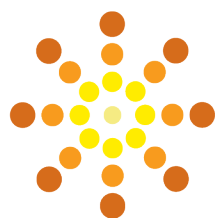
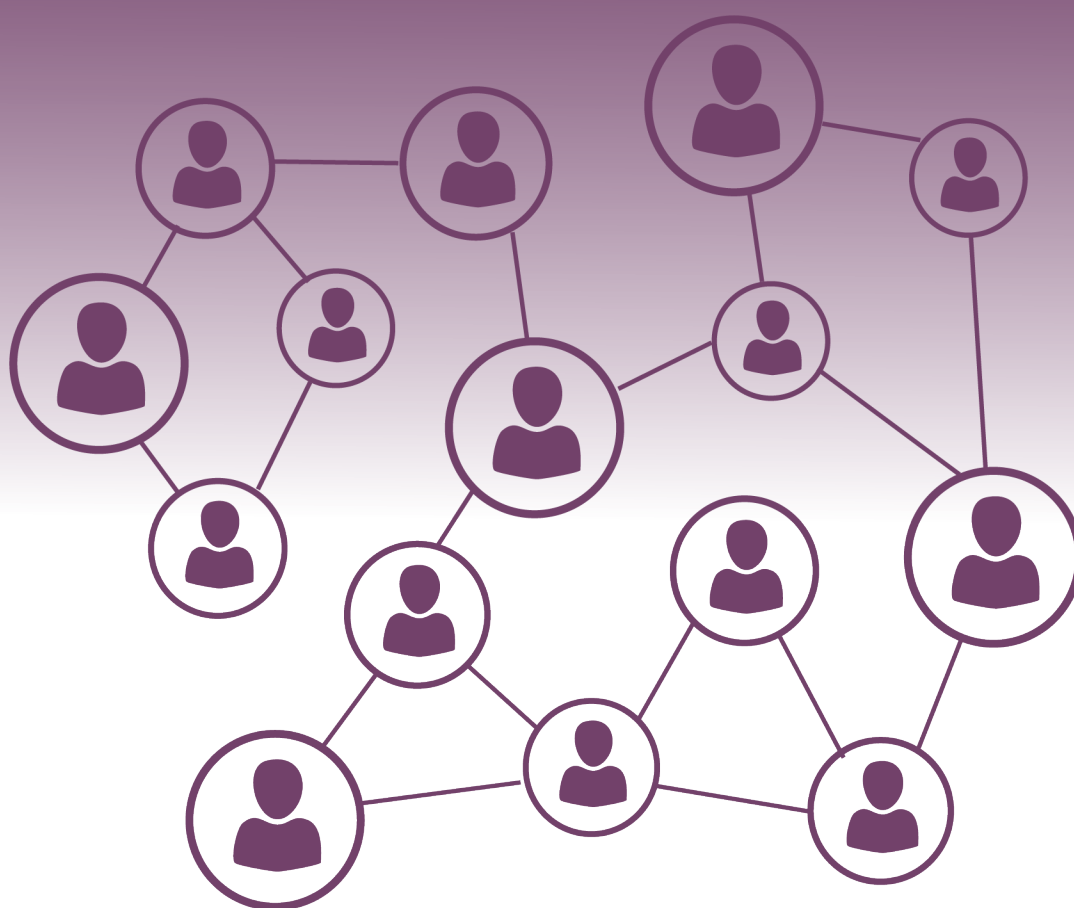


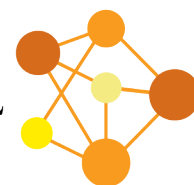
# Households and Heritages

## How Family Health Hooks into Social Capital



**UTAH FOUNDATION**  
RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

**SOCIAL  
CAPITAL  
INDEX**



# HOUSEHOLDS AND HERITAGES

## HOW FAMILY HEALTH HOOKS INTO SOCIAL CAPITAL

This series was sponsored by:



THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
FOUNDATION

LAWRENCE T. & JANET T.  
**DEE FOUNDATION**

GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES  
F O U N D A T I O N

### Utah Foundation Board of Trustees

*Kelly Mendenhall, Chair\**  
*Carlton Christensen, Vice Chair\**  
*Benjamin Brown, Treasurer\**  
*Annalisa Holcombe, Previous Chair\**

Nathan Anderson  
Ryan Andrus  
Scott Barlow  
Mayor Dirk Burton\*  
Jonathan Campbell\*  
Michelle Carroll  
Silvia Castro  
David Connelly  
J. Philip Cook  
Cameron Cowan  
Bill Crim  
Chris Dallin  
Aaron Dekeyzer\*  
Cameron Diehl  
Michael DiOrio

Denise Dragoo\*  
Alex Eaton  
Mark Edgley  
Stephanie Frohman  
Shawn Frye  
Bryson Garbett  
David Gessel  
Michael Gregory\*  
Kris Griffith  
Andrew Gruber\*  
Andrew Haaland  
Julie Hatchett\*  
Brandon Hendrickson  
Ben Horsley  
Suzanne Hyland  
Perna Jain  
Michelle Judd  
Catherine Kanter\*  
Derek Kearn  
Geoff Landward

Drew Maggelet  
Peter Mann  
Nate McDonald  
Susan McLeod  
Brad Mortensen\*  
Angie Osguthorpe  
Mary Catherine Perry  
Scott Parson\*  
Bryn Ramjoue'  
Jennifer Robinson\*  
David Rowley  
Tim Sheehan  
Harris Simmons  
Dominic Spaethling  
Nick Starn  
Henrie Walton  
Chad Westover\*  
Thomas Young

*\* Executive Board members*

### Utah Foundation Report Staff

Laura Pacheco, *Research Intern, author*  
Kyler Zarate, *Research Intern, data analyst*  
Christopher Collard, *Research Director, author*  
Shawn Teigen, *President*  
Ashley Marshall-Cantor, *Research Analyst*

### 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.**

**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*.

## INTRODUCTION

Family is the basic building block of society and a core component of social capital. Stable families provide ways for children to socialize and develop emotionally and intrinsically. The larger community benefits from this stability, especially when family connections are strong.

Notable social capital researchers, such as Robert Putnam and James Coleman, highlight the role that family plays in promoting social capital and community development, as well as related socio-economic benefits. Furthermore, strong family structures and relations promote higher levels of trust and community participation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Putnam, Robert D., 2000, "Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of american community", *New York: Simon and Schuster*, <https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Bowling-Alone-Revised-and-Updated/Robert-D-Putnam/9781982130848>; Coleman, James, 1988, "Social capital in the creation of human capital," *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 94, <https://doi.org/10.1086/228943>.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS REPORT



- Utah has the second-highest ranking of family health in the nation, second only to Idaho.
- Utah's family health has fallen from an index score of 20 to an index score of 13 from 2013 to 2025 – the fourth largest drop in the nation.
- By a clear margin, Utah has the nation's highest proportion of currently married adults and the highest proportion of births to married women.
- Prior to the pandemic, Utah languished in the bottom 10 states in reading to young children, and it had been in rapid decline. However, since the pandemic, Utah has arrested its decline.
- During the pandemic, Utah saw a spike in families eating together daily. However, that share has declined, and Utah is now the lowest among Mountain States and the tenth lowest in the nation.
- Recreational electronic device use among Utah youth peaked during the pandemic and has since fallen. Once a good measure for Utah, the state now sits around average.
- While Utah families may be well-formed, the interactions within those families have been of declining quality. The consequences for children will play out over time and may have negative effects on future family formation.

This installment in the Social Capital Index project seeks to measure family health. The Utah Foundation does so using seven indicators:

- Share of adults aged 35 to 64 who are currently married.
- Share of births to married women.
- Number of adults per household.
- Share of children aged five and under who are read to every day.
- Time spent on electronic devices by children from 6 to 17.
- Share of families eating a meal together daily.
- Time spent with family while eating, exercising, or socializing.

The first three indicators focus on the strength of family structure, while the last four indicators focus on the quality of family ties. While Utah has some of the best indicators in the nation in terms of family structure, indicators that measure the quality of interactions place Utah at or below average.

## BACKGROUND

### Family Structure

Strong family health is inextricably linked with a network of interrelated and self-perpetuating benefits. For instance, families with two parents are far less likely to live in poverty, and the children of those families are more likely to do well in educational attainment.<sup>2</sup> The data are so stark that it is impossible to examine economic or educational outcomes without considering family structure.

In addition to the poor economic and educational outcomes that are more likely in single-parent households, researchers have connected fatherlessness with a litany of repercussions, including increased risk of substance use, depression, obesity, child abuse, suicide, teen pregnancy, and contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>3</sup> Weak family structures also result in weaker connections to aid young adults as they seek employment and important social opportunities.

