

A SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE
POLICY PUBLICATION

Issue Brief:

Election Reform and Public Trust

**What Utah voters think about
proposed election reforms**

By Derek Monson



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For more information about this survey or the work of Sutherland Institute, contact us:

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Y² Analytics conducted the survey highlighted in this report.

METHODOLOGY DETAILS

n = 993 registered 2024 general election voters
Online interviews fielded October 26th – November 20th, 2024
Margin of error +/-3.1

Y² Analytics sampled 993 registered 2024 general election voters from a previously collected voter opinion panel and from the Utah voter file. This scientific panel was originally drawn from the Utah state voter file in October 2023 and has been supplemented quarterly with additional sampled voter records since that time. Survey invitations were sent via email and text messages. Online interviews were fielded October 26th – November 20th, 2024. The fielding period includes Election Day. 489 respondents took the survey on or before Election Day. The remaining 504 took it afterwards.

Margin of error +/- 3.1 percentage points. The general election voter data were weighted to reflect the demographics of likely voters in Utah, specifically with regards to gender, age, race, education level, political party registration, congressional district, and presidential, governor, and senate ballot outcomes from the 2024 election.

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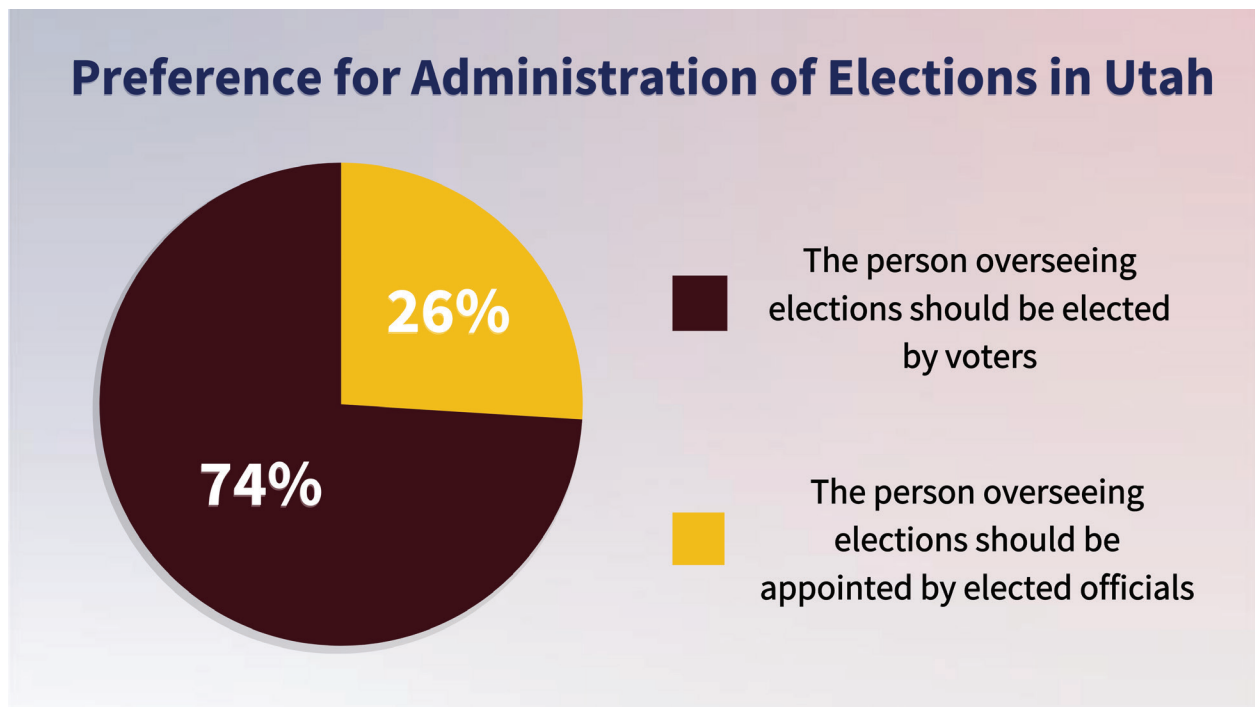
Who voters want to oversee Utah elections

By Derek Monson

Sutherland Institute partners with Y2 Analytics to regularly survey voters in Utah about key policy and political issues. This issue brief provides an overview of registered voter sentiment toward election policy issues in the state relevant to the 2025 legislative session.

