

Let Freedom Ring: America's 250th and Utah

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

– Declaration of Independence

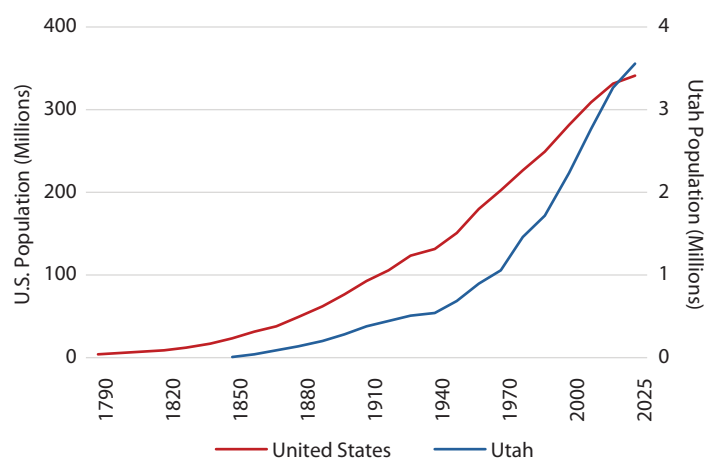
On July 4, 2026, the United States of America celebrates the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The document captures the ideals that guided the founders as they worked to establish a new nation. Utah became the 45th state in 1896, almost 120 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration's influence weaves through Utah's Constitution, which incorporated many of the same principles. "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness," among others, remain core tenets of American civic life. America's 250th offers a chance to reflect on the nation's history, growth, and future. This fact sheet offers insights into Utah's place within the United States of America.

U.S. and Utah Population

The U.S. Constitution requires a population census every 10 years. In 1790, 14 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the first census took place. The population of the United States in 1790 totaled 3,929,625 people. In 2025, the population of the United States reached 341,784,857. In 1900, the first census after Utah's statehood, Utah's population totaled 276,749. In 2025, the state's population reached 3,551,150 – roughly 400,000 fewer than the U.S. population at the time of the first census.

Early census questionnaires offered limited race reporting options, and census workers did not attempt to count certain populations, such as American Indian and Alaska Native populations. When Mormon pioneers entered the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, approximately 20,000 American Indians lived within Utah's current borders.¹ In 1890, the decennial census included specific efforts to count American Indians and Alaska Natives on and off reservations. Census records indicate that approximately 2,623 American Indians lived in Utah in 1900.^{2,3} Today, there are eight sovereign tribal nations that call Utah home.⁴ In 2024, approximately 30,404 people, or 0.7% of Utah's population, identified as American Indian and Alaska Native.

Figure 1: U.S. and Utah Population, 1790-2025



Note: Early census enumerations did not include all people living within the United States. For example, American Indian and Alaska Native populations were not counted in the census until 1890. Utah population data from 1850 to 1890 represents the Utah Territory; the 1900 census was the first to count the State of Utah.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census, extracted from IPUMS NHGIS, University of Minnesota

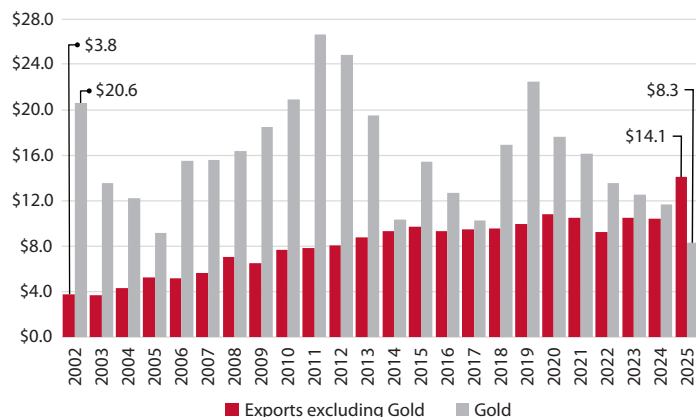
Crossroads of the West

Often referred to as the Crossroads of the West, Utah played an important role in the growth of the United States, though the region existed as an important hub for cultural exchange long before statehood. Significant trade existed between American Indian tribes within the current state boundaries. Groups adapted traditions from others as tribes moved, expanded, and interacted with surrounding groups.