The importance of family structure to social capital starts early. For instance, a recent study found a strong association between two-parent families and

---

2 Butler, Stuart M., William W. Beach, and Paul L. Winfree, 2008, "Pathways to economic mobility: Key indicators," *Pew Charitable Trusts, Economic Mobility Project*, p. 8, <https://search.issuelab.org/resource/pathways-to-economic-mobility-key-indicators.html>. See also, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2012, *Information on Poverty and Income Statistics: A Summary of 2012 Current Population Survey Data*. [https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated\\_legacy\\_files/138191/ib.pdf](https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files/138191/ib.pdf); it found that "Children living in female-headed families with no spouse present had a poverty rate of 47.6 percent, over 4 times the rate in married-couple families."

3 Brown, Jerrod, 2021, "Father-absent homes: Implications for criminal justice and mental health professionals," *Minnesota Psychological Association*, <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=18147&context=dissertations>.



youth participation in extracurricular activities.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, family practices also link to children's outcomes. For example, a study examining families in Appalachia found that family cohesion provides positive adjustment in youth.<sup>5</sup>

Community-based programs, such as the Welcome Baby program by United Way of Utah County, emphasize these family practices. The program offers various services based on social capital principles of trust and community support, providing new parents with the resources to foster early literacy and promote parent-child bonding.<sup>6</sup> Beyond family structure, the activities families participate in also provide evidence of family health.

## Quality of Interactions

Over the years, there has been increasing concern about how families spend time together and how children spend their time. As seen in this report, the time children spend in front of a screen has been increasing at an alarming rate. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, screen time has surged over the years. Nationally, from July 2021 to December 2023, 50% of teenagers reported spending more than four hours on screens.<sup>7</sup>

The pandemic has had significant impacts on family life, both positive and negative. On the one hand, families spent more time together at dinner, and parents read to their children more often.<sup>8</sup> But this report also finds a remarkable upsurge in recreational electronic device usage among children that was only accelerated by the pandemic.

## The Data

For the purposes of this series, the Utah Foundation defines family health as a collection of both structural elements and habitual activities affecting marriage and children. It should be noted that there may be factors beyond those identified in this report that affect family health. Those used in this report are commonly used in analyses of social capital related to family stability.

---

4 An, Bruce, Weihua, and Western, 2019, "Social capital in the creation of cultural capital: Family structure, neighborhood cohesion, and extracurricular participation," *Social Science Research*, Vol. 81, p. 192, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2019.03.015>.

5 Shorter, Rebecca L., Elledge, L. Christian, "Family functioning and adjustment in appalachian youth: Moderating role of extracurricular participation," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* Vol. 29, pp. 2745–2758, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-020-01757-7>.

6 United Way Utah County, 2020, "Welcome Baby," *United Way Utah County*, <https://unitedwayuc.org/welcome-baby>.

7 Zablotsky, Benjamin, Basilica Arockiaraj, Gelila Haile, and Amanda E. Ng, 2024, "Daily screen time among teenagers: United States, July 2021–December 2023," *NCHS Data Brief* no. 513, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db513.pdf>.

8 Mayol-García, Yerís, 2022, "Pandemic brought parents and children closer: More family dinners, more reading to young children," *U.S. Census Bureau*, [www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/01/parents-and-children-interacted-more-during-covid-19.html](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/01/parents-and-children-interacted-more-during-covid-19.html).

## THE SHARE OF MARRIED ADULTS AGED 35-64

Families have been called the “bedrock of social capital.”<sup>9</sup> Marriage is traditionally understood as the starting point of family creation, as the original sense of the word “matrimony” was the making of a mother. Marriage binds spouses legally and with familial ties, as the spouse is traditionally considered a member of the “in-law” family. This has obvious and immediate repercussions for building social capital, as it merges the networks of two people and their families. While marriage is a key indicator of social capital, it should be noted that some single people may be more actively engaged in expanding their social networks, albeit on a more tenuous basis.<sup>10</sup>

The average number of married adults aged 35-64 is calculated using data from the American Community Survey produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. For more details, see the Appendix.

9 Belcher, John R., et al., “Family capital: Implications for interventions with families,” *Journal of Family Social Work*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2010.542113>.

10 Kislev, E., 2020, “Social capital, happiness, and the unmarried: A multilevel analysis of 32 European countries,” *Applied Research Quality Life*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-019-09751-y>.

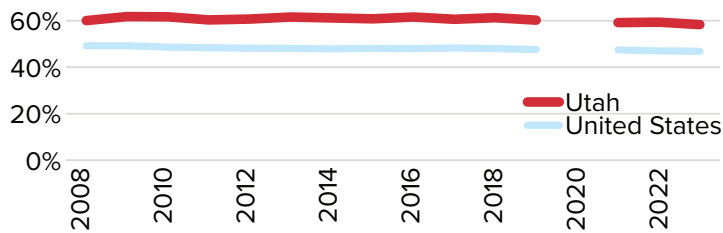


Salt Lake City, Utah

THE SHARE OF MARRIED ADULTS AGED 35-64 DASHBOARD

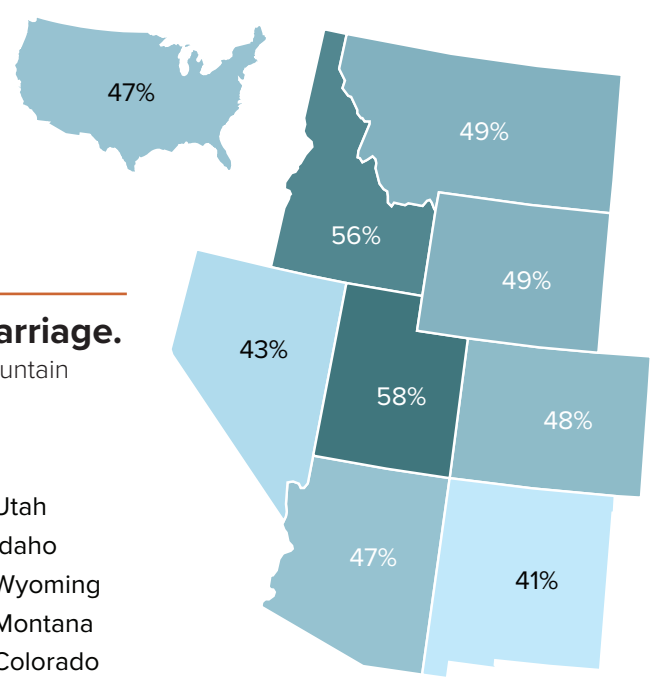
Marriage in Utah is holding strong.

Figure 1.1: Share of Adults 35-64 Currently Married, Utah and the United States: 2008-2023



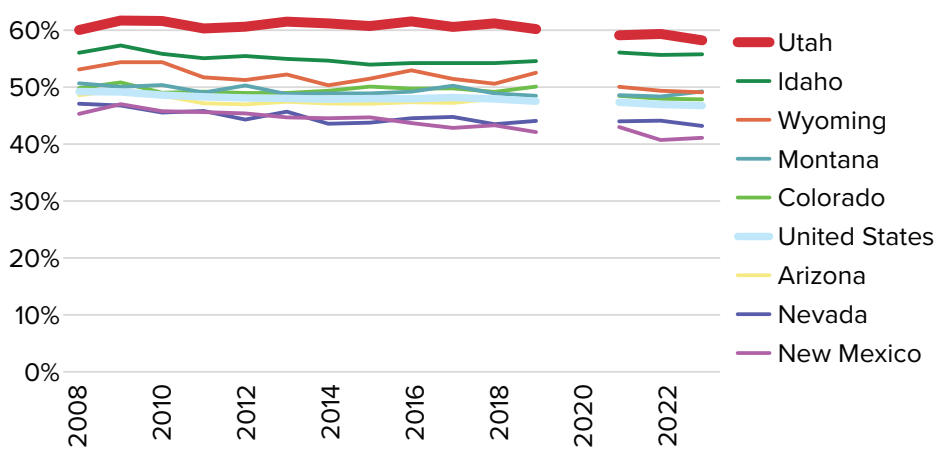
Utah and Idaho have the highest rates of marriage.

