The Works of John Adams, 1850)

⁶ (Brewer, 2013)

⁷ (Rae, 2013)

partisan newspaper publishers started to arbitrate the nominees. In some cases, legislative caucuses met to coordinate nominees, later seeing the nominations to the newspapers⁸

The Federalists fell apart after a few years and leaving the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans to rule as the only coherent coalition left. This period, from 1800 to 1825, was known as the Era of Good Feelings.

By the mid 1820s, most white males gained the vote, leading to populism in the electorate.⁹ While politics in the early years of the republic were based on deference to more powerful and influential people, by the 1820s Americans started to think more politically. Ordinary people got involved in political debates and agitated for the popular vote.¹⁰ Jackson, who appealed to regular voters, emerged as a great populist leader on the heels of this suffrage wave. In the Presidential election of 1824 Jackson won easily, but because his voter base was nebulous and not well organized. Because of this, he was vulnerable in the electoral college and a coalition of opposition joined forces to deny him the presidency.

In response to this loss, Martin Van Buren organized a machine to recruit pledged electors who would be loyal to Jackson. The machine he created in 1830 was a system of caucuses, delegates, and conventions which would select a single nominee for each office at the local and national level. Voters would be given slates on colored paper telling them who the nominees were and thus who they should vote for. This political machinery became known as the Democratic Party¹¹ – the first modern political party. The existence of a

⁸ (Gooch A. D., 2022)

⁹ (Rae, 2013, p. 28)

¹⁰ (Ware, 2002, p. 65)

¹¹ (Schoenbaum, 2024)

political party nullified the electoral college as an independent organization.¹² This machine would propel Van Buren to the Presidency after Jackson. The discipline of a party convention with an official nominee and the ability to leave dissenters out in the cold was the key to success.¹³

Whigs, who emerged as an opposition coalition in 1830, were dubious of the convention scheme. “Resolving, that we believe the establishment of the Convention system in this state, for the purpose of nominating all state and county officers, to be anti-republican, and ought not to be tolerated in a republican government.”¹⁴ Van Buren won Illinois in 1840, but those counties that had a convention showed increased strength of the party.¹⁵ Even though the convention system was contrary to their principles, they adopted it for political expediency. The success of the party in 1842 was largely attributed to the broad adoption of the convention system. They resolved to push for general adoption of the convention system in 1844.¹⁶

On March 1, 1843, at a mass meeting of Whigs to help organize the elections for the year, Lincoln was the most prominent figure and a candidate for congress. He called the meeting to order. Drew up the platform for principles. Lincoln was chairman of the committee charged with the address to the people regarding conventions. In this address Lincoln and the committee he



Figure 2 – Abraham Lincoln, 1846

¹² (Rae, 2013)

¹³ (Schoenbaum, 2024)

¹⁴ From a resolution of the Whigs in the Illinois General Assembly, 1835. (Thompson, 1912)

¹⁵ (Thompson, 1912)

¹⁶ (Schoenbaum, 2024)

chaired called for the use of conventions as a defensive measure against the Democrats who were already using them. Later in this address Lincoln wrote:

“That union is strength is a truth that has been known, illustrated, and declared in various ways and forms in all ages of the world. That great fabulist and philosopher, Aesop, illustrated it by his fable of a bundle of sticks; and He whose wisdom surpasses that of all philosophers has declared that ‘a house divided against itself cannot stand.’”¹⁷

Caucuses were unpopular with voters, but because they were secret, they were harder to rally against.¹⁸

In 1841 the party voted to try convention out and they saw great success with them in 1842. That success silenced critics and in 1843 the Whigs decided to adopt the delegate convention system as their standard. In that year Duncan wrote a scathing rebuke of the move, calling it evils and explaining the view of his followers that the convention system would lead to cronyism, bossism and all sorts of bad things.¹⁹

“By this party drill, the rank and file are forced to ratify every bargain made by their leaders, however repugnant it may be to their feelings, rather than split from this party, and be called traitors to their principles; for experience has shown that most men would sacrifice their country, and compromise their honor, or their principles, sooner than encounter the sneers, much less the obloquy and scorn of a party,



Figure 3 - Gov. Joseph Duncan

¹⁷ (Hay & Nicolay)

¹⁸ (Schoenbaum, 2024)

¹⁹ (Schoenbaum, 2024)

after having firmly enlisted under its banners. This convention system, if adopted by both parties, will make our government a prize to be sought after by political gamblers. It throws the chains of slavery and degradation around its victories, prostrates the fine feelings of nature, extinguishes every spark of patriotism, creates jealousies, distrusts, and angry divisions in society, and will ultimately make us an easy prey to some fiend, or despot, at the head of an army or church, whose followers, like themselves, love the spoils of power better than the liberty of their country.” – Gov. Joseph Duncan²⁰

Political parties at this stage printed their slates colored paper and distributed to voters on election day²¹. Over the years political parties have served as a moderating force in American politics and served as an outlet for the political feelings of various interest groups who came together in coalitions with shared interests²².

The system that parties used was now a two-stage process of caucuses and conventions. Citizens would get together in meetings to select delegates and those delegates would go to a convention to choose party nominees. It is important to note that “caucus” was a New England term. Everywhere else they were known as “primaries”.²³ In larger urban areas these primaries were basically just elections, and there wasn’t much “meeting” involved.²⁴

²⁰ (Schoenbaum, 2024, p. 177)

²¹ (Cohen, 2008)

²² (Hofstadter, 1969)

²³ (Ware, 2002, p. 38)

²⁴ (Ware, 2002, p. 60)

Reform

By the 1830s, the population grew, urbanization increased, and the informal political systems of previous decades were no longer sufficient.²⁵

The increased urban populations also made voter fraud easier.²⁶ Before the 1880s, most citizens knew most other

citizens in their communities, so political was more informal and conducted belly-to-belly. Everyone in a community knew who was entitled to vote, so there was no need for official voters rolls. In fact, in the early years of the republic, voting was done by voice. As populations grew, voice voting became impractical and were replaced by ballots. Early ballots were crude pieces of paper printed by candidates or by early political parties. Balloting was public. In fact, early parties printed their ballots on different colors of paper so everyone knew who was voting for whom.²⁷ This reflected the 19th century idea that voting was “speechifying” and was not a private matter of conscience. Voting was therefore to be conducted in full view of the public.²⁸

Over time the haphazard nature of elections and the secret nature of caucuses succumbed to corruption.



Figure 4 - The term "smoke-filled back room" refers to 19th century caucus meetings, which were often filled with cigar smoke.

²⁵ (Ware, 2002, p. 21)

²⁶ (Troiano, 2024, p. 29)

²⁷ (Ware, 2002, p. 34)

²⁸ (Ryan, 1997, p. 96)

The party machines grew in power and party bosses took over. Tammany Hall was a prime example of the corruption of boss politics. It was believed that lucrative government offices were the proper spoils of political victory.

“I don’t care who does the electing, so long as I get to do the nominating.” – William “Boss” Tweed²⁹

Political parties were run informally, and it was understood that any reform needed to be external, statewide and legal. Since parties were decentralized and state parties therefore had no power over county parties, the only way to achieve statewide reform was by state legislative action.³⁰ The only way to reform “the evils of the caucus system” was external reform.³¹

Political parties tried to formalize delegate select selection and nomination procedures, but this only led to more intense competition, controversy and contention among hustling candidates. The stricter the rules, the harder candidates worked to gain advantage.³²

The Porter Law was the first step. The California law was enacted in reaction to the violent Union Party convention of 1865. California Republicans pushed for reform over the objections of the Democrats in 1866. Soon reform spread to other states. The reforms traded legitimacy and recognition of political parties in the general election for reforms

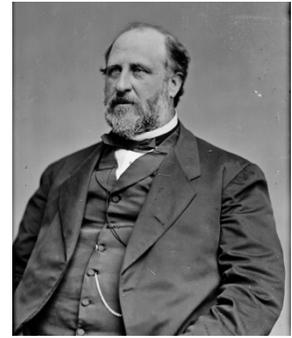


Figure 5 - William "Boss" Tweed

²⁹ (Welch, Gruhl, Thomas, & Borrelli, 2003, p. 224)

³⁰ (Ware, 2002, p. 70 & 77)

