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## Utahns are Becoming More Likely to Say Human-Caused Climate Change is Happening

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## Utahns are Becoming More Likely to Say Human-Caused Climate Change is Happening

Jessica D. Ulrich-Schad, Jennifer E. Givens, Peter D. Howe, & Cole Lancaster

Scientists who study the earth’s climate overwhelmingly agree that human activities are causing rapid change<sup>1</sup>. Most Americans also agree that global warming is happening (74%) and caused by humans (61%)<sup>2</sup>. However, the same research finds that about one in eight (12%) of Americans do not think global warming is happening. This indicates that despite scientific consensus, some Americans remain skeptical about whether climate change is real and if humans are the cause.

The state of Utah is already facing environmental threats related to climate change, including drought<sup>3</sup>; air pollution from wildfires, emissions, and airborne dust<sup>4</sup>; hazards like wildfires and flooding<sup>4</sup>; and increased temperatures which will amplify natural hazards<sup>5</sup>. Among other issues, this will impact the broader economy and health of residents<sup>6</sup>. This means understanding how Utahns’ view and interpret climate issues is imperative. Using data from a statewide survey of Utahns ([Utah People and Environment Poll, or UPEP](#)) this research brief aims to provide valuable insights useful for effective communication, policy formulation, and sustainable measures to address climate change and related issues.

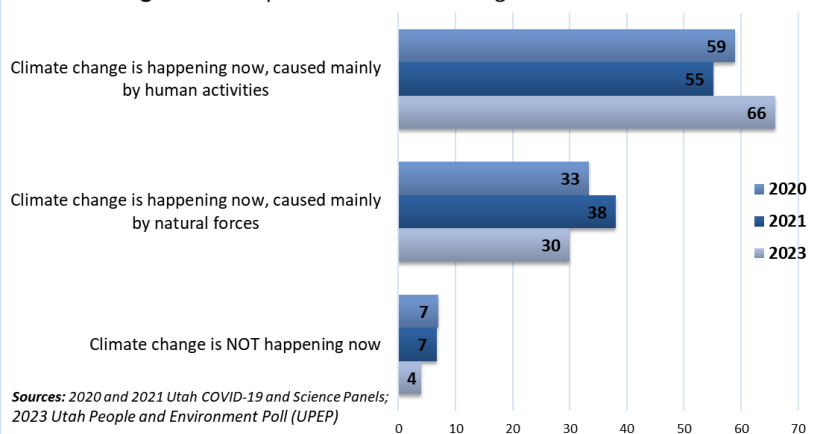
### Climate Change Skepticism is Declining in Utah

Our survey data indicates a possible shift in Utahns' attitudes towards climate

#### KEY FINDINGS

- Statewide polling of Utah residents indicates that most Utahns believe climate change is currently happening and caused mainly by human activities (66% in 2023), similar to the majority of Americans.
- Since 2020, more Utahns see climate change as real and caused by human activities.
- The percentage of Utahns who think climate change is not happening decreased from 7% in 2020 and 2021, to 4% in 2023.

Figure 1 Perceptions of Climate Change Over Time in Utah





change over a relatively short period of time<sup>1</sup>. For instance, Figure 1 indicates that in 2020 and 2021, 7% of Utahns thought climate change was not currently happening, while in 2023, 4% said the same. At the same time, we find that fewer Utahns who believe climate change is happening see it as caused mainly by natural forces. While there was a slight increase from 2020 to 2021 in people who believed this, we find that it has declined from 33% in 2020 to 30% in 2023. We also find that while slightly fewer saw climate change as caused mainly by human activities in 2021 than in 2020, in 2023, 66% saw it as caused by human activities compared to 59% in 2020. Overall, the survey findings indicate that Utahns likely increasingly see both climate change as happening and as caused by human activities rather than natural forces.

## Conclusion

This research brief indicates that Utahns' opinions about climate change align with those of most Americans. In addition, there may be a shift occurring in Utahns' perceptions of climate change, as more individuals acknowledge its occurrence and human causation in 2023 compared to recent previous years. The drying of Great Salt Lake, increased temperatures and drought, and reduced air quality are some examples of environmental problems at least partially attributable to climate change that are increasingly apparent in the everyday lives of Utahns which may be driving this shift. Utah is also experiencing rapid population growth from in-migration, which may also be contributing to the shift in residents' views on climate change. While few do not see climate change as real, there is still a considerable percentage (nearly one-third) that do not see it as primarily attributable to human activities. This indicates that work remains to be done regarding effectively demonstrating and communicating the link between human behavior and climate change.

## Data and Methods

Survey data from 2020 (n=634) and 2021 (n=635) come from online non-probability survey panels collective by Qualtrics. Both include registered voters in the state of Utah and have rake weights applied to ensure statewide representativeness on gender, age, education, party registration, and region of the state. Survey data from 2023 comes from the Utah People and Environment Poll, or UPEP, which was started to track Utahns' perceptions on environmental issues of importance to the state to help inform policy to address environmental issues. A random sample of 3,750 households were contacted using postal mail to respond to the survey online or on paper. 441 individuals responded to the survey for a final total

response rate of 12%. Weights for survey design and to adjust for age, education, and gender representation are applied. To access other briefs and learn more about the UPEP, please visit: <https://chass.usu.edu/sociology/canri/upep>

## About CANRI

The Community and Natural Resources Institute, or [CANRI](#), produces and promotes interdisciplinary and applied social science and humanities research focused on challenges at the intersection of people and the environment in the Intermountain West.

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<sup>1</sup> Our survey sampling methods differed between 2020-21 and 2023, so differences between years may be attributable to differences in sampling methods.



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