Figure 1.2: Share of Adults 35-64 Currently Married in the Mountain States, 2023



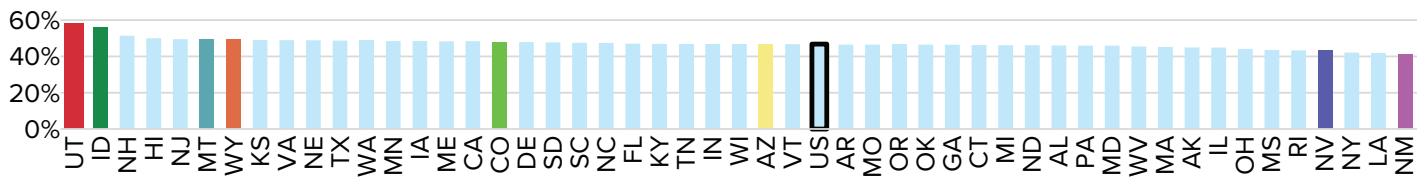
Many Mountain states see slight declines in marriage.

Figure 1.3: Share of Adults 35-64 Currently Married, Utah and the Mountain States: 2008-2023



Utah leads the nation in marriage.

Figure 1.4: Share of Adults 35-64 Currently Married by State, 2023



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

## Utah's Marriage Rates, Over Time

Several factors put downward pressure on marriage rates. One is the rapidly rising marital age in the U.S., which went from 23 for men and 21 for women in 1980 to nearly 30 and 28, respectively, in 2024.<sup>11</sup>

In the past 30 years, even as the percentage of divorces has held relatively steady, the percentage of women never married has shot up from about 22% to 30%. The percentage of men never married has steadily increased, from 30% to almost 40%.<sup>12</sup>

The average Utah marital age for men is 26.8, and for women it is 25.2. While these ages are younger than the national average, they are four years older than in 2000.<sup>13</sup>

Marriage in Utah has been holding steady in recent times. From 2008 through 2023, the share of adults aged 35 to 64 and currently married remained near 60%.

## Marriage in the Mountain States

While Utah is the national leader in marriage, Idaho keeps the Beehive State company in the second spot. Montana and Wyoming are also in the top 10. Two other Mountain States are above average. But the final two, Nevada and New Mexico, are at the opposite end of the states, with New Mexico having the lowest share of married adults and Nevada also among the bottom 10 states.

## Utah and the Nation

Marriage rates nationally slipped slightly from 2008 to 2023, resulting in the gap between the U.S. and Utah increasing slightly. Utah clearly has the nation's highest proportion of currently married adults.

---

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2024, "America's families and living arrangements, historical time series of marital status marital status visualizations, Figs. MS-2, MS-1a and MS-1b," <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/marital.html>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Prior, Heidi, 2025, "Utah's marriage trends: Young, married, and changing," *Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute*, <https://d36oiwf74r1rap.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Marriage-Trends-Apr2025.pdf>.



## BIRTHS TO MARRIED WOMEN

Beyond marriage levels, this report looks at family formation through the percentage of births to married women. As noted, research has shown that two-parent households produce better economic, physical, and mental health outcomes. They also tend to provide wider opportunities to build social capital, as children gain access to both parents' social networks and the networking that a stronger economic status enables.

The proportion of births to married children is from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention database on Natality. For more details, see the Appendix.



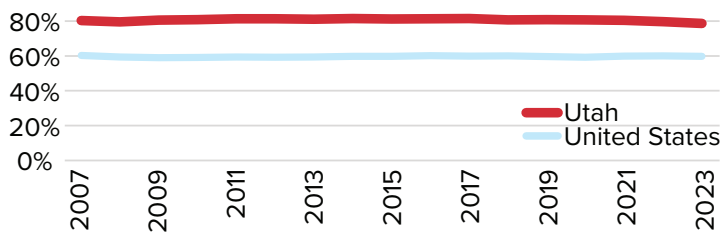
*Riverton, Utah*

---

BIRTHS TO MARRIED WOMEN DASHBOARD

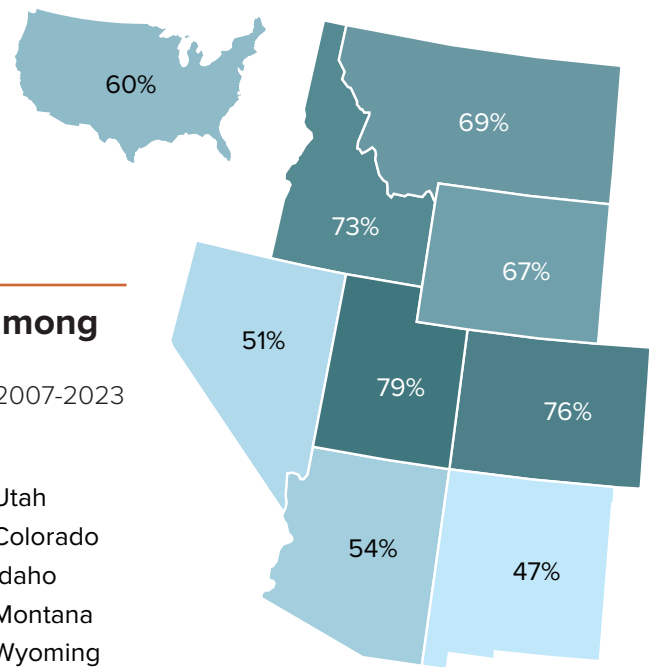
Births to married women have been holding steady at around 80%.

Figure 2.1: Births to Married Women, Utah and the United States: 2007-2023



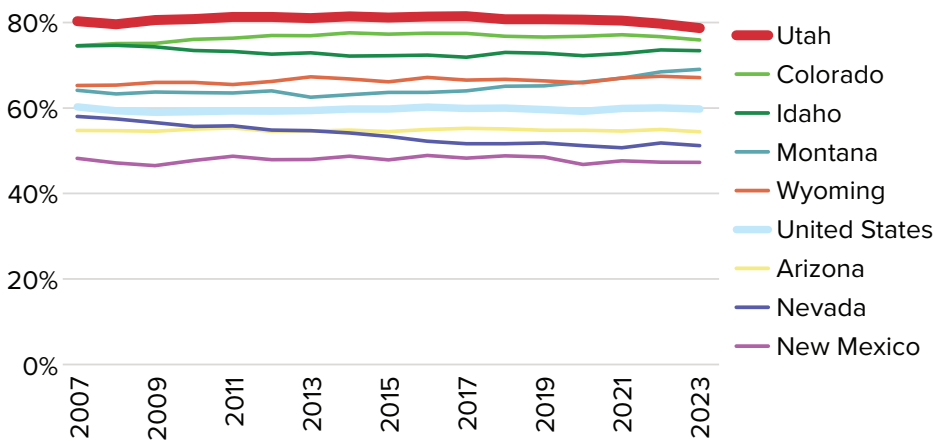
Mountain States perform split in births to married women.

Figure 2.2: Births to Married Women in the Mountain States, 2023



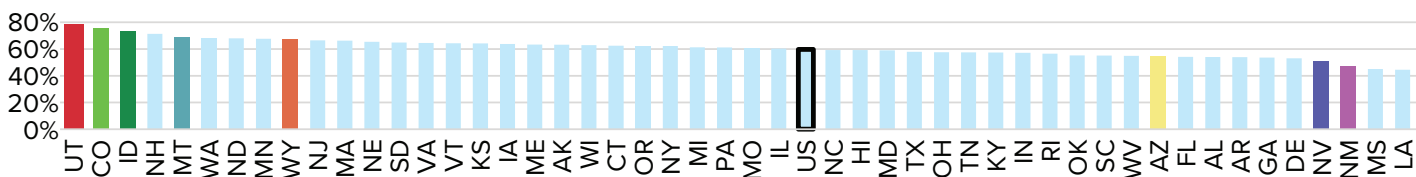
Most Mountain States have stable birth rates among married women.

Figure 2.3: Births to Married Women, Utah and the Mountain States: 2007-2023



Utah strongly leads the nation in births to married women.

Figure 2.4: Births to Married Women by State, 2023



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

## Utah Births to Married Women, Over Time

Despite the rise of birth control and abortion rates, as well as the clear evidence of socio-economic consequences, out-of-wedlock birth rates began soaring around 1970 and kept moving upward for decades. Theories on why this has taken place include the rise of the welfare state, changes in the economy, the sexual revolution, and the decline of so-called “shotgun” marriages.<sup>14</sup> Some treat these theories as competing, others see them as interwoven.

However, after peaking around 2007, the proportion of births to unmarried women appears to have leveled out nationally. In Utah, from 2007 to 2023, the proportion of births to married women has held strong at around 80%.

## Births to Married Women in the Mountain States

With Utah as the national leader in births to married women, two neighboring states – Colorado and Idaho – occupy the next two spots. Wyoming and Montana are also well above the national rate. However, New Mexico and Nevada sit among the bottom five nationally. While the Mountain States have minimal shifts, Nevada’s rate of births to married women has continued to decline. Nevada’s births to married women went from 58% births in 2007 to only 51% in 2023.

