

The Wealth of Strong Families, Communities, and Congregations:

Utah as a Case Study in Social Capital

SCP BRIEF | FEBRUARY 2019

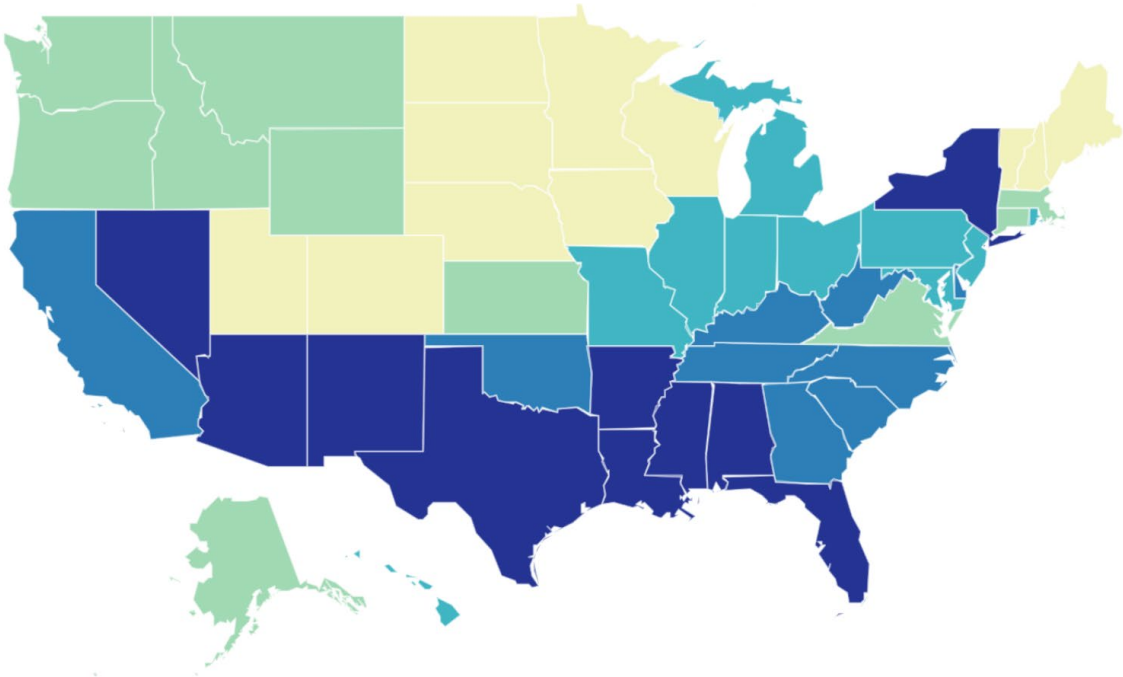
social capital project

A project of the Joint Economic Committee – Republicans | Chairman, Sen. Mike Lee
jec.senate.gov | G-01 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510 | (202) 224-5171

Last year, the Social Capital Project released its Social Capital Index, a tool that measures the health of associational life across the United States. As explained in our earlier report, [What We Do Together: The State of Associational Life in America](#), we define associational life as the “web of social relationships through which we pursue joint endeavors—namely, our families, our communities, our workplaces, and our religious congregations.”¹ Overall, Utah ranks as the state with the highest social capital among the 50 states and Washington, D.C. Utah’s robust associational life is likely connected to the history of many of its people, whose ancestors pioneered to the Salt Lake Valley in the mid-1800s to seek religious freedom and build a united, religious community.

The Index utilizes several categories of variables to measure social capital at the state level: family unity, family interaction, social support, community health, institutional health, collective efficacy, and philanthropic health.² Utah ranked number one on three of these categories—family unity, social support, and philanthropic health. It ranked within the top ten on three others—family interaction, collective efficacy, and community health. However, on institutional health it ranked all the way down at number 30.

SOCIAL CAPITAL PROJECT SOCIAL CAPITAL INDEX, BY STATE



Source: Social Capital Project, https://www.lee.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/9935863c-a25e-44c5-8295-4ddf1c96e538/figure-1.-new-window.html.

