



What Matters Most to Utahns?

Envision Utah Survey Results by Gender

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Eric Dahlin, Susan R. Madsen, & Kolene Anderson | September 19, 2024

Introduction

Envision Utah is a non-profit organization committed to enhancing the quality of life in Utah communities by engaging stakeholders such as local governments, citizens, and for-profit and non-profit organizations. Envision Utah generates policy recommendations and identifies strategic priorities through public outreach, collaboration, and data-driven analyses. Since 1997, Envision Utah has launched numerous initiatives that have revitalized city centers, steered urban planning, improved transportation networks, and addressed environmental and water conservation issues.

In November 2021, Envision Utah conducted an online survey of 800 citizens to identify the values and priorities that are most pressing for Utahns. The sample was stratified along the lines of age, gender, and race to reflect the demographic composition of Utah. The survey asked respondents to identify their most pressing concerns; other questions asked about their quality of life, attitudes about population growth, and views of diversity and inclusion. The following report focuses on gender differences and identifies implications for policy and community engagement.

Which Issues Are Most Important to Utahns?¹

Table 1 provides a comparison of the importance of various issues for Utahns related to environmental (e.g., water and air quality), economic (e.g., jobs), health (e.g., healthcare), and other matters (e.g., disaster preparation). Overall, the survey results show that the most pressing issues are similar for women and men: water, housing and cost of living, healthcare, education, air quality, and economic development and jobs present many day-to-day challenges for respondents. For instance, drought is an ever-present concern that receives frequent media attention, and rapid population growth has led to rising real estate costs that have made affordable housing a pressing concern.

Table 1. Importance of Issues by Gender (1 – Not important, 7 – Extremely important)

Issue	Women (N=420)	Men (N=366)	Difference for Women
Water	6.4	6.5	
Housing and cost of living	6.3	6.2	
Healthcare	6.2*	6.0	+ 0.2
Education	6.1	6.2	
Air quality	6.1	6.1	
Economic development & jobs	6.1	6.0	
Healthy living	5.9	5.8	
Energy	5.9	5.8	
How our towns/cities grow	5.9	5.9	
Preparation for disasters	5.9*	5.7	+ 0.2
Agriculture	5.8	5.7	
Public land management	5.7	5.6	
Outdoor recreation	5.6	5.7	

¹ The results are based on responses to the following survey question: Thinking about the community where you live, please rate each of the following issues where 1 means “not at all important to Utah’s future,” and 7 means “extremely important to Utah’s future.”

Transportation	5.6	5.5	
<i>Diversity and inclusion</i>	5.6*	5.0	+ 0.6
<i>Climate change</i>	5.5*	4.9	+ 0.6
<i>Arts and culture</i>	5.1*	4.7	+ 0.4

*The difference in means for women and men is statistically significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test)

Issues considered to be less urgent to respondents are diversity and inclusion, climate change, and arts and culture. In addition, regarding diversity and inclusion and climate change in particular, political views (Utah leans Republican) may affect how these issues are viewed. Conservative viewpoints are more likely to be skeptical of scientific claims about climate change and diversity initiatives that de-emphasize merit-based ideologies.

The survey found widespread agreement, but perspectives of women and men differ in notable areas. Women place higher importance on healthcare, preparation for disasters, diversity and inclusion, climate change, and arts and culture—issues that are more closely linked to overall quality of life. As those who are more likely to serve as primary caregivers for children and elderly family members, perhaps women have more immediate concerns about their health and safety and are more sympathetic to underserved or marginalized groups.

How Well Is Utah Performing on These Issues?²

Table 2 reveals significant differences in perceptions of Utah’s performance on key issues. Women rated Utah’s performance lower than men on 14 of the 17 issues; the greatest differences were in diversity and inclusion and housing and cost of living. The findings emphasize women’s need for improvement in areas related to quality of life and equality. The numbers echo the 2023 WalletHub gender gap study (based on 71 metrics that included work environment, education, health, and political empowerment) that ranked Utah as the *worst* state for women’s equality.