## Utah and the Nation

Utah enjoys a far higher proportion of births to married women compared to the nation at large. In Utah in 2023, 79% of births were to married women, versus 60% nationally. Utah strongly leads the nation on this measure.

---

<sup>14</sup> For a summary of these theories, see Akerlof, George, and Yellen, Janet, 1996 “An analysis of out-of-wedlock births in the United States,” the *Brookings Institution*, [www.brookings.edu/articles/an-analysis-of-out-of-wedlock-births-in-the-united-states/](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/an-analysis-of-out-of-wedlock-births-in-the-united-states/).



## AVERAGE NUMBER OF ADULTS PER HOUSEHOLD

As highlighted in earlier sections, marriage extends a family's network. The same is true for adults in a household more generally. While earlier indicators focused on the ties of marriage – a fair measure of the strength of a social capital bond – this indicator attempts to capture the breadth of household networks. While it encapsulates marriage, it also seeks to capture the additional networks brought by cohabitating partners, multi-generational family structures, or even adult children still living at home. Moreover, it also captures the social capital created by roommates and housemates, which may not hold as tightly as family ties, but still offer plenty of benefits, particularly as many of those living in dorms or shared apartments are young adults still expanding their social networks. While these types of bonds exist in similar relationships outside of adults living in the same household, the proximity of living in the same household makes others both more aware of potential problems and more likely to recognize potential connections to address those problems.

The average number of adults per household is calculated using data from the Public Use Microsample of the American Community Survey produced by the U.S. Census Bureau. It includes the average of all individuals 18 years or older living in a single household. For more details, see the Appendix.

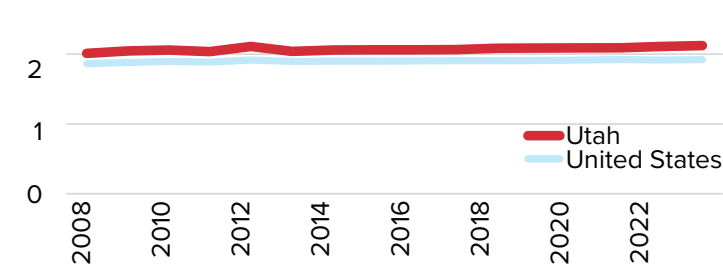


*Randolph, Utah*

AVERAGE NUMBER OF ADULTS PER HOUSEHOLD DASHBOARD

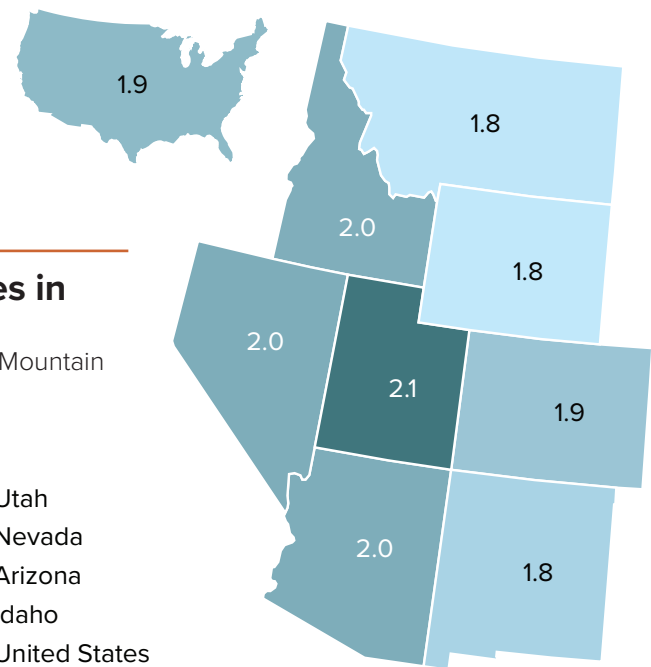
Utah’s average number of adults per household has been increasing over time.

Figure 3.1: Average Number of Adults per Household, Utah and the United States, 2008-2023



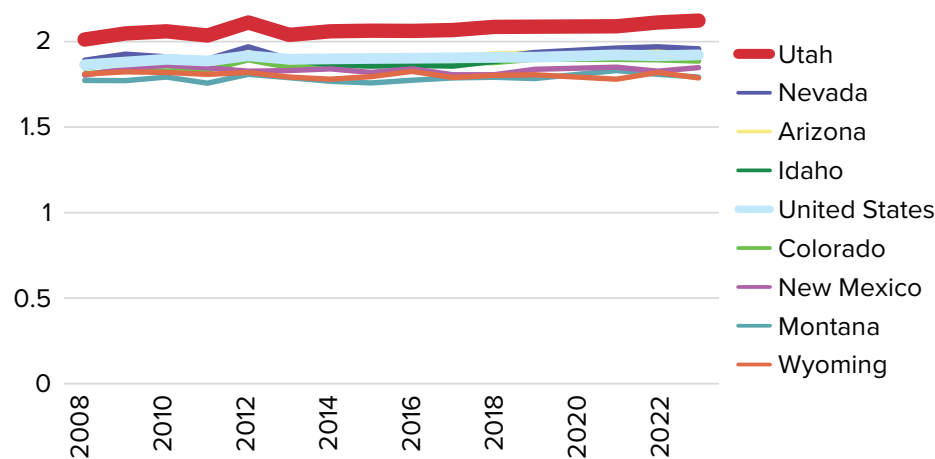
Western Mountain States are among those with the highest number of adults per household.

Figure 3.2: Average Number of Adults per Household in the Mountain States, 2023



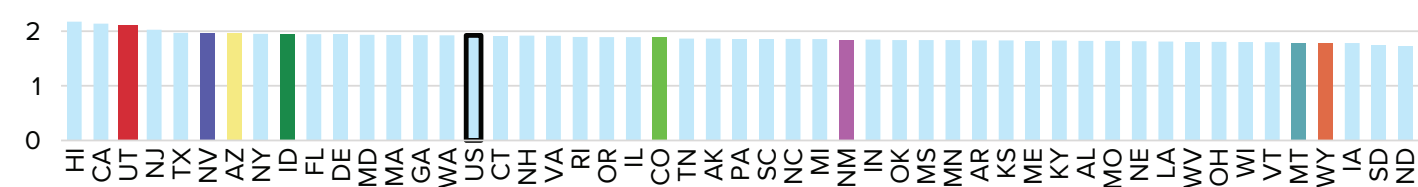
Most Mountain States have seen slow increases in the number of adults per household.

Figure 3.3: Average Number of Adults per Household, Utah and the Mountain States, 2008-2023



Utah is third in the nation in average adults per household.

Figure 3.4: Average Number of Adults per Household by State, 2023



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

## Utah's Average Number of Adults per Household, Over Time

Utah's average number of adults per household has been slowly increasing from an average of 2.0 adults per household in 2008 to 2.1 in 2023. Recent increases may be fueled in part by the rapid increase in housing prices, which may encourage adult children to continue living with their parents, as well as other forms of doubling up to keep costs down.

## Average Number of Adults per Household in the Mountain States

Utah has the highest number of adults per household in the Mountain states. The four western Mountain States all fall among the top ten states for the average number of adults per household. Montana and Wyoming fall among the bottom five states.

## Utah and the Nation

While the average number of adults per household is increasing across the nation, it is increasing faster in Utah. Additionally, Utah has one of the highest shares of adults per household in the nation, third only to Hawaii and California.





## READING TO CHILDREN

The share of children who are read to every day provides an indicator of the time parents spend with their children and the strength of that bond. Furthermore, early attainment of reading and other basic educational skills can set the pace for the rest of a student's academic career. For example, children who are read to at least one book per day are exposed to 290,000 more words by the age of five, compared to children who are not regularly read to by their parents or guardians.<sup>15</sup> And, as noted in a separate report in this series, educational attainment opens the way for critical gathering of social capital.

The share of children aged five and under who are read to every day are from the National Survey of Children's Health. For more details, see the Appendix.

---

<sup>15</sup> Grabmeyer, Jeff, 2019, "The importance of reading to kids daily," *The Ohio State University*, <https://ehe.osu.edu/news/listing/importance-reading-kids-daily-0>.