Utah is a unique state in that over half (55 percent) of its population is made up of members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a religious minority in the rest of the United States.³ Thus, an analysis of Utah will by nature require an analysis of the Church. That such a large portion of the state's population belongs to the same religion most certainly contributes to the strong connectedness of Utahns to each other, as does the fact that many share a heritage of pioneer ancestry. The Church's teachings and practices also promote social connectedness on many levels, including in the family as well as in the community.

FAMILY UNITY (#1) & FAMILY INTERACTION (#8)

Family Unity

The Index measured "family unity" using three variables:

- percent of births in the past year to unmarried women;
- percent of adult women who are married;
- percent of children living in a single-parent family.

Utah has the lowest rate of unwed childbearing, the lowest percent of children living in single-parent homes, and the highest percent of married women.

Utah's high overall ranking on family unity is likely due to a few factors. Utah has a relatively highly-educated population, ranking 13th highest on percent of adults 25 years and older with a bachelor's degree or more.⁴ Highly-educated adults in the United States are far less likely to have children outside of marriage, and they are also more likely to be married.⁵ Furthermore, Utah's population is largely made up of non-Hispanic whites (78.5 percent), who are less likely to have children outside of marriage compared to blacks and Hispanics.⁶ Among all races, those with higher education are less likely to have children outside of marriage, but racial differences in unwed births still persist across education levels.⁷

Utah's rates of unwed childbearing and percent of children in single-parent households are much lower than those of any other state. These differences are also likely due to the large population of Latter-day Saints. Like most religions, Latter-day Saint doctrine teaches that sex and childbearing should take place only within marriage. Their doctrine also teaches that marriage and family relationships are eternal and thus should be built to endure. In a 2014 study using a nationally representative sample of adults ages 18-60, researchers found that Latter-day Saints were by far the least likely among all religious groups and non-religious groups to report having engaged in premarital sex, and also the least likely to agree that "cohabitation is a good idea for couples considering marriage."⁸ Additionally, a 2018 Pew Research Center report found that Latter-day Saints are the most likely of all religious groups and non-religious groups to be

married.⁹ Furthermore, a 2012 Pew Research Center survey found that Latter-day Saints are far more likely than the general public to say that being a good parent is one of the most important things in life (81 percent of Latter-day Saints, compared to 50 percent of the general public) or that having a good marriage is one of the most important things in life (73 percent of Latter-day Saints, compared to 34 percent of the general public).¹⁰

Family Interaction

We measured family interaction using three variables:

- the percent of children who spend four hours or more per weekday watching TV;
- the percent of children who spend four hours or more per weekday on an electronic device (excluding homework);
- the percent of young children who have a family member reading to them every day.

Utah ranks number nine on children's TV watching, meaning the ninth lowest on the percentage of children watching four or more hours of TV per weekday, and number five on children's time spent on electronic devices. But it ranks below average on the percent of young children who have a family member reading to them daily, at number 29.

Children in homes headed by college-educated parents on average spend less time watching TV and on electronic devices, compared to children in non-college-educated homes, potentially explaining part of the reason why Utah ranks relatively low on children's screen time.¹¹ There is also a significant difference in screen time by race, with white children spending much less time watching TV or on computers compared to black and Hispanic children.¹² The Church also places emphasis on family interaction, with members encouraged to set aside one night a week for "Family Home Evening," for example.

The fact that Utah ranks below the middle on the percent of young children with an adult family member who reads to them daily is somewhat surprising, considering children in college-educated households are more likely to be read to every day, as are children who are non-Hispanic white.¹³ Children in married-parent homes are more likely to be read to every day as well, compared to children in single-parent households.¹⁴

SOCIAL SUPPORT (#1)

The Index uses four variables to measure social support: percent of adults who say they get the social support they need, the average number of close friends adults report, the percent of neighbors who say they do favors for each other, and the percent of adults who say they can trust all or most of their neighbors.

Utah ranks first on three of these areas, and ranks second on the fourth area, the percent of people who say they get the social support they need.

