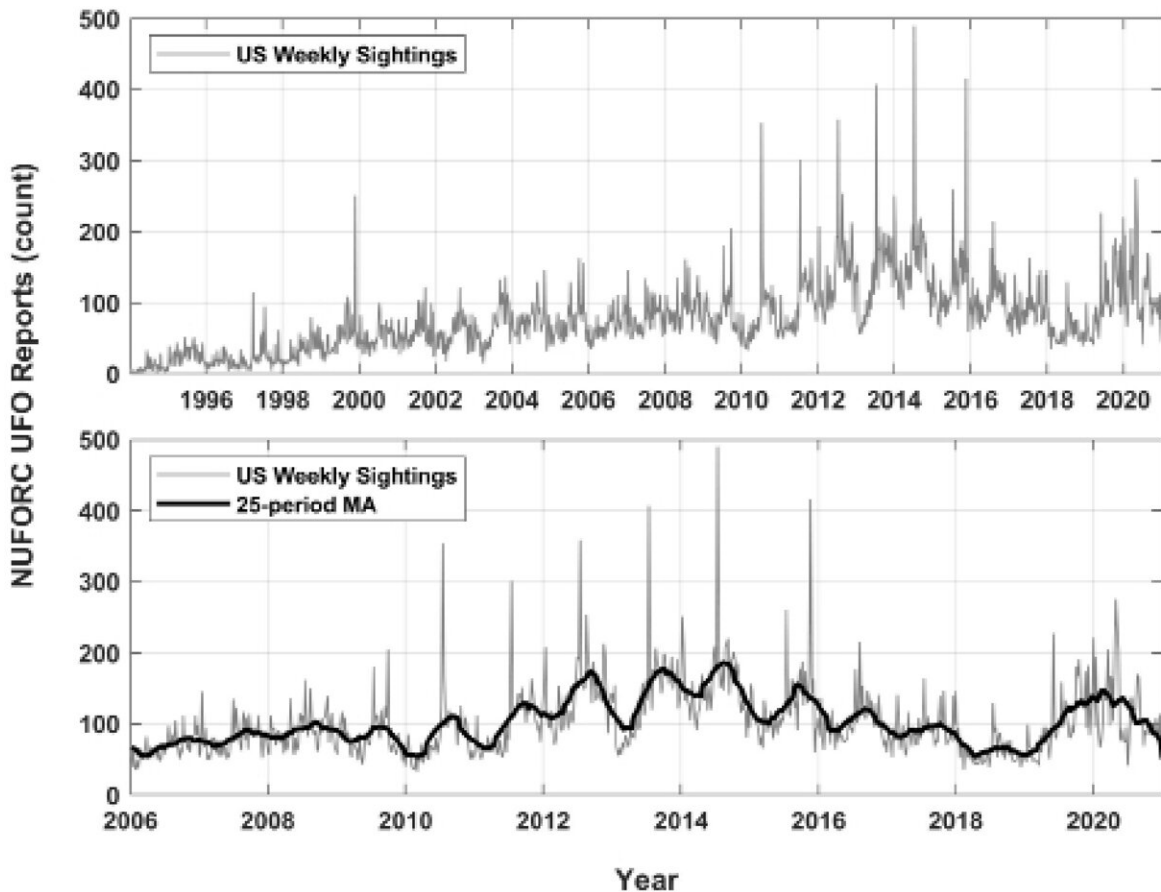


# New study investigates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on UFO reporting

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UFO reports submitted to NUFORC. Upper panel: Weekly count of Unidentified Flying Object (UFO) reports submitted to the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC), from 1/1/1994 to 12/31/2020. In general, we note that there is typically a clear seasonal effect to report counts, with reporting peaking in the summer. Lower panel: Weekly count of UFO reports submitted to NUFORC from 1/1/2006 to 12/31/2020 (gray) with the 25-period moving

average overlaid on the plot in black. Credit: *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (2023). DOI: 10.31275/20222681

Have you ever wondered if social factors like pandemics can affect UFO reporting? In a recent article published in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, authors Chase Cockrell from the University of Vermont, and Mark Rodeghier and Linda Murphy from the Center for UFO Studies, investigated whether the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with an increase in UFO sightings.

The authors hypothesized that the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in lockdowns and social distancing measures, may have led to an increase in UFO sightings. The reasoning behind this hypothesis was that with more people staying home and spending time outdoors, there may have been an increase in available free time, which could result in more UFO sightings.

Additionally, the authors tested the idea that increased feelings of anxiety and uncertainty may have led to heightened attention to the environment, which could have caused people to more often notice unusual phenomena and make sense of what they experienced by connecting it with UFOs.

The authors analyzed data from the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC) and the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), the two most comprehensive UFO reporting sites in the United States, from 2018 through 2020 and compared the number of UFO reports before and after the start of the pandemic.

To test whether [social factors](#) could have influenced the number of reports, they used publicly available data for [social mobility](#) from

Google Community Mobility Reports, and SARS-CoV-2 cases and deaths, which are indirect measures of stress and anxiety.

Their analysis demonstrated that UFO reports did increase in 2020 compared to the previous year by about 600 reports in each database. However, there was no association between the number of reports—aggregated across the US or by state—with the mobility and pandemic health measures, providing no support that social factors led to increased reports.

The researchers then searched for alternative causes and identified the initiation of regular launches of Starlink satellites beginning in late 2019 as a complicating factor. These launches include up to 60 small satellites at once, which are very distinctive and often easily visible. As a result, many people understandably reported these as UFOs.

The analysis demonstrated a relationship between a launch and subsequent reports. After removing these reports, they retested the association with the social and pandemic-health factors, but again found no relationship. Critically, with the Starlink reports removed, there was no statistical increase in reports in 2020, and even a decrease in reports to NUFORC.

The [astronomical community](#) is concerned about the impact of Starlink, and other similar projects, launching large numbers of satellites in relatively low orbits and potentially degrading astronomical measurements. The authors demonstrated that the UFO community has a similar problem.

"This study sheds light on the potential impact of social factors on UFO reporting," says Mark Rodeghier, Scientific Director of the Center for UFO Studies. While they found that the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) did not significantly impact UFO reporting, their findings suggest that future

research should investigate other factors that may influence reporting.

**More information:** R Chase Cockrell et al, Social factors and UFO reports: was the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic associated with an increase in UFO reporting?, *Journal of Scientific Exploration* (2023). [DOI: 10.31275/20222681](https://doi.org/10.31275/20222681)

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