Across the nation—but most particularly in Utah—morality-based wedge issues began polarizing both major political parties and the electorate in general beginning in the late-1970s. This polarization has created a ‘moral curtain’—sometimes called the Zion Curtain in Utah—between the two parties. While the ‘moral curtain’ (or moral polarization) has attributed to deeply rooted parity between the Republican and Democratic Parties across the nation, moral polarization has created a deluge of religiously defined conservatism that has not been seen in Utah since its territorial years. Never before has Utah’s State Legislature been consecutively dominated by one party like it has in the last twenty-five years. The extreme polarization in the composition of the Legislature during these times is also noteworthy. In defiant contrast, the post-World War II era was a time of political balance throughout Utah and its political institutions. During these thirty-five years, Utah’s electorate balanced voting for Republicans and Democrats. Explaining why Utahns voted this way during the post-World War II era, why they stopped voting this way by the end of the 1970s, and what voting behavior might be expected in the years to come are the objectives of this paper.

"Complaints are everywhere heard from our most considerate and virtuous citizens, equally the friends of public and private faith, and of public and personal liberty, that our governments are too unstable, that the public good is disregarded in the conflicts of rival parties, and that measures are too often decided, not according to the rules of justice and the rights of the minor party, but by the superior force of an interested and overbearing majority party."

—James Madison,
The Federalist No. 10
November 22, 1787

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary political climate in Utah is marred by a lop-sided concentration of conservative politics. Those on the political left often feel alienated, ineffectual, and pessimistic when it comes to state politics or political engagement. Politics in Utah during the 1980s and 90s was a contentious sport with both Republicans and Democrats accusing the other of either embracing an immoral political platform or exercising unethical abuses of power; the sport continues today. Furthermore, even within state Republican caucuses and primaries, battles were waged—and continue to wage—between the Party’s conservative right and its moderate center. Such contention in state politics scared off Utahns from becoming active in the political process, which, in turn, exacerbated the problem. However, it was not always this way; in fact, at times congeniality, cooperation, and wide-spread political participation were the political norms, specifically during the post-World War II era. In contrast, at other times extreme polarization was even worse in the state. During the New Deal era, for example, only five out of eighty-three legislators were Republican in the 1937 legislative session. The purpose of this paper is to unearth the antecedents that created an atmosphere for healthy party competition, bipartisan cooperation, relative political goodwill, and a politically engaged public from the early 1950s to the late 1970s and contrast that era to the disharmony rampant in contemporary Utah politics. The paper will then focus on what can be done today to stimulate similar competition, cooperation, goodwill and participation in contemporary politics.

HOW IT ALL STARTED: A BRIEF POLITICAL HISTORY OF UTAH

To understand how Utah’s political climate evolved (or devolved) into what it is today, it is critical to have some familiarity with Utah’s political history starting from its European-American beginnings. A brief description of how it all started follows.
The two-party system in Utah has a peculiar past that pitted members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (or Mormons) against non-Mormons. The majority of Utah’s initial European-American settlers, the Mormons, came not for the usual economic opportunities—whether trapping, mining, or railroading—that enticed most to the West. Rather they came to the semi-arid valleys of the Wasatch Range in search of political respite from state governments that actively pursued their disenfranchisement and in some cases “extermination,” as was the case in Missouri. When the Mormons came to the Great Basin they brought with them the meticulous organization that characterized their earlier political history. In 1847, when the Mormons first arrived in Utah, such organization became a prominent characteristic of their government institutions. In pursuing such organization along with a community of “one heart, one mind,” dissent was uncommon.

The early political organization of the Mormon-controlled Great Basin region, or the Territory of Deseret, was not unlike a theocratic regime, or what is sometimes called a “theodemocracy” by historians (Campbell 1978, 153). A letter written in 1882 by John Taylor, then President of the L.D.S. Church, to the Saints living in Cache valley exemplifies the invariable organization and cohesive character of these Mormon settlements:

In all cases in making new settlements, the Saints should be advised to gather together in villages, as has been our custom from the time of our earliest settlement in these mountain valleys. The advantages of this plan, instead of carelessly scattering out over a wide extent of country, are many and obvious to those who have a desire to serve the Lord.

By this means the people can retain their ecclesiastical organizations, have regular meetings of the quorums of the priesthood, and establish and maintain day and Sunday schools, Improvement Associations, and Relief Societies. They can also co-operate for the good of all in financial and secular matters, in making ditches, fencing fields, building bridges, and other necessary improvements.

