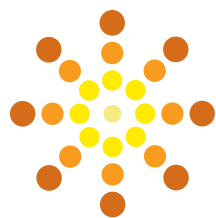
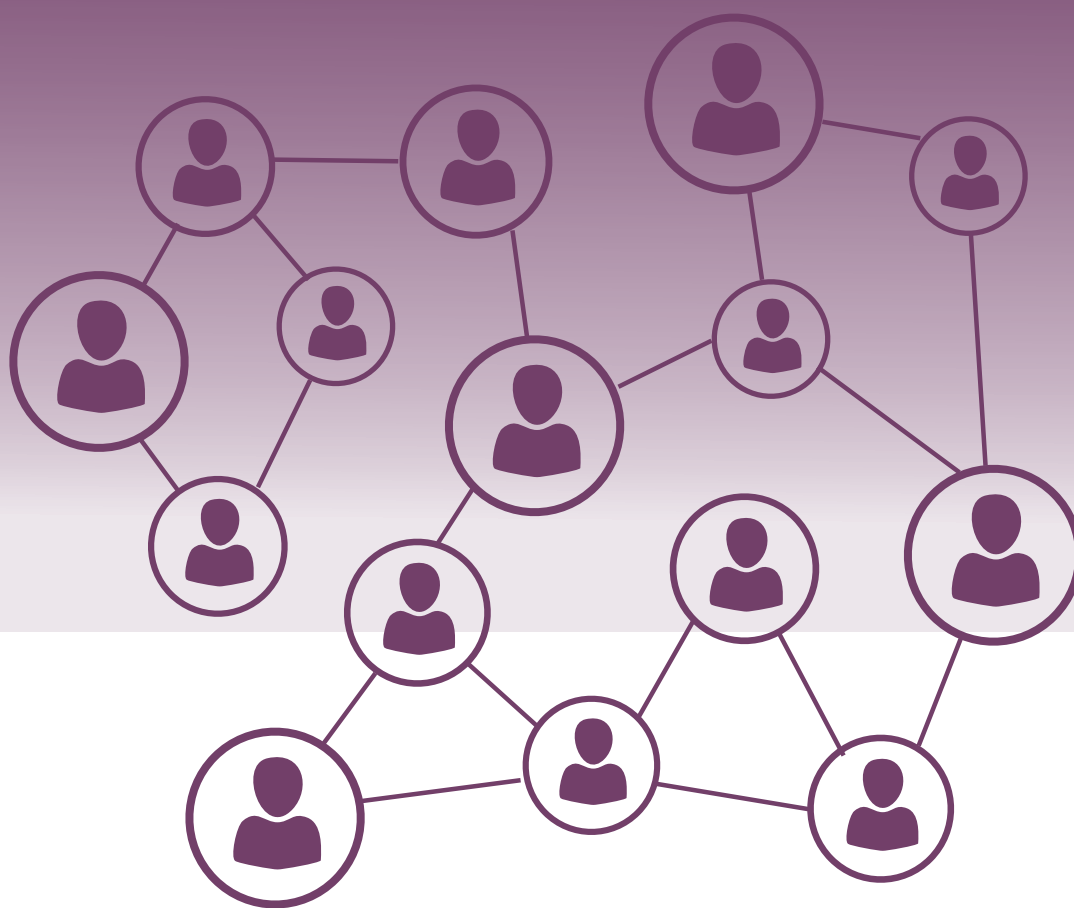


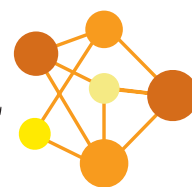
Tenets and Truths

How Social Trust Ties into Social Capital



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**SOCIAL
CAPITAL
INDEX**



TENETS AND TRUTHS

HOW SOCIAL TRUST TIES INTO SOCIAL CAPITAL

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About the Utah Foundation

Since 1945, leaders, legislators, and community members have relied upon the **illuminating, independent, and nonpartisan public-policy research** produced by the Utah Foundation to support informed decision-making on topics that matter most. As a 501(c)3 with broad community support and a 60-member board, the Utah Foundation exists to empower **civic engagement as the foundation for enhanced quality of life for Utahns.**

INTRODUCTION

Successful social interactions depend on trust. Social trust has major implications for the prosperity of an economy, the health of a democracy, and the strength of a community's social fabric. As people develop social trust, communities develop stronger social cohesion, stability, integration, and economic mobility.¹ This is all tied to high levels of social capital.

No honest individual prefers to do business with someone who might be a fraudster or in a place where the politicians demand pay-offs. Nor does anyone prefer to live in a neighborhood where the neighbors might rob or beat them.

Unfortunately, surveys indicate that social trust in the United States has declined dramatically on multiple fronts. This can be seen in the levels of trust in government, institutions, the media, and one another.²

Turning that around is of the utmost importance. The rise of distrust affects everyday interactions and transactions, often limiting an individual's ability to build strong social connections and networks. It can prevent engagement across diverse groups, weakening the formation of certain types social capital.³ Furthermore, distrust can reinforce economic stratification.⁴

¹ Newton, Kenneth, Dietlind Stolle, and Sonja Zmerli, 2017, "Social and Political Trust," in Uslaner, The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.38. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.20>. And Herreros, Francisco and Henar Criado, 2009, "Social Trust, Social Capital and Perceptions of Immigration," Political Studies, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 337-355. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00738.x>.

² Joint Economic Committee, 2021, "An Overview of Social Capital in America", . *Social Capital Project Vol. 1, U.S. Congress*, p.29, https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/8cb559c4-3764-4706-9009-b4d8565ec820/scp-volume-1-digital-final.pdf.

³ Moore, Mathew D. and Nicholas L. Recker, "Social Capital Groups and Crime in Urban Counties," *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 655-667. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1197609>

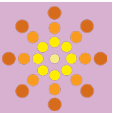
⁴ Rothstein, Bo, 2018, "How the Trust Trap Perpetuates Inequality," *Scientific American*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-the-trust-trap-perpetuates-inequality/>.

Social Capital

Simply put, social capital refers to the ways in which people utilize networks and social connections to benefit themselves and their communities. Social capital has numerous direct and indirect benefits, as highlighted in the introductory report of the Utah Foundation's Social Capital Index project: *Foundations and Frameworks: A Primer on Social Capital and Why It's Important*.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS REPORT

- Utah has the second-best social trust sub-index score in the nation, and the best sub-index score among the Mountain States.
- Of four social trust indicators measuring crime, Utah was among the top 12 states for every indicator, and either first or second among the Mountain States for every indicator.
- From 2022 to 2024, Utah had the best rate in the nation for breach-of-trust penalties.
- Utah's social trust sub-index score has continued to improve over the past 12 years – primarily driven by falling rates of fraud convictions.
- Most Mountain States and the nation at large have experienced declining rates of fraud and public corruption over the past 12 years.



