

The Salt Lake Tribune

Tribune poll: Becker has big lead entering last days of SLC mayoral sweepstakes

By Derek P. Jensen
The Salt Lake Tribune

Article Last Updated: 11/01/2007 07:08:18 AM MDT

Call it a jumbo treat for Ralph Becker and a Halloween scare for Dave Buhler.

A new *Salt Lake Tribune* poll gives Becker a colossal 55 percent to 34 percent lead in the Salt Lake City mayor's contest less than a week before voters race to the polls to replace lightning-rod Mayor Rocky Anderson.

Eleven percent are undecided.

The numbers are a fright for Buhler, laboring to overcome a three-decade shutout for Republicans and active Mormons hoping to lead City Hall. Becker, by contrast, is a non-Mormon Democrat.

"You will never see a Mormon Republican elected in the city in our lifetime - if at all," predicted Stuart Reid, a Mormon and self-professed conservative who was waxed by Anderson in 1999.

Reid, who calls Utah's capital a "bastion of liberalism," points to the poll as

"ample evidence" of the city's left-leaning trend.

Buhler "should have known better than anyone because he ran against [former Mayor] Deedee [Corradini] in the same political dynamic and lost" in 1991, he said Wednesday. "And the demographic has gotten worse."

Salt Lake City is more liberal now and less LDS.

The Mason-Dixon Polling & Research survey, conducted Oct. 29 and 30, interviewed 500 likely voters. The margin for error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

"It's a very comforting position to be in five to six days out from the election," Becker said. "It shows the support that we felt coming out of the primary - and have felt from the reaction we continue to get going door to door."

Buhler took the lopsided figures in stride, pointing to Tuesday's "real poll."

"We're continuing to work. We're feeling optimistic, and I still think I have a chance to win," he said. "It depends on who turns out to vote. I feel like we have momentum."

Still, the poll has to be disheartening to Buhler, according to Kirk Jowers, director of the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics.

Advertisement

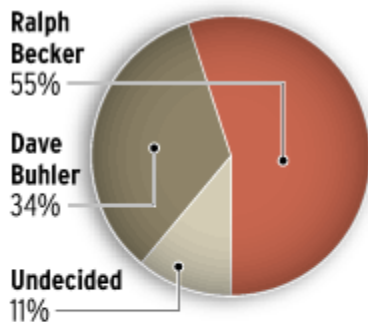
The Salt Lake Tribune

"When you're the underdog, you don't need to be leading in these polls, but you have to show some momentum,"

Poll: Mayoral race

500 Salt Lake City voters were interviewed October 29-30, 2007 by Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, Inc. of Washington, D. C. All stated they were likely to vote in the November mayoral election.

If the election for mayor were held today, would you vote for Ralph Becker or Dave Buhler?



Margin for error is +/- 4.5 percentage points.

Source: Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, Inc.

AMY LEWIS/*The Salt Lake Tribune*

Jowers said. "Buhler will have to have the most incredible get-out-the-vote effort this state has ever seen."

Becker, an urban planner and the Democratic House minority leader, held virtually the same 20-percentage-point edge among men and women, according to the poll.

Among non-LDS voters, 75 percent prefer Becker, while just 16 percent embrace Buhler. Becker even managed to snag 31 percent of the LDS vote in the survey compared with 55 percent for Buhler, a two-term City Council member, a sign that the affable Becker may be less divisive among Mormons than Anderson.

Even so, both candidates said it is unfortunate religion plays any role in the mayor's chase.

"They ought to vote based on who would do the best job, not what religious label they wear," said Buhler, who called the split "interesting."

Becker said he was approached this week on the street by a voter who claimed he was voting for Buhler because he was Mormon.

"I would hope I could do well across the board regardless of ethnicity or what their religious makeup is," he said. "I also realize that, for some people on both sides, that is an important issue."

Tom Phillips, a Becker backer who lives in central city, predicts his candidate will make "a bit more mellow" mayor than Anderson.

Advertisement

The Salt Lake Tribune

"I kind of like what he's saying," Phillips explained. "It hit the spot."

But Liberty Park resident David Nelson likes Buhler's "conservative agenda," particularly on spending.

"It's going to be a tight race," Nelson said.

Voters in Salt Lake City have not elected a practicing Mormon - or a Republican - as mayor since the 1970s.

That string appears likely to continue - if the poll results hold up. Democrats overwhelmingly support Becker (83 percent to 8 percent) in the officially nonpartisan race. The front-runner also leads among independents (56 percent to 29 percent), whom Buhler calls key.

Buhler does capture 76 percent of the GOP vote, according to the survey, compared with Becker's 13 percent.

In the Sept. 11 primary, Becker blitzed a large field of candidates, carrying 39 percent of the vote. Buhler garnered 28 percent to advance to the November runoff.

"Salt Lake City almost always votes Democrat," Sugar House resident Matt Bingle noted. "Even though [the candidates] say they're nonpartisan, everyone knows where they stand."

Bingle plans to vote for Becker since the city "definitely needs a planner."

"Actually, the whole valley needs a

planner," Bingle added, "but it's kind of late now."

Significant margins also break Becker's way in the favorable/unfavorable category, according to the poll.

More than 60 percent of likely voters give Becker a favorable mark compared with 46 percent for Buhler.

And 27 percent recognized Buhler as unfavorable, compared with just 12 percent for Becker.

"The [low] unfavorable rating is hopefully a reflection of how I've conducted myself on the campaign," Becker said. "It shows to me that the misrepresentations that [Buhler's] been presenting and the negative attack have not withstood credibility with voters."

Buhler insisted his favorability rating has improved since the primary and noted many people still have not made up their minds.

"The polls are a snapshot in time," he said. "We'll see where we are on Election Day."

However, Reid argues the city's demographics render the outcome predestined.

"If you're a Mormon in good standing, you're out. If you're a Republican, you're out," Reid said. "If you're a conservative, you're out."

Advertisement

The Salt Lake Tribune

Jowers notes one wild card may be apathy if residents stay home, thinking the mayor's race and the school-vouchers vote "look like slam-dunks."

"That's the only thing that, if I were Becker's campaign, I would be slightly nervous about."

And Mary Alice Brinley, a Buhler backer who lives downtown, says anything can happen in the macabre Halloween season.

"I have been in politics a long time," she said. "I have seen where dead people vote."

djensen@sltrib.com

IF THE ELECTION FOR SALT LAKE MAYOR WERE HELD TODAY, WOULD YOU VOTE FOR . . .

Becker a shoo-in?

DAVE BUHLER

11%

Source: Mason-Dixon Polling and Research, Inc. Margin of error is +/-4.5 percentage points

It's a very comforting position to be in five to six days out from the election. It shows the support that we felt coming out of the primary . . ."

RALPH BECKER

We're feeling optimistic, and I still think I have a chance to win. It depends on who turns out to vote. I feel like we have momentum."

DAVE BUHLER

Advertisement

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™