Further than this they are a mutual protection and a source of strength against horse and cattle thieves, land jumpers, etc., and against hostile Indians, should there be any; while their compact organization gives them many advantages of a social and civic character which might be lost, misapplied or frittered away by spreading out so thinly that inter-communication is difficult, dangerous, inconvenient, and expensive (Stegner 1942, 30-31; emphasis added).

Nearby menacing groups, including “horse and cattle thieves, land jumpers, etc.” and “hostile Indians, should there be any,” and the hostility of the western landscape contributed to the Mormons’ need for meticulous organization.

Further connecting the Utah landscape to Mormon agrarian, social, cultural, and political life, writer-historian Wallace Stegner observed that “by revelation and accident and adaptation the Mormons discovered what the cliff-dwellers had discovered centuries before: that the only way to be a farmer in the Great Basin and on the desert plateau of the Colorado watershed was to be a group farmer. In more ways than one the Mormon village is a cousin to the towns of the Pueblo and the Zuñi” (Stegner 1942, 31).

While the early Mormon settlers learned to cooperate in a socio-cultural context, so did they cooperate in civic affairs; this cooperation never led to a need for the creation of political parties, at least in this “theodemocracy”. It was not until non-Mormon, European-American settlers came to Utah that a political party—the Liberal Party—was even organized; the Liberal Party was officially organized in February 1870 and only represented a small slice of the electorate (Larson 1978, 248). The objective of the party was to counterbalance Mormon influence in the Great Basin and specifically in territorial affairs. In response to the creation of the Liberal Party, Mormon leaders established their own party known as the Popular Party. By the time the Popular Party suspended activities in 1889, animosity had grown thick between the “Gentile” and Mormon territorial parties. As Utah was vying for statehood in the early 1890s, one condition required by the U.S. Congress before Utah could receive statehood was that both the Liberal and Popular parties cease activities and that Utah conform to the existing national two-party system by establishing local Republican and Democratic parties.

With Utah’s ratification into the Union, state officials organized the two parties; meanwhile Utahns quickly joined both political parties. But because Republicans in Washington, D.C. aggressively pursued and prosecuted polygamists in Utah during the territorial years, most Mormon-Utahns quickly joined the Democratic Party, that is, until Mormon leaders became conspicuously vocal over, and many times involved in, state and local politics. This overt vocalization—considered by many Mormon faithful as divinely inspired—encouraged political polarization and for the next fifty years state politics were dominated by either the Democrat or Republican Party. While the fifty years following Utah’s statehood were the most politically polarized years in the State’s history, they were also years that taught the body politic the need for political balance, cooperation, and further still, political goodwill.

**The First Fifty Years of Utah Statehood: Historical Antecedents Leading to Balance**

A collision of historical forces both inside and outside of Utah exploded during the first fifty years of statehood into such political polarization that the only self-evident path for the political actors of the post-WWII era to pursue was a path of political conciliation and cooperation, which conciliatory rhetoric evolved into political hand-warming and goodwill. But this conciliation was a long time in the making.

Just before Utah received statehood in 1896, L.D.S. Church president Joseph F. Smith, nephew of the founder of the L.D.S. Church of the same name, responded to a Salt Lake Herald editorial entitled “A Plain Talk: Reasons Why the People of Utah Should be Democrats,” published on October 11, 1892. Smith’s response, published by the Republican Central Committee, was titled “Another Plain Talk: Reasons
Why the People of Utah Should be Republicans.” The essay made the argument that while the Republican Party had conspicuously sought to legally abrogate polygamy in Utah through congressional acts, e.g. the Edmunds-Tucker Law of 1882, the Democratic Party overtly sent Johnston’s Army in 1858 to Utah to “snuff” out Mormonism. Smith’s conclusion from history was that the Republicans could be more easily trusted because of their candor while the Democrats practiced a feigned yet fiendish friendship toward Mormons during the territorial era.