³¹ (Whitridge, 1883, p. 26)

³² (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 157)

that outlawed fraud in elections and brought county parties under control. This transformed political parties from private to semipublic organizations.³³

Alcohol was used to buy votes and later tax incentives were used. A system of patronage sprung up and party bosses exercised near total control over the election apparatus in many states³⁴. The insecure, public, and non-standard nature of elections led to ballot stuffing and other forms of corruption that eroded public confidence in elections, though mostly in urban areas where lucrative offices were at stake and where it possible to be anonymous.³⁵

“...the central or managing committees of both parties made nominations, and candidates spent little or no time going through the form of standing before the people for nominating votes. Each party had a Central Committee composed of one member from each ward. When there were delegates to be sent to a city convention which was to choose a mayor and other offices, the Central Committee met and called the convention and fixed the date for the selection of the delegates in the wards. Then the member of the Central Committee for that ward consulted a few chums or candidates and decided on the delegates he wanted to send to the convention. His slate was invariably elected. The committeeman treated the voters of the ward with the scantiest pretense of fairness, even when they were entirely unorganized in opposition. His delegates would be chosen in a place selected by himself, presided over by himself, the tellers of the ballot chosen by himself, and packed by his friends in advance of the time announced for meeting. If there was

³³ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 3)

³⁴ (Reynolds J. E., 2006)

³⁵ (Ware, 2002, p. 71)

opposition to him in the ward, and he feared that his mass meeting might be captured, he would resort to tricks that were bolder.” – William Flewellyn Saunders³⁶

The Australian ballot was introduced in the 1880s. Features of the ballot were that it was a standard ballot, printed by the state, not by candidates or parties, it was only available at the polls and it could not be legally removed from the polling place. Secret balloting was introduced, uniform design. By 1891, most states used secret ballots.³⁷

As a result of this discontent, reform movements sprang up across the country agitating for standardized “Australian” ballots, secret balloting, and direct primaries divorced from the back-room dealings that had become so prevalent across the country.³⁸

Another driver of the direct primary was the candidate centered nature of modern politics.³⁹ In the 19th century it was considered improper for politicians solicit support (to campaign). “the office shall seek the man and not the man the office.” Campaigning was seen as evidence that a candidate was of poor virtue.⁴⁰ Lawyers and political hacks constituted a growing percentage of delegates. Campaigning became easier with the telephone and telegraph, and the hustling candidate was born.⁴¹ “Political clubs”, which were the grass roots of political parties in the 18th century, vanished by the 1890s. Where these political clubs once performed the grunt work of mobilizing support and finding delegates for party action, their efforts were replaced by candidates themselves. Now

³⁶ (Saunders, January 21, 1898)

³⁷ (Ware, 2002, p. 31)

³⁸ (Reynolds J. F., 2018)

³⁹ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 10)

⁴⁰ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 63)

⁴¹ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 102)

advertising took the place of these groups work. The hustling candidate became a bigger source of energy.⁴²

Voter fraud was not considered a serious in the 1880s. Because parties were considered private organizations (like mens clubs) and these primaries weren't considered "real elections", voter fraud was considered no more serious than cheating at cards or playing a practical joke. Election fraud was considered to be "all in good fun" at the primary level.⁴³ If anyone was convicted of committing fraud in a primary election (if laws existed prohibiting such fraud), generally the police and judges treated the offenses with leniency. In part this was because the offenses were not considered serious and in part because the judges and magistrates themselves were guilty of the infractions they were charged with prosecuting.⁴⁴

Money was even dispensed openly at primary places.

"Votes were bought and sold on the public streets during the primaries yesterday as openly and shamelessly as though they were butter and eggs." – Los Angeles Times, 1906⁴⁵

Ticket peddlers were key to voting. Outside general elections were peddlers with voting tickets in a different color for each party. Voters could pencil out candidates or add them. Some peddlers offered "pasters", which were sticky pieces of paper you could paste onto another party's ticket to allow voters to support a single candidate form the opposing

⁴² (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 104)

⁴³ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 113)

⁴⁴ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 164)

⁴⁵ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 114)

party. It was also not uncommon for ticket peddlers to offer tickets the color of the opposing party's tickets but with a few names changed to help their guy.⁴⁶

“The problem before this people is very largely how to stir reputable citizens up to their duties, and to make those duties easy to perform, while at the same time depriving the less reputable portion of the community both the chance to commit frauds in politics and the opportunity to be rewarded for committing them.” – Theodore Roosevelt⁴⁷

First the laws were focused on eliminating fraud and putting an end to bribery, but this was the first step in recognizing political parties' status as organizations with public purpose. These laws gradually integrated parties into the general election process, which is the root of their official status. When these laws were contested, their constitutionality was affirmed by the courts by virtue of their role in furnishing candidates for the general election. Reform laws faces little opposition because they outlawed practices in the primary that were already illegal in the general election.⁴⁸

Robert M. La Follette popularized the direct primary with speeches in Illinois and Michigan in 1897 & 1898.

“Waste no more time on vain sermons of the duty of attending caucus. It is too late for that.” – Robert M. La Follette⁴⁹

“No longer...will there stand between the voter and the [elected] official a political machine with a complicated system of caucuses and convention, by the easy manipulation of which it thwarts the will of the voter” - Robert M. La Follette⁵⁰

⁴⁶ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 126)

⁴⁷ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 160)

⁴⁸ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 163)

⁴⁹ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 180)

⁵⁰ (Reynolds J. E., 2006, p. 184)

Majority rule

With reform and the democratization of American elections, white voters in the South began to fear for their monopoly on political power. As a hedge against the suffrage of negroes in the south, Jim Crow rules were instituted as a check on the growing electoral power of the American negro between.⁵¹

Majority rules were implemented in the south between 1902 and 1939. Outside the south, only Oklahoma (contiguous to the South and a one-party state) and Utah (a one party state with a Mormon majority at the start of the 20th century) instituted the runoff election. In a one-party state, the primary was the de-facto general election. While not necessarily the product of racist forethought, the majority rule did perpetuate the majority supremacy, and this was certainly recognized.

Glaser writes, “If blacks could forge a plurality behind a single black candidate in the first round, whites could still rally around the surviving white candidate in the second round...”⁵²

In Texas, the Democratic party famously argued that because it was a “private organization” it was entitled to ban negroes from party membership, excluding them from primaries and disenfranchising them from political power. The U.S. Supreme Court famously ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* in 1944 that political parties in the south were not “private organizations” but “agencies of the state” (semi-public organizations) and that the state had an obligation to ensure fairness in both general and primary elections⁵³.

⁵¹ (Glaser, *The Hand of the Past in Contemporary Southern Politics*, 2013)

⁵² (Glaser, *The primary runoff as a remnant of the old South*, 2006, p. 777)

⁵³ (*Smith v. Allwright*, 1944)

Other tools used to ensure white supremacy survived, however. Most notably for this report was the “majority rule” which stated that any candidate must receive a majority in the primary to win. This rule was created so that cultural majorities would always maintain power. It was feared that if two members of the cultural majority (whites in the south) were to split the vote, a black candidate might be able to slip through the cracks and win with a plurality.⁵⁴

In such cases, a runoff election was instituted to ensure that the cultural majority would always have a second bite at the apple, ensuring that the cultural minority would never win⁵⁵.

Cases that mention majority voting:

“It referred also to the Texas rule requiring a majority vote as a prerequisite to nomination in a primary election and to the so-called "place" rule limiting candidacy for legislative office from a multi-member district to a specified "place" on the ticket, with the result being the election of representatives from the Dallas multi-member district reduced to a head-to-head contest for each position. These characteristics of the Texas electoral system, neither in themselves improper nor invidious, enhanced the opportunity for racial discrimination, the District Court thought. More fundamentally, it found that, since Reconstruction days, there have been only two Negroes in the Dallas County delegation to the Texas House of Representatives, and that these two were the only two Negroes ever slated by the Dallas Committee for Responsible Government, a white-dominated organization that is in effective control of Democratic Party candidate slating in Dallas County.” - *White v. Regester*

⁵⁴ (McDonald, 1985)

⁵⁵ (Glaser, *The primary runoff as a remnant of the old South*, 2006)

“to submerge the will of the minority [and] deny the minority’s access to the system” – Rogers v. Lodge

“As the District Court well understood, the majority vote rule, which forbade election by a plurality, would always require the black candidate in an at-large election, if he survived the initial round, to run against one white candidate. In the context of racial bloc voting prevalent in Port Arthur, the rule would permanently foreclose a black candidate from being elected to an at-large seat.” – City of Port Arthur v. United States

Note: In Utah the Majority rule and runoff election solution were enacted to protect a very different kind of cultural majority – Mormons.

