Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Higher Education Advocate
Training Session
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Historical Utah Voter Participation:

Voter Turnout in Utah, 1980-2008

Note: Turnout equals number voting for highest office on ballot divided by voting age population
Data Source: http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm
### Recent Utah Voter Participation:

**Voter turnout dismal**
Percentage of eligible Utah voters participating in the mid-term election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Rank among 50 states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>37</td>
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</table>

Source: U.S. Elections Project, George Mason University
The Salt Lake Tribune
National Political Environment

Utah Voter Participation vs. Nation:

[Graph showing voter turnout comparison over years]

Source: Michael McDonald, George Mason University, Illustration by Utah Data Points
Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Utah’s nomination system is unique and presents the highest barrier in the nation

- In 7 states, including Utah, conventions play a significant role in nominee selection;

- Utah is one of 2 states where conventions alone determine statewide and legislative nominees;

- 38 states, unlike Utah, select nominees through a primary election.
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Caucus-Convention Timeline

- **March 2012** - (March preceding even-year elections) – Precinct officers, County Delegates, and State Delegates are elected at neighborhood caucus meetings.

- **May 2012** – Statewide Convention. Public may attend, but only County Delegates or State Delegates can vote.

- **June 2012** – If one candidate is not selected by 60% of Delegates, a primary election is held to determine nominee (GOP primary is closed; Democratic primary is open).

- **November 6, 2012** – General Election Day
The caucus-convention process demonstrates the best and worst of Utah:

**BEST**
- Convention delegates are among the nation’s most engaged citizens.
- Delegates spend countless hours analyzing candidate positions and attending issue forums before casting their votes.

**WORST**
- Delegates constitute less than 2/10 of 1% of Utah’s population.
- Delegates do not represent Utahns’ views.
- The system disenfranchises large swaths of our population.
- Parties have become subservient to extreme bases while ignoring moderates.
- Interest groups manipulate the process before the electorate weighs in.
- Utah has the highest barrier for a candidate’s entry onto a primary election ballot of any state in the nation.
- Utah’s caucus-convention system is “ripe for voter fraud.”
Delegates constitute less than 2/10 of 1% of Utah’s population:

- Delegates received hundreds of mailings, phone calls, gifts and invitations to meals and events leading up to the state convention.
- The rest of Utah voters were never engaged — 99.8% of the population was irrelevant during the most determinative elections.
- Utah erects the country’s highest barrier to primary candidacy (e.g., Utah is the only state that would not have allowed Governor Olene Walker or U.S. Senator Bob Bennett to appear on the ballot).
# Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Delegates do not represent the parties’ respective voters and views:

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<td>2. Creating a business-friendly economy</td>
<td>2. Improving the ethics and oversight of elected officials</td>
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<td>3. Protecting gun rights</td>
<td>3. Expanding the availability of health care</td>
</tr>
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<td>4. Allowing mining and grazing on federal lands</td>
<td>4. Lowering the costs of health care</td>
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<td>5. Preventing illegal immigration</td>
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Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
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**Republican Delegates**
1. Protecting states’ rights
2. Creating a business-friendly economy
3. Protecting gun rights
4. Allowing mining and grazing on federal lands
5. Preventing illegal immigration

**Democratic Delegates**
1. Improving quality of K-12 education
2. Improving the ethics and oversight of elected officials
3. Expanding the availability of health care
4. Lowering the costs of health care
5. Decreasing pollution

**Unaffiliated Voters**
1. Improving the quality of K-12 education
2. Improving the ethics and oversight of elected officials
3. Increasing the number of high-quality jobs
4. Reducing crime
5. Creating a business-friendly economy

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Delegates do not represent the parties’ respective voters and views:

Key Disparity

- Question: “Do you agree or disagree that it is valuable for Utah to re-elect current U.S. Senators and Reps. in order to maintain seniority in Congress?”

  - 43% of Republican delegates strongly disagree
  - 23% of Republican voters strongly disagree

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Delegates do not represent the parties’ respective voters and views:

Key Disparity

• Question: “Do you agree or disagree that the U.S. should withdraw from the United Nations?”

  – 13% of Republican delegates strongly disagree
  – 32% of Republican voters strongly disagree

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
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Key Disparity

• Question: For whom would you vote “if the 2012 Republican presidential primary were being held today?”
  – 76% of registered Republicans named Romney
  – 54% of Republican delegates named Romney

• Romney won nearly 90% of all GOP votes in Utah in 2008. While a majority of delegates still favor Romney, there is a clear disparity.

• Among GOP delegates, the next most popular choice for 2012 is Rep. Ron Paul (14%). In contrast, only 5% of registered Republicans named Paul. 7% of GOP delegates named Sarah Palin; 2% of registered GOP voters named Palin.

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
Improving Education not a top priority for GOP Delegates

- Republican delegates ranked “improving the quality of K-12 education” as the 11th-most important political issue in Utah (out of 22).

- Democratic delegates, registered Democrats, and unaffiliated voters ranked “improving the quality of K-12 education” as the most important issue. Among registered Republicans, it ranks 4th.

- 68% of Democrats (67% delegates, 69% registered), 50% of unaffiliated voters, and 44% of registered Republicans say improving the quality of education is “extremely important.” However, just 26% of Republican delegates agree.

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
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The system disenfranchises large swaths of our population:

- 55% of registered Republicans who voted in the 2008 election are women.

- Though Republican women have a higher rate of voting than Republican men, Republican women in Utah are dramatically underrepresented in the ranks of current GOP delegates; only 25% of current GOP delegates are female.

- Among Utah Democrats, women also participate more than men – of all registered Democrats who voted in 2008, 60% are female.

- Despite their higher rate of participation, Democratic women are also less likely to participate in Utah’s convention process – 45% of Democratic delegates are women.

Source: Dan Jones & Associates, Utah Foundation, Hinckley Institute of Politics, 2010
Utah’s Caucus-Convention System

Utah’s caucus-convention system is “ripe for voter fraud”

- “Often, there is a lack of control and accountability as people gathered in a living room will write down names on a slip of paper and pass it to a caucus chair or designee, who reads the names and declares the delegates.”

- “Substitute delegates can be chosen by party leaders, who also can rule delegates ineligible.”

Paul Rolly: Utah ripe for election manipulation. The Salt Lake Tribune, August 14, 2010
Potential Reforms to Nomination Process:

The following three simple reforms will allow us to keep the convention and benefit from our hardworking delegates while re-engaging and empowering Utahns. Utah’s parties must:

1. make primary elections more common and accessible by lowering the convention’s current 40% vote threshold to 20% and establish a petition process;

2. devote more resources to outreach and get exponentially more people involved in our caucus meetings; and

3. make the rules of the system less confusing and more consistently and transparently applied.
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Potential Reforms to Nomination Process:

The people of Utah may keep the convention to re-engage and empower Utahns by:

Providing candidates with an additional path from the convention to access the primary-election ballot by obtaining and submitting the signatures of at least two percent of a registered political party’s members who reside in the jurisdiction of the office the candidate seeks.