The political ramification of Smith’s essay should not be underestimated. His pamphlet embodied a carryover of Mormon officials’ conspicuous political involvement characteristic of the territorial era; it was, in a sense, an indirect political statement from the L.D.S. Church. As could be expected, following the publication of the pamphlet politics in Utah experienced a steep shift toward Republican favoritism, which is exactly what Smith wanted. “Joseph F. Smith assumed the political leadership of his people as well as the power inherent in his religious position. By directing affairs of the State through the Republican Party, he became the most powerful man in Utah, a position he willingly sought,” wrote historian Q. Michael Croft. “Smith’s involvement took many forms. Through his influence, candidates were selected or rejected for nomination, political endorsements given or withheld, and Church money contributed to support a partisan newspaper in Salt Lake City” (Croft 1985, 68).

But high ranking Republican-Mormons were not the only ones to openly pursue political influence. In 1898, Utah’s Democratic Party chose Mormon apostle Moses Thatcher as its choice for U.S. Senator. Thatcher was an outspoken Democrat and well-liked by the people of Utah. But citing Thatcher’s failure to notify his apostolic colleagues before accepting his party’s nomination, the L.D.S. Quorum of the Twelve Apostles ousted Thatcher from its body, despite passionate appeals from Thatcher himself. Another defeat came to Thatcher when the Republican dominated legislature nominated Republicans Arthur Brown and Frank J. Cannon, over Thatcher and Joseph L. Rawlings, the second Democrat nominee, to Utah’s two U.S. Senatorial seats. His defeat signaled not only a loss to himself but to Democrats state-wide, and was another step toward Republican entrenchment into Utah’s collective political-consciousness, an entrenchment that lasted thirty years (Stout 1966, 6).

The death of President Smith in 1918 heralded the end of “theocracy” in Utah. With the passing of Smith so went the overt influence the L.D.S. Church exerted over Utah’s civic and political affairs during its first twenty years as a state. Heber J. Grant, Smith’s successor, was a well-known Democrat. But after becoming president of the L.D.S. Church he became nearly silent on state political issues except when he supported Reed Smoot’s reelection to Congress and opposed some federal New Deal programs. Under Grant’s politically quiet tenure, from 1918 to 1945, politics in Utah freely followed national trends with intensity.

The party composition of the Utah Legislature vividly tells the story: from 1896 to 1950, either the Democrats or the Republicans held more than two-thirds of the seats—Republicans held this majority 52 percent of the time and the Democrats 48 percent of the time. Only 12 percent of legislative sessions during this time held any semblance of balance between the two parties. As Figure 1 demonstrates, when the nation elected a Republican to the U.S. presidency so did the state elect Republicans to the State Legislature, and the same is true for the Democrats. Also noticeable from Figure 1 is the presence of railroad magnate and Democrat Simon Bamberger. From 1901 until 1933, the only time Democrats held control of the legislature occurred at the same time Bamberger was elected governor of Utah in 1918. Riding on the patriotism and Democratic enthusiasm that President Woodrow Wilson spread across the nation following the United States’ entry into World War I, Bamberger rode into the governor’s office with the respect and infatuation of most Utahns. While Governor Bamberger built a railroad infrastructure all over Utah, he also laid the groundwork for the political conciliation that was to become commonplace following World War II. Not only was Bamberger the first Democrat and non-Mormon governor of Utah, he was also one of the first Jewish governors in the United States. His rise to political success demonstrated that political actors no longer needed to be Mormon to participate in civic affairs. Bamberger decided not to run for reelection but his influence would be remembered for the next thirty years, persistently reminding Utahns that non-Mormons can make elective politicians.

![Figure 1: Party Composition of the Utah State Legislature](image)

Figure 1 Source: Utah Senate and House of Representatives, Journals, 1896-1977; Deseret News; [http://www.le.utah.gov](http://www.le.utah.gov).

It wasn’t until the Great Depression in the 1930s when President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal programs won the hearts of most Utahns, that politics in Utah made a wide turn in favor of the Democrats. Even against the admonition of L.D.S. President Grant, Utahns—Mormon and non-Mormon—overwhelmingly supported President Roosevelt’s
New Deal programs by electing a number of New Dealers to Utah’s congressional delegation. Democrats, led by President Roosevelt, grew so popular in Utah that they held ninety-four percent of all seats in the 1937 State Legislature; in the Senate, only one Senator out of twenty-three was Republican. With the end of World War II so went the era of extreme politics in Utah. The post-World War II era ushered in a new theme to state politics: balance.