Numerous ad hoc national attitude surveys look to measure social trust. This installment in the Social Capital Index project aims to measure social trust through four indicators that researchers can revisit consistently at the state level over time:

- Convictions for fraud
- Penalties for breach of trust
- Public corruption convictions
- Violent crime rates

BACKGROUND

Social trust can be described as the extent to which people believe that other people in their community will do the right thing most of the time. When such trust is high, people are more likely to work together, collaborate during crises, and achieve productive political outcomes. Such collaboration may lead to an increase in volunteerism, where individuals are more likely to contribute to charities and engage in other acts of civic virtue.⁵

Societies that trust more are distinguishable for their good government, minimal corruption and crime rates, and greater security and equality.⁶ Moreover, individuals in societies with higher social trust are willing to engage in transactions and cooperate with those they do not know.⁷

Declining Social Trust

Various analyses have documented a decline in attitudes reflecting social trust. For instance, one major survey found that whereas 57% of Americans in 2007 had trust in the wisdom of the American people in making political decisions, that number had plummeted to about one-third by 2015 and to under one-quarter by 2023.⁸

⁵ Putnam, Robert D., 2000, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community," *New York: Simon and Schuster*, pp. 136, <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Bowling-Alone-Revised-and-Updated/Robert-D-Putnam/9781982130848>.

⁶ Newton, Kenneth, Dietlind Stolle, and Sonja Zmerli, 2017, "Social and Political Trust," in Uslaner, *The Oxford Handbook of Social and Political Trust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), p.40. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274801.013.20>.

⁷ Herreros, Francisco and Henar Criado, 2009, "Social Trust, Social Capital and Perceptions of Immigration," *Political Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 337. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00738.x>; Cook, Karen S. and Jacob Reidhead, 2022 "Social Trust," in Melenovsky, *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy, Politics, and Economics* (Taylor & Francis), p. 439, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367808983>.

⁸ Dimock, Michael, 2020, "How Americans View Trust, Facts, and Democracy Today," *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pew.org/en/trust/archive/winter-2020/how-americans-view-trust-facts-and-democracy-today>. Pew Research Center, 2023, "In divided Washington, Americans have highly negative views of both parties' leaders" page 19, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2023/04/PP_2023.04.07_100-days_REPORT.pdf.

Trust in government itself has also declined. After an upswing in the late 1990s, trust in government began to decline after 2000, dropping from 50% who trusted Washington most of the time to 22% by 2024, which was up from a low point several year earlier.⁹ Trust in the news media has plummeted, particularly among conservatives and independents, with Gallup recording a decline from over 70% in the 1970s to just over 30% in 2024.¹⁰

Much of the discussion of social trust in recent years has focused on either a deepening values divide or a decline in trust in institutions. However, the decline in trust extends to individuals as well, with interpersonal distrust particularly acute among younger Americans.¹¹

Social Trust and Crime

Criminologists have considered the connection between social trust and crime. Though measures of social trust, such as crime, broadly encompass the dynamics of a community or individuals, there are multiple reasons why evaluating crime and similar determinants can explain social trust and social capital. Crime can explain social trust as it is an extension of what is socially acceptable and unacceptable, as established by civic norms.¹² For instance, social trust can reduce criminal behavior due to the potential guilt and shame connected with crime.¹³

Social trust implies that individuals trust strangers and are trustworthy to those they do not know, thereby necessitating peaceful mediation to resolve conflicts and addressing collective action issues, such as free riding. Consequently, as social trust increases, such behavior tends to decrease.¹⁴

Various studies have examined the relationship between social trust and crime across countries, revealing connections to reduced homicide rates, property crime, and corruption.¹⁵

⁹ Pew Research Center, 2024, "Trust in government: 1958-2024," <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/06/24/public-trust-in-government-1958-2024/>.

¹⁰ Megan Brenan, October 2024, "Americans' trust in media remains at trend low," *Gallup*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/651977/americans-trust-media-remains-trend-low.aspx>.

¹¹ Gramlich, John, 2019 "Young Americans are less trusting of other people – and key institutions – than their elders," *Pew Research Center*, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2019/08/06/young-americans-are-less-trusting-of-other-people-and-key-institutions-than-their-elders/>; Megan Brenan, October 2024, "Americans' trust in media remains at trend low," *Gallup*, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/651977/americans-trust-media-remains-trend-low.aspx>.

¹²

¹³ Buonanno, Paolo, Daniel Montolio, and Paolo Vanin, 2009, "Does Social Capital Reduce Crime?" *The Journal of Law & Economic*, Vol. 52, No. 1, pp. 145-170. <https://doi.org/10.1086/595698>

¹⁴ Herreros, Francisco and Henar Criado, 2009, "Social Trust, Social Capital and Perceptions of Immigration," *Political Studies*, Vol. 57, No. 2, pp. 339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2008.00738.x>; Lederman, Daniel, Norman Loayza, and Ana Maria Menedez, 2002, "Violent Crime: Does Social Capital Matter?" *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, Vol. 50, No. 3, pp. 509-539. <https://doi.org/10.1086/342422>.

¹⁵ Lederman, Loayza, & Menéndez, p. 529.; Cook, Karen S. & Jacob Reidhead, "Social Trust," in Meleynovsky, C.M., ed., *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy, Politics, and Economic* (New York: Routledge, 2022), p. 446.; Moore, Matthew D. & Nicholas L. Recker, "Social Capital Groups and Crime in Urban Counties," *Deviant Behavior* Vol. 38, No. 6, pp. 655-667.

In addition to these reasons, Robert Putnam describes the dynamic between crime and social capital, stating that social capital has a negative correlation with crime.¹⁶ When individuals are connected through social capital and networks, they are more likely to comply with the rules and laws.¹⁷

Perceptions and observations of crime are related to the amount of trust individuals in the community have in one another. A recent Gallup poll found that 25% of respondents described crime as an “extremely serious” issue, and another survey stated roughly two-thirds of individuals believe crime is increasing.¹⁸ Studies connect these unfounded perceptions of crime with higher levels of distrust, which in turn can lead to greater fear of crime, adding to declines in social trust.¹⁹ However, working to increase levels of social trust can reverse this downward cycle.²⁰

¹⁶ Putnam, Robert D, 2001, “Social Capital: Measurement and Consequences,” *Isma: Canadian Journal of Policy Research* Vol. 2, pp. 41-51. <https://smg.media.mit.edu/library/putnam.pdf>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Gallup, 2024, “Crime,” www.news.gallup.com/poll/1603/crime.aspx; Ehrenhalt, Alan, 2025, “Crime is Falling. Why Don’t Americans Believe It?” *Governing*, <https://www.governing.com/urban/crime-is-falling-why-dont-americans-believe-it>.

¹⁹ Han, Sehee, 2020, “Compositional and Contextual Associations of Social Capital and Fear of Crime,” *Deviant Behavior*, Vol. 42, No. 6, pp. 718-732, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2020.1789295>.

²⁰ Adams, Richard E. & Richard T. Serpe, 2000, “Social Integration, Fear of Crime, and Life Satisfaction,” *Sociological Perspectives* Vol. 43, No. 4, pp. 605-629, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1389550>; Gibson, Chris L. et al., 2006, “Social Integration, Individual Perceptions of Collective Efficacy, and Fear of Crime in Three Cities,” *Justice Quarterly* Vol. 19, No. 3, pp. 537-564, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418820200095341>; Ferguson, Kristin & Charles H. Mindel, 2007, “Modeling Fear of Crime in Dallas Neighborhoods: A Test of Social Capital Theory,” *Crime & Delinquency* Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 322-349, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128705285039>; Zhao, Jihong Solomon, Brian Lawton, & Dennis Longmire, 2010, “An Examination of the Micro-Level Crime-Fear of Crime Link,” *Crime & Delinquency* Vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 19-44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128710386203>.



