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UTAH SOCIAL CAPITAL SERIES

PART VI



THE FLOWERING of YOUTH

The Next Generation in Utah

MAY 2022

THE FLOWERING OF YOUTH

Thanks to the following for providing grant support to make this project possible:

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Research Report 800

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INTRODUCTION

The extent to which a society attends to the needs of its children says much about its effort to build social capital into the future. If children are neglected, a family withers on the vine – and the same can be said about a society more generally. If children are nurtured and given opportunities to reach their physical and mental potential, a society will tend to thrive. Often those opportunities entail the cultivation of both hard and soft skills, as well as the building of social capital from an early age.

The extent of a community's focus on the next generation also says something about how socially invested a citizenry is in the future of a place. Furthermore, family itself is a key source of social capital, with larger families often forming the threads for larger social networks.¹

This installment in the Utah Social Capital Series seeks to measure the extent to which our state is focused on the needs of the next generation. We measure this future focus by looking at investments in recreation and public schools, and how robust youth organizations are. We also look at the most basic metric for a focus on the next generation: the begetting of children.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, the Utah Foundation hosted Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam to keynote its annual luncheon. He is widely viewed as one of the most influential scholars on the topic of social capital. The topic of Putnam's address focused on the widening opportunity gap among American children, with declining interactions between social classes and growing disparity in educational and recreational offerings. The consequences project into adulthood.²

For instance, Putnam noted that team sports were once wide open to all children, whereas today lower-income children may not be able to afford the hefty fees and travel they entail. As the Utah State University Families in Sports Lab has documented, participation in youth sports now requires significant investments, and youth participation in sports generally has declined precipitously since 2008.³ This means many children are