Any history of Utah is a history of place. From the burgeoning ancient Fremont culture millennia past to the arrival of Mormon settlers in 1849 to the damming of the Great Basin rivers a century later, the semi-arid valleys of the Intermountain West influenced the people, the culture and, lastly, the political sub-cultures of the region. As the people of Utah adapted to the land, so did their culture, and as a result, the business and political climate evolved.

At no other time has Utah’s business and political climate evolved around the land more than during the post-World War II era. Water reclamation, mineral extraction, and the construction of a transnational interstate were projects on the minds of most civic leaders as they headed into the Cold War. An underlying urgency to protect Utah’s water rights and to create local economic development through mineral extraction prompted locally elected officials and business leaders to pursue federal monies along with private capital to finance dam construction and mining projects. In addition, a burgeoning automobile lobby, National City Lines, sought the construction of a federal interstate, and this proposed interstate had obvious benefits for rural Utah. While all of these projects directly benefited Utah in some way, local capital was not enough to fund this massive effort (Francis and Thomas 1992, 36). State and federal governments had to intercede if these projects were to become a reality—and intercede they did. Senator Arthur V. Watkins, R-UT, cosponsored legislation authorizing Congress to appropriate millions of dollars to invest in western water reclamation projects. Out of this legislation came the construction of Flaming Gorge Dam in 1964 and Glen Canyon Dam in 1966. These were just a couple of the largest projects undertaken during this time.

What made these land-use projects important politically was that their construction was dependent upon local officials from both parties working in tandem to secure both federal and private monies to finance these projects. The Democrats were most adept at securing federal monies and hence the party had particular popularity in those areas affected by the construction. Furthermore, Republicans were forced to step outside of their core philosophy and join Democrats in seeking government aid to complete these projects. Authors John Francis and Clive Thomas observed:

This heavy dependence upon government in the West has been primarily a consequence of necessity and not of choice...It has resulted largely from need—primarily economic need—rather than any philosophical belief in the intrinsic value of government in promoting social goals. Indeed, the antigovernment attitudes and strong strain of political individualism and conservatism that exist in many parts of the West, particularly the Mountain states, opposes such an intrinsic role...So within the context of political individualism and conservatism that predominate in many parts of the West, what this all-pervasive role of government has produced, in effect, is a nonideological equivalent of Western European statism. That is, the recognition, if only tacitly and reluctantly in the West, that the transformation or development of society, and particularly its economic welfare, is impossible without the active and constant participation of government (Thomas and Francis 1992, 37-38).

The irony of the post-WWII era is that out of economic and political expediency both parties were forced to work together and to conform to ideologies outside their core philosophies. The unintended consequence of this cooperation was a political environment that fostered goodwill and cohesiveness between the two parties.

And hence, the post-WW II era ignites memories of a time when friendly and congenial relations between both parties was the norm and not the exception, which provided for an unprecedented era of political goodwill. Nonetheless, Utah historian F. Ross Peterson pointed out that:

There is a real difference between church influence and individual party control. Very few informed sources would argue that the L.D.S. Church has controlled Utah’s post-World War II politics. L.D.S. leaders can and do influence legislators and others, but they do not control candidate selection, platform construction, or elected officials, as was the pattern in the territorial years (Peterson 1978, 517).

Stories of a triumvirate that oversaw most political happenings across the state during this time add evidence to the above statement. Every week during the late 1950s and into the 1960s, L.D.S. Church president David O. McKay, along with The Salt Lake Tribune publisher John Fitzgerald and Salt Lake Chamber of Commerce Executive Secretary Gus Backman, who were Catholic and Jewish respectively, met for breakfast to discuss state-wide issues. According to University of Utah Vice President Emeritus Paul W. Hodson, the three “were the core of the power structure in Utah, and very little happened in Utah without their knowledge” (Hodson 1987, 83-84). As all three men hailed from different religious affiliations, they brought with them the views of most of Utah’s differing interests. It provided a place where the interests of Mormons and non-Mormons, conservatives and liberals, conservative economists and New Dealers could meet and work out differences. This triumvirate, as undemocratic as it was, became the tripartite soul of Utah and helped to create an environment for cooperation and congeniality in Utah.
Evidence for Political Goodwill
The post-World War II era (from 1947 until 1979) is unprecedented in its balance of party representation in the Utah Legislature. Party composition of the Utah State Legislature never exceeded the critical two-thirds majority mark with the exception of the late 1960s during the height of Vietnam War tensions. By remaining under the two-thirds majority mark, the majority party was always subject to checks from the minority party. To illustrate the significance of the post-WWII era, the graph in Figure 1 represents the composition of the Utah Legislature as percentages of party affiliation from the state’s inaugural year, 1896, until 2003. As evidenced in Figure 1, the political party composition of the State Legislature became more balanced in 1947 and that trend continued through the late 1970s.