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Measuring Social Trust

In this report, the Utah Foundation does not examine social trust in terms of attitudes, such as those gathered through population surveys. Instead, we examine social trust in terms of factors that generally promote social trust. We look at fraud convictions to get a sense of the trustworthiness of transactions; we look at penalties for breach of trust to understand how often people used their trusted positions to a nefarious advantage; we look at public corruption convictions to explore how trustworthy public officials may be; and we look at violent crime rates to understand how much people should feel safe in their interactions with strangers. We took this approach because those data points are easier to track over time and compare across geographies. Social trust surveys do not occur with sufficient consistency over time and geography for this series. At any rate, some social capital scholars argue that social trust attitudes reflect realities and vice versa.²¹

The Utah Foundation's efforts to explain social capital through measures promoting social trust will help deepen the understanding of its impact on social capital. These insights may spark further discussions to enhance economic activity, people's well-being, and community life, further emphasizing the role that social trust plays in a thriving society.²²

²¹ Putnam, Robert D., 2000, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community," *New York: Simon and Schuster*, pp. 138, <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Bowling-Alone-Revised-and-Updated/Robert-D-Putnam/9781982130848>.

²² Yann, Algan, 2018, "Trust and Social Capital" in Stiglitz, Joseph E., Jean-Paul Fitoussi, Martine Durand, eds., *For Good Measure Advancing Research on Well-being Metrics Beyond GDP* (Paris: OECD), pp. 286, https://www.yann-algan.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Algan-2018_Ch.-10-Trust-and-Social-Capital_OECD.pdf.



Police Department (St. George, Utah) by 'Manway' under license (CC-BY-SA 3.0)

FRAUD CONVICTIONS

Fraudsters damage social trust, creating a riskier environment for doing business. Where embezzlement or financial scams abound, social trust is eroded, resulting in lower levels of social capital.²³ This section focuses solely on fraud, which includes cases of theft and embezzlement. It utilizes data from the U.S. Sentencing Commission, which provides sentencing statistics for each judicial district, the districts within each judicial circuit, and the districts within each state, allowing for a state-by-state comparison.²⁴

Because the judicial process can span years, convictions often occur years after the initial crime. To better isolate trends, this section uses rolling three-year averages to smooth out bumps and dips of individual years. However, using three-year averages may make it more difficult to identify changes in recent trends.

This indicator measures convictions, excluding data on acquitted individuals, those with charges dropped, and unreported cases.

²³ Park, Chuljin Albert, 2017, "Weathering the Storm: Social Capital Repair and Performance Improvements After Financial Fraud," *doctoral dissertation published by Penn State University*, <https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/13896czp138>.

²⁴ United States Sentencing Commission, 2025, "Data Reports by Geography," *United States Sentencing Commission*, www.ussc.gov/research/data-reports/geography. The reports include drug cases, immigration, firearms and other cases that constitute federal crime.

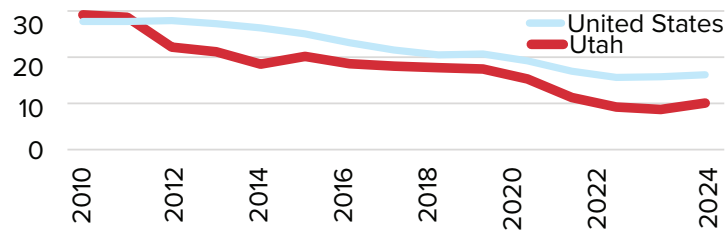


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FRAUD CONVICTIONS DASHBOARD

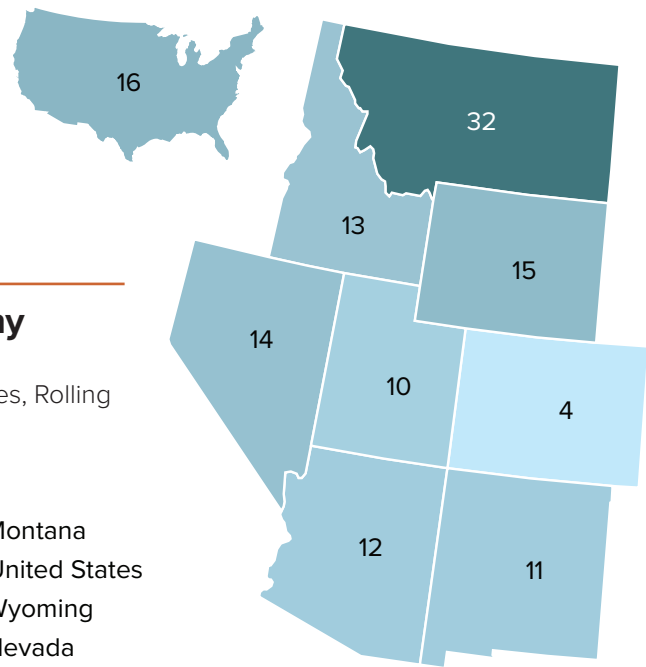
Fraud convictions have a declining trend over the past 15 years.

Figure 1.1: Fraud Convictions per Million, Utah and the United States, Rolling Three-Year Average, 2010-2024



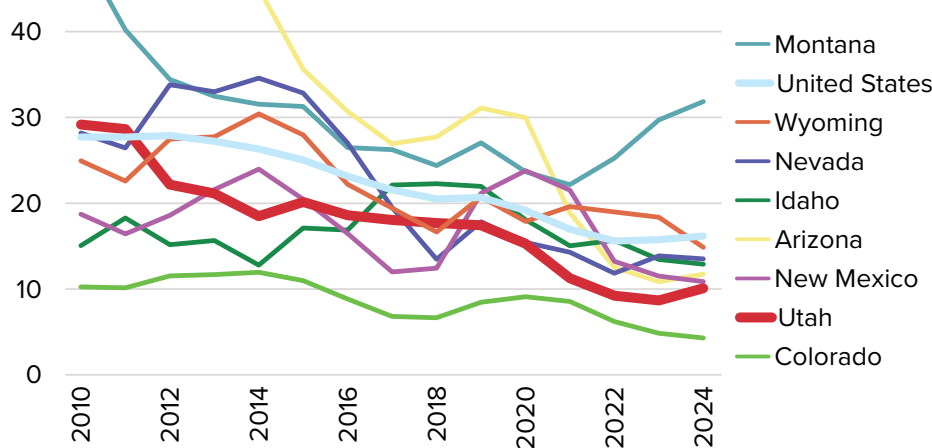
Utah's fraud convictions are second-lowest in the region.