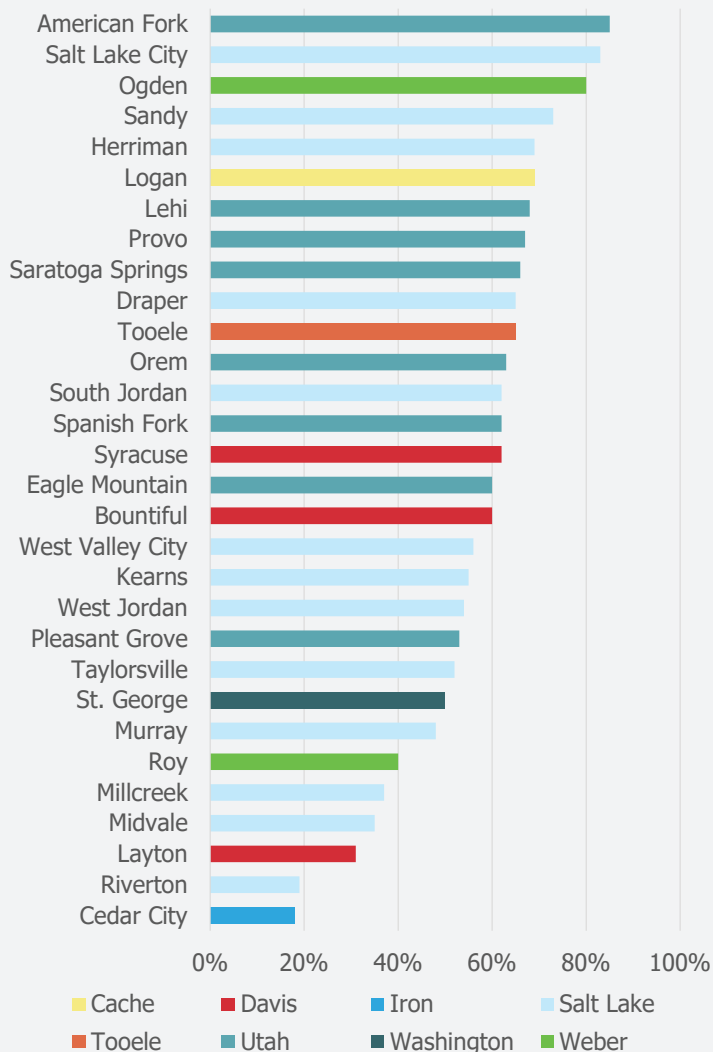


KEY FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT

- Though Utah's public investments in parks and recreation (relative to income) have generally been in decline, the state remains in the top five nationally.
- Utah's state and local expenditures on primary and secondary education per \$1,000 of personal income declined by a notable amount from 2008 to 2019, falling more than one-fifth. Utah is now below the national average on this metric.
- While Utah's birth rate has been in precipitous decline, the Beehive State still leads the nation.
- Utah and neighboring Arizona are last in the nation when it comes to the number of youth organizations per 1,000 residents. This is not typical of the region: Wyoming and Montana are the nation's most prolific.
- The decline in funding effort both for education and recreation in Utah and elsewhere comes alongside a decline in the birth rate. It is possible that these downward trends are intertwined. Taken together, however, the trends suggest the focus on the next generation has become less sharp.

Utah's cities vary widely by the proportion of residents living near parks.

Figure 1: Percent of Residents Living within a 10-Minute Walk of a Park, by City, 2020



Source: The Trust for Public Land.

missing out on the chance to build soft skills like grit and teamwork. It also means reduced opportunities to build social capital.

Youth team sports participation is only one of several noteworthy trends. For instance, American birth rates are on a downward slide. Further, class segregation remains a feature of American schools, and the relative investment in schools is in decline. Public investments in recreation are also in decline. As a nation, the U.S. is seemingly losing interest in the next generation. The following analysis seeks to explore the extent to which Utah is tracking – or bucking – this trend.

INVESTMENT IN PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

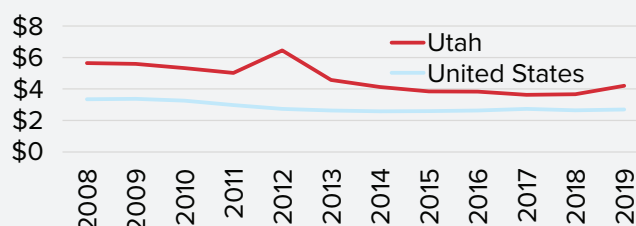
Access to parks and recreation is a critical indicator for public health. In a 2010 study, researchers suggested that more government spending on parks and recreation has positive implications for overall mortality rates.⁴ Parks also provide social value for communities, including children.

Utah's Investment in Parks and Recreation Over Time

Though Utah's overall investment in parks and recreation does not stand out, opportunities for recreation in various parts of Utah abound. According to the Trust for Public Land, most of the larger cities in Utah are near or above the national average in the percentage of population within a short walk of a public park. American Fork, Salt Lake City and Ogden stand out as far above average. By contrast, Riverton and Cedar City are well below the national average.⁵

Utah's parks and recreation investments relative to income have declined significantly.

Figure 2: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal income, Utah and the United States, 2008-2019

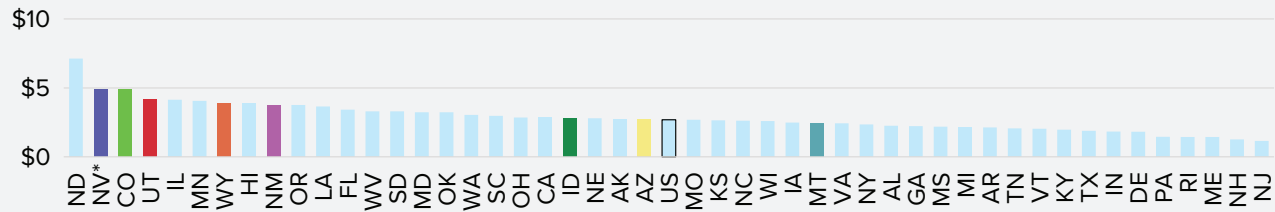


For source information on the remainder of the figures, see the Appendix.