Utah's strong social support is likely a function of the religious make-up of the state as well. Latter-day Saint congregations (called "wards") are structured geographically, with those living closest to each other generally being members of the same congregation. Thus, Utahns are often not only neighbors with those living around them, but they frequently are fellow congregants with many of their neighbors as well. Thus, it is unsurprising that Utahns have a high level of trust among neighbors and that neighbors are likely to provide favors for each other. Besides the overlapping nature of neighborhoods with wards, the Church also promotes service among ward members by assigning each member of the ward to look after specific individuals or families within their ward.

PHILANTHROPIC HEALTH (#1)

Another area where Utah ranks number one is on philanthropic health. This is measured by a single variable: the share of people who say they have made a contribution of \$25 or more to a charitable group in the past year.

Utah's philanthropic strength is also likely connected to its large share of Latter-day Saints, as other researchers have noted.¹⁵ Members of the Church are asked to contribute a tenth (a tithe) of their annual earnings to the Church. Nearly 80 percent of Latter-day Saints in the United States say they pay a full tithing, according to the Pew Research Center.¹⁶ Latter-day Saints are also encouraged to help the poor through fasting once a month and then contributing at least the amount they would have spent on the foregone meals to offerings that fund the Church's welfare programs. The Church's welfare system includes food assistance that is provided through "Bishop's storehouses"—grocery distribution centers for those in need—[thrift stores](#), social services, job training, and so forth.¹⁷

COLLECTIVE EFFICACY (#8)

Collective efficacy is measured by the number of violent crimes among every 100,000 people. Utah ranks among the lowest 10 states on violent crime, at number eight, with 215.6 violent crimes per 100,000 people in 2014.

COMMUNITY HEALTH (#10)

The Social Capital Index's measure of community health includes eight measures:

- percent of adults who have volunteered for a group in the past year;
- percent of adults who have attended a public meeting in the past year;

- percent of adults who have worked with neighbors in the past year to fix or improve something;
- percent of adults who have served on a committee as an officer of a group;
- percent of adults who have attended a meeting in the past year where political issues were discussed;
- percent of adults who took part in a march, rally, protest, or demonstration in the past year;
- membership organizations per 1,000 people;
- number of registered non-religious non-profits, including religious congregations, per 1,000 people.

Utah ranked high or at least above average on some of these factors: it ranked number one (the highest) on percent of adults who had volunteered for a group in the past year, number three on percent of adults who had worked with neighbors to improve or fix something, number four on the percent of adults who had served as an officer on a committee, number 11 on percent of adults who had attended a political meeting in the past year, and number 14 on percent of adults who had attended a public meeting in the past year. Religiosity in general is correlated with many of these elements of community involvement; thus, Utah's religiosity is also likely correlated with its relatively high ranking on several of these areas.¹⁸

However, Utah ranked poorly on several other community health factors, particularly on the number of membership organizations per 1,000 people, where they ranked last, as well as on the number of non-religious non-profits plus religious congregations per 1,000 people, where they ranked number 43. The state ranked in the middle (number 26) on the percent who had attended a march, rally, protest, or demonstration in the past year.

Volunteering is more common among those who are married, those who have children, college-educated adults, and non-Hispanic whites, all demographic factors common or relatively common in Utah.¹⁹ The state's high level of volunteering is also likely due to the large amount of volunteering that takes place within the Church. The Church functions entirely with a lay ministry, and most active Latter-day Saints volunteer in their wards. A 2012 University of Pennsylvania study of about 2,700 active Latter-day Saints found that they report volunteering an average of 240 hours per year.²⁰ This is compared to an average of 52 hours annually among active volunteers in the United States.²¹

Surprisingly, Utah ranked relatively low in terms of having a small number of membership organizations as well as a small total number of (combined) non-religious non-profits plus religious congregations. This might also be a byproduct of the state's large population of Latter-day Saints. Other membership organizations or non-profits outside of the Church may not be as necessary because so much of social, charitable, and community life happens within the Church. Fewer membership organizations and non-profits may simply reflect the

centrality of the Church for many Utahns, rather than their lack of associational life. However, it could also mean that those inside the Church are not connecting with those outside of the Church. For example, the Pew Research Center found that nearly three-quarters of Latter-day Saints in Utah say that all or most of their close friends are also Latter-day Saints.²²