New caucus

The runoff election was not popular Utah. As the years rolled on, Candidates and voters grew tired of the three elections per cycle. Three elections were tedious for voters and expensive for candidates. Over time participation in the runoff election declined. Eventually the runoffs were dominated by political insiders and “pay roll” voters, meaning that the primary election was dominated by increasingly extremist factions within each party⁵⁶. The state legislature was eager for a solution⁵⁷.

In 1947 the leaders of the Utah Democratic and Republican parties offered the legislature a somewhat self-serving solution⁵⁸. The parties offered to pre-qualify candidates for the open primary ballot by reinstating a modified form of the caucus convention system. Delegates would be chosen in “neighborhood” caucus meetings (significantly different from the smoke-filled backrooms of old), and the candidates would then compete for two (2) spots on the ballot at state and county conventions⁵⁹. In this way the primary election winner was guaranteed to have attained a majority of the vote and no runoff election would be necessary⁶⁰.

The legislature accepted this approach and on March 4th, 1947, SB118 was passed⁶¹ and the modern caucus-convention system was born⁶².

⁵⁶ (Salt Lake Telegram, The, 1947)

⁵⁷ (Williams, 1947)

⁵⁸ (Salt Lake Telegram, The, 1947)

⁵⁹ (Deseret News, The, 1947)

⁶⁰ (Holbrook & Melich, 1947)

⁶¹ (Salt Lake Telegram, The, 1947)

⁶² (Holbrook & Melich, 1947)

1994

Over the ensuing decades changes were made to the nominating process at convention. In 1962 the Utah Democratic party coined the “get out of primary free” rule - a clause to their platform stating that if a candidate won a majority at convention, they shouldn’t have to compete for the nomination in a primary⁶³. The legislature decided later that although the implied 50% threshold to avoid a primary was too low, the idea of being able to avoid a primary if a candidate demonstrated significant support at convention as adopted. The legislature initially set the “get out of primary” threshold to 80%⁶⁴. In 1974 democratic legislators succeeded in reducing the threshold to 70%, closer to the 50% demanded by the 1962 democratic party platform⁶⁵.

Then in 1994 something odd happened. Staffers for then house speaker Rob Bishop misread a U.S. supreme court ruling related to the first amendment rights of political parties⁶⁶. The ruling was *Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut*, and the ruling stated that state legislatures could not force a party to have an open or closed primary because such rules violated their first amendment right of association⁶⁷.

Staffers for the speaker misread the ruling to imply that state legislators could not regulate political parties in any way, which is wrong. This interpretation was carried by the speaker to the house floor in a speech on February 24th, 1994. In his floor address, Bishop Speaker Bishop stated that “numerous” supreme court rulings had made it clear that political parties were private organizations and that they could no longer be regulated by

⁶³ (Salt Lake Tribune, The, 1962)

⁶⁴ (Malmquist, 1963)

⁶⁵ (Budget Bill 44, 1974)

⁶⁶ D. Acumen, personal communication, December, 2024

⁶⁷ (*Tashjian v. Republican Party of Connecticut*, 1986)

the state. The house duly passed HB367 which removed the state from all involvement in party primaries and handed control over to the parties themselves⁶⁸.

Although Passion about an issue can drive people to become politically active, a significant number are “recruited” by campaigns or acquaintances. Because recruitment plays an important role, it’s important to look at who gets recruited. It looks like recruitment tends to stay within certain demographic boundaries. Women don’t cross the gender line, minorities don’t cross the race line. Also, those who are active in some capacity tend to be recruited for others. It becomes a self-perpetuating cycle of activists.⁶⁹ It is important to note that a significant number of activists were recruited and a significant portion of those may have been recruited intentionally. It is therefore not out of the realm of consideration that a significant number of activists may be leftovers from paid recruiting efforts by past political campaigns. Thus any argument that the activists base is purely organic must be taken with a grain of salt.

⁶⁸ (HB359, 1994)

⁶⁹ (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995)

CMV

Over time the parties became more extreme. Activists dominated caucuses and conventions. Polls showed that the delegates were diverging from regular voters ideologically⁷⁰ and attendance at caucus meetings, never robust, declined.

“These conventions teach the people to lean upon the politicians instead of investigating, acting and thinking for themselves.” - Gov. Joseph Duncan⁷¹

By 2010 outside organizations began to realize that for relatively little money they could use Utah’s caucuses and delegate structure to have an outsized effect on the national stage. Washington thinktank Club for Growth targeted popular Utah senator Bob Bennett in 2010 by packing the caucuses with recruited delegates⁷², ousting Bennett at convention⁷³. In this case, Bennett, who was influential in Washington and popular among Utah voters, was denied even a place on the primary ballot. Mike Lee was elected to replace him.

In reaction to this state business and political leaders came together and formed count my vote. They threatened to run a ballot initiative to change the system to direct primary if the party did not increase their threshold to 67%. The state central committee of the Utah GOP, dominated by activists, indignantly refused and the Count My Vote ballot initiative went forward⁷⁴.

⁷⁰ (Bernick, Analysis: Utah GOP Delegates are Much More Conservative than Other Republicans, 2016)

⁷¹ (Schoenbaum, 2024, p. 184)

⁷² (Mcardle, 2010)

⁷³ (Catanese, 2010)

⁷⁴ (URP v. Cox, 2016)

SB54

In 2013 the Utah state legislature stepped in and negotiated a compromise with Count My Vote to save the caucus-convention system. The proposal by Senator Curt Bramble was to allow candidates to circumvent the caucus-convention system if they acquired a requisite number of signatures. The bill was known as SB54 and it passed with broad support. The system in Utah is now known as a dual-path⁷⁵.

The signature thresholds were set intentionally high to disincentivize candidates from circumventing the caucus system. The law also opened the primary, so thresholds were set relative to republican and unaffiliated voters⁷⁶. When a later court challenge struck down the open primary on first amendment right of association grounds the thresholds were not adjusted, making them even more burdensome on candidates.

⁷⁵ (URP v. Cox, 2016)

⁷⁶ (S. B. 54 Elections Amendments, 2014)

Lawsuits

Republican Party elites, who controlled the nominating process, were so upset by the compromise that they sued the state and in a series of legal battles and appeals that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. The courts agreed that the open primary was unconstitutional, but because there was a severability clause in SB54, the rest of the bill held up in court⁷⁷. Today political activist and party leaders continue to cry about the unconstitutionality of SB54. They claim (incorrectly⁷⁸) that the party is a private organization and that their right of association is violated by the signature path. Legally these arguments have been refuted repeatedly, but the party persists. Many legislators are sympathetic to the cries of party leadership and activists, but the dual path remains popular with ordinary voters⁷⁹.

The Presidential Preference Polls as seen as a way to boost support for the caucus system and to bolster efforts to repeal SB54. Party leadership believed that by asserting their right of association and their status as a private organization, they could build support for their cause.

⁷⁷ (URP v. Cox, 2016)

⁷⁸ *"We think that this statutory system for the selection of party nominees for inclusion on the general election ballot makes the party which is required to follow these legislative directions an agency of the state in so far as it determines the participants in a primary election. The party takes its character as a state agency from the duties imposed upon it by state statutes; the duties do not become matters of private law because they are performed by a political party."* - (Smith v. Allwright, 1944)

⁷⁹ (Bernick, Poll: Majority of Utahns Support Allowing Candidates to Gather Signatures to Get on Primary Ballot, 2016)

Data Analysis

The Poll

The text of the poll was simple: rate the Presidential Preference Poll on a scale from 1 – 5. We sent this out to 400,000 republican voters, sorted from most to least likely to vote

“On a scale of 1 to 5 (**5 = Very Satisfied, 1 = Very Unsatisfied**), how would you rate your experience with the Utah Republican Party's Presidential Preference Poll on Tuesday, March 5th.