That said, Utah's relative public investments in parks and recreation have generally been in decline. While those investments were at \$5.65 per \$1,000 of personal income in 2008 and peaked above \$6 in 2012, by 2018 they had declined below \$4. However, spending recovered somewhat in 2019 – to \$4.20.

Utah is a top-ranked state in relative parks and recreation spending.

Figure 3: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal income by State, 2019



* Data for Nevada are from 2018.

Utah and the Nation

Utah has consistently outspent the nation on parks and recreation. However, the gap is narrowing. Utah spent nearly double the national amount a decade ago. Since then, national spending relative to income stabilized, while Utah's relative spending generally continued to decline (though 2019 saw a bump that put it near the 2014 level).

Still, as of 2019, Utah remained among the top five states in terms of relative spending on parks and recreation.

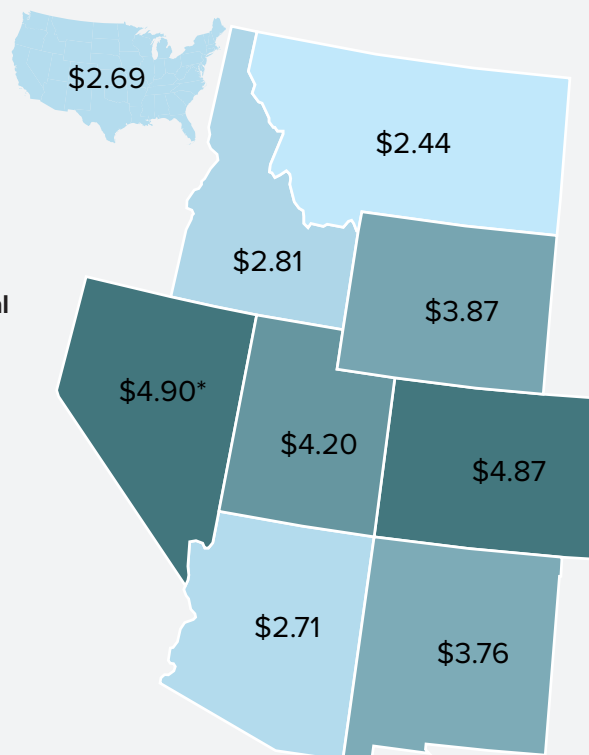
Parks and Recreation in the Mountain States

Most of the eight Mountain States ranked in the top 10 nationally for parks and recreation spending per \$1,000 of personal income. Along with Utah, Nevada and Colorado were in the very top tier in 2019, with Wyoming and New Mexico also spending relatively aggressively. Only Montana spent below the national average. (See endnotes for important information on Nevada's data.)⁶

Most of the Mountain States spend well above the national average on parks and rec.

Figure 4: State and Local Expenditures on Parks and Recreation per \$1,000 of Personal income in the Mountain States, 2019

* Data for Nevada are from 2018.



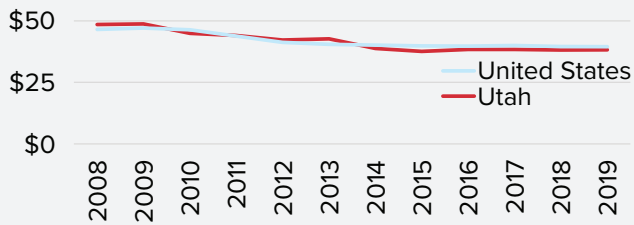
SCHOOL SPENDING

Education spending may be the most direct investment a society can make in its children. A successful public school system prepares its students to succeed in a post-secondary setting, where they will acquire the skills that allow for middle-class employment. A successful school system will thereby open the way for economic mobility and the acquisition of social capital.

It should be noted that the success of a system does not depend entirely on funding levels. As Utah Foundation research has previously revealed, higher levels of investment do not correlate with higher performance.⁷ However, at a certain point spending can become decisive, and effectively targeted programmatic investments will yield positive results. And, more importantly for the purposes of this report, school spending provides a useful metric for examining a community's commitment to the next generation.