However, it is also possible that the poor performance of Utah on these measures reflect bad data. The County Business Patterns data on which the membership organization figures are based implausibly suggest that Utah ranks lowest in the nation in terms of religious membership organizations. For example, the data indicate that Utah has only 196 religious establishments across Salt Lake, Utah, and Davis counties. However, these counties have 414 Latter-day Saint “stakes” (a stake consists of multiple wards) combined.²³ The reason for the discrepancy may be because organizations are only counted if they have paid employees, and because Latter-day Saint congregations are operated solely by volunteers, they would not be counted.

INSTITUTIONAL HEALTH (#30)

Utah ranks below average on institutional health at number 30. Institutional health is measured by five factors:

- voter participation in the 2012 and 2016 elections;
- mail-back response rates for the 2010 census;
- percent of adults who have confidence in corporations to do what’s right;
- percent of adults who have confidence in the media to do what’s right;
- percent of adults who have confidence in public schools to do what’s right.

While Utah scored high on confidence in corporations (ranking third), and ranked relatively high on the Census mail-back rate (at number 15), the state scored low on voter participation (at number 38), and scored the absolute lowest of all states and Washington, D.C. on confidence in the media (at number 51). Utahns’ confidence in public schools ranked roughly in the middle (at number 23).

It is somewhat surprising that Utah has such low voter turnout, given that in the 2012 election Mitt Romney, a fellow Latter-day Saint, was the Republican presidential candidate. Furthermore, Latter-day Saints are encouraged to vote by church leaders at the highest level.²⁴ However, Utahns might be less motivated to vote given the state’s political homogeneity— it has nearly the largest Republican voter demographic in the nation—and thus many political races are non-competitive.²⁵ The state’s strong distrust in the media may also be linked to Utah’s large Republican population, as Republicans are far less likely to trust the media compared to Democrats.²⁶ We would like to have had state-level measures of confidence in local institutions, where Utah might exhibit more confidence than other states.

Overall, Utah is a state that is rich in social capital. Families are strong, individuals are socially connected and trust their neighbors, charitable contributions are high, violent crime is low, and people are volunteering in their communities and helping their neighbors. Its thriving associational life appears to be embedded into the culture of its people, a culture that is the lasting legacy of the original Latter-day Saint pioneers who settled the state back in the nineteenth century.

ENDNOTES

1. Social Capital Project, Joint Economic Committee, “What We Do Together: The State of Associational Life in America,” May 15, 2017, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/analysis?ID=82AEEDDA-B550-481E-BA31-9623B85A20D6>.
2. The Index also measures social capital by county, using a smaller subset of variables.
3. Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*, “Mormons,” <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/mormon/>, accessed January 29, 2019.
4. U.S. Census Bureau, American Fact Finder, “Educational Attainment, 2017 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates,” Table S1501, <https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/searchresults.xhtml?refresh=t>, accessed February 4, 2019.
5. Social Capital Project, Joint Economic Committee, “Rising Unwed Pregnancy and Childbearing across Educational and Racial Groups,” February 14, 2018, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/analysis?ID=A075A2E2-5CD0-406B-86B8-E44BB7A8FD6B>; Pew Research Center, “As U.S. marriage rate hovers at 50%, educational gap in marital status widens,” September 14, 2017, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/09/14/as-u-s-marriage-rate-hovers-at-50-education-gap-in-marital-status-widens/>, accessed January 29, 2019.
6. U.S. Census Bureau, Quick Facts, “Utah,” <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/ut>, accessed January 29, 2019; Social Capital Project, Joint Economic Committee, “Rising Unwed Pregnancy and Childbearing across Educational and Racial Groups.”
7. Elizabeth Wildsmith, Jennifer Manlove, and Elizabeth Cook, “Dramatic increase in the proportion of births outside of marriage in the United States from 1990 to 2016,” *Child Trends*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/dramatic-increase-in-percentage-of-births-outside-marriage-among-whites-hispanics-and-women-with-higher-education-levels>, accessed February 12, 2019.
8. The Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture, *Relationships in America Survey*, 2014, “Premarital sex by religious affiliation,” Figure 12.3, <http://relationshipsinamerica.com/relationships-and-sex/how-common-is-premarital-sex>, accessed January 29, 2019; Ibid. “Cohabitation is a good idea for couples considering marriage,” Figure 21.1, <http://relationshipsinamerica.com/family-attitudes/is-cohabitation-a-good-idea-for-couples-considering-marriage>, accessed January 29, 2019.
9. Pew Research Center, “Share of married adults varies widely across U.S. religious groups,” March 19, 2018, <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/19/share-of-married-adults-varies-widely-across-u-s-religious-groups/>, accessed January 29, 2019.
10. Pew Research Center, *Mormons in America—Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society*, “Life Goals Among Mormons and the General Public,” January 12, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-family-life/>.
11. Victoria Rideout, *The Common Sense census: Media use by kids age zero to eight*, (San Francisco: Common Sense Media, 2017), https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/csm_zerotoeight_fullreport_release_2.pdf, accessed January 29, 2019.
12. Northwestern University, School of Communication, Center on Media and Human Development, “Children, Media, and Race: Media Use Among White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian American Children,” June 2011, <http://cmhd.northwestern.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/SOCconfReportSingleFinal-1.pdf>, accessed January 29, 2019.
13. Ibid.
14. Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent Health, <http://childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=5535&r=1>, accessed January 31, 2019.
15. Philanthropy Roundtable, *The Almanac of American Philanthropy*, “Who Gives Most to

