

Utah State University

DigitalCommons@USU

Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP)

Community and Natural Resources Institute

2023

UPEP 2023 Overview

Jessica Schad

Utah State University, jessica.schad@usu.edu

Elizabeth Brunner

Utah State University, elizabeth.brunner@usu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/canri_projects



Part of the [Environmental Sciences Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schad, Jessica and Brunner, Elizabeth, "UPEP 2023 Overview" (2023). *Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP)*. Paper 4.

https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/canri_projects/4

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the Community and Natural Resources Institute at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.



Utah People & Environment Poll (UPEP)



College of Humanities & Social Sciences
Community & Natural Resources Institute
Utah State University

Survey Overview 2023



Introduction

Utah's people and environment are currently experiencing significant changes as the population continues to grow, droughts and flooding pose threats to agriculture, air quality leads to health concerns, energy needs rise, and public lands see increased use. Action is needed to address these changes, especially given how rapidly they are occurring. Political leaders, environmental organizations, Tribal Nations, and universities play a critical role in ensuring Utah's environment, economy, workforce, and underserved communities have a sustainable path forward. Understanding residents' views, values, and concerns can help better craft the policy, inform infrastructure, and identify the services needed to do so. With this goal of understanding in mind, Utah State University's Community & Natural Resources Institute (CANRI) launched the Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP) in spring of 2023. The following summarizes findings in each category of the survey. You can also learn more here: <https://chass.usu.edu/sociology/canri/upep>

Overview

The 2023 Utah People and Environment Poll (UPEP) is a statewide survey of adult Utah residents assess attitudes toward and perceptions of a variety of environmental issues facing Utah today as well as respondents' values and beliefs. The results form a rich body of data that will be able to inform actions and initiatives across the state. Subsequent surveys will be able to assess change over time and potentially offer insights into the impact of various interventions.

The poll was designed to reach a representative population for the state. Close to 450 people completed the poll from 25 counties across Utah. Survey respondents were rather evenly dispersed across gender, education, political affiliation, and profession. Respondents were 93.1% white, which is just above the state's 90.0%, with 64.6% indicating they were residents of Salt Lake, Utah, or Davis county.

A Collaborative Effort



The survey was a collaborative effort led by Dr. Jessica Schad and her SOC 7100 (Advanced Survey Methods) class. Faculty and students from departments across College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHaSS) as well as the department of Environment and Society (ENVS) contributed questions.

Utahns: Connected to Home

Overall, respondents indicated a strong connection to Utah, which may be tied to the amount of time they have lived in the state. Respondents reported living in Utah from one to 88 years, with an average of 37.5 years. Most plan to stay, with 67.1% said that they intended to still live in Utah in five years and 66.6% either somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they would regret having to move to another place. 71.4% either somewhat or strongly agrees that Utah is the best place for what they like and do and 66.7% somewhat or strongly agreed that if this place changes too much, they may want to leave. For those considering leaving Utah, drought/lack of water and air quality were the most significant concerns (38.8% and 31.4%, respectively).

Issues of Concern

Drought was the most concerning to respondents (57.6% very concerned). Relatedly, the drying up of the Great Salt Lake ranked second (54.8%) followed by air quality (52.2%), population growth (43.6%), and changing access to public lands (43.1%).



Outdoor Recreation

The tourism industry is a major economic driver in Utah. In 2021, Utah visitors spent \$10.56 billion, which supported 130,600 jobs and resulted in \$1.81 billion in state & local tax revenue. The tourism industry can have significant impacts on outdoor recreation and public lands, especially in a state where such opportunities are drawing new residents.

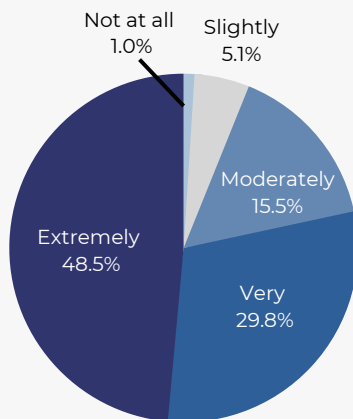
Respondents support using state funds to:

Maintain existing resources - 93.7%

Education on responsible recreation - 86.7%

More greenways or trails within communities - 78.5%

How important are outdoor recreation options to you?



The majority of respondents (93.8%) indicated that outdoor recreation options and/or access to wilderness and public lands was moderately, very, or extremely important to them. Over 80% expressed attachment to Utah's National Parks and public lands. When asked how much they support or oppose using state funds to manage recreation, respondents expressed the greatest support for maintaining existing resources (93.7%), education on responsible recreation (86.7%), and more greenways and trails within communities (78.5%).