Utah's education spending effort has declined by a notable amount.

Figure 5: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income, Utah and the United States, 2008-2019



While private schools and post-secondary institutions are critical components of a society's efforts in this regard, K-12 public education investments provide the most straightforward barometer, allowing for simple apples-to-apples comparisons. We use the education spending effort based on income, rather than the popular method of per-pupil spending, because it provides a more direct indication of a state's relative focus on education spending.

Utah's Public School Investments Over Time

Utah's state and local expenditures on primary and secondary education per \$1,000 of personal income declined by a notable amount from 2008 to 2019, falling from \$48.52 to \$38.26 – more than one-fifth.

FORMAT OF THE UTAH SOCIAL CAPITAL SERIES

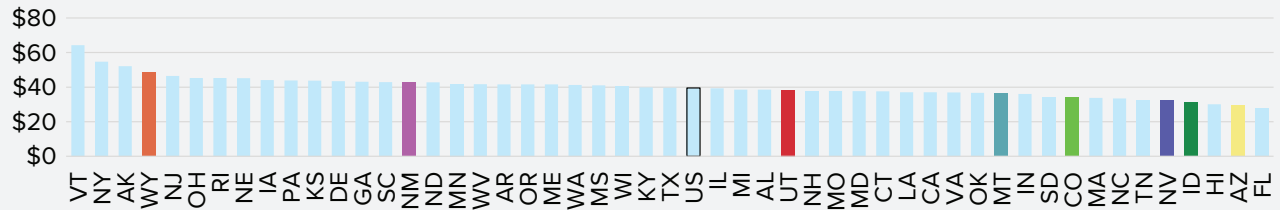
Social capital refers to the bonds between neighbors and among networks, which they can use to benefit themselves and the group as a whole. Social capital takes many forms. With this series, the Utah Foundation seeks to be comprehensive, gathering data on roughly 30 metrics. We sorted them into seven categories:

- Civic Engagement
- Social Trust
- Community Life
- Family Health
- Social Cohesion
- Future Focus
- Social Mobility

In determining the metrics, we explored other social capital analyses, including the indices created by Joint Economic Council and by Harvard University political scientist Robert Putnam. From these, we culled certain metrics that are not reproduced at regular intervals, which could inhibit comparisons over time. We also added a number of factors either because they would be of particular interest to Utah or because they allow us to flesh out our analysis of certain topic areas. Our analysis compares Utah to the U.S. at large and to the other Mountain States (Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico and Wyoming). It also examines trends over time. There is no absolute consensus on how to measure social capital.

Utah's K-12 spending effort is now lower than the national average.

Figure 6: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income by State, 2019



Utah and the Nation

Utah's relative public school spending has closely tracked the nation at large over time. However, by 2019 it stood below the national average, putting Utah in the bottom half of states.

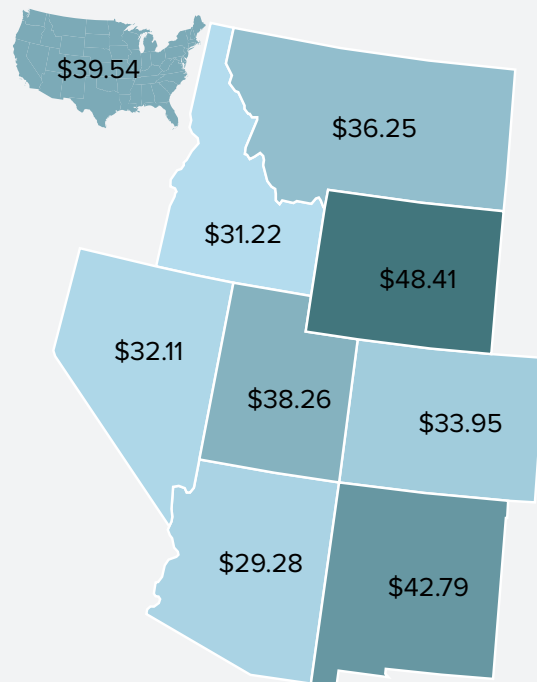
School Spending in the Mountain States

Among the Mountain States, only Wyoming stands out as making a high relative investment in K-12 public education, placing in the top five nationally as of 2019. Four of the eight states in the region were in the bottom 10.