Figure 1.2: Fraud Convictions per Million in the Mountain States, Three-Year Average, 2022-2024



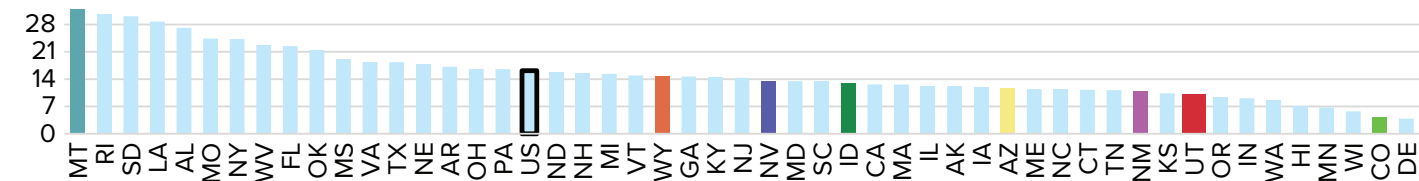
Fraud convictions have a declining trend in many Mountain States.

Figure 1.3: Fraud Convictions per Million, Utah and the Mountain States, Rolling Three-Year Average, 2010-2024



Utah has the ninth-lowest rate of fraud convictions.

Figure 1.4: Fraud Convictions per Million by State, Three-Year Average, 2022-2024



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Utah Fraud Convictions Over Time

Overall, the number of fraud convictions in Utah has declined over the past 15 years. Fraud convictions per million in 2023 were at less than one-third the level seen in 2010. Declines have plateaued, but it is unclear whether this represents a change in the trend or a new baseline.

Fraud Convictions in the Mountain States

Most Mountain States have rates of fraud convictions below the national rate. Montana is the only Mountain State with a higher rate than the nation. Utah and Colorado are among the states with the lowest rates for fraud convictions. Many of the Mountain States are experiencing a downward trend, although this is not the case for Montana.

Utah and the Nation

Fraud convictions in Utah fell below the national rate a decade ago and have remained lower ever since. Utah has continued to fall below the national rate, despite the national rate declining over the past 15 years. Utah has the 9th lowest rate of fraud convictions per million.



flickr user 'Utah Reps' (PDM)

BREACH-OF-TRUST PENALTIES

When considering convictions, additional penalties can be imposed in cases where there was an abuse of a position of trust. This penalty is not added when the abuse of trust is the primary offense, but rather when a crime was committed and the offender's position helped complete or conceal the offense.

For example, a penalty for breach of trust would *not* apply to embezzlement by a bank teller or clerk but *would* apply to embezzlement by an attorney acting as a guardian. Other examples could include falsely representing oneself as a legitimate investment broker, lawyer or doctor; a bank executive's fraudulent loan scheme; a teacher or physician abusing a student or patient; a postal service employee tampering with mail; a state employee providing false means of identification; a hospital orderly who misuses patient information; or a volunteer at a charity who misuses information from a donor's file.²⁵

These crimes are designed to take advantage of individuals' trust in figures of authority, or the reasonable expectation that people will not misuse the information that we entrust to them.

Because the judicial process can span years, convictions often occur years after the initial crime. To better isolate trends, this section uses rolling three-year averages to smooth out the bumps and dips of individual years. However, using three-year averages may make it more difficult to identify changes in recent trends.

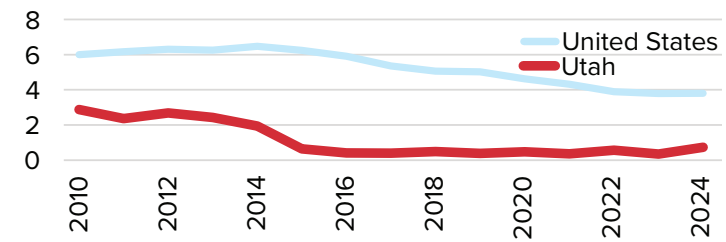
This indicator measures penalties, meaning that acquitted individuals and those with charges dropped or penalties removed are excluded from these data. Further, while breaches of trust may have occurred, beneficiaries and courts may choose not to pursue penalties.

²⁵ United States Sentencing Commission, 2018, "Guidelines Manual 2018" §3B1.3 United States Sentencing Commission, <https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/guidelines-manual/2018/GLMFull.pdf>.

BREACH-OF-TRUST PENALTIES DASHBOARD

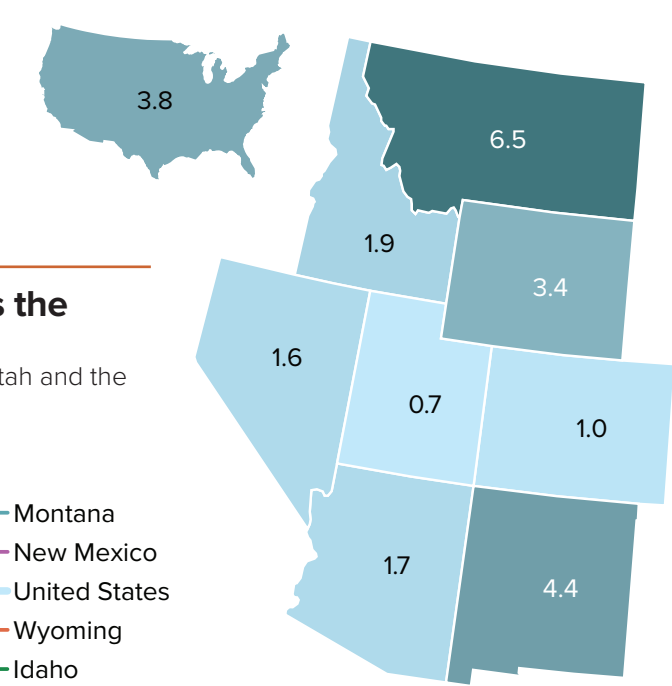
Breach-of-trust penalties in Utah have been substantially lower since 2015.

Figure 2.1: Convictions Penalized for Breach of Trust per Million, Utah and the United States, Rolling Three-Year Average, 2010-2024



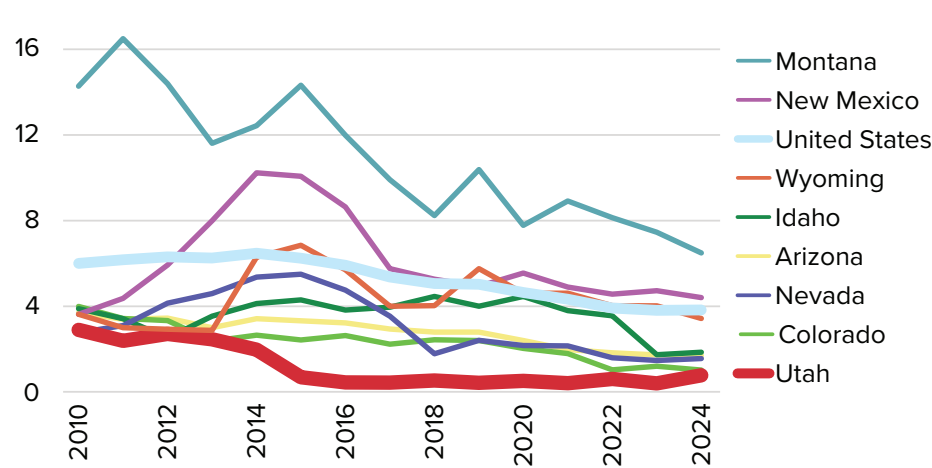
Utah and four neighboring states have low breach-of-trust levels.