If you have specific feedback about your caucus experience or the party's decision to hold a "preference poll" at caucus instead of a Primary election, you can contact Utah Republican Party Chairman Rob Axson at chair@utahgop.org or respond to this text.”

Figure 6 - Presidential Preference Poll sentiment survey sent to 410,356 Republican voters.

and most conservative to least conservative.

Utah is a small, red state. Currently there are 1.76M active registered voters in Utah and Republicans outnumber Democrats nearly 4-to-1⁸⁰. With only 934k active voters in the state, sending a text message to 410,356 was a huge effort. The 11,700 responses we

Last updated on April 7, 2025.

	Active	Inactive*	Total
Constitution	6,563	1,525	8,088
Democratic	241,767	39,445	281,212
Green	663	14	677
Independent American	74,004	15,623	89,627
Libertarian	18,891	5,249	24,140
No Labels	10,871	312	11,183
Republican	934,065	86,725	1,020,790
United Utah	2,217	780	2,997
Utah Forward	208	2	210
Unaffiliated	474,796	106,517	581,314
Total	1,764,045	256,192	2,020,238

Figure 7 - Utah voter registration totals by party affiliation.

⁸⁰ Utah Lieutenant Governor's Office

received represented 1.25% of the registered Republicans in the entire state. Even after filtering out non-numeric responses, the response rate was still above 1%.

We wanted a large sample size for several reasons. First, we wanted to use this survey as a voter identification tool, not simply a survey to gauge overall sentiment. Second, we knew that this would be a unique opportunity and wanted to take advantage of it. Finally, we wanted to be able to drill down into the data on a number of different factors and we knew that it would not be possible to do that with a standard n600 sample.

Analysis

Overview

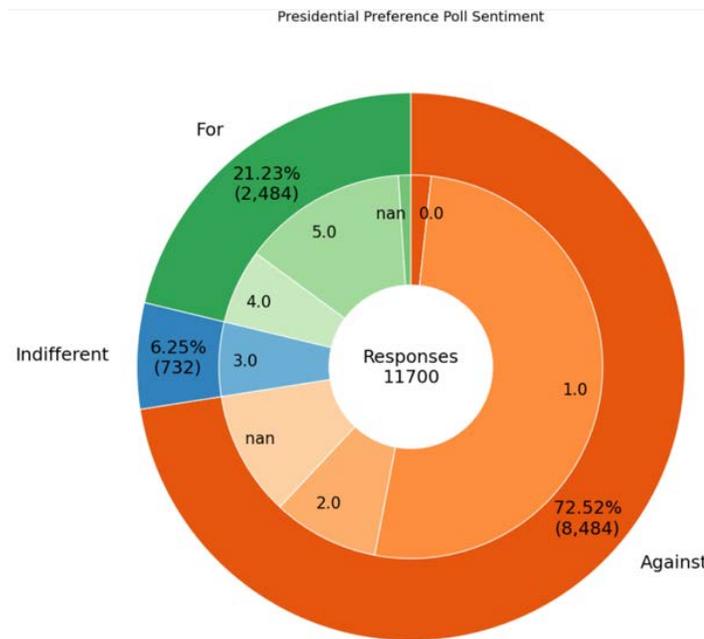


Figure 8 - Caucus sentiment survey results by sentiment score.

Our analysis was to proceed in three stages. The first state would be an overall analysis of negative sentiment by region and legislative district. The second stage would be a decision tree analysis of significant variables predicting positive sentiment using proprietary and consumer data. The last state would be to build a predictive model for positive sentiment using the same proprietary and consumer data.

For the purposes of reporting, we focus on either voters with positive sentiment or negative sentiment, ignoring indifferent voters in-between. If the focus in our reporting is positive sentiment, it does not mean that the inverse of that metric is “negative” sentiment because “indifferent” voters are still present. This is important to keep in mind as we shift between the metrics.

Overall results

72.5% of the responses we received to our survey indicated dissatisfaction with the Presidential Preference Poll. Out of the 11,700 replies we received 6,001 voters (51.3%) rated the Presidential Preference Poll as “1” on

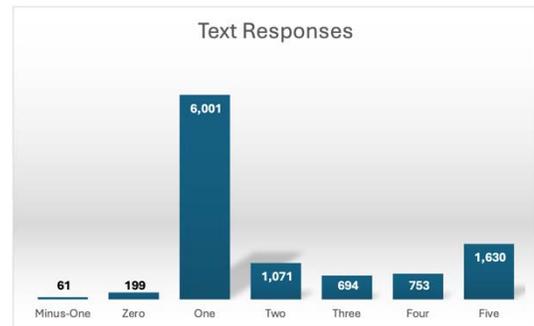


Figure 9 - Raw sentiment scores

a scale from 1 to 5. An additional 199 voters rated the Presidential Preference Poll “0” (that is below the lowest rating possible) and 61 actually gave the Presidential Preference Poll a “negative” number.

Using “Acu.men/stats”⁸¹ we determined that the confidence interval for this sample was ± 0.8 . Thus, given the adjusted sample proportion of 76.93%, the odds of negative sentiment being lower than 50% are approximately 10^{565} to one against⁸². That’s one “ten septemoctogintacentillion” to one against. Overall, the results are unambiguous: voters disapproved of the Presidential Preference Poll. There are 933,326 active registered Republican voters in Utah.⁸³ 10,551 unique scored responses.

For overall reporting, we used negative sentiment for overall reporting. We did this because negative sentiment provided a richer data, set allowing us to segment the data in greater detail.

⁸¹ <https://acu.men/stats>

⁸² note: there are only 10^{82} atoms in the observable universe.

⁸³ <https://vote.utah.gov/current-voter-registration-statistics/> (6/11/2025)

We adjusted the data for five demographic factors: County, Age, Gender, Income, Education.

Gender	code	population	740,859	adjustment	sample	9,951	oversample
Female	F	361,548	48.8%	1.00	4,450	44.7%	91.6%
Male	M	379,311	51.2%	0.93	5,501	55.3%	108.0%

Age	code	population	743,955	adjustment	sample	10,039	oversample
120+	120	43	0.0%	1.00	-	0.0%	0.0%
110+	110	258	0.0%	0.58	6	0.1%	172.3%
100+	100	925	0.1%	0.69	18	0.2%	144.2%
90+	90	8,816	1.2%	1.00	66	0.7%	55.5%
80+	80	45,440	6.1%	0.98	627	6.2%	102.3%
70+	70	100,955	13.6%	0.71	1,926	19.2%	141.4%
60+	60	130,539	17.5%	0.75	2,359	23.5%	133.9%
50+	50	127,646	17.2%	0.93	1,857	18.5%	107.8%
40+	40	149,171	20.1%	1.00	1,771	17.6%	88.0%
30+	30	109,052	14.7%	1.00	1,025	10.2%	69.7%
20+	20	67,499	9.1%	1.00	384	3.8%	42.2%
10+	10	3,611	0.5%	1.00	-	0.0%	0.0%

County	code	population	817,258	adjustment	sample	10,551	oversample
Beaver	Beaver	2,341	0.3%	1.00	17	0.2%	56.2%
Box Elder	Box Elder	18,947	2.3%	1.00	175	1.7%	71.5%
Cache	Cache	36,448	4.5%	1.00	392	3.7%	83.3%
Carbon	Carbon	5,667	0.7%	1.00	56	0.5%	76.5%
Daggett	Daggett	422	0.1%	0.78	7	0.1%	128.5%
Davis	Davis	97,799	12.0%	0.99	1,274	12.1%	100.9%
Duchesne	Duchesne	6,646	0.8%	0.95	90	0.9%	104.9%
Emery	Emery	3,683	0.5%	1.00	36	0.3%	75.7%
Garfield	Garfield	2,058	0.3%	1.00	12	0.1%	45.2%
Grand	Grand	2,059	0.3%	0.81	33	0.3%	124.1%
Iron	Iron	17,766	2.2%	1.00	124	1.2%	54.1%
Juab	Juab	4,535	0.6%	1.00	47	0.4%	80.3%
Kane	Kane	3,047	0.4%	1.00	16	0.2%	40.7%
Millard	Millard	4,810	0.6%	1.00	44	0.4%	70.9%
Morgan	Morgan	4,874	0.6%	0.97	65	0.6%	103.3%
Piute	Piute	811	0.1%	1.00	5	0.0%	47.8%
Rich	Rich	1,061	0.1%	1.00	7	0.1%	51.1%
Salt Lake	Salt Lake	224,233	27.4%	0.95	3,051	28.9%	105.4%
San Juan	San Juan	2,947	0.4%	1.00	26	0.2%	68.3%
Sanpete	Sanpete	9,105	1.1%	1.00	97	0.9%	82.5%
Sevier	Sevier	7,842	1.0%	1.00	75	0.7%	74.1%
Summit	Summit	10,570	1.3%	1.00	83	0.8%	60.8%
Tooele	Tooele	17,788	2.2%	1.00	209	2.0%	91.0%
Uintah	Uintah	11,618	1.4%	1.00	119	1.1%	79.3%
Utah	Utah	189,854	23.2%	0.73	3,365	31.9%	137.3%
Wasatch	Wasatch	10,734	1.3%	0.70	199	1.9%	143.6%
Washington	Washington	60,983	7.5%	1.00	398	3.8%	50.6%
Wayne	Wayne	1,171	0.1%	1.00	7	0.1%	46.3%
Weber	Weber	57,439	7.0%	1.00	522	4.9%	70.4%