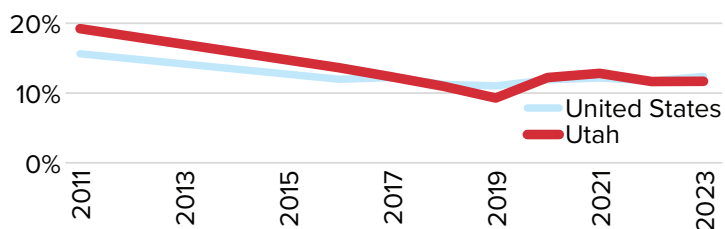


Salt Lake City, Utah

## READING TO CHILDREN DASHBOARD

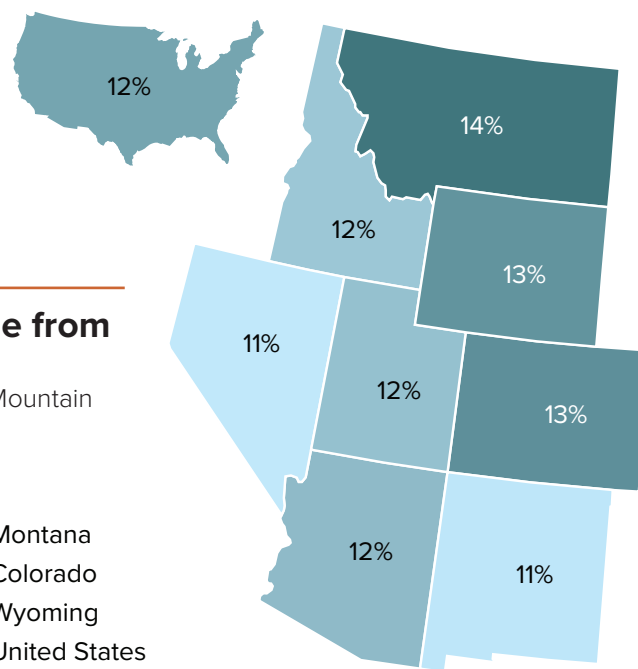
### The share of Utah children read to every day flattens after a slight recovery from the COVID pandemic.

Figure 4.1: Share of Children 5 and under Read to Every Day, Utah and the United States, 2007-2023



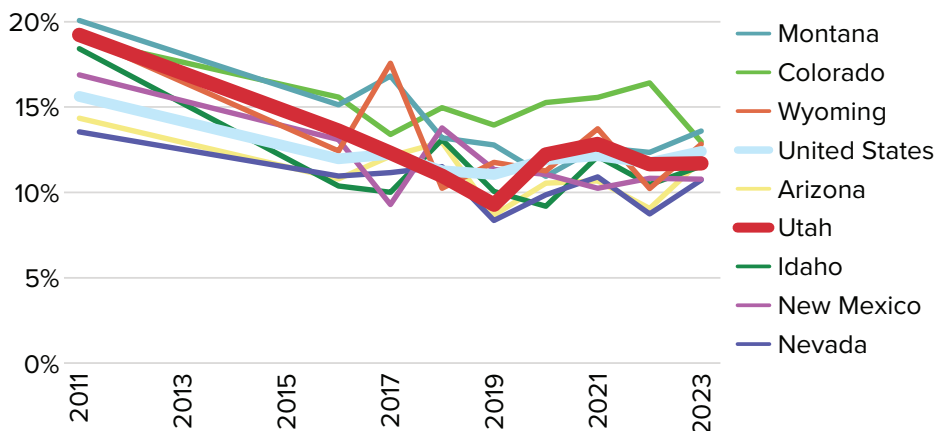
### Utah falls to Mountain State average in reading to children.

Figure 4.2: Share of Children 5 and under Read to Every Day in the Mountain States; 2023



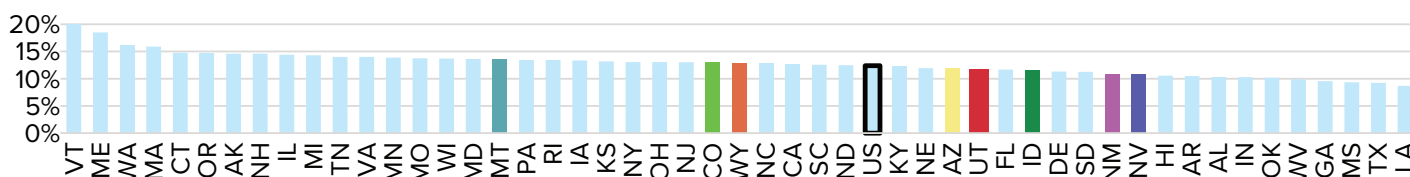
### Utah outpaced other Mountain States in decline from 2011 to 2019.

Figure 4.3: Share of Children 5 and under Read to Every Day in the Mountain States; 2007-2023



### Utah ranks below the national average in the percentage of children read to every day.

Figure 4.4: Share of Children 5 and under Read to Every Day, by State, 2023



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

## Utah Parents Reading to Children, Over Time

From 2011 to 2019, the share of Utah children aged five and under who were read to every day fell by more than a third. However, after 2019, the share rebounded slightly and steadied at around 12%. This rebound can be attributed to the pandemic. The U.S. Census found that the increase was largely driven by parents above the poverty level and with higher levels of education.<sup>16</sup>

## Reading to Children in the Mountain States

After declining from 2011 to 2019, most Mountain States experienced a slight recovery in terms of reading to children. Utah experienced one of the largest recoveries in the region, but it still fell below the national share in reading to children. Utah shares the lower tier with Arizona, Idaho, New Mexico, and Nevada. In 2023, Utah's share of reading to children was the same as that of two other states, Idaho and Arizona.

Montana was the highest-performing state in the region. And the percentage of young children read to daily in that state was only 14% – well below even the 19% Utah enjoyed in 2011. While the Mountain States' share of reading to children varied, the most striking pattern comes from Colorado. The state was well above other Mountain States and the nation at large from around 2018 to 2022. However, in 2023, the state's share dramatically declined, reaching a level comparable to the other Mountain States. Aside from Montana, Colorado, and Wyoming, all other Mountain States are below the U.S. average.

## Utah and the Nation

A decade ago, Utah outpaced the nation in reading to children. However, by 2017, the percentages had converged, and by 2019, Utah had fallen below the national rate. Indeed, Utah's percentage had dropped to the 10th lowest in the nation. While Utah saw a remarkable jump as the pandemic hit in 2020, it soon fell under the national rate by 2022. In 2020, Utah was ranked 25th in the nation, and in 2023, it was ranked 34th.

---

<sup>16</sup> Mayol Garcia, Yeris, 2022, "Pandemic brought parents and children closer: More family dinners, more reading to young children," *U.S. Census*, [www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/01/parents-and-children-interacted-more-during-covid-19.html](https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/01/parents-and-children-interacted-more-during-covid-19.html).



## CHILDREN AND SCREENTIME

Since the turn of the millennium, there has been a massive increase in the amount of time children spend on screen entertainment, driven by the rise of video games, the internet, social media, and mobile devices. This is revolutionizing interactions among young people, and with this revolution comes consequences. The amount of time spent watching TV and on electronic devices eats into time that children could otherwise spend on in-person social activities, sports, and family interactions that expand their social capital.<sup>17</sup> Youth who spend more time on recreational electronic media reportedly have lower grades and lower levels of contentment.<sup>18</sup>

This section looks at the share of children aged 6 to 17 who spend four or more hours watching TV or an electronic device for non-school purposes on the average weekday. Before 2018, the question was separated between TV and electronic devices and then it was combined into one question. The Utah Foundation summed up the percentage of children spending four or more hours watching television with those who spent four or more hours using an electronic device. Data are from the National Survey of Children's Health. For more details, see the Appendix.

---

17 Long, Roxanne, 2020, "Protect students' education futures through social capital opportunities in sport and non-sport extracurricular activities," *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research* 10, no. 1:1-15, <https://dc.swosu.edu/aij/vol10/iss1/5>.

18 Rideout, Victoria J., Ulli G. Foehr, and Donald F. Roberts, 2010, "Generation M2: Media in the lives of 8- to 18-year-olds," *Kaiser Family Foundation*, p. 4, [www.kff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/8010.pdf](http://www.kff.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/8010.pdf).