The most notable product of political goodwill during the 1950s and 60s was that it created an atmosphere that put politics in a favorable light in the perception of Utah’s electorate. This positive political climate encouraged positive political participation which resulted in high voter turnout. To demonstrate the level of political activity resulting from political goodwill, voter turnout rates from 1944 until 2000 are provided in Figure 2.

The question, though, is what made this positive political climate possible? The efforts of political actors largely contributed to a congenial atmosphere.

The late Frank E. Moss, a Democrat who represented Utah for three terms from 1959 to 1977 in the U.S. Senate, was an example of a political actor who helped to cultivate fertile soil for political goodwill. Moss was instrumental in brokering compromises in the U.S. Senate between Republicans and Democrats over environmental, consumer and health-care issues. But it was on the home front where he was recognized as a champion of conciliation. He worked with the popular Democratic governor, Cal Rampton (1965-1977), to bring a handful of Republicans on to his gubernatorial cabinet in order to win the peace between both parties. Utah political insider Paul Rolly wrote in a February 2003 column in the Salt Lake Tribune:

The Moss era featured a deep friendship between Republican State Chair Kent Shearer and his Democratic counterpart, John Klass, two chums who continued daily contact years after their public rivalries and ended with Shearer maintaining a vigil beside Klass’ death bed. The era saw leaders of the state Democratic and Republican parties cavort through Southern California together in the 1960s when they had traveled as one for a University of Utah football game. Moss’ good friend and colleague, Gov. Cal Rampton, soothed the political pot by naming a number of Republicans to key cabinet posts after he was elected Utah’s first Democratic governor in 16 years. Moss’ agenda in Washington relied on his ability to bring Republican senators into his line of thinking through the art of compromise. He garnered bipartisan support for his landmark consumer protection bills and the establishment of numerous national parks and monuments (Rolly 2003, AAS).

The 1958 race for United State Senator was also illustrative of actors and opportunities coming together to foster healthy political dialogue. The incumbent, Senator Author V. Watkins, asked President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Agriculture Erza Taft Benson to return to Utah to campaign on his behalf. The unusual aspect of this campaign, however, was that Benson was also a Mormon apostle. Watkins’ Democratic challenger Frank E. Moss, who eventually won the election, realized that he had to counter-balance Watkins’s strategy. Moss asked the one-time Democratic state chairman Hugh B. Brown to campaign on his behalf. Brown, like Benson, belonged to the upper echelons of Mormon leadership. The 1958 race proved again that Mormons did not have to be of “one heart/one mind” when it comes to political parties. In fact, as a result of active and equal participation on both sides, political participation in the state benefited enormously. As shown in Figure 2, voter turnout in 1960 was at nearly 80 percent. Compare that to contemporary voter turnout rates, which dipped to a mere 45 percent in 1996.

Figure 2 Source: Federal Election Commission, http://www.fec.gov/voteregis/turn/utah.htm.

But it can now be asked, what brought Utahns out to the polls in the 60s and 70s? In a seminal work on political participation, Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics, the authors provide evidence for American participation in politics, not least of which is membership in a church or union. In an illustrative passage, the authors write: “Why, we asked, do those who are inactive not take part in politics? We proposed three possible reasons: they can’t, they don’t want to, or nobody asked. What we have shown is that citizens who have resources can be active; those who are engaged want to be active; and those who are recruited often say yes when asked” (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995, 390, emphasis added). Again, there is evidence to suggest that all three of these reasons were present in Utah’s era of goodwill. While the unionization of Utah’s workers is not strong, most Utahns identify themselves with some type of church affiliation. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady’s work identifies unions
and churches as the organizations that provide resources for political participation, engage its adherents to be active, and finally recruits them to participate in some concrete way. At the beginning of each election season, the First Presidency of the L.D.S. Church issues a statement to its members encouraging each to be active in the political process. The statement also always announces the L.D.S. Church’s strict policy of neutrality between political parties and candidates. Consider the following excerpt:

While the Church does not endorse political candidates, platforms, or parties, members are counseled to study the candidates carefully and vote for those individuals they believe will act with integrity and in ways conducive to good communities and good government. Hence, political candidates are asked not to imply that their candidacy is endorsed by the Church or its leaders (News of the Church 1998: 77)

WHY DID POLITICAL GOODWILL END IN THE LATE 1970s?
One explanation for today’s political exclusivity and hubristic divisiveness in Utah is that both political parties have become moralized or demoralized by one another. Professor Dean May called this divisiveness “moral polarization,” which started in the 1960s and became solidified after the Roe v. Wade decision in 1974. After the Supreme Court’s decision, the Democratic Party became the abortion rights poster child and as a result lost some of its Christian constituency—it was no longer kosher to mix Christianity with the Democratic Party, at least according to Republicans. On the other side of the spectrum, the Republican Party grew increasingly oriented toward moral issues during Ronald Reagan’s jump from the silver screen into the national political scene, as both he and his party gained popularity with the many Protestants and evangelicals across the United States. With these critical moral issues at stake, especially in Utah, both parties moved away from an active political process involving talking and cooperation and transformed into finger-pointing and moral crusading. This juncture indicates the burgeoning of the moral curtain and the end of the politics of goodwill.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH POLITICS IN UTAH TODAY?

“I’m really Chairman of two parties.”
—Joe Cannon,
Utah State Republican Party Chairperson,
November 11, 2003

Not only did moral polarization create dissension between Utah’s Republicans and Democrats, it also created a chasm within the Utah Republican Party; moderate-Republicans willing to work with Democrats became the targets of the moralistic contingent within the GOP. For example, in the 2000 Republican State Convention, Senator Orrin Hatch, R-UT, and then Utah Governor Mike Leavitt were both booted by Republican moralists attending that day. Even with Republican intra-party cacophony continuing today, Democrats remain the moral enemy of the GOP. While our local media probably exaggerate and help to exacerbate the disharmony between Republicans and Democrats, today’s chilly political climate is intolerable in light of yesterday’s political cooperation. Consider these examples:

1) Salt Lake Valley Republicans Janice Auger, John Christensen, Mont Evans, and John Rosenthal experienced today’s political enmity during the 2002 election. They openly endorsed Democrat Randy Horiuchi who was running for County Council. These Republicans, who held positions in the Republican Party, were punished for their “heresy” by removal from their party appointments. Only after outcry from moderates in the Republican Party were they reinstated.

2) The same individual who castigated these four Republicans also used punitive actions against the Salt Lake Tribune. John Solomon, Salt Lake County’s Republican Chairman, urged party faithful to unsubscribe from the paper he perceived to have a Democratic bias. The Salt Lake Tribune’s editorial page endorsed four Democrats and two Republicans during the 2002 election.

3) Utah State Representative Roz McGee, a Democrat from Salt Lake City, recounted the scrutiny that Democrats face in the legislature. In an interview with the Daily Utah Chronicle in March 2003, McGee alleged that “there is less openness on the part of the majority party. In the past, there was a conciliatory tone in the House and Senate” (Thatcher 2003, Opinion). She remarked that during legislative committee meetings bills sponsored by Democrats are subjected to a high level of “scrutiny”, whereas bills sponsored by Republicans are given little attention. McGee describes Republican behavior as “picky” toward Democratic legislation.

4) Salt Lake Tribune columnist Paul Rolly recently editorialized about the lack of openness on the part of the Republican party. In a February 2003 op-ed piece he wrote, “Democrats [are] now being locked out of the legislative decision-making process through closed Republican caucuses and political redistricting designed to push the minority party into extinction.” Rolly also commented on the Republican disposition to single out and attack Democrats. Contrasting today to the 1960s, Rolly wrote, “Contrast [the era of the 1960s] to congressional campaigns against Utah’s lone Democrat based solely on the fact that he is a Democrat. Contrast the era to a Salt Lake County Council that wants a recount in an election with a 50,000-vote difference simply because the winner was a Democrat” (Rolly 2003, AA5).

IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR UTAH?
Following the 2000 Census, the Utah Legislature redrew political boundaries to represent shifts in the population statewide. The legislative GOP leadership—whose task it was to redraw the boundaries because they held control of the Legislature—redrew the boundaries to target two of Utah’s most prominent Democrats: Jim Matheson and Patrice Arent. In the case of Jim Matheson, the lone incumbent Democrat to the U.S. House of Representatives, the GOP redrew his mostly urban Democratic congressional district—District 2—
to include large portions of conservative rural Utah. Matheson, being left with the arduous task of appealing to both liberal/moderate urban voters and conservative rural voters, was forced to become a radical centrist.