Methodology: 993 Utah registered voters completed the survey online between Oct. 26 and Nov. 20, 2024. Data were weighted to reflect demographics of likely voters in the Utah 2024 general election, with a margin of error of +/- 3.1 percentage points.

Utah Voters Want Chief of Elections to Be Elected, Not Appointed

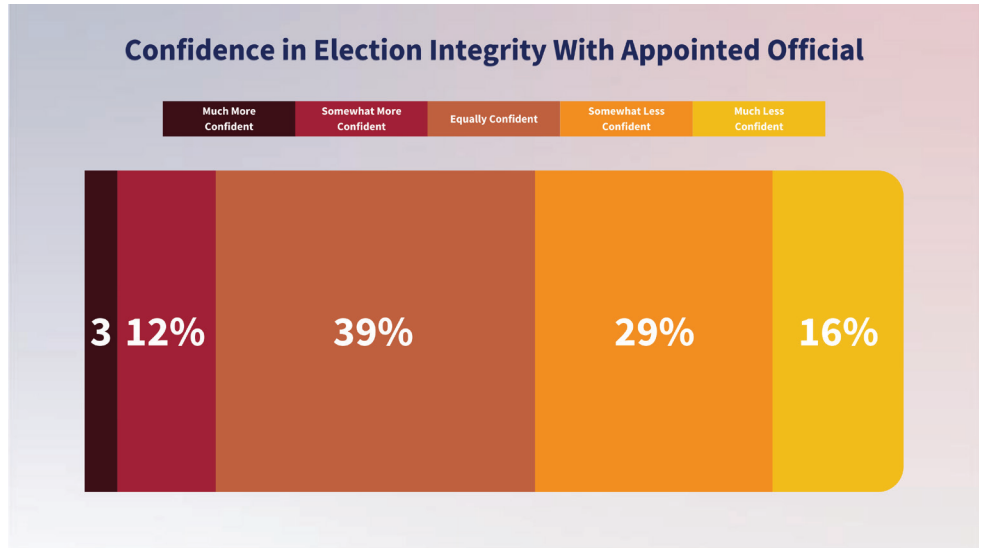


One possible high-profile election reform that has been in the news is to take election oversight out of the Utah Lieutenant Governor's Office and put it in the hands of another appointed or elected official. Proposals have ranged from an elected secretary of state, like many other states have, to an election official appointed by a committee of elected leaders. If lawmakers choose to reform election oversight, Utah voters have a clear preference for how this top election official should be chosen.