So while Utah ranked third among the Mountain States, the region as a whole exhibits a low education spending effort. Utah's spending effort is only three-fourths of Wyoming's. All eight states have seen a decrease in funding effort over time.

Utah's education spending effort ranked third among the low-spending Mountain States.

Figure 7: State and Local Expenditures on Primary and Secondary Education per \$1,000 of Personal Income in the Mountain States, 2019



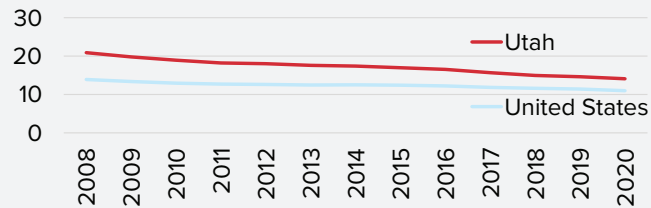
BIRTH RATES

Utah's exceptionally large families are emblematic of its culture. They bespeak a direct focus on the next generation – the very essence of parenthood. As noted, large families can also provide enhanced social capital. The built-in network of siblings, cousins, etc., often allows for lifelong relationships that can help weave a large network of connections.

However, it is clear that the size of the Utah family is not what it used to be. And there is little to suggest that the trends in place now are about to change.

Utah's birth rate has declined rapidly.

Figure 8: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents, Utah and the United States, 2008-2020



The Trend in Utah's Birth Rate

Utah's birth rate dropped precipitously from 2008 to 2020, from 21 births per 1,000 residents to nearly 14. This represents a major reconfiguring of Utah's population that will manifest in countless ways during the coming years, in arenas ranging from education to public health to employment.

Utah and the Nation

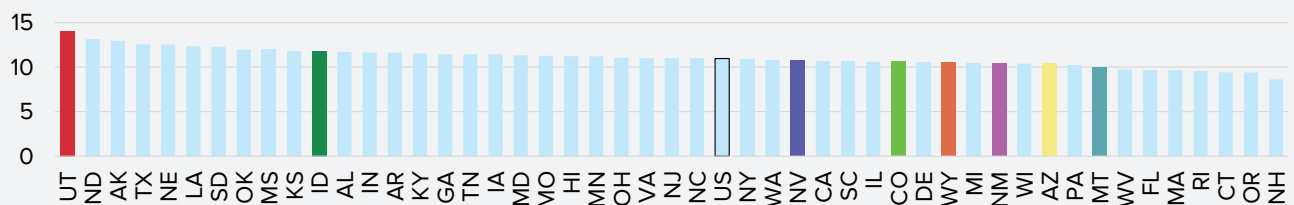
Birth rates have been in decline nationally. Utah's decline in birth rates significantly exceeds the national decline. Whereas the nation has seen only a modest decline, from 13.9 births per 1,000 residents to 11.4, Utah has seen its birth rate drop by nearly one-third.

Part of the decline stems from a reduction in teen pregnancy. The birth rate for teenagers nationally in 2020 fell to 15.4 births per 1,000 teenage girls aged 15 to 19, down nearly 70% since 2007. The Utah teen birth rate was far lower than the national average, at 10.7.⁸

Still, Utah's birth rate remains well ahead of the nation's at large, and as of 2020 it was clearly the nation's highest. Birth rates declined in every single state in 2020 amidst the coronavirus pandemic.