Air Pollution & Health

Close to 88% of respondents indicated they agree or strongly agree that air pollution is a serious problem that can cause harm. Most respondents did not, however, consider air pollution to be a problem that would impact them in the near term. In fact, only 34.4% reported that it would be likely or extremely likely that they would experience health concerns from air pollution in the next year while 64.5% respondents indicated that they were likely to experience health concerns over their lifetime.

Values

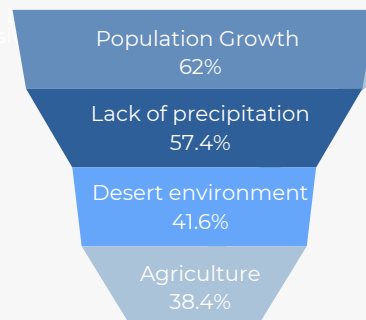
Overall, protecting and preserving the environment was of great importance to respondents. Over 80% of respondents indicated they had the following guiding values: protecting the environment for future generations (97.4%); protecting the environment and preserving nature (94.7%); protecting the earth and harmony with other species (94.3%); equality, equal opportunity for all (92.9%); and social justice, correcting injustice, care for the weak (82.4%).

Water

Water is a top concern among Utahns, with 79.7% of respondents ranking Utah's water crisis as a 6 or higher on a 10-point scale of severity. When asked what factors are contributing to the current water crisis, people perceived the top 5 factors as: population growth (62%), lack of precipitation (57.4%), desert environment (41.6%), agriculture (38.4%), and residential uses (21.9%).

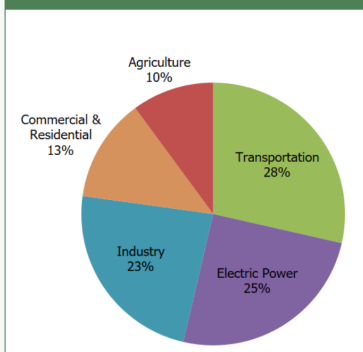
Overall, respondents expressed that government was not managing water responsibly, with more people agreeing that the federal government was not being responsible (~60%) than the state (57.4%) or local governments (44.8%). Residents cited water management (63.3%), residential uses (54.2%), population growth (52.1%), agricultural uses (50.4%) and local or political involvement as areas that could be changed to mitigate Utah's current water crisis.

What factors are contributing to Utah's water crisis?



Energy

Total U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Economic Sector in 2021



In 2021, the EPA reported that 25% of total US greenhouse gas emissions came from electricity consumption. In 2022, 53% of Utah's electricity net generation came from coal-fired power plants. As the population of the state continues to grow, demands will likely increase.

While over 50% of respondents agree or strongly agree that growing energy needs pose a threat to Utah's natural environment, only 37.5% were willing to pay more for carbon-free energy sources and only 57.7% agree or strongly agree that transitioning to carbon-pollution free energy would lessen the impacts of climate change (20% neither agree nor disagree). This suggests opportunities for public engagement regarding energy initiatives and their potential impacts.

Wildfire

Responses indicate that wildfire is not one of respondents' top concerns. However, when asked directly, 56.9% agree or strongly agree that it currently poses a significant threat to Utah residents and 72% agree or strongly agree that it poses a threat to Utah's landscapes. 79.5% agree or strongly agree that prescribed burning can be a useful management technique in Utah. Moderate support exists to including federally recognized tribes in decision-making processes about lands (61.4% agree or strongly agree).



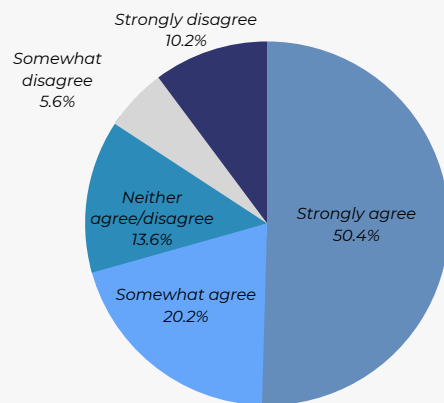
Cultural Heritage



71.3% of respondents consider themselves to be knowledgeable about Utah's cultural heritage and 66.7% think it should be included as part of planning and/or new development in Utah. However, a significant portion neither agree/disagree that the state (53.6%) or federal (47.3%) government is managing Utah's cultural heritage responsibly.

Environment & Equality

Identity and the environment are intertwined in that one's identity can result in uneven or unequal experiences of environmental risks or harms. Respondents indicated that geographic location (82.7%), class/economic status (73.0%), and race (54.7%) were the three most impactful categories followed by disability (49.9%) and age (48.6%). Most also agree (50.4% strongly agree) that corporations should be held responsible for harming vulnerable communities.