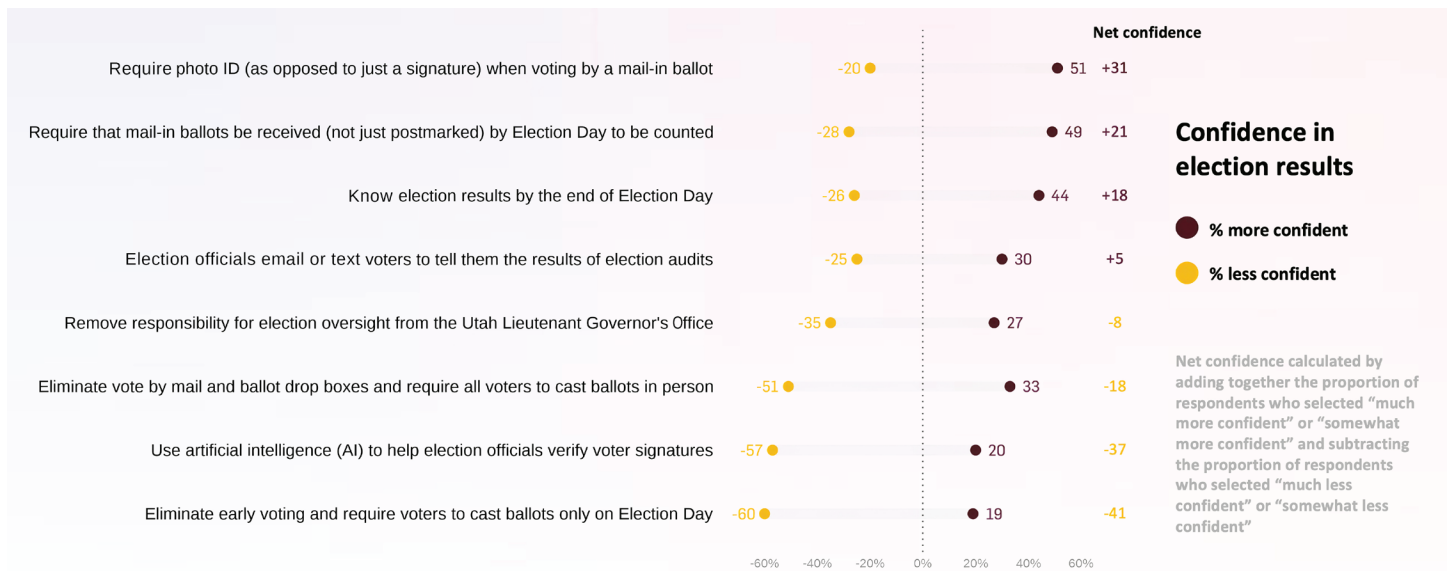
By a nearly 3-to-1 margin, Utah voters believe that the person overseeing elections should be chosen by themselves and not elected officials. Almost three-fourths (74%) of Utah voters say that the person overseeing elections should be elected by voters, whereas just over one-fourth (26%) of voters want the person overseeing elections to be appointed by elected officials.

Voter confidence decreases with an appointed election official

Perhaps not coincidentally, nearly three times as many Utah voters say that their confidence in election integrity would decrease with appointed election oversight as say it would increase. A full 45% of voters say their confidence in election integrity would go down in this scenario, compared with 15% who say their confidence would increase and 39% who say it would not change.



Voter confidence higher with some election reforms, lower with others



As the previous chart highlights, the impact on voters' confidence in election results is a key measure of the soundness of election policy reforms. When asked about eight different proposed reforms that could come before the Utah Legislature in 2025, four produced a net increase in voter confidence in election results, while four produced a net decrease in voter confidence.