The differences for women are no doubt due to a variety of factors. For instance, lower values for economic development and jobs are likely due to perceptions related to job opportunities, wage equality, or workplace conditions that tend to disadvantage women. The results also suggest women are more concerned about challenges related to diversity and inclusivity and the costs of living, which directly affect family members’ quality of life.

Table 2. Utah Performance on Issues by Gender (1 – Not well, 7 – Extremely well)

Issue	Women (N=420)	Men (N=366)	Difference for Women
Outdoor recreation	5.4	5.4	
<i>Economic development & jobs</i>	4.7*	5.1	– 0.4
Arts and culture	4.7	4.8	
<i>Agriculture</i>	4.6*	4.8	– 0.2
<i>Healthy living</i>	4.5*	4.8	– 0.3
<i>Transportation</i>	4.5*	4.8	– 0.3
<i>Public land management</i>	4.4*	4.8	– 0.4
<i>Energy</i>	4.4*	4.8	– 0.4
<i>Preparation for disasters</i>	4.4*	4.7	– 0.3
<i>Healthcare</i>	4.4*	4.8	– 0.4
<i>Education</i>	4.3*	4.6	– 0.3
<i>How our towns/cities grow</i>	4.2*	4.6	– 0.4
Water	4.2	4.4	
<i>Diversity and inclusion</i>	4.0*	4.5	– 0.5

² The results are based on responses to the following survey question: Please indicate how well you think Utah is performing on each of these priorities using the scale where 1 means “the state is not performing well at all” and 7 means “the state is performing extremely well.”

<i>Climate change</i>	3.9*	4.3	-0.4
<i>Air quality</i>	3.5*	3.9	-0.4
<i>Housing and cost of living</i>	3.0*	3.5	-0.5

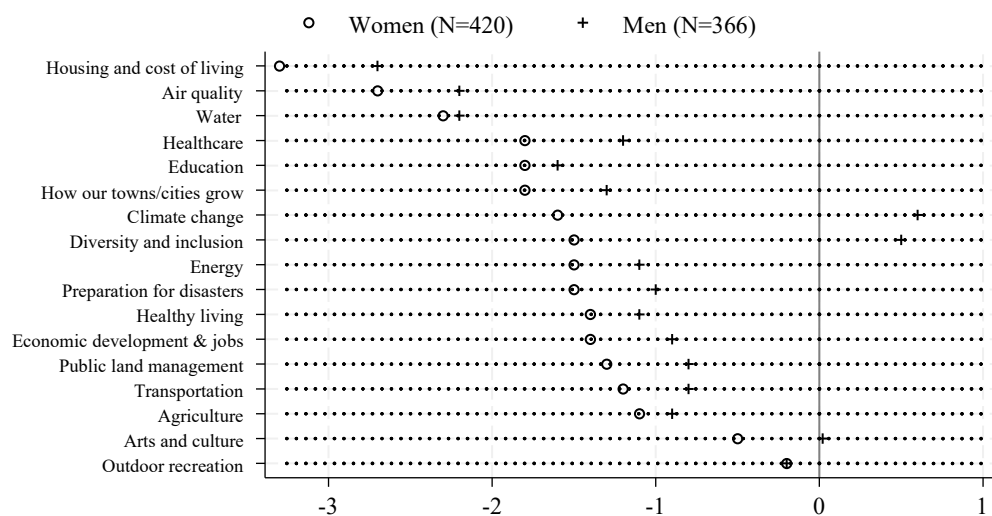
* The difference in means for women and men is statistically significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test)

The Difference between Importance and Performance

Graph 1 shows the difference between the perceived importance of various issues (Table 1) and Utah’s performance on those issues (Table 2), as reported by both women and men. Each value represents the average difference in Utah performance compared to the importance of each issue. Therefore, larger negative values indicate these issues are considered to be important, but they are perceived as underperforming by the state. Smaller negative and smaller positive values indicate that an issue’s importance and performance are rated similarly.