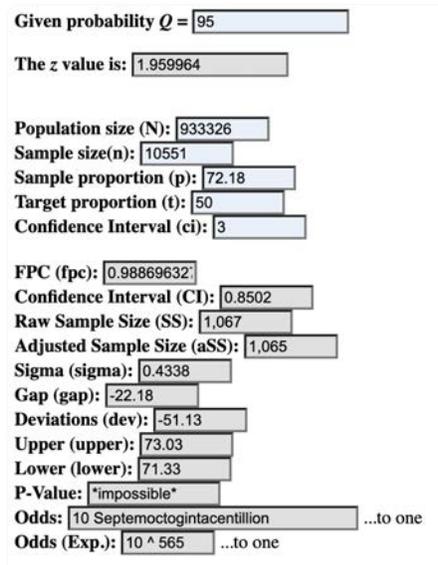
Income	code	population	817,258	adjustment	sample	10,551	oversample
0	0	589	0.07%	0.58	13	0.12%	171.0%
<\$15k	1	8,260	1.0%	1.00	71	0.7%	66.6%
\$15k - \$20k	2	9,663	1.2%	1.00	87	0.8%	69.7%
\$20k - \$30k	3	28,695	3.5%	1.00	321	3.0%	86.6%
\$30k - \$40k	4	33,734	4.1%	1.00	372	3.5%	85.4%
\$40k - \$50k	5	47,353	5.8%	1.00	567	5.4%	92.7%
\$50k - \$75k	6	122,750	15.0%	1.00	1,552	14.7%	97.9%
\$75k - \$100k	7	121,030	14.8%	1.00	1,558	14.8%	99.7%
\$100k - \$125k	8	114,177	14.0%	0.98	1,511	14.3%	102.5%
\$125k+	9	331,007	40.5%	0.95	4,499	42.6%	105.3%

Education	code	population	817,257	adjustment	sample	10,551	oversample
	0	144,466	17.7%	1.00	1,330	12.6%	71.3%
Some High School	1	31	0.0%	1.00	-	0.0%	0.0%
High School Graduate	2	156,647	19.2%	1.00	1,498	14.2%	74.1%
Some College	3	232,329	28.4%	1.00	2,779	26.3%	92.7%
College Graduate	4	195,404	23.9%	0.80	3,150	29.9%	124.9%
Graduate Degree	5	88,380	10.8%	0.64	1,794	17.0%	157.2%

Race	code	population	773,442	adjustment	sample	10,104	oversample
Asian	A	12,787	1.7%	1.00	113	1.1%	67.6%
Black	B	17,127	2.2%	0.96	232	2.3%	103.7%
Hispanic	H	35,138	4.5%	1.00	367	3.6%	80.0%
White	W	708,390	91.6%	0.99	9,392	93.0%	101.5%

voter_id	score	yes	no	country	IBE3101	IBE7641_01	IBE6623_01	IBE9688	IBE9549	age_3	country	IBE3101	IBE7641_01	IBE6623_01	IBE9688	IBE9549	age_3	adjustment	no	yes	3,889.34	5388.15684	
1706291	2	0	1	Cache	W	8	1948	M	0	70	1.00	0.99	0.98	0.71	0.93	1.00	0.71	0.45	0.45	-	-	-	-
5555375	3	0	0	Box Elder	W	6	1962	M	3	40	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	0.93	1.00	1.00	0.91	-	-	-	-	72.18%
1709165	3	0	0	Cache	W	4	1962	F	4	40	1.00	0.99	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	0.79	-	-	-	-	-
6064171	2	0	1	Box Elder	W	8	1973	F	4	50	1.00	0.99	0.98	0.93	1.00	0.80	0.93	0.66	0.66	-	-	-	-
6023301	5	1	0	Cache	W	9	1985	F	3	30	1.00	0.99	0.95	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.94	-	-	0.94	-	
4200602	0	1	0	Beaver	W	1	1961	M	2	60	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.75	0.93	1.00	0.75	0.51	0.51	-	-	-	-
6079474	5	1	0	Box Elder	W	3	1954	M	4	70	1.00	0.99	1.00	0.71	0.93	0.80	0.71	0.37	-	-	0.37	-	-

After adjustments we were able to determine that the actual negative statewide sentiment of the Presidential Preference Poll was 72.18%. In the raw data we oversampled Wasatch and Utah counties, men, voters ages 50-80, those with six-figure incomes and those with college degrees.



Our first round of segmentations was by county. Utah counties are categorized into urban vs. rural counties by the Department of Health and we leveraged their definition for segmentation⁸⁴. We observed that the difference between the rural and urban counties is statistically significant.

⁸⁴ <https://le.utah.gov/interim/2012/pdf/00000877.pdf>

To better understand the relationship between rural and urban counties, in particular the confidence intervals of such, we used the bootstrapping method with 1,000 samples. Negative sentiment in rural counties averaged 63.3% vs. 74.5% for urban counties. The

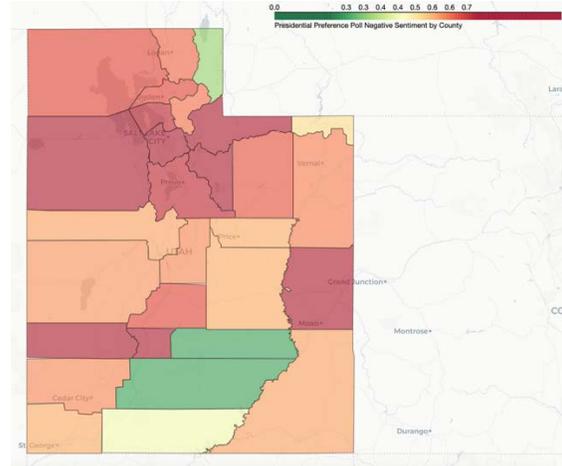


Figure 10 - Average negative sentiment by county.

confidence interval of negative sentiment for rural counties ranged between 61.2 and 65.4 with a standard deviation of 1.04. For urban counties the confidence interval ranged between 73.6 to 75.5% with a standard deviation of 0.49. Because the lower range of the 95% confidence interval for urban counties is above the upper range of the 95% confidence interval for rural counties, we can say with confidence that negative sentiment in urban counties is higher than for rural counties.

The fact that negative sentiment in rural counties is lower than urban counties is intuitive considering history. According to several sources, it was the rise in urbanization that contributed to the increasing animosity towards the old caucus convention system at the tail end of the 19th century⁸⁵. Because it is easier to form close relationships with other voters in a small rural community and voters are more likely to know their delegates personally (and to trust them), residents of these communities have greater confidence in the delegate process and are less put off by the idea that someone else is voting for them.

⁸⁵ (Giddens, 1977)

It's important to note however that even though negative sentiment is lower in rural counties, still nearly 2/3 of voters were unsatisfied with the Presidential Preference Poll.

We repeated the bootstrapping exercise for senate and house districts. Of the 25 senate districts in Utah, only one (SD28) had a confidence interval whose lower range fell below 50%⁸⁶. Out of 75 districts in the house, we found that ten districts had confidence intervals whose lower ranges fell below 50%. Two had averages below 50%.