Figure 2.2: Convictions Penalized for Breach of Trust per Million in the Mountain States, Three-Year Average, 2022-2024



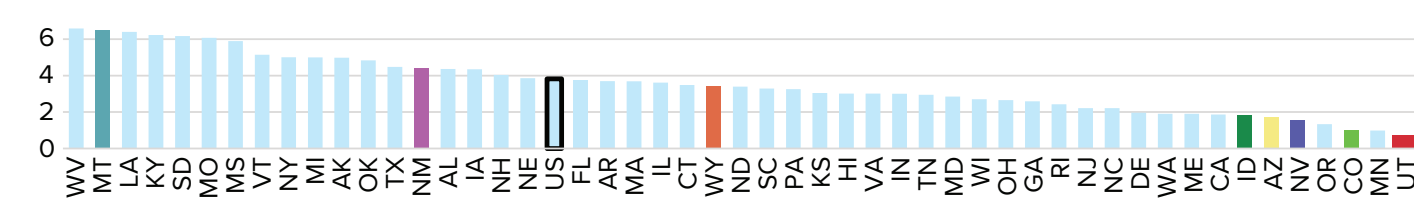
Breach-of-trust penalties have declined across the Mountain States over the past decade.

Figure 2.3: Convictions Penalized for Breach of Trust per Million, Utah and the Mountain States, Rolling Three-Year Average, 2010-2024



Breach-of-trust penalties in Utah are the lowest in the nation.

Figure 2.4: Penalties for Breach of Trust per Million by State, Three-Year Average, 2022-2024



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Breach of Trust in Utah Over Time

In Utah, breach-of-trust penalties have declined since reaching a peak of about 3 penalties per million for the three years ending in 2012. Over the past decade, breach of trust remained steady at around 0.5 penalties per million people.

Breach of Trust in the Mountain States

Most of the Mountain States fall below the national rate of breach-of-trust penalties per million people. The rates in Utah, Colorado, Nevada, Arizona, and Idaho are well below the national rate over the past three years. Montana and New Mexico exceed the national rate with 6.5 and 4.4 penalties per million people, respectively. Generally speaking, the rates of breach-of-trust penalties have been decreasing over the past 15 years.

Utah and the Nation

Breach-of-trust penalties in Utah were well below the national rate throughout the past decade. During the past three years, the national rate was almost five times higher than Utah's rate.



Piute County Courthouse by Tricia Simpson, licensed under (CC BY SA 3.0)

FEDERAL PUBLIC CORRUPTION CONVICTIONS

Public corruption begets lower social capital, and lower social capital begets public corruption. Corruption in government gives the impression that society as a whole is untrustworthy and may make actors in that society less likely to cooperate in good faith.²⁶

Each year, the Justice Department provides an annual report to Congress that details statistics on the nationwide federal effort against public corruption.²⁷ The Justice Department defines public corruption as a crime involving the abuse of public trust by government officials at the federal, state, or local level. The report also provides information on individuals involved in public corruption offenses. The offenses include extortion, bribery, election crimes, and criminal conflicts of interest.

Because the judicial process can span years, convictions often occur years after the initial crime. To better isolate trends, this section uses rolling three-year averages to smooth out the bumps and dips of individual years. Using three-year averages may make it more difficult to identify changes in recent trends.

This indicator measures federal public corruption convictions, excluding data from acquitted individuals, those with charges dropped, and unreported cases of public corruption. Further, the level of prosecutorial aggressiveness may impact the number of convictions over time and across different geographical areas.

²⁶ Rothstein, Bo, 2013, "Corruption and Social Trust: Why the Fish Rots from the Head Down," *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 80, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sor.2013.0040>.

²⁷ Public Integrity Section, 2018, "Report on the Activities and Operations of the Public Integrity Section," U.S. Department of Justice, Criminal Division, www.justice.gov/criminal/pin.

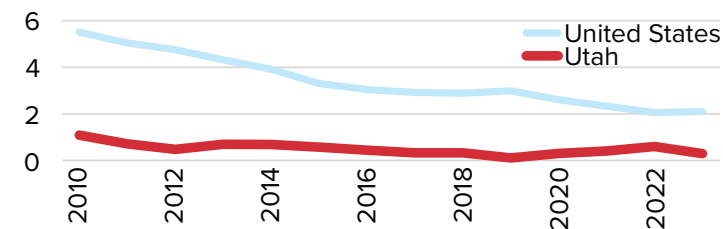


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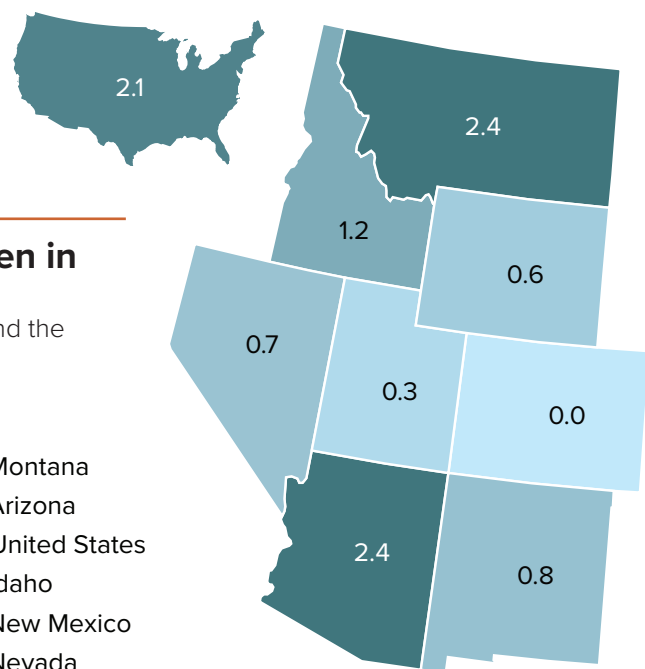
Utah maintained a low level of federal public corruption convictions in the last 15 years.

Figure 3.1: Federal Public Corruption Convictions per Million, Utah and the United States, Rolling Three-Year Average 2010-2023



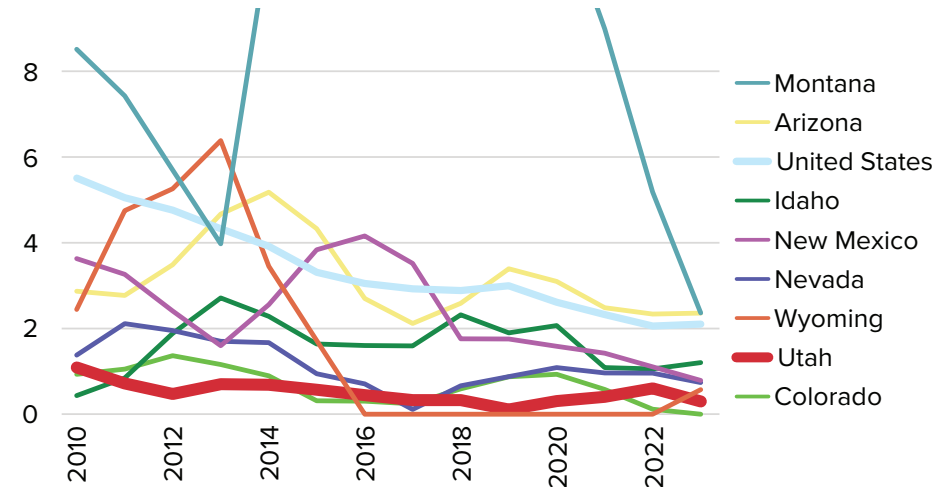
Most of the Mountain States have low levels of federal public corruption convictions.