Beginning in the 1700s, American Indian tribes established trade relationships with Spanish colonists. The Old Spanish Trail, a trade route from Santa Fe to Los Angeles, later passed through southern Utah. Before long, fur trappers and explorers passed through Utah and the surrounding areas, mapping the mountains, waterways, and natural resources necessary for survival in the harsh climate of the American West. Beginning in 1846, the first group of Mormon pioneers migrated west

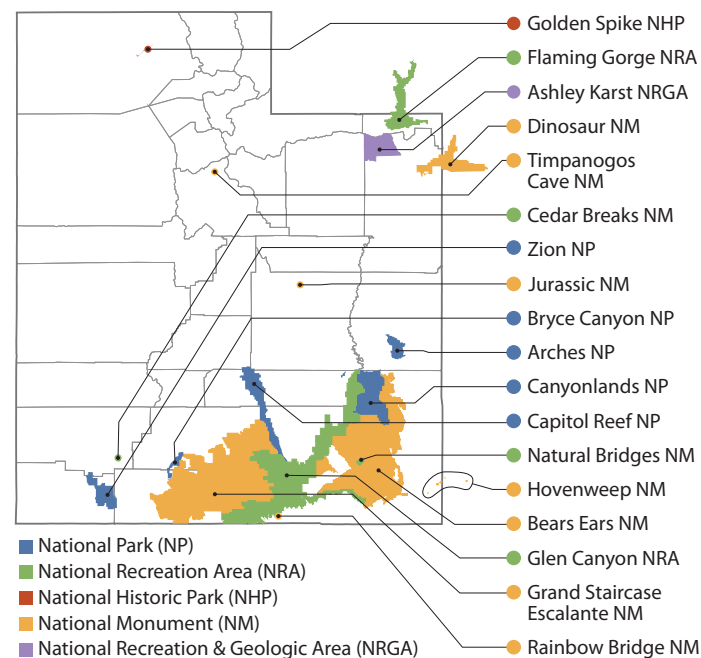
Figure 2: Value of Utah International Goods Exports, 2002–2025

(Billions of Constant 2025 Dollars)



Note: Values adjusted for inflation using the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis price index for exports of goods (non-gold exports) and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Export Price Index for unwrought gold (gold exports). Exports excluding gold and silver total \$11.6 billion in 2025.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, USA Trade Online

Figure 3: National Parks, Monuments, and Recreation Areas in Utah



Source: Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute

along the Mormon Trail from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the Salt Lake Valley. Salt Lake City and the nearby area quickly became critical to the westward expansion efforts of settlers. Overland freight and stagecoach routes, including the Pony Express, passed through Salt Lake City, and in 1861, workers completed the telegraph lines connecting San Francisco and Omaha there. In 1869, workers connected the two portions of the transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific and Union Pacific lines, at Promontory Point in northern Utah.

Utah's role as the Crossroads of the West continues, with major north-to-south and east-to-west interstate highways, a premier inland port logistics hub, and a major international airport connecting Utah with the world. From Utah, freight carriers can reach an estimated 80 million people within an 18-hour drive.⁵ This connectivity helps drive economic activity. In 2023, more than \$115 billion worth of freight moved through the state.⁶ In 2025, Utah exported \$22.4 billion of international goods, making Utah the 24th largest state exporter of goods.⁷ Utah firms exported goods to 198 countries and imported goods from 144 countries in 2025.⁸