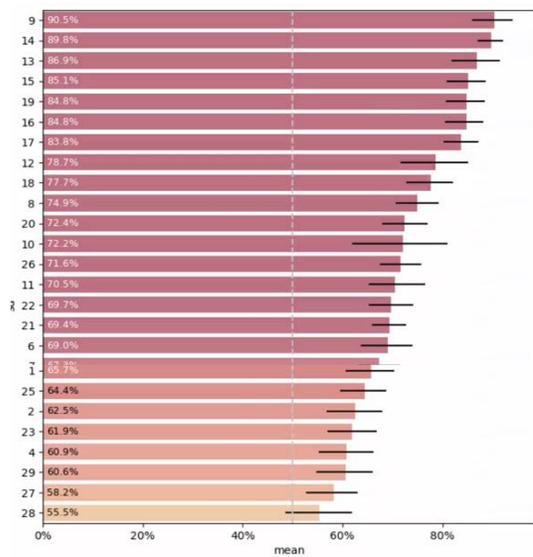


Figure 11 - Negative sentiment by senate district, including confidence intervals.

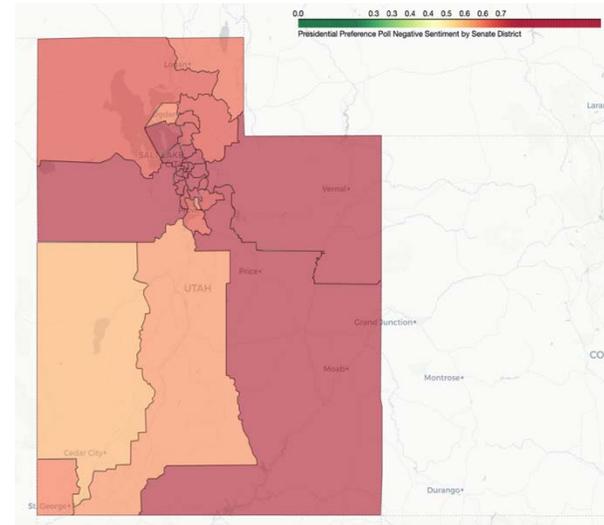


Figure 12 - Negative sentiment by senate district.

It is evident from the data that very few districts have even a slight probability of negative sentiments below 50%. That is not to say that their positive sentiments are above 50%, because there is a consistent portion of the population that is indifferent, but in most

⁸⁶ House districts 10, 70, 65, 66, 68, 4, 8, 72, 71 & 74 have lower ranges that include 50%. Only house districts 71 & 74 have means below 50%

cases, we can say with confidence that the majority of voters were unhappy with the Presidential Preference Poll.

When we segmented survey data by city, we found that very few cities or towns of significant size had negative sentiments approaching 50%. In

Washington County, which had the lowest positive sentiment of the more populous counties in the state (56.4%), St. George (it's largest city) had significantly negative sentiment at 59.7%. Of the towns with positive sentiment, none were of significant size and the largest had fewer than a score of responses.

15	16.0	0.614815	135	16	Lee, Trevor (R)	53.3	68.9	3.96
67	68.0	0.609589	146	68	Chew, Scott H. (R)	52.2	68.5	4.04
10	11.0	0.603175	63	11	Hall, Katy (R)	47.6	71.4	6.33
70	71.0	0.600000	80	71	Shipp, Rex P. (R)	48.8	70.0	5.54
55	56.0	0.591195	159	56	Peterson, Val L. (R)	52.2	66.7	3.83
65	66.0	0.581560	141	66	Shelley, Troy (R)	49.6	66.0	4.13
66	67.0	0.574803	127	67	Watkins, Christine F. (R)	48.8	65.4	4.26
68	69.0	0.568807	109	69	Monson, Logan (R)	46.8	65.1	4.70
4	5.0	0.557971	138	5	Snider, Casey (R)	48.6	64.5	4.17
8	9.0	0.547945	73	9	Sawyer, Jake (R)	43.8	67.1	5.92
72	73.0	0.534091	88	73	Jack, Colin W. (R)	43.2	63.6	5.32
71	72.0	0.477273	88	72	Elison, Joseph (R)	36.4	58.0	5.51
74	75.0	0.469880	83	75	Brooks, Walt (R)	34.9	57.8	5.64

Figure 13 - Legislative districts with the lowest average negative sentiment percentage.

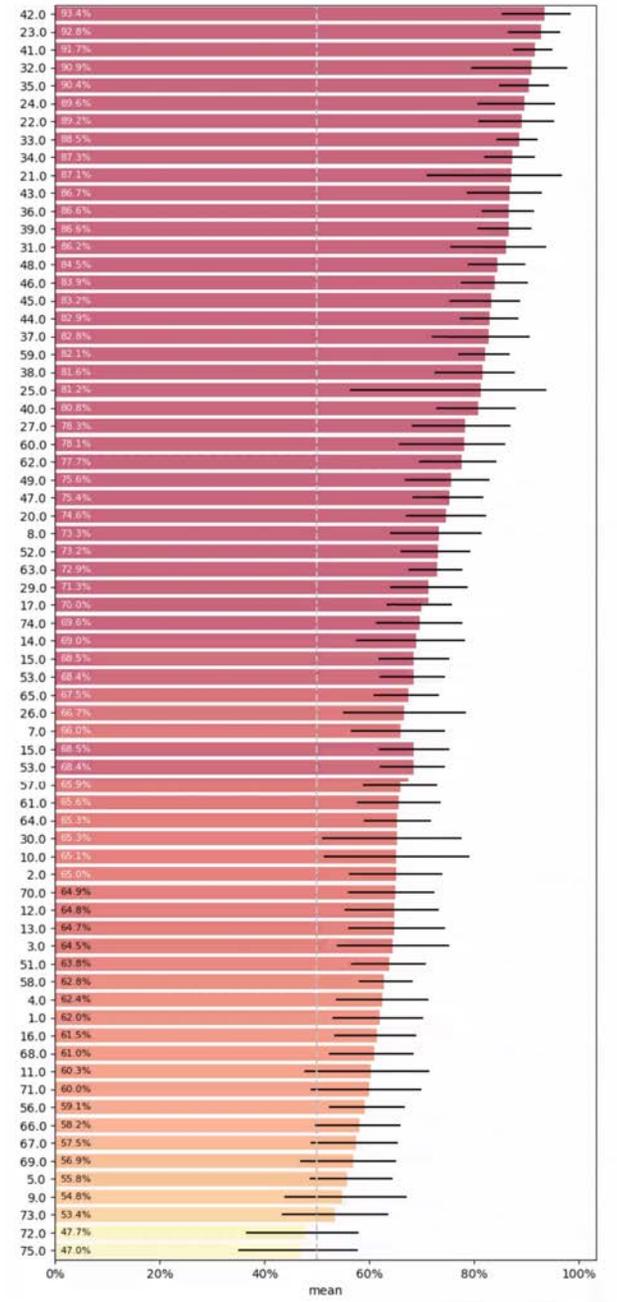


Figure 14 - Average negative sentiment by legislative district including confidence intervals.

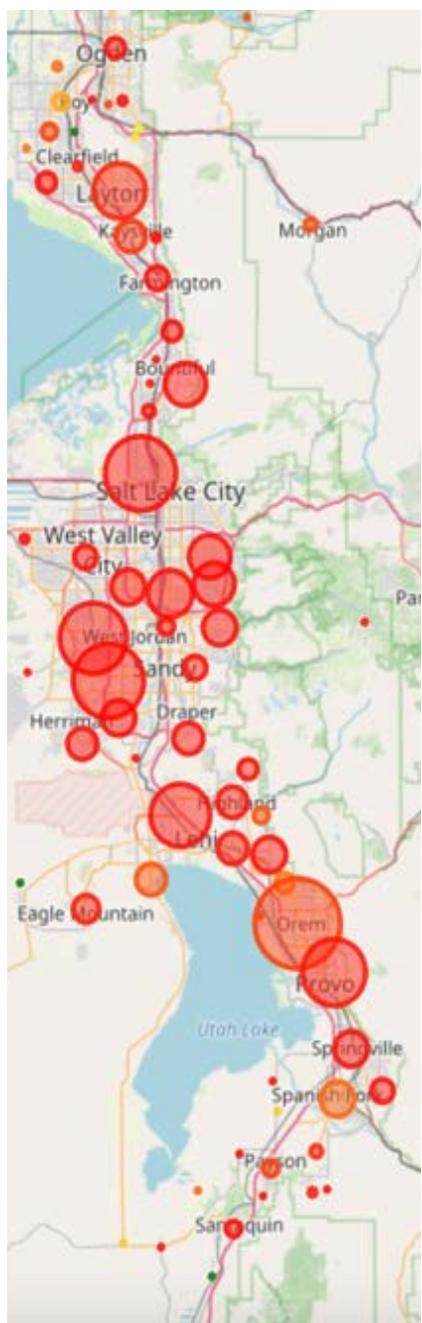


Figure 15 - Average negative sentiment by city.