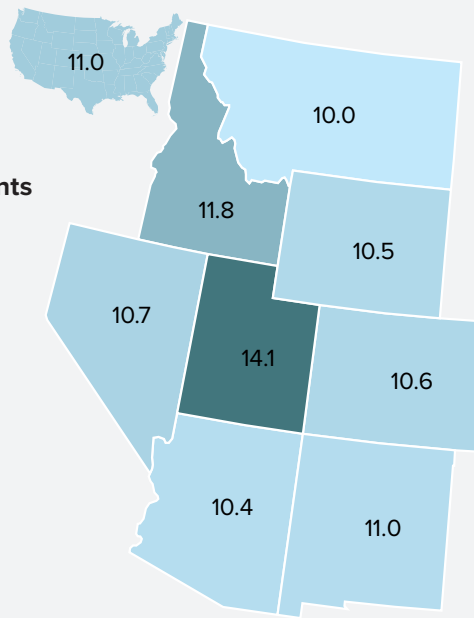
Utah had the nation's highest birth rate in 2020.

Figure 9: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents by State, 2020



Utah's birth rate far exceeded all other Mountain States.

Figure 10: Birth Rate per 1,000 Residents in the Mountain States, 2020



Birth Rates in the Mountain States

The Mountain States do not have particularly high birth rates. In fact, with the exceptions of Utah and Idaho, all are below the national average. Despite its decline, Utah's remarkable birth rate far exceeded all other Mountain States in 2020.

YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

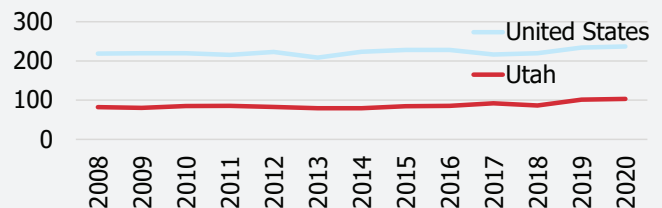
Civic engagement among youth can have positive impacts on their development. Studies suggest that young people who are more civically engaged show a higher capacity to resolve social and interpersonal issues. Further, there is a positive relation between youth civic involvement and their future contributions to civil society.⁹ Youth involvement is an important indicator of social capital, as it implies a more engaged and tight-knit society. The extent to which a society mobilizes organizational support and resources for youth is also indicative of its focus on future generations.

Utah Youth Organizations Over Time

Utah has seen a notable increase in the number of youth development nonprofits. From 2009 to 2020, the youth groups per 1,000 youths aged 5 to 17 increased by more than 20%. This may be in part because Utah has so much room to grow, with a relatively small number of youth groups in a state with such a youthful population.

While Utah has a low number of youth groups, the number is growing.

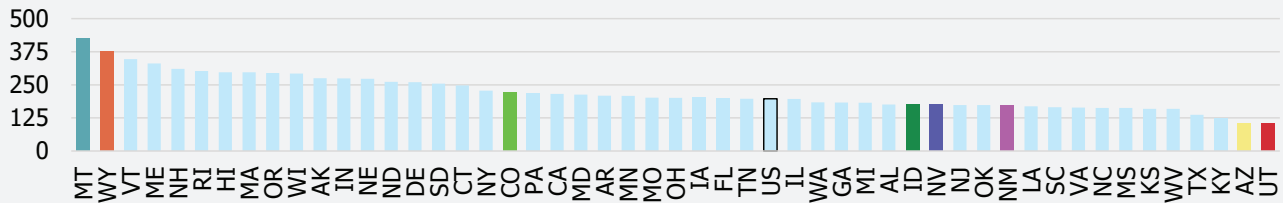
Figure 11: Youth Organizations per 1,000 Youth Aged 5-17, Utah and the United States, 2009-2020



Utah has seen a notable increase in the number of youth development nonprofits. From 2009 to 2020, the youth groups per 1,000 youths aged 5 to 17 increased by more than 20%.

Utah the nation's smallest ratio of youth groups.