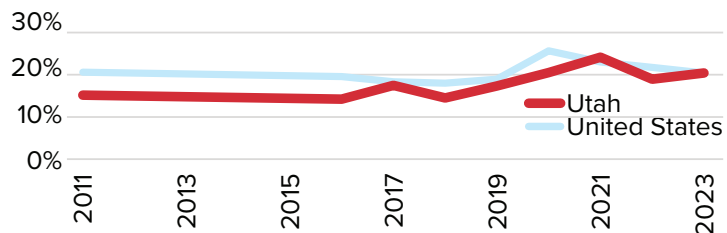




## CHILDREN AND SCREENTIME DASHBOARD

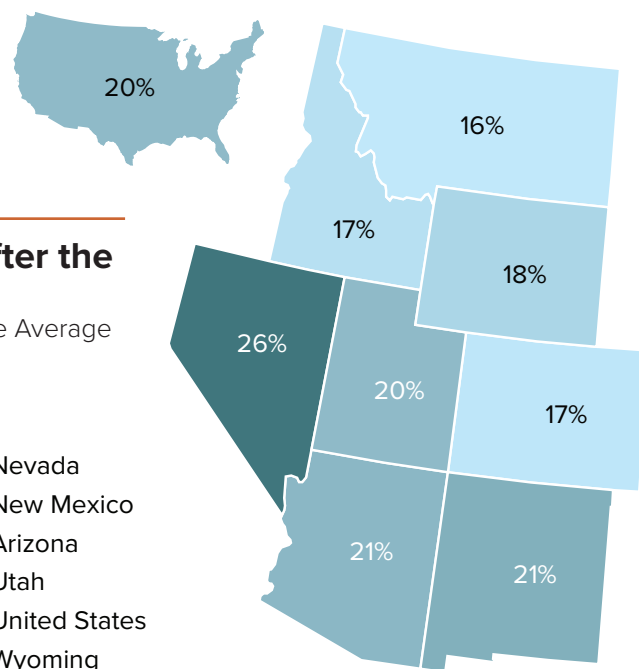
### Utah catches the U.S. for its share of children with 4+ hours of screen time.

Figure 5.1: Share of Children 6-17 with 4+ Hours of Screen time on the Average Weekday, Utah and the United States: 2011-2023



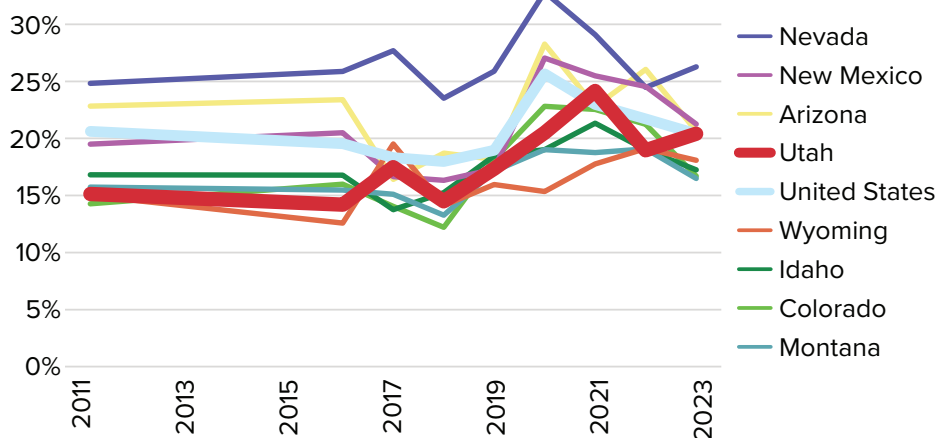
### Nevada has largest share of children with screentime among the Mountain States by a substantial margin.

Figure 5.2: Share of Children 6-17 with 4+ Hours of Screen time on the Average Weekday in the Mountain States, 2023



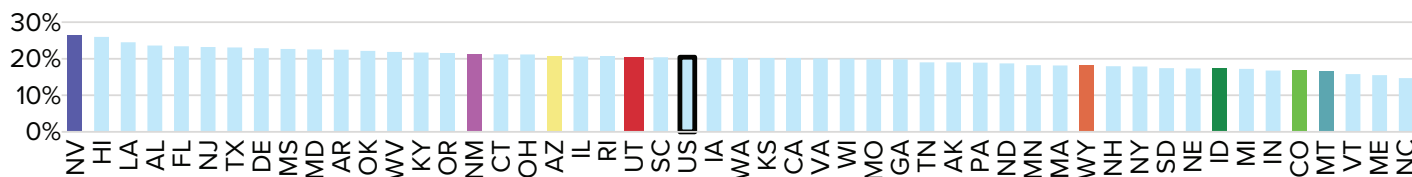
### Screen time peaked during and immediately after the pandemic among Mountain States.

Figure 5.3: Share of Children 6-17 with 4+ Hours of Screen time on the Average Weekday, Utah and the Mountain States: 2011-2023



### Utah children spend as much time on screens as the national rate.

Figure 5.4: Share of Children 6-17 with 4+ Hours of Screen time on the Average Weekday by State, 2023



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

## Utah Children: TV and Electronic Devices, Over Time

A rapid ascent began after 2016 and reached its peak in 2021. At that point, nearly one-in-four children were spending four or more hours on the average weekday on TV or an electronic device. While the proportion of children with four or more hours of screen time has fallen since the pandemic peak, one in five Utah children still spends four or more hours of screen time on the average weekday.

## Children and Electronic Media in the Mountain States

Nevada continues to lead the Mountain States and the nation in terms of screentime. Utah is fourth among the Mountain States. Screentime for most Mountain States peaked in 2020, while Utah and Idaho peaked a year later. Only Montana and Wyoming did not experience a rapid increase during the pandemic period.

## Utah and the Nation

Utah initially had lower levels of screentime than the nation. However, increases during the pandemic have brought Utah much closer to the national level.



## CHILDREN AND FAMILY MEALS

In contrast to the time children spend on media, daily family meals provide a time-tested forum for the family to act as a socialization force.<sup>19</sup> Mealtimes offer an opportunity for families to come together, strengthen relationships, communicate important information, and address any problems that arise. Children who regularly eat with their parents are more likely to perform well in school and face lower levels of stress.<sup>20</sup> Family meals are also associated with healthier diets and lower obesity rates.<sup>21</sup>

This indicator looks at the percent of families that ate a meal together daily over the previous week. The data are from the National Survey of Children's Health. See the Appendix for more details.

---

19 Belcher, John R., et al., 2011, "Family capital: Implications for interventions with families," *Journal of Family Social Work*, 14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10522158.2010.542113>.

20 OECD, 2014, "Who are the school truants," *PISA In Focus*, No. 35, p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1787/5jzb019jwmd5-en>; The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, 2012 "The Importance of Family Dinners VIII," p. 5, *Columbia University*, <https://cdn-01.drugfree.org/web/prod/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/1920241/The-importance-of-family-dinners%20VIII.pdf>.

21 Harvard School of Public Health, 2018, "The power of a family meal," [www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/multimedia-article/family-meals-healthy-eating/](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/multimedia-article/family-meals-healthy-eating/).

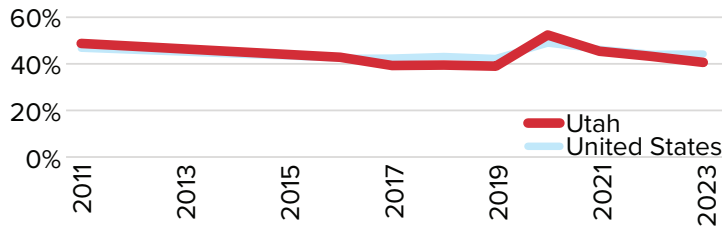




CHILDREN AND FAMILY MEALS DASHBOARD

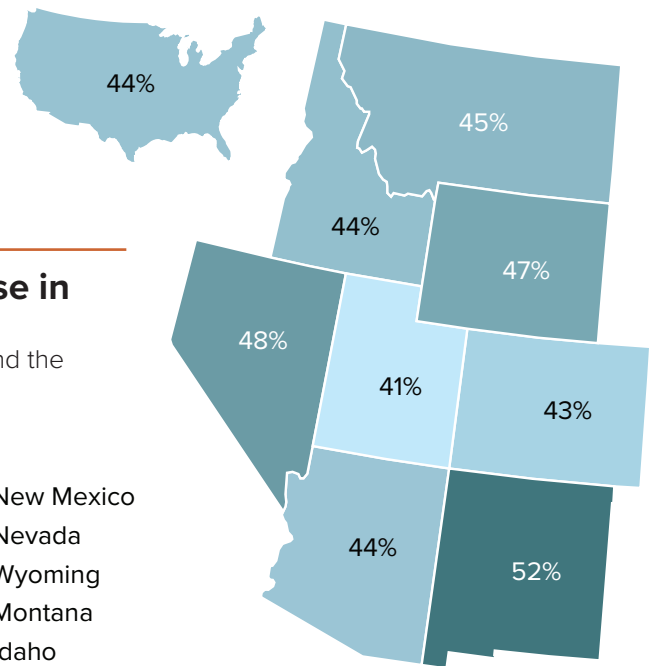
Family meals in Utah drop below the national rate post-pandemic.