Figure 3.2: Federal Public Corruption Convictions per Million in the Mountain States; Three-Year Average 2021-2023



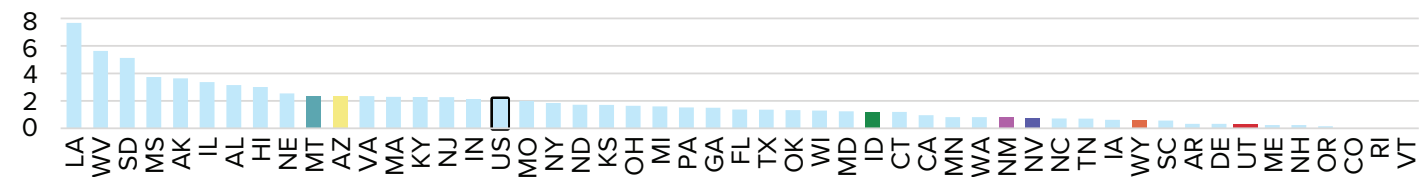
Federal public corruption convictions have fallen in many Mountain States over the past 15 years.

Figure 3.3: Federal Public Corruption Convictions per Million, Utah and the Mountain States, Rolling Three-Year Average 2010-2023



Utah is among the bottom ten states with the lowest level of federal public corruption convictions.

Figure 3.4: Federal Public Corruption Convictions per Million by State, Three-Year Average, 2021-2023



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Utah's Federal Public Corruption Convictions Over Time

Utah's federal public corruption convictions remain low. After bottoming out for the three years ending in 2019, convictions in Utah jumped for the three years ending in 2022. The most recent data point, covering the period from 2021 to 2023, places it near its average for the past decade.

Federal Public Corruption Convictions in the Mountain States

With the notable exceptions of Montana and Arizona, most Mountain States fall well below the national rate in terms of federal public corruption convictions per million people. Most Mountain States have falling rates of federal public corruption. Utah has the second-lowest rate after Colorado.

Utah and the Nation

The federal public corruption convictions in Utah have remained well below national levels over time. Utah was among the bottom 10 states with the lowest levels of convictions for the three years ending in 2023, with around 0.3 public corruption convictions per million people.



Pexels user 'Samuel Sweet', (PDM)

VIOLENT CRIMES PER THOUSAND

There appears to be a strong connection between social capital levels and crime rates. Some posit a negative feedback loop whereby declining social capital leads to higher crime rates, which in turn increases the fear of crime, leading people to withdraw both psychologically and physically from the community. This withdrawal reduces businesses and jobs in the community, further lowering social capital.²⁸ In short, high crime rates tend to be indicative of low social capital.

The following discussion addresses the most traumatic form of crime to a community: violent crime. These data are from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting database.

²⁸ Kruger, Daniel J., et al., 2007, "Assault Injury Rates, Social Capital, and Fear of Neighborhood Crime," *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 35, No. 4, pp. 483-498, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20160>.

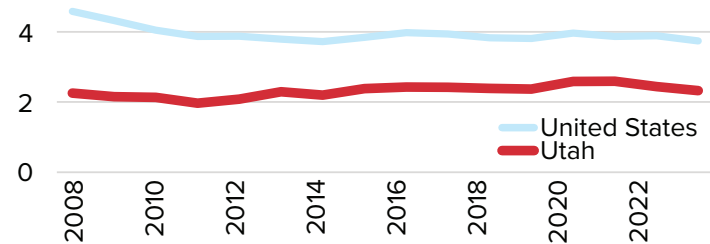


Defense Visual Information Distribution Service, (PDM)

VIOLENT CRIMES PER THOUSAND DASHBOARD

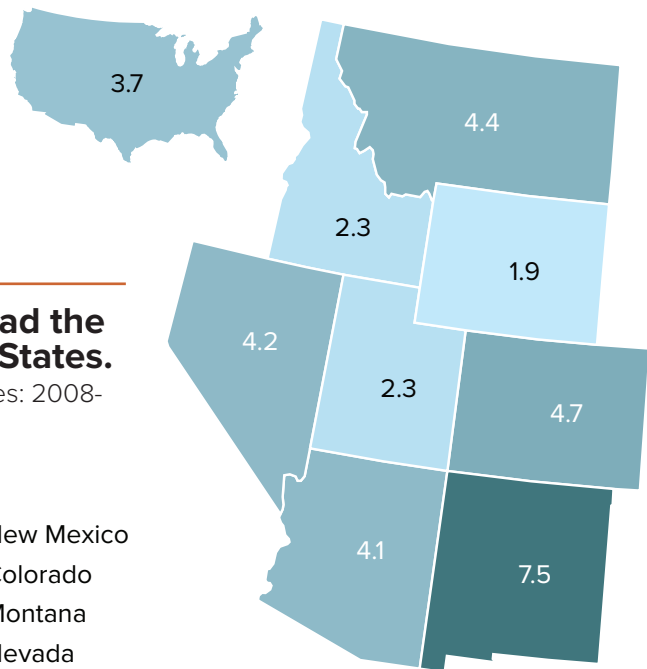
Violent crime rates in Utah peaked in 2021 and currently sit at the lowest level in the past decade.

Figure 4.1: Violent Crime per Thousand, Utah and the United States: 2008-2023



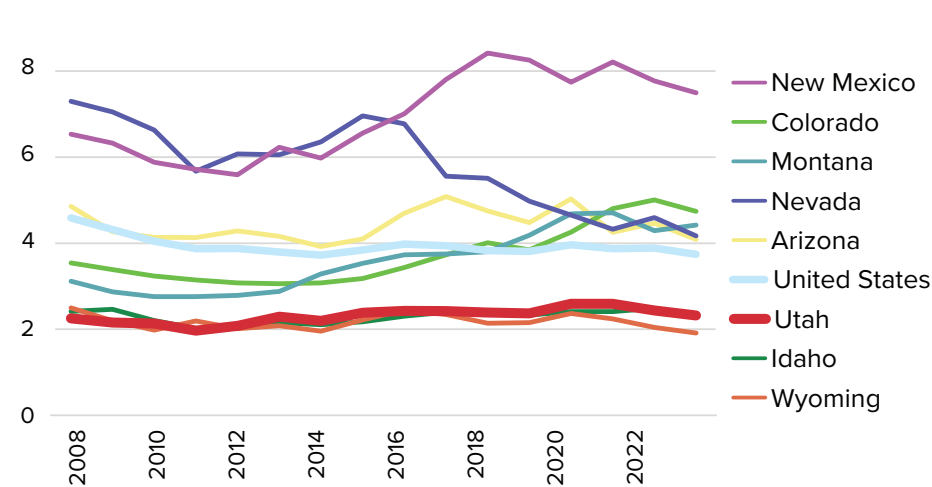
When it comes to violent crime, Utah is among the safest states in the region.