Figure 12: Youth Organizations per 1,000 Youth Aged 5-17 by State, 2020



Utah and the Nation

The number of youth organizations in Utah remains far below the national average. As of 2020, Utah had the nation's lowest number of youth groups per 1,000 youths aged 5 to 17. However, the ratio has been increasing in Utah.

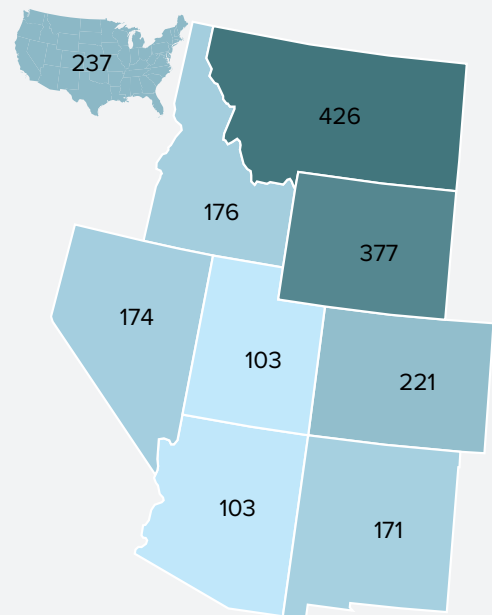
It appears counterintuitive that such a youthful state has such a low number of youth organizations for its youth population. But it may be because a single entity – the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – is so strongly engaged in the lives of its youth members.

Youth Organizations in the Mountain States

The Mountain States show a wide range of performance when it comes to youth organizations per 1,000 children aged 5 to 17. Montana and Wyoming are the top two states in the nation and have far higher numbers than any other state. Arizona and Utah are at the opposite end of the spectrum, ranked next to last and dead last, respectively. The other four Mountain States hover more closely to the national average.

Utah joins Arizona with a very low number of youth organizations.

Figure 13: Youth Organizations per 1,000 Youth Aged 5-17 in the Mountain States, 2020





Taken together, the trends suggest the focus on the next generation has become less sharp.

CONCLUSION

When it comes to our measures of Utah's focus on future generations, the bag is decidedly mixed. This is true of all Mountain States.

The Mountain States as a group tend to invest heavily in parks and recreation. Only Montana's relative spending is below the national average. Utah is in the top 10 nationally, joined there by four of the other seven states in the region. However, Utah's parks and rec spending relative to income is declining, as it is in most other Mountain States.

Relative school spending varies significantly across the region. Wyoming's K-12 public education spending effort is among the highest in the nation, whereas Arizona's is nearly last. Utah is a bit below the national average on this metric, and has been closely mirroring a downward national trend – though below the nation for the past five years.

The birth rate in Utah is also trending downward, but it has been consistently high compared to other states and in 2020 was clearly the highest in the nation. In this regard, Utah stands out in a region with low birth rates. Among the Mountain States, only one other state (Idaho) bests the national birth rate.

Utah is at the opposite end of the states when it comes to youth organizations. This is counterintuitive in a state with such a young population, though the small number of individual organizations may be at least in part attributable to the strong engagement of a single organization (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) in the lives of so many children. Regardless, no other states has a lower number of youth organizations per 1,000 children aged 5 to 17. Interestingly, two other Mountain States (Montana and Wyoming) have far and away the nation's highest ratio.

Across all four metrics, Utah looks unremarkable – very strong in a couple of areas, mediocre on another and last in the nation on a fourth. Among the Mountain States, Wyoming appears to be the most consistently strong in its focus on the next generation, leaving aside its unremarkable birth rate. Arizona appears to be the weakest. The decline in funding effort both for education and recreation in Utah and elsewhere comes alongside a decline in the birth rate. It is possible that these downward trends are intertwined. Taken together, however, the trends suggest the focus on the next generation has become less sharp.