Figure 6.1: Share of Children Eating a Meal with Family Daily, Utah and the United States: 2011-2023



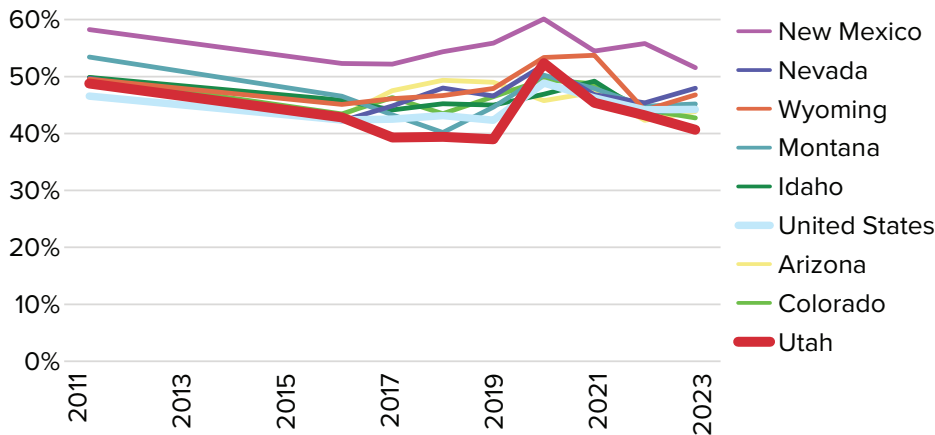
Utah is the poorest-performing state in the region when it comes to meals as a family.

Figure 6.2: Share of Children Eating a Meal as a Family Daily in the Mountain States; 2023



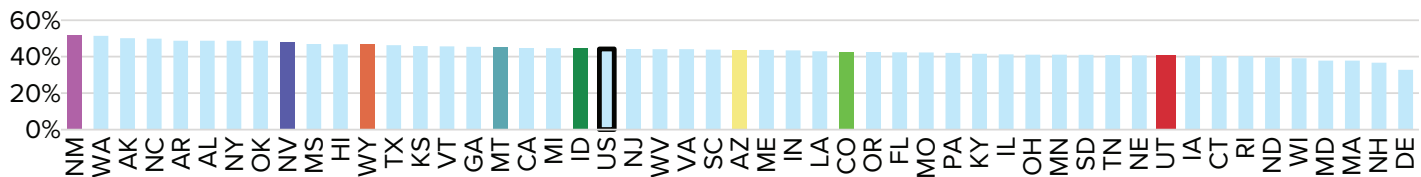
Family meals in Utah have declined below those in other Mountain States post-pandemic.

Figure 6.3: Share of Children Eating a Meal with Family Daily, Utah and the Mountain States, 2007-2023



Utah is among the low-performing states in terms of family meals.

Figure 6.4: Share of Children Eating a Meal with Family Daily in the Past Weekday by State, 2023



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

## Family Meal Trends in Utah, Over Time

The percentage of Utah families eating together has been in rapid decline. In 2011, 49% of Utah children convened for a meal with their family every day. By 2019, that number had dropped by one-fifth, to 39%. While the pandemic boosted family meals in 2020, sending Utah to its highest point in the past 15 years, the state has since almost returned to its low point.

## Family meals in the Mountain States

Five Mountain States are above average in terms of the share of families eating together daily, and two of them are in the top 10 nationally. Arizona, Colorado, and Utah were below average in 2023. Since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many Mountain States have faced declines in family meals. However, the rate at which these states declined varied. Utah and Wyoming faced a sharp decline, while New Mexico faced fragmented declines. Additionally, New Mexico is in the top slot by a considerable distance. This may be due to a cultural attribute: New Mexico is the most Hispanic/Latino state in the nation; those families are more likely to prioritize mealtimes.<sup>22</sup>

## Utah and the Nation

In 2011, Utah was ahead of the national share in its share of children eating a meal together with their family daily. By 2019, the Beehive State had fallen behind the national share on this metric. The pandemic increased this rate, as more people stayed in their homes. Utah became 7th in the nation in 2020 as the state experienced a one-third increase. With the increase, Utah in 2020 also saw the highest share of children participating in a family meal daily in 15 years. After five years, Utah's share of children eating a meal together with their family daily has decreased to 41%.

---

22 One study found that 78.3% of Hispanic immigrant families eat a meal together daily. Fleishman, J., 2017, "The association of family mealtime and acculturation with weight in Latino youth," *Pacific University*, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-Association-of-Family-Mealtime-and-with-Weight-Fleishman/9a600cdf0bc5dc1c52244a055d1d36b907140e6b# citing-papers>. See also Hammons, Amber Jean, et al., 2020, "The evolving family mealtime: Findings from focus group interviews with Hispanic mothers," *JMIR Pediatrics and Parenting*, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7445606/>.

## TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY

The benefit of family time extends beyond just meals. Family bonds can develop and strengthen not only during dinner, but also during meal preparation, sports, exercise, socialization, and leisure activities. The amount of time spent with family members – whether within or outside the household can indicate the health of the family network and illustrates the resources individuals can bring to bear to address problems and concerns.

This metric examines the average number of minutes per day that individuals spend with their family during activities such as eating, drinking, sports, exercise, socializing, or leisure. A family includes a spouse or partner, children, siblings, and parents, whether those individuals live in the household or elsewhere. The previous four years of data have been averaged to account for limited data in low-population states. Data are from the American Time Use Survey produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. For more information, see the Appendix.

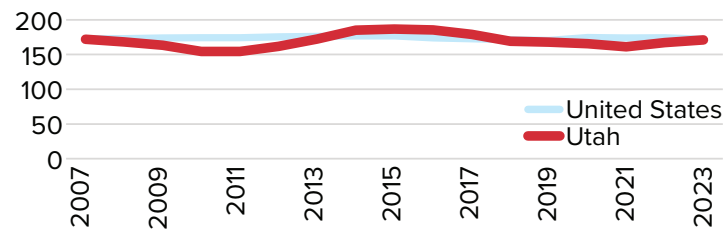


*Near Cedar City, Utah*

TIME SPENT WITH FAMILY DASHBOARD

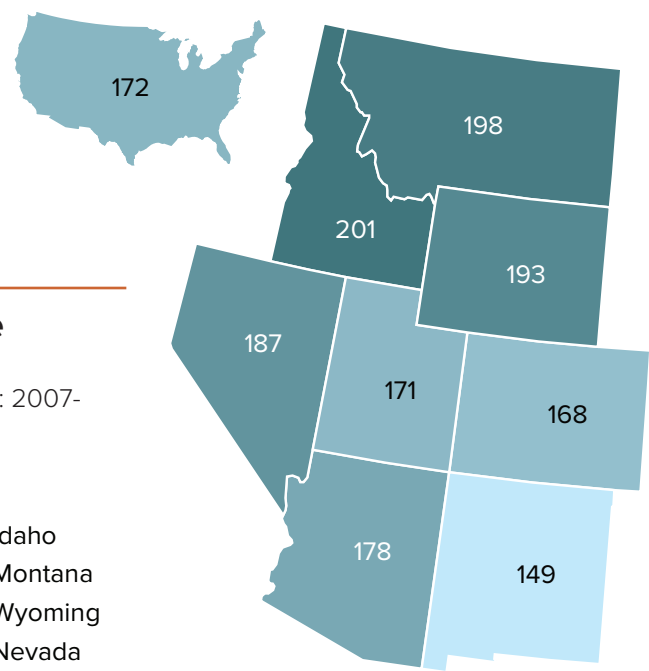
Utahns spending time with their family has fluctuated over the past 17 years.

Figure 7.1: Minutes Spent with Family per Day, Utah and the United States, 2007-2023 4-year rolling average



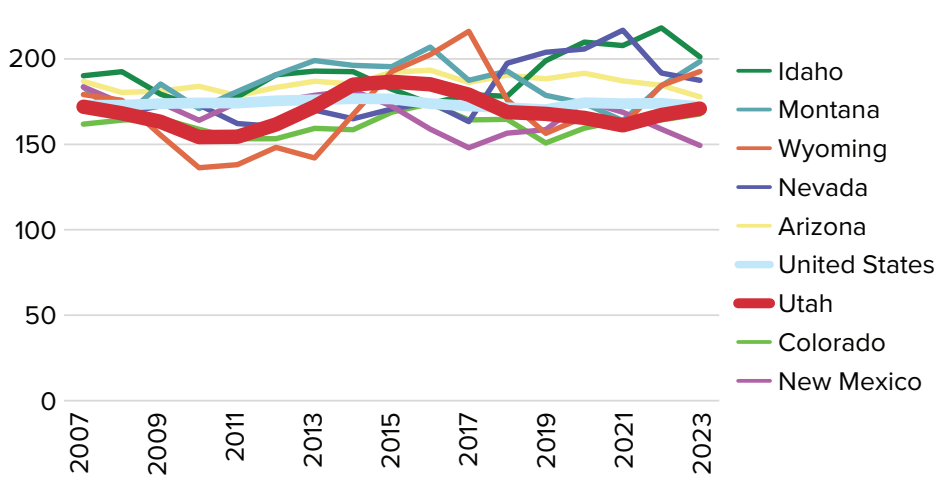
Utah is sixth among Mountain States in terms of time spent with family.