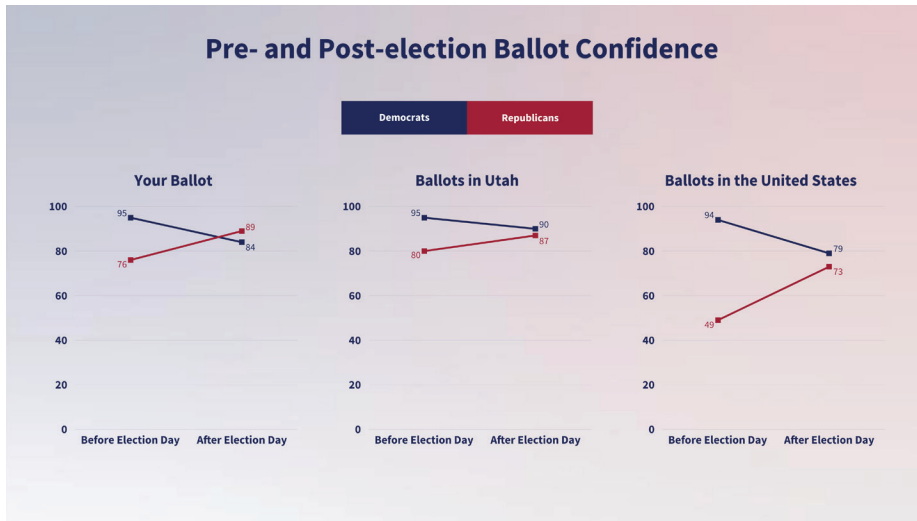
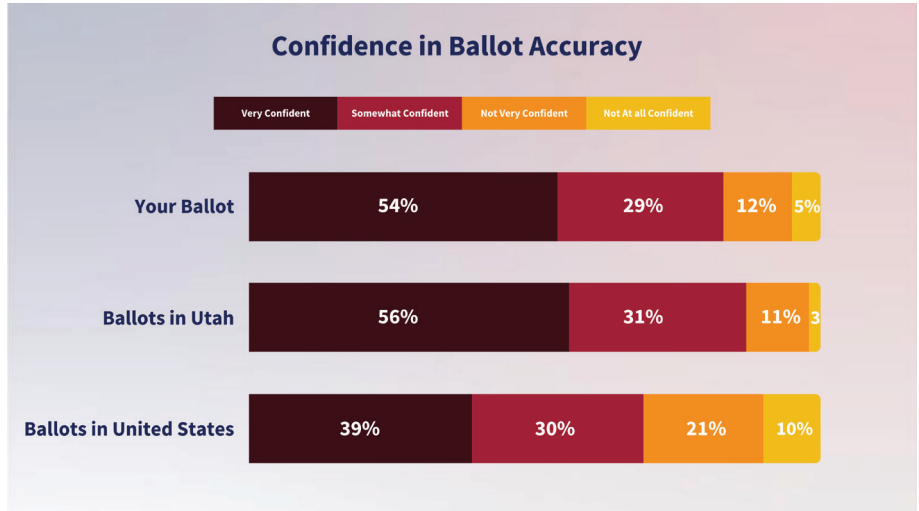
Requiring photo ID when mailing in a ballot was clearly the reform that would produce the greatest boost in voter confidence. Requiring that mail-in ballots are received by Election Day rather than postmarked by Election Day and ensuring that election results are known by the end of Election Day would also significantly boost voter confidence. Communicating the results of election audits to voters would produce a modest increase to voter confidence.

On the other hand, several reforms that have been discussed for the 2025 legislative session to help boost voter confidence would actually decrease it. For instance, restricting the ways people can vote – requiring voting in person by eliminating mail-in voting or ballot drop boxes, or limiting voting to Election Day – noticeably decrease voter confidence. Using AI for signature verification also has a significant negative impact. Removing election oversight from the Lieutenant Governor's Office also negatively impacts voter confidence, although with a more modest impact than these other proposals.

Current voter confidence in elections is high but varies by political party

As lawmakers consider these and other election reform proposals out of stated concerns for voter confidence, it is notable that the overwhelming majority of Utah voters are confident that ballots in Utah are being counted accurately. When asked about their confidence that their own ballot was counted accurately, 83% of Utah voters said they were very or somewhat confident, while only 17% said they were not confident.

The result was similar when voters were asked about the accuracy of ballot counting in Utah as a whole, with 87% confident in the accuracy of election results. Voter confidence decreased somewhat when asked about the accuracy of ballot counting in the United States as a whole, but a significant majority (69%) still said they were confident, while just under one-third (31%) said they were not confident.



Clearly, Utah does not seem to be starting from a crisis of confidence in elections. To the contrary, voter confidence in Utah appears to be quite high. However, there does appear to be a difference in voter confidence driven by political party affiliation and the results on Election Day 2024.

Whether the question was about an individual’s ballot, ballots in Utah generally, or ballots across the nation, voter confidence in the accuracy of ballot counting visibly increased from before Election Day to after Election

Day for Utah Republicans, while the opposite was true for Utah Democrats. In fact, Democrats had higher confidence before Election Day about their individual ballots, while Republicans had higher confidence after Election Day. And after Election Day, the confidence gap between the two parties was almost entirely eliminated for ballots in Utah generally and the nation as a whole.

Given the outcome of the 2024 presidential election, these survey results support academic research finding that public trust in elections can be significantly influenced by non-policy factors, such as whether one’s preferred candidate(s) won or lost the election.



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