Charity?”, <https://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/almanac/statistics/who-gives>, accessed January 29, 2019.

16. Pew Research Center, *Mormons in America—Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society*, “Tithing,” January 12, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-beliefs-and-practices/>, accessed January 29, 2019.
17. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, “Welfare,” <https://www.lds.org/topics/welfare?lang=eng&old=true>, accessed January 29, 2019.
18. Robert Putnam, “American Grace,” Lecture, Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Princeton University, October 27-28, 2010, https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/p/Putnam_10.pdf, accessed January 29, 2019.
19. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Volunteering in the United States, 2015,” February 25, 2016, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/volun.toc.htm>, accessed January 30, 2019; See also: Social Capital Project, Joint Economic Committee, “Volunteering in America,” September 12, 2017, <https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/republicans/analysis?ID=08655017-18E7-42C4-8BAA-E46172256C46>.
20. Van Evans, Ram Cnaan, and Daniel W. Curtis, “Volunteering Among Latter-Day Saints,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 4 (2013): 827-841.
21. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Volunteering in the United States, 2015.”
22. Pew Research Center, *Mormons in America—Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society*, “Mormon Friendship Networks,” January 12, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/01/12/mormons-in-america-mormon-moment/>, accessed January 31, 2019.
23. Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, <http://ldschurchtemples.org/statistics/units/united-states/utah/>, accessed February 12, 2019. The total number of stakes was calculated by adding the number of stakes and districts for the following temple districts: Bountiful, Draper, Jordan River, Mount Timpanogos, Oquirrh Mountain, Payson, Provo City Center, Provo, and Salt Lake.
24. Newsroom, “First Presidency 2016 Letter Encouraging Political Participation, Voting in US,” October 5, 2016, <https://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/first-presidency-2016-letter-political-participation>, accessed January 30, 2019.
25. Pew Research Center, *Religious Landscape Study*, “Party affiliation by state,” <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/compare/party-affiliation/by/state/>, accessed January 30, 2019; Utah Foundation, “Checking the Box: The Latest on How Utahns Vote,” October 17, 2017, <http://www.utahfoundation.org/reports/checking-box-latest-utahns-vote/>, January 30, 2019.
26. Andrew Dugan and Zac Auter, “Republicans’, Democrats’ Views of Media Accuracy Diverge,” *Gallup*, August 25, 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/216320/republicans-democrats-views-media-accuracy-diverge.aspx>, accessed January 30, 2019.

social capital project

A project of the Joint Economic Committee – Republicans | Chairman, Sen. Mike Lee
jec.senate.gov | G-01 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510 | (202) 224-5171