Figure 4.2: Violent Crime per Thousand in the Mountain States; 2023



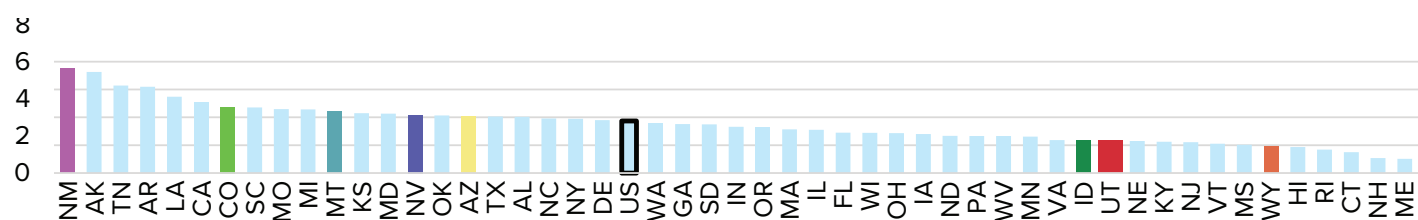
Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho have consistently had the lowest rates of violent crime among Mountain States.

Figure 4.3: Violent Crime per Thousand, Utah and the Mountain States: 2008-2023



Violent crime in Utah is relatively low.

Figure 4.4: Violent Crime per Thousand by State, 2023



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Violent Crime in Utah Over Time

Violent crime in Utah has generally remained stable from 2008 to 2023. However, crime did trend upward during the 2010s. From a low of 2.0 violent crimes per 1,000 people in 2011, the number stood at 2.6 by 2020. Since then, it has dropped slightly to 2.3, which is the lowest level in the past decade.

Violent Crime in the Mountain States

There is a significant disparity in violent crime rates among the Mountain States. While Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho all have among the lowest numbers of violent crimes per 1,000 people, the other five states had rates higher than the national rate. New Mexico has far and away higher violent crime rates than the rest of the region.

Wyoming, Utah, and Idaho have all had consistently lower rates of violent crime in the region. Similar to Utah, both Montana and Colorado had increases in violent crime during the 2010s. However, the increase in each of those states was much more substantial, putting them above the national rate. In fact, Colorado is now among the top 10, with violent crime at roughly twice the rates found in Utah.

Utah and the Nation

Violent crime rates in Utah have remained far lower than the national rate. As of 2023, the national number of violent crimes per 1,000 people was roughly 60% higher than the Utah rate. That year, Utah had the 12th lowest violent crime rate in the nation.



Gunnison, Utah Police Department by 'An Errant Knight' under license (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

SOCIAL TRUST SUB-INDEX SCORE

The Utah Foundation standardizes the indicators discussed above to create an index score ranging from 0 to 14, standardized to 2016 levels. However, some states, such as Arizona and Montana, have indicators so far outside the norm that they have received negative scores in the past. Additionally, since the index is standardized to 2016 levels, if states continue to improve over time, they can achieve higher index scores. This is indeed the case for Utah and Colorado in 2025.

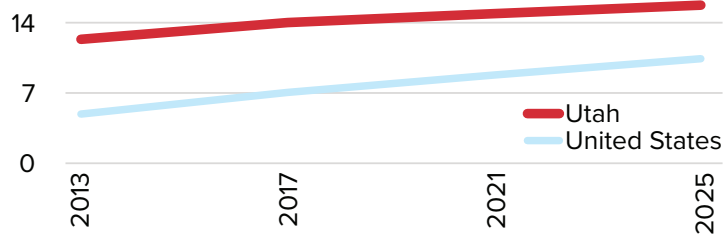


Matheson Court House by 'Chanilim714', under license (CC BY-SA 3.0)

SOCIAL TRUST SUB-INDEX SCORE DASHBOARD

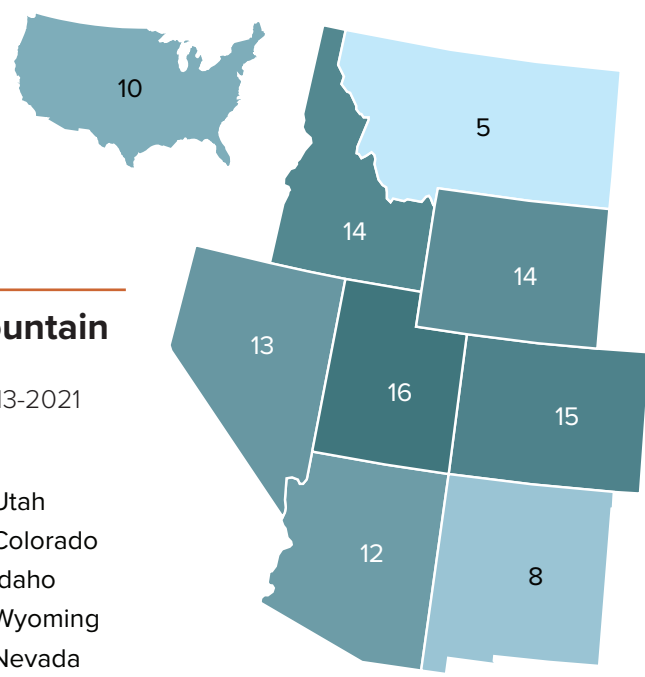
Utah’s social trust sub-index continues to improve.

Figure 5.1: Social Trust Sub-index, Utah and the United States, 2013-2021



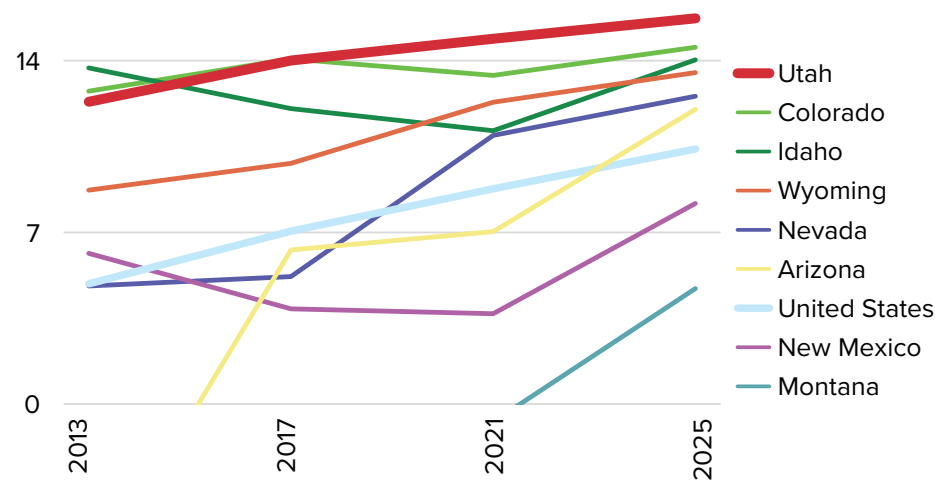
Utah is outperforming all other Mountain States on social trust.