APPENDIX

Per Capita Investments in Public Parks and Playgrounds

Every five years (years ending with a 7 and a 2) the U.S. Census takes a census of local governments expenditures and revenues. In all other years, it also publishes similar data based on a sample of governments. The Utah Foundation uses the expenditures listed as “Parks and Recreation” as the base of this metric.¹⁰ The Utah Foundation made these raw expenditure data comparable by putting the expenditures in terms of the personal income in each state, per thousand dollars. This roughly translates as: for every \$1,000 of income earned by a resident, the government spends the reported amount on parks and recreation. Quarterly personal income data by state was pulled from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and roughly converted to a fiscal year by averaging the quarterly annualized personal income of the first two quarters of the year with the previous two quarters of the previous year.¹¹

Per Capita Investments in Public Schools

Every five years (years ending with a 7 and a 2) the U.S. Census takes a census of local governments expenditures and revenues. Every other year (years NOT ending with a 7 or a 2), it publishes similar data based on a sample of governments. The Utah Foundation uses the expenditures listed as “Elementary & secondary [education]” as the base of this metric.¹² The Utah Foundation made these raw expenditure data comparable by putting the expenditures in terms of the personal income in each state, per thousand dollars. This roughly translates as: for every \$1,000 of income earned by a resident, the government spends the reported amount on elementary and secondary education. Quarterly personal income data by state was pulled from the Bureau of Economic Analysis and roughly converted to a fiscal year by averaging the quarterly annualized personal income of the first two quarters of the year with the previous two quarters of the previous year.¹³

Birth Rates

Birth rate data was collected from the Center of Disease Controls database on Natality, 2007-2020.¹⁴ Birth rates are calculating by looking at the births per 1,000 residents.

Youth Organizations per 1,000 Youth Aged 5-17

Youth organization data are gathered from the IRS Business Master File which lists nonprofit organizations registered or active with the IRS. The Utah Foundation used the files hosted by the Urban Institute.¹⁵ To ensure that we counted only active organizations, we restricted the count to organizations filing within the previous two years and those filing with more than \$0 in gross receipts.¹⁶ Nonprofit organizations are categorized based on the National Taxonomy of Exempt Entities (NTEE) code. In order to look at just youth organizations, we restricted the count to those where the first NTEE digit is “O” which represents “Youth Development” organizations. In 2017, several states were missing data. In these cases, the data were calculated by averaging their 2016 and 2018 numbers.

The NTEE classification used to identify the type of organization is not complete in the IRS file, so the NCCS systematically created a version of the NTEE classification to fill in the gaps. Because these were not reported by the organizations themselves, there is a possibility of misclassification.

ENDNOTES

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- 2 For a full discussion, see Putnam, Robert D., *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016.
- 3 Project Play, “Survey: Most Kids Quit Sports by Age 11,” Aspen Institute, August 1, 2019, www.aspenprojectplay.org/national-youth-sport-survey/kids-quit-most-sports-by-age-11.
- 4 J. Tom Mueller et al., “The relationship between parks and recreation per capita spending on mortality from 1980 to 2010: A fixed effects model,” *PMC*, (2019). www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6377401/.
- 5 The Trust for Public Land offers a city-by-city analysis at www.tpl.org/parkscore.
- 6 The U.S. Census Bureau reported much higher levels of Nevada spending for Fiscal Year 2019 – \$9.94 per \$1,000 of personal income. Because this number was such an outlier the Utah Foundation investigated the reason for such a spike. The census data indicated that the spike in spending came from municipal spending on capital projects. However, after reviewing municipal finances for major municipalities in Nevada, the Utah Foundation could not corroborate any spike in spending. For the purposes of this report, we used Nevada’s 2018 number (still one of the highest in the nation) and compared it against the region’s 2019 data.
- 7 See Utah Foundation, *Making the Grade? K-12 Outcomes and Spending in Utah*, August 2019, www.utahfoundation.org/reports/making-the-grade-k-12-outcomes-and-spending-in-utah/.
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