Graph 1. Difference between Importance and Performance by Gender

(Negative Values Indicate Perceived Underperformance)



The issues with the greatest discrepancies for women include housing and cost of living, air quality, healthcare, diversity and inclusion, and education, reflecting significant concerns about the state’s ability to address these critical areas effectively. For the issues of water, education, and agriculture, the differences for women and men are not statistically significant, and the results for outdoor recreation are the same for women and men. The differences for all the other issues are statistically significant ($p < .05$ [two-tailed test]) by gender. For men, many of the issues with the greatest discrepancies are similar, though the differences are far less pronounced, suggesting a much more favorable view of Utah’s performance overall. The findings represent a notable gender gap, with women identifying a greater need for improvement in these important areas.

Which Words or Phrases Are Perceived to Be More Divisive or Unifying?³

Table 3 reports findings by gender derived from survey questions asking whether Utahns perceive different words or phrases to be more divisive or unifying. Women and men generally agree that terms such as “respecting everyone,” “welcoming everyone,” and “treating everyone fairly” are the most inclusive, with scores of 8.0 or more out of 10. The terms “racism” and “White supremacy” are the most divisive, with scores of 3.0 or lower.

³ The results are based on responses to the following survey question: Please review each word or phrase below and use the sliding scale to indicate if you feel the word or phrase is more unifying and constructive or if it is more divisive and hurtful. You can stop at any point along the slider to indicate how you feel about the word or phrase.

**Table 3. Views about Words/Phrases that Are More Divisive or Unifying by Gender^a
(1 – Divisive, 10 – Unifying)**

Word or Phrase	Women ^b (N=204)	Men (N=189)	Difference for Women
Respecting everyone	8.3	8.2	
Welcoming everyone	8.3	8.0	
Treating everyone fairly	8.3	8.0	
Equal opportunity	7.8	7.8	
Equality	7.6	7.5	
Inclusion	7.3	7.1	
Tolerance	6.9	7.1	
Equity	6.9	6.6	
Anti-racism	6.8	6.6	
Racial justice	6.3	5.9	
<i>Color blindness</i>	5.5*	6.1	-0.06
Critical race theory	4.3	4.0	
Privilege	4.2	4.2	
Unconscious bias	4.2	3.8	
Differences in opportunity based on parents' income/education	4.0	4.0	
Differences in opportunity based on race/ethnicity	3.6	3.9	
Differences in opportunity based on sexual orientation	3.7	3.8	
Inequality	3.3	3.5	
Unfairness based on race/ethnicity	3.5	3.1	
Structural racism	3.4	3.1	
Racism	2.9	3.0	
White supremacy	2.6	2.5	

^a Non-conforming gender identities were dropped from the analysis due to the limited number of respondents who identified with these categories (N=9). Only part of the sample (N=393) was asked these survey questions.

* The difference in means for women and men is statistically significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed test)

Two other results are notable. First, the average values for “color blindness” differ statistically for women and men, with women finding it more divisive than men (5.5 for women compared to 6.1 for men). Second, many of the terms in the middle of the table reflect a nuanced view of how respondents perceive language. The responses for the terms “inclusion” through “racism” have greater variability, or a greater range, compared with the others. One way to illustrate this dispersion is with the variance, a statistical measure of how much the responses for a variable differ from the mean.⁴ A higher variance indicates that the responses are more spread out, and a lower variance indicates they are closer to the mean. The average variance for variables for “inclusion” through “racism” is 7.13, and 5.24 for the others (i.e., respecting everyone, welcoming everyone, treating everyone fairly, equal opportunity, equality, and White supremacy). The variance for these variables represents differing levels of consensus among respondents, with higher variance indicating less agreement and more diverse opinions. The findings imply these terms are more controversial or are subject to differing interpretations among the surveyed group.