Figure 5.2: Social Trust Sub-index among Mountain States, 2025



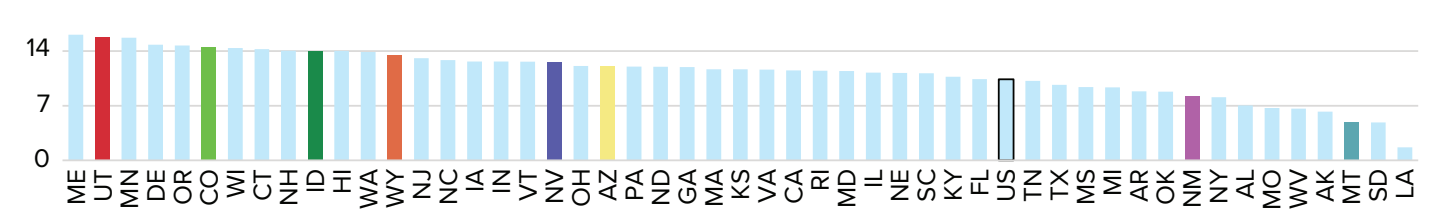
Social trust has been improving among the Mountain States.

Figure 5.3: Social Trust Sub-index, Utah and the Mountain States, 2013-2021



Utah ranked second in the nation in 2025 for social trust.

Figure 5.4: Social Trust Sub-index by State, 2025



For source information on all figures, please see the Appendix.

Social Trust in Utah Over Time

Utah's social trust sub-index has continued to increase over the past 12 years. The falling rates of fraud convictions in the state largely drive this increase. The three-year average of fraud convictions has dropped from 22 convictions per million people for the three years ending in 2013 to 10 convictions per million for the three years ending in 2025. Utah's index scores from the three other measures have plateaued over the past eight years.

Social Trust in the Mountain States

Utah has the highest index score for social trust among the Mountain States. This is largely because Utah consistently performs well across the various indicators – always among the top 12 performing states. With the exception of Montana and New Mexico, the Mountain States all perform well in measures of social trust. Similar to Utah, most Mountain States are experiencing a rising trend of civic trust.

For Montana, 2025 is important: it marks the first year the state has achieved a positive score. High levels of federal public corruption convictions and high levels of breach-of-trust penalties had kept Montana with negative scores for nearly a decade. Similarly, Arizona had negative civic trust scores due to a high rate of fraud convictions before 2016.

Utah and the Nation

Utah ranked second in social trust in 2025, second only to Maine. Along with Utah and most other Mountain States, the United States has benefited from rising social trust, as fraud and federal public corruption convictions have declined over the past 12 years.

CONCLUSION

Social capital has many different facets, including social trust. This is important given that widespread fraud and crime can break down the trust we have in each other. This report examines social capital by using four indicators of social trust, comparing Utah's rates to the other Mountain States and the nation.

Utah's levels of social trust rank second in the nation. The state has a history of performing well in terms of social trust and has continued to improve. Most Mountain States and the nation have also seen improvements in social trust. The Beehive State outperforms the nation on all four indicators and ranks among the 12 best-performing states for each indicator.

Utah's rate of fraud convictions is trending downward – largely driving Utah's improving social capital score. The state has the ninth-lowest rate of fraud conviction in the nation and the second-lowest among the Mountain States. Montana, on the other hand, has the-highest rate of fraud convictions in the nation.

Utah outperforms the rest of the nation in terms of breach-of-trust penalties. In fact, five of the seven states with the fewest penalties are located in the Mountain States. At the other end, Montana was the nation's second-worst state, and the worst among the Mountain States for the breach-of-trust indicator.

Utah has the seventh-lowest rate in the nation of federal public corruption convictions and the second-lowest among the Mountain States. Montana has historically had significantly higher rates than the rest of the country, but in recent years has moved much closer to the national average.

Utah is part of a cluster of three Mountain States – with Wyoming and Idaho – that can boast violent crime rates that are far below the national rate. Utah has the twelfth-lowest rate in the nation. The other five Mountain States all had higher violent crime rates than the nation. New Mexico stood out with the highest rate of violent crime in the nation.

Taken together, these measures suggest that Utah is among the better-performing states nationally in terms of social trust, and the best-performing state in the region. This bodes well for Utah's overall level of social capital.

APPENDIX: TECHNICAL DATA SECTION

Fraud Convictions per Capita

Fraud conviction data were taken from the United States Sentencing Commission. The data consist of records of federal fraud convictions only – meaning that acquitted individuals and those with charges dropped are not included – and were originally recorded by the federal court district where the conviction occurred before being sorted by state. The data do not include a record of any appeals or acquittals following conviction.²⁹ Fraud under these circumstances includes theft and embezzlement. Population data came from the US Census.

Convictions Including the Abuse of a Position of Trust

Data were taken from the United States Sentencing Commission. The final dataset includes all convictions under fraud charges with any conviction flagged as including an Abuse of a Position of Trust under United States Sentencing Guidelines §3B1.3.³⁰ Population data came from the US Census.

Federal Public Corruption Convictions per Million

Corruption conviction data came from the U.S. Department of Justice.³¹ The data consist of records of public corruption convictions only – meaning acquitted individuals and those with charges dropped are not included – and were originally recorded by the federal court district where the conviction occurred before being sorted by state. The data do not include a record of any appeals or acquittals following conviction. In some instances, if a conviction occurs during one year and sentencing during another, the case may be recorded in the latter year.³² Population data came from the US Census.

²⁹ United States Sentencing Commission, 2022, "Variable Codebook for Individual Offenders," *United States Sentencing Commission*, https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/research-and-publications/datafiles/USSC_Public_Release_Codebook_FY99_FY21.pdf.

³⁰ United States Sentencing Commission, 2018, "Guidelines Manual" §3B1.3 *United States Sentencing Commission*, <https://www.ussc.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/guidelines-manual/2018/GLMFull.pdf>.

³¹ United States Department of Justice, 2025, "Reports to Congress on the Activities and Operations of PIN," *U.S. Department of Justice*, www.justice.gov/criminal-pin/annual-reports.

³² U.S. Department of Justice, 2019. "Report to Congress on the Activities and Operations of the Public Integrity Section for 2019," *U.S. Department of Justice*, <https://www.justice.gov/criminal/criminal-pin/file/1346061/dl?inline>.

Violent Crimes per Thousand

The FBI collects data on violent crime through the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program. The FBI uses UCR data along with supplementary data to estimate the level of crime across states.³³ The FBI defines violent crime as murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.³⁴ In 2013, the FBI broadened the definition of rape for reporting purposes, which affects the time-series data for each state, as some state and local law enforcement agencies continue to report incidents with the former definition. Population data came from the US Census.

³³ Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Crime/Law Enforcement Stats (Uniform Crime Reporting Program)," U.S. Department of Justice, www.fbi.gov/services/cjis/ucr.

³⁴ Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2020, "Crime Data Explorer - Documents and Downloads – Additional Datasets – Summary Reporting System- Estimated Crimes." *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/downloads>



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