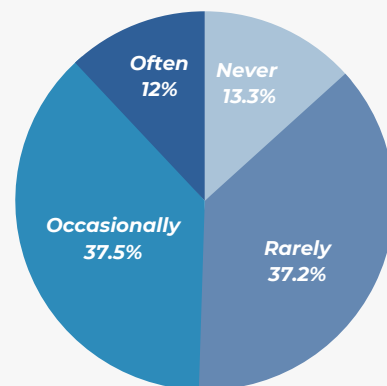


Corporations should be held responsible for harming low-income and communities of color.

Climate Change & Vulnerability

While 77.8% of respondents indicated their view that most scientists agree that climate change is happening, 15% reported not knowing if scientists agreed or disagreed and 7.2% indicated that they viewed most scientists as disagreeing that climate change is happening. Most (62.4%) believe climate change is happening now, caused mainly by human activities and 27.9% believe the change is caused mainly by natural forces.

How often do you discuss global warming with family & friends?



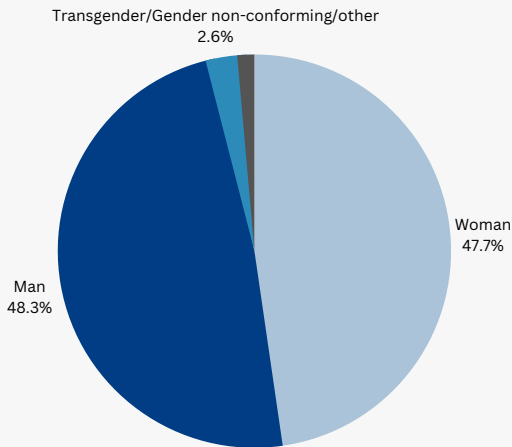
The Environment & Fertility



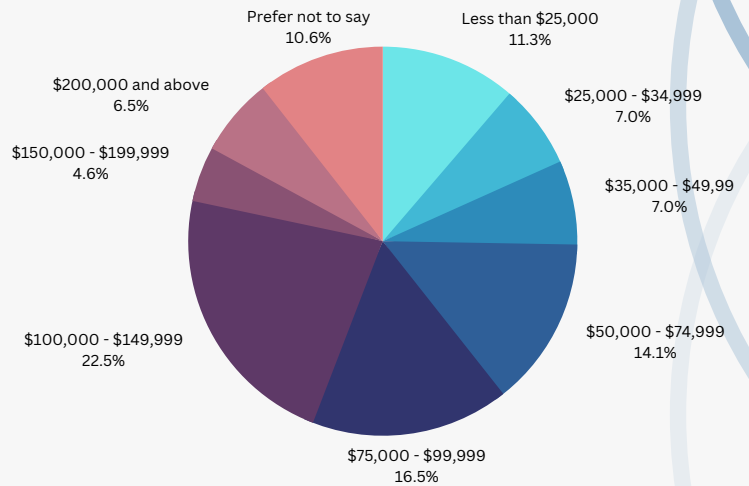
When asked whether they wanted one or more children, 30.4% responded "yes." Respondents indicated personal circumstances or preferences were the greatest factor in making a decision about having kids (81.4% said somewhat or a lot of influence). Environmental conditions were ranked much lower (33.9%) after financial circumstances (68.1%) and current household size (41.3%).

Demographics

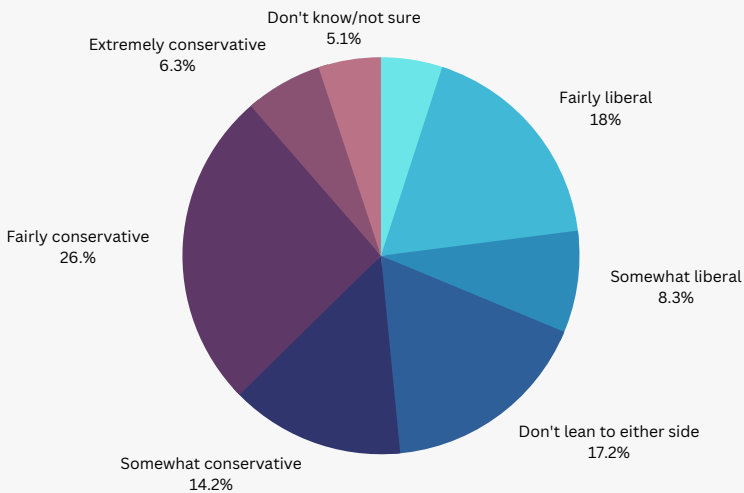
Gender



Household Income



Political identity



Race