Meanwhile, one of the Democrat’s most talented up-and-coming leaders in Utah, Patrice Arent, also drew ire from the GOP during redistricting. Arent was elected to the State House of Representatives three times and served as the House Minority Whip. During her six years in the Legislature, Arent gained a reputation for her work ethic and for her skill as a negotiator. In 2002, the National Democratic Party honored Arent, along with nine other Democrats from across the U.S., as one of the Party’s up-and-coming leaders. Fearful that Arent might gain further momentum in Utah, the GOP redistricting body eliminated entirely the House district which she represented. The GOP hoped that Arent would either dropout of politics at that point or run in neighboring House districts, all of which were already represented by female Democrats. When the dust from the redistricting brouhaha settled, many Utahns felt that the GOP had unfairly targeted Utah’s Democrats. The political gulf widened between those who called the GOP’s new political map “redistricting” and those who called it “gerrymandering.”

The stakes increased during the 2002 election year as a result of GOP redistricting; both parties were eager to see in which direction the polls would swing in the newly established districts. The heightened stakes also brought record campaign spending from both the Democratic and GOP parties. Also, the newly restructured second congressional district, held by Matheson at the time, pitted urban voters versus rural voters. While Matheson enjoyed most of his support in the urban centers of Utah, his opponent, Republican John Swallow, enjoyed even more support in the rural areas of the district.

As for Arent, she chose to remain in politics. But instead of running against her Democratic colleagues in the primaries, she decided to run for the State Senate against the incumbent Senate Majority Leader, Steve Poulton, a white Mormon male from the predominantly white Mormon patriarchal neighborhood of Holladay. Because of the heightened stakes, Democrats and Republicans spent more money in this race than in any other race for State Senate in Utah’s history. While the results from the 2002 election went overwhelmingly in favor to the GOP, the Democrats were vindicated in two crucial races. Matheson narrowly beat out Swallow to remain the representative for Utah’s second congressional district, and Arent, a white Jewish working mother, won by a ten percent margin over Poulton.

So, is there any hope? That Matheson and Arent won these races is of no small significance. Their victories defy overarching political trends in Utah. First off, the Matheson/Swallow race indicated that a Democrat can win in rural Utah as long as a portion of the district is also urban. On the macro level, the Matheson/Swallow race showed that the Democratic Party is still viable in Utah. The Arent/Poulton race demonstrated that conservative Mormon neighborhoods will easily vote for a female Democrat. In fact, with the exception of Susan Lawrence, a Republican, the east bench of Salt Lake County is almost entirely represented by female Democrats. It is too early to tell if these victories represent a trend among Utah voters or not, but the victories could represent a harbinger of things to come.

On the other hand, there are no signs that the moral polarization dividing Utahns is relenting. To the contrary, some prominent Republican politicians still, and will always, cling to morality as the paramount issue when it comes to choosing party affiliation. The danger in citing morality as the paramount issue in choosing a party is that this concept either neglects other critical public policy issues or is, at least, incapable of addressing them. Furthermore, amoral public policy issues may have farther reaching ramifications—in terms of quality of life standards, education, business environment, etc.—than the moral issues of the day. Are we to hold politicians who favor focusing on amoral public policy issues, rather than using time and financial resources to defend morality, culpable of society’s sins? Another danger is that while Utah’s most critical public policy issues demand bipartisan cooperation, collaboration, and co-integration (such as water-rights issues, funding of public education, creating a friendly and enticing business environment, etc.) focusing too much on morality issues distracts from these critical policy issues that inherently affect more Utahns than the immorality so repugnant to other policy makers. If the issues that brought politicians together during the post-World War II era—issues that are still largely the same today—what will bring them together?

Republican Senate Majority Leader Mike Waddoups said to the Salt Lake Tribune editorial board that “all one-hundred and four Utah legislators should be Republicans because that party reflects Utah values.” Political leaders who insist on seeing politics through moral right/wrong lens in a democratic, pluralistic society will only further entrench Utahns’ stereotyped political perceptions. And for now, it seems this entrenchment is only continuing.

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