Decision Tree analysis

The second form of analysis we conducted was a decision tree regression in R. For decision tree analysis we used “positive” sentiment as our response variable. We did this

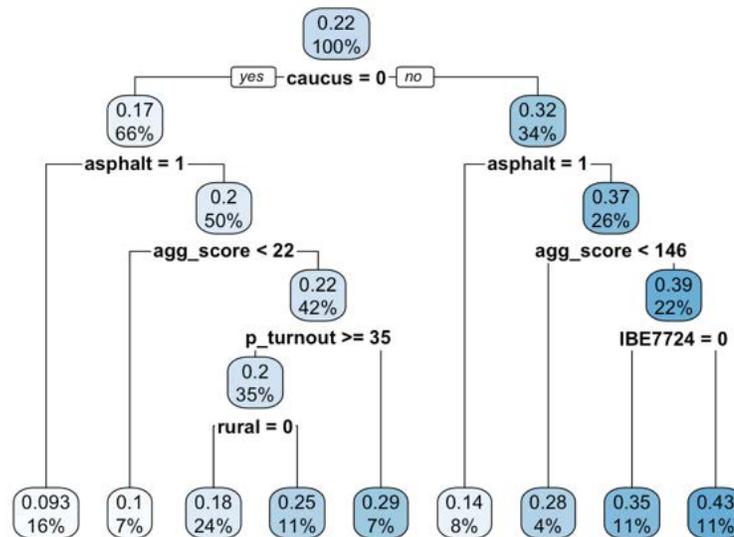


Figure 16 - Presidential Preference Poll decision tree

because a confusion matrix in R showed that the error rate for positive sentiment was lower for positive sentiment than it was for negative sentiment.

For decision tree modeling we used a subset of the raw response data. We pruned the data of all non-numeric response data to avoid subjectivity from our model. We also removed any responses from voters who left the Republican Party after the initial survey. The resulting data set was 10,000 responses, all of which had a clean, numeric root.

In our decision tree we found that the most significant variable was caucus attendance, which is intuitive. We expect previous caucus attendance to be significant because it stands to reason that people who are able to attend caucus regularly will not find attending caucus burdensome. It follows that those who do not find attending caucuses

burdensome will approve of the Presidential Preference Poll. 32% of voters who previously attended caucus approved of the Presidential Preference Poll while only 17% of non-previous caucus attendees approved.

Our data on previous caucus attendance is incomplete because we did not have access to raw data from the Utah Republican Party. Data strategists in Utah collaborate to a certain extent and share caucus attendance data freely, so the data we had access to was as good as it is possible to get without direct access to the Utah Republican Party database. The source data was compiled from lists acquired in the course of campaign consulting by half a dozen campaign consultancies over the course of a decade. Some of the historical data on caucus attendance came directly from county parties.

The next most significant level in our decision tree was “roof type”. When we looked more closely at the roofing variable, we observed that only one type of roof (asphalt shingle) was significant. Based on this we created a binary variable for “asphalt shingle”, which allowed us to split the data into an asphalt shingle and other roofing material segment. For non-caucus attendees, the absence of an asphalt shingle roof doubled the likelihood of Presidential Preference Poll support from 9.3% to 20%. For previous caucus attendees, 14% of voters with an asphalt shingle roof approved of the Presidential Preference Poll while 37% of voters with roofing types other than asphalt shingle approved.

We spent considerable time looking at correlations with other variables to try to understand what underlying factors contributed to roofing type’s impact on Presidential Preference Poll sentiment but found nothing interesting. We found that roofing type was correlated to a number of variables that we knew intuitively and through analysis were also correlated to caucus sentiment, but all such variables were already included in our model.

When we removed roofing type, our error rate increased significantly, so removing roofing type simply because we were unable to intuitively understand the reason for its significance was not an option.

For voters who had a roofing type other than asphalt shingle, the next variable significantly correlated to Presidential Preference Poll sentiment was conservatism. For non-caucus attendees the break point was 22, which is a moderate score. 10% of voters with calculated conservatism scores below approved of the Presidential Preference Poll, while 22% of voters with conservatism scores above 22 approved. For caucus attendees the break point was a high 146 and the difference was 28% for voters with a conservatism score below 146 and 39% for voters with conservatism scores above 146.

For voters who have not historically attended caucus, the next most significant variable is primary election turnout probability. If a voter who has not historically attended caucus is greater than 35% likely to vote in the primary election, then Presidential Preference Poll support was 20%. If that voter's probability of primary election turnout was lower than 35%, then Presidential Preference Poll sentiment was 29%.

Finally, for voters who did not attend caucus and whose turnout was greater than 35%, rural voters had a support probability of 25%, while urban voters support for the Presidential Preference Poll was 18%.

Voters with conservatism above 146 who have previously attended caucus and who follow politics have a Presidential Preference Poll support percentage of 43% while those who do not follow politics supported Presidential Preference Poll at 35%.

The leaf nodes on this decision tree were all of significant size, the smallest being 4% of respondents. The range of positive sentiment among leaf nodes was between 9.3%

to 43%. The size of leaf nodes and the range of support makes this decision tree useful for policymakers and activist groups interested in election reform.

The caucus support predictive model

As with our decision tree analysis, we used the clean, 10,000 response data set for regression modeling. This precaution removed all subjectivity from the forthcoming model.

To facilitate more comprehensive modeling we acquired consumer data with 900 independent variables which we joined to our response data. We manually pruned the variables of those that were duplicative or obviously irrelevant and came up with 750 variables for regression analysis. An initial test of significance reduced the list to 150 variables, of which we found that 47 were highly significant. Stepwise regression further reduced the variables for our model down to the following 24:

- `poly(age,4)` - we applied a four variable regression to age because we observed through an independent analysis that this model best fit the actual relationship between age and sentiment.
- `agg_score` - conservatism
- `Rural` - indicating whether the county is rural or urban.
- `Caucus` - previous caucus attendance
- `p_turnout` - voter turnout probability
- `pet_cmv` - voter signed the Count My Vote petition
- `pet_pot` - voter signed a medical marijuana petition
- `pet_vouchers` - voter signed a ballot initiative permitting government funded school vouchers
- `trump` - Support for President Donald J. Trump
- `asphalt` - Binary variable indicating the presence of an asphalt roof.
- `IBE2024` - Interest in arts and antiques
- `IBE7724` - Current affairs & political interest
- `IBE7734` - Reading - best sellers
- `IBE7736` - reading - science fiction
- `IBE7751` - exercise - walking
- `IBE7782` - spectator sports - football
- `IBE7794` - investments - real estate
- `IBE7813` - motorcycling
- `IBE7823` - outdoors
- `IBE7828` - music & movies
- `IBE8570` - home loan type (FHA, VA, Construction, Individual)
- `IBE8572` - Home loan interest type (Fixed, variable, other)
- `IBE8621_02` - gas or department store
- `IBE8693` - credit card user

- IBE9509 - education level (high school, college, graduate school, vocational school)

Of the variables included in our final model, a few warrant further explanation:

Age is calculated using a four-factor regression line because in the course of data discovery we observed that a straight line regression was inadequate to explain the relationship between age and sentiment. The actual relationship

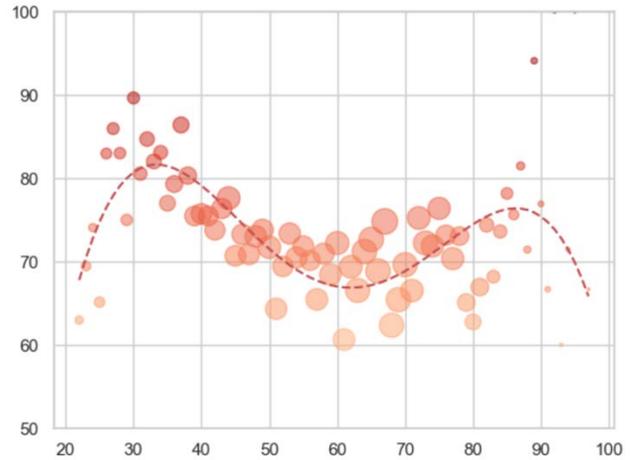


Figure 17 - Best for age age regression line.

between age and Presidential Preference Poll sentiment is shaped like a saddle with negative sentiment peaking at ages 30 & 85 and with a valley floor at age 60. We incorporated this regression equation into our model.