Summary and Recommendations

These findings highlight the priorities that are most pressing for Utahns by gender. Though many of the issues are similarly important for women and men, including water, housing and cost of living, healthcare, education, air quality, and economic development and jobs, a number of significant differences by gender exist as well. Women place greater importance on healthcare, preparation for disasters, diversity and inclusion, climate change, and arts and culture (Table 1), issues that link closely

⁴ For any given variable, the variance is calculated by measuring the difference between the value for each respondent and the mean of the variable, squaring these differences, and then averaging them.

with overall quality of life and equality. Notably, women consistently rate Utah’s performance in these areas lower than men on 14 of the 17 issues (Table 2). Comparing the differences between the importance and performance of an issue, the largest disparities for women include housing and cost of living, air quality, water, healthcare, and education (Graph 1): issues that directly affect family members’ quality of life. This report also examines how different terms are perceived. Terms such as “respecting everyone,” “welcoming everyone,” and “treating everyone fairly” were seen as the most inclusive, while “racism” and “White supremacy” were the most divisive. For women, the term “color blindness” is more divisive than for men (Table 3).

The study’s findings underscore the need for strategies to address gender disparities in the state’s performance on the issues that are important to all Utahns and especially Utah women. Significant gender differences in the state’s performance on healthcare, economic development and jobs, housing and cost of living, and diversity suggest a need for more inclusive policy-making processes. Policymakers should prioritize and engage the women who are adversely impacted in these areas. Including more women’s voices in the decision-making processes will ensure that all Utah residents are better represented and served.

The gender discrepancies in how well Utah is performing on these key issues emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and improvements. Women consistently rate Utah’s performance lower across most issues included in this Envision Utah survey, especially for economic development and jobs, diversity, and cost of living. To address these issues, policymakers and organizations must incentivize equality for women in the workplace, including job opportunities, promotions, and equal pay for equal work. Advancing workplace measures and addressing affordable housing and healthcare services can help ease the high costs of living currently facing Utahns. Closing the gaps between importance and performance in these areas is crucial.

The varied perceptions of terms related to divisiveness and inclusivity have never been more apparent than they are in the current political landscape. The findings from this report confirm the obvious: careful communication is essential in policy discussions that seek to affect change; paramount are the terms that evoke different reactions and levels of divisiveness (e.g., “critical race theory” and “unconscious bias”). But the findings also demonstrate that there is little variation in how men and women perceive these terms (with the exception of “color blindness”). Despite gaps in the respondents’ views of performance on issues deemed most important to women and men, understanding how commonly used terms in political dialogue are perceived can result in more productive debates. Recognizing these perceptions can help policymakers navigate the challenges of communicating across social groups, foster greater trust among different groups, and work together to develop and implement effective solutions.

Research over the last several decades⁵ demonstrates that when individuals and organizations better understand gender differences in values, attitudes, and experiences, more people are better served in ways that yield the greatest impact. The Envision Utah study identifies key issues Utahns need to prioritize if we want to ensure that more Utah women and their families thrive.

⁵ Brown, J. (2022). *How to be an inclusive leader: Your role in creating cultures of belonging where everyone can thrive* (2nd ed.). Berrett-Koehler; Hoff, K. A., Granillo-Velasquez, K. E., Hanna, A., Morris, M., Nelson, H. S., & Oswald, F. L. (2024). Interested and employed? A national study of gender differences in basic interests and employment. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 148, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2023.103942>; Madsen, S. R. (2015, January 12). *Why do we need more women leaders in Utah?* Utah Women & Leadership Project. <https://www.usu.edu/uwlp/files/briefs/10-why-do-we-need-more-women-leaders.pdf>; Thomas, D. A., & Ely, R. J. (1996, September–October). Making differences matter: A new paradigm for managing diversity. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/1996/09/making-differences-matter-a-new-paradigm-for-managing-diversity>

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Partner Organizations: Envision Utah is a nonprofit organization that brings together business, government, and community leaders to ensure a holistic, balanced approach to Utah's future. Their mission is to create and sustain beautiful, prosperous, healthy, and neighborly communities for current and future residents. They engage Utahns in discussions about topics ranging from air quality to education, agriculture, and transportation, allowing residents to have a say in how their communities grow. The Utah Women & Leadership Project (UWLP) is housed in the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at Utah State University (USU) and works in partnership with USU Extension. UWLP's mission is to strengthen the impact of Utah girls and women. The UWLP serves Utah and its residents by, first, producing relevant, trustworthy, and applicable research; second, creating and gathering valuable resources; and third, convening trainings and events that inform, inspire, and ignite growth and change for all Utahns.

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