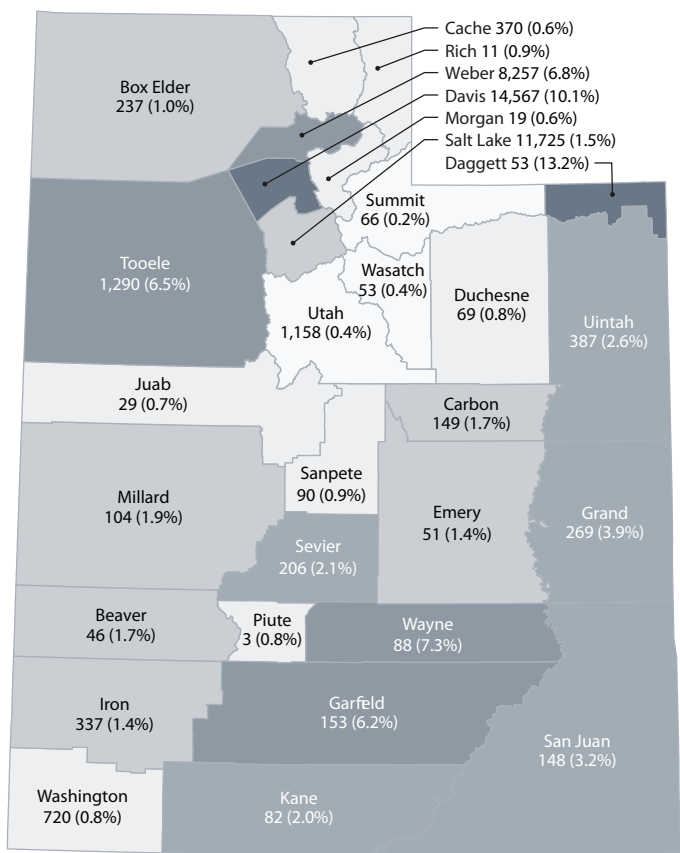
National Parks, Monuments, and Recreation Areas

Utah's landscapes attract visitors from around the world. The federal government owns or manages 64.4% of the state, the second-highest percentage of federal ownership among all 50 states and plays a critical role in managing and conserving significant historical, geologic, and ecological sites throughout the state. In 1908, the federal government designated Natural Bridges National Monument as the state's first national monument, preserving some of the world's largest natural bridges, and it later became the world's first "International Dark Sky Park." In 1919, the federal government established Zion National Park as the state's first national park, upgrading it from the national monument status it had held since 1909. Today, the federal government oversees five national parks, a national historic park, nine national monuments, and three national recreation areas spread throughout the state. In 2024, visitors to the state spent a record \$13.29 billion in Utah's economy, and in 2025, Utah's five national parks recorded more than 11 million visits.⁹

Federal Employees

The federal government employs a significant number of Utahns. Federal jobs account for 2.4% of all Utah jobs when military jobs are excluded, ranking Utah 14th among states. Including military jobs, the share rises to 3.3%, ranking Utah 23rd. Nearly 57,000 federal employees work in Utah, consisting of non-defense civilian employees (nearly 22,000), defense civilian employees (about 19,000), and military personnel (about 16,000). Most federal employees in Utah work for the Department of Defense (primarily at Hill Air Force Base), the Department of the Treasury (primarily the Internal Revenue Service in Ogden), the U.S. Postal Service, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Due to the location of Hill Air Force Base and other federal government offices, federal employees are heavily concentrated along the Wasatch Front.¹⁰

Figure 4: Federal Civilian Employment Counts and Shares by County, 2024



Note: Employment represents average job counts by work location from quarterly data between 2023 Q3 and 2024 Q2, inclusive.
Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages

Voting and Representation

Utah enjoys a proud voting history. In 1870, the Utah Territory became the nation’s second jurisdiction to enfranchise women, following the Wyoming Territory. However, because Utah held elections before Wyoming, Utah became the first place in the United States where women legally cast ballots. In 1896, government leaders included a suffrage clause in the new state constitution, enshrining women’s right to vote. After statehood, Martha Hughes Cannon, a notable suffrage advocate, ran for the new State Senate, facing male and female opponents, including her husband. She became the first woman in the United States elected to a state senate.