“pet_cmV”, a binary variable indicating that a voter signed a petition in support of the Count My Vote ballot initiative was not very significant (z-value = 1.563), but we chose to leave this variable in the model because this study is directly relevant to the Count My Vote organization and the possibility of a future ballot initiative. Count My Vote signatures turnout out not to be a very significant factor in determining Presidential Preference Poll sentiment, but we left the variable in anyway because it directly relates to our sponsoring organization.

With these our final list of significant variables we were able to create a model whose error rate was 23.49% on our 30% validation data set. The error rate using this model on our validation data set was actually lower than the 23.6% error rate we observed with

out training data set, so there was no overfitting observed in our model. Although the final error rate was higher than the no information rate of 22.16%, we are happy with the model and believe it will help guide policy and ballot initiative strategy.

Raw Feedback

The raw feedback from our sentiment survey of Republican voters was very rich. 1,700 comments were received from angry voters of every type. We compiled the feedback into a 338-page book arranged by senate district and tried to share that feedback with the Government Operations Interim Committee of the Utah State Legislature, but we were rebuffed. To keep the feedback anonymous, we removed contact information from the file and we reference individual comments back by page number in the book.

We attempted to run an automatic sentiment analysis on this raw feedback, but many of the responders were so “polite” in their feedback that it foiled every sentiment algorithm we could create. In the end it was easier to hire a team to review the feedback manually and classify each response as positive or negative sentiment. We did this and used the results in our overall analysis.

We received both email and text feedback, but only text feedback was used in this report. We have included a small sample of the feedback we received below for context. The comments are categorized by respondent type.

Veterans

“For the past 20 years I have been fighting terrorists throughout the Middle East and North Africa. I'm an Arabic linguist. I help the U.S. Government track down and remove people who hate our way of life and want to harm freedom-loving people all over the world. I love this country and I'm very passionate about defending freedom and democracy.

I also realize the importance of voting and making this blessing we enjoy more easily available to the citizenry of the United States. That is, in part, why I continue to risk my safety in far-off places. I want to make it easier for every single eligible voter to exercise this God-given freedom. The GOP caucus system does the exact opposite, making it harder for people to vote.

We live in the year 2024. Last night I felt I was transported back 100 years to a time when public gatherings were necessary to exchange information. That is no longer necessary. We can, and should be able to, access any and all political information we need via the internet. I invite you and the rest of the Utah GOP leaders to join us in the year 2024 by getting rid of the caucus system and replacing it with mail-in ballots. That will make it easier for people like my dear mother, who is politically passionate, but physically incapable of attending caucus meetings, to exercise her freedom to vote. She feels that the caucus system represents voter suppression.” [114]

The elderly

“As a senior citizen I was disappointed that it was so difficult to vote. I called and texted the Utah GOP office but did not get a response until the day before the caucus. The text told me I could vote with an absentee ballot but when I tried doing that, I found I had to either deliver my ballot to the caucus or send someone with my ID to the caucus. I don't go out after 6 pm, can't walk to far nor stand in long lines - so the caucus does not work for me. At least with the Primary I can go vote in my own time and convenient polling place. Or I can mail my vote or use a drop box. But the caucus is too much for me as a senior citizen. I have always voted, and it disappointed me that the Utah GOP decided to caucus without asking the constituents. Sometimes saving money isn't the answer. Please go back to having primaries.” [122]

Workers

“During the caucus this was a discussion myself Dr Pingree (neurosurgeon) and all the surgical staff had. We couldn't leave the surgery to go to the caucus so because we were literally saving a life our right to vote is taken away. Yet the government would put us in jail for not paying taxes. Is that being a contributing citizen or just a financial slave?”

[276]

Leadership

“I was very disappointed that you took no responsibility for the botched caucus. You placed all of the blame on the participants we were too dumb to do it right, or some volunteers failed to show up. But it was your system and your responsibility to plan for contingencies; you didn't do that...This massive failure could not have come as a surprise to you...Seriously, it appears to me that the caucus is used to restrict voter's participation...Leadership appears to favor the caucus as a means of retaining their prominence in the Republican Party. I think that you should take full responsibility for the failed caucus, apologize and resign like a man, not hide behind lame excuses.” [29]

Security

“All that just to get handed a slip of paper and no pen (had to color the bubble in with someone else's sharpie) and vote in front of a group of strangers with zero privacy, and no way to determine that the votes were unique. There was nowhere to even sign my name and I was given the paper without having to prove the wristband was even mine - so much for your security. And then we were told to put the papers on a table where everyone was walking by in a sad, crumpled pile.

And the republicans claim to be so concerned about election integrity... my god.”

[142]

Disabilities

“My wife and I are both elderly and my wife is handicapped. Because of the caucus requirement instead of mail in ballots, we did not participate in the primary presidential elections. I feel like you took our voting rights away from us because of the way you set up the primaries. We tried your option of absentee ballots but that still requires delivering the ballot to the caucus location. In our situation this is very inconvenient. We are extremely dissatisfied with the way we're being forced to attend a caucus in order to exercise our voting rights. The Republican party better get their act together...” [44]

Parents

“I had brought my teenage daughter to volunteer and introduce her to voting and democracy. She was thrust at a table, in charge of helping people find their precincts and room numbers and guess what? Hundreds of people were lined up at her table, frustrated with my poor 14 year old, who had no idea what she was doing and was only trying to help. She left in tears.” [15]

Conclusions

Our hypothesis for this study was “Republican voters in Utah disapproved of the Presidential Preference Poll.” We found that our hypothesis was correct.

There were variations in sentiment based on clearly identifiable variables, but across every segment, the majority of voters disapproved of the decision to replace the 2024 presidential Primary with a Presidential Preference Poll held on caucus night.

Based on the data we have presented, we believe that policymakers in Utah should strongly consider repeal the law allowing political parties in Utah to substitute Presidential Primary elections with informal, insecure and chaotic “polls” conducted by untrained volunteers in classrooms across the state. We believe that such is a threat to democracy and weakens voter confidence in our elections.

Prospects for legislative action based on this research

There is no future for this sort of analysis because the Utah state legislature does not believe in survey data. I spoke to several state legislators off the record and the consensus was that legislators do not have faith in research. They go by their gut and if survey data is presented that contradicts their foregone conclusions, they disregard it.

One legislator told me that the legislature would welcome a survey with thousands of responses. When I pointed out that I had presented just such a survey to his committee, he had no reply.

Jeff burton, committee chairman, presented before the gov ops committee a proposal to remove vote by mail. He claimed in the committee hearing that he had lost of survey data, but the only data he presented was not in fact related to vote by mail⁸⁷. When pressed by email for the details of the surveys he cited, he did not respond⁸⁸.

The fact is, the legislature does whatever it wants to and does not consider the feelings of voters outside their narrow echo chamber and the delegates. Numerous times polls have shown that their actions are out of sync with voters, but they do not care.

The heritage foundation says that 30-50 calls will move a legislator, but a poll, no matter how large or how well performed, will not get their attention.

For this reason, it is my opinion that further research on this subject will have no effect on policy. Until Utah lawmakers let of their ignorant prejudices against data and analytics, there can be no progress. While the caucus system remains, Utah voters will have little to no voice in the governance of their state.

⁸⁷ (Burton, 2025)

⁸⁸ D. Acumen, personal communication, March 18, 2025

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