Many Utahns have served across all three branches of the federal government. Eight Utahns served as Utah Territory delegates in the House of Representatives from 1851 to 1896. At statehood, Utah sent one representative to the House of Representatives. Beginning in 2013, Utah’s representation in the U.S. House of Representatives increased from three to four as a result of Utah’s growing population. Forty-four Utahns have represented the state in the House of Representatives since statehood. In the Senate, 18 Utahns have represented the state since statehood. Other notable positions held by Utahns in the federal government include U.S. Supreme Court judges, ambassadors, cabinet secretaries, and other appointees. (Table 1).

Table 1: Select Utahns in Notable Federal Government Positions

Name	Position	Date
George Sutherland	Associate Justice, U.S. Supreme Court	1922–1938
Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.	Under Secretary of State; Ambassador to Mexico	1928-1929; 1930-1933
George Henry Dern	Secretary of War	1933-1936
Marriner S. Eccles	Chairman, Federal Reserve Board	1934–1948
Cavendish Wells Cannon	Ambassador to Yugoslavia; Envoy to Syria; Ambassador to Portugal; Ambassador to Greece; Ambassador to Morocco	1947–1958 (various assignments)
Ezra Taft Benson	Secretary of Agriculture	1953–1961
Ivy Baker Priest	Treasurer of the United States	1953–1961
David M. Kennedy	Secretary of the Treasury; Ambassador to NATO	1969–1971; 1972–1973
Melvin Lawrence Manfull	Ambassador to Central African Republic; Ambassador to Liberia	1970-1975
James C. Fletcher	NASA Administrator	1971–1977; 1986–1989
Terrel H. Bell	Secretary of Education	1981–1984
Rex E. Lee	Solicitor General of the United States	1981–1985
Jon M. Huntsman Jr.	Ambassador to Singapore; Ambassador to China; Ambassador to Russia	1992–1993; 2009–2011; 2017–2019
Pat Shea	Director, Bureau of Land Management	1997–1998
Kathleen Clarke	Director, Bureau of Land Management	2001-2006
John Price	Ambassador to Seychelles; Amassodor to Mauritius	2002–2005
Michael O. Leavitt	EPA Administrator; Secretary of Health and Human Services	2003–2005; 2005–2009
Matthew Tueller	Ambassador to Kuwait; Ambassador to Yemen; Ambassador to Iraq	2011–2022 (various assignments)
Melissa Holyoak	Commissioner, Federal Trade Commission	2024–2025

Endnotes

1. Utah History Encyclopedia. Native Americans in Utah by David Rich Lewis. (1994). https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/n/NATIVE_AMERICANS.shtml
2. While American Indian and Alaska Native populations have been included in the census enumerations since 1890, the shift to self-response Census questionnaires provides more depth and accuracy to the data.
3. United States Census Bureau. 1900 Census: Volume 1. Population, Part 1. Table 14. Indian Population, by States and Territories: 1880 to 1900. (1901). <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1900/volume-1/volume-1-p10.pdf>
4. Confederated Tribes of Goshute, Navajo Nation, Northwestern Band of Shoshone Nation, Paiute Indian Tribe of Utah, San Juan Southern Paiute, Skull Valley Band of Goshute, White Mesa Community of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and Ute Indian Tribe.
5. <https://inlandportauthority.utah.gov/logistics/>
6. <https://www.bts.gov/browse-statistical-products-and-data/state-transportation-statistics/state-transportation-numbers>
7. <https://ustr.gov/map/state-benefits/ut> and <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/InternationalTrade-Apr2026.pdf>
8. <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/InternationalTrade-Apr2026.pdf>
9. <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/TT-Trifold-Feb2026.pdf>
10. <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/FedEmp-March2025-Updated.pdf>

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