Figure 7.2: Minutes Spent with Family per Day in the Mountain States; 2020-2023 average



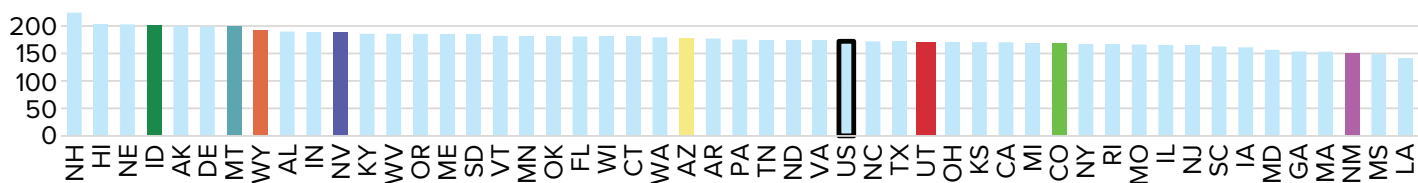
Utah usually ranks among the lower half of the Mountain States.

Figure 7.3: Minutes Spent with Family per Day in the Mountain States: 2007-2023 4-year rolling average



Utah sits under the national share of time spent with family.

Figure 7.4: Minutes Spent with Family per Day, by State, 2020-2023 average



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



## Utah's Time Spent with Family, Over Time

In 2023, Utahns spent an average of nearly three hours (171 minutes) per day eating, exercising, or socializing with their family members. Utahns' time spent with family has fluctuated between 150 and 200 minutes over the past 17 years.

## Time Spent with Family in the Mountain States

Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming are among the top ten states in the nation for spending time with family. Nevada is eleventh. The remaining Mountain states are more dispersed in the ranking, with New Mexico third-to-last in terms of spending time with family. Even averaging the data across four years, there is still a substantial amount of variation from year to year.

## Utah and the Nation

Utahns spend less time with their family than the nation at large. While Utah surpassed the nation from 2014 to 2017, the state is generally among the lower half of states.



Near Cedar City, Utah

---



## FAMILY HEALTH SUB-INDEX SCORE

The Utah Foundation standardizes the indicators discussed in this report to create an index score ranging from 0 to 14. This scale was standardized to 2016 levels. Since the index is standardized to 2016 levels, if states improve or decline over time, they can achieve index scores outside this range. Additionally, several states have indicators so far outside the norm that they may also fall outside this range.



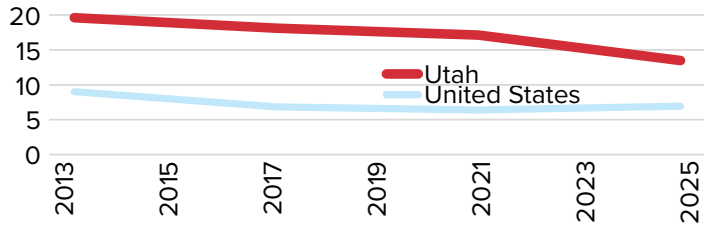
*Dutch John, Utah*

---

## FAMILY HEALTH SUB-INDEX DASHBOARD

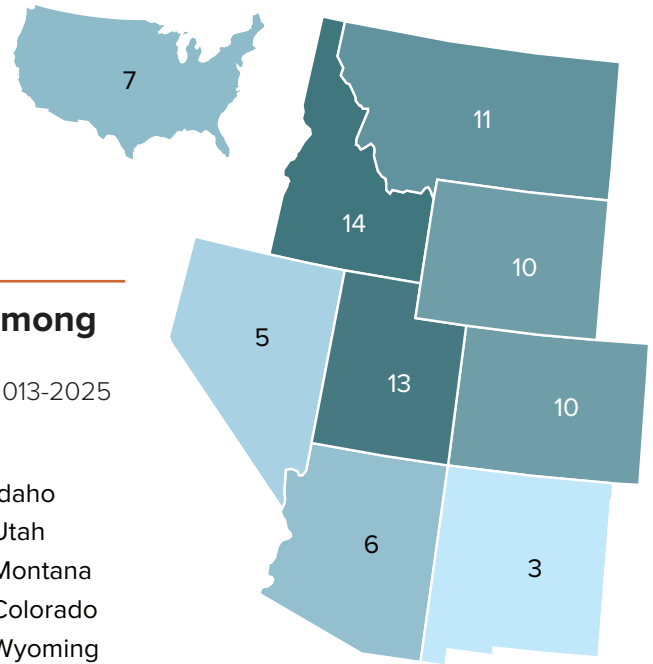
### Utah's family health has declined while remaining one of the best in the nation.

Figure 8.1: Family Health Sub-index, Utah and the United States, 2013-2025



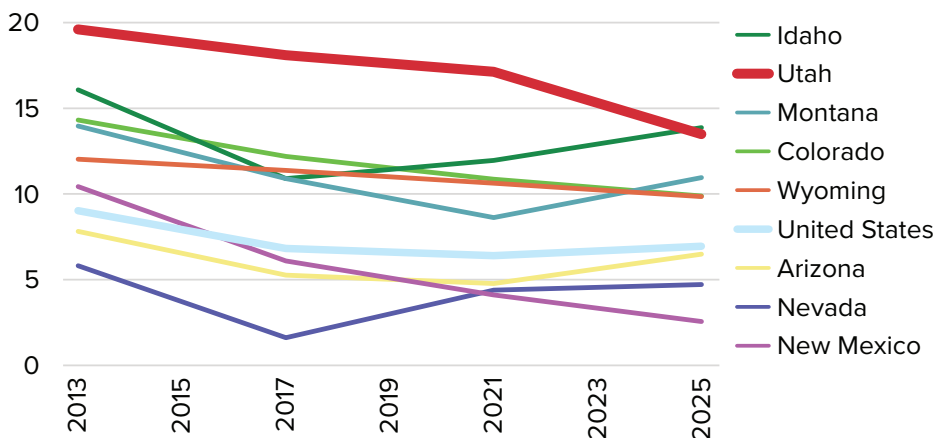
### Utah has the second-highest family health among the Mountain States.

Figure 8.2: Family Health Sub-index in the Mountain States; 2025



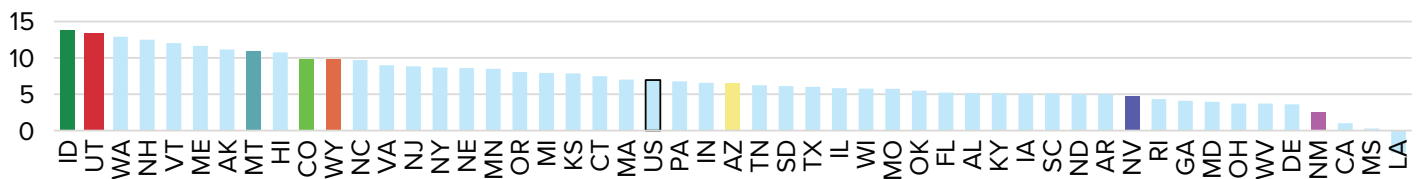
### Utah had the biggest decline in family health among the Mountain States.

Figure 8.3: Family Health Sub-index, Utah and the Mountain States: 2013-2025



### Utah has the second-highest family health in the nation.

Figure 8.4: Family Health Sub-index, by State, 2025



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

## Utah Family Health, Over Time

From 2013 to 2025, Utah saw a downward trend in family health. However, Utah had an extremely high starting place in 2013. At that time, Utah was a high outlier on six of the seven indicators. This gave Utah an index score of 20 on a scale where most states should fall between 0 and 14. As the time spent reading to children and family dinners has decreased in Utah, and while time spent on electronic devices has increased, Utah has fallen to within the expected range – to 13 on the subindex. At the same time, Utah’s high rankings in family structure indicators (married adults, births to married women, and adults per household) keep Utah among the top states in terms of family health.

## Family Health in the Mountain States

Idaho and Utah have the best family health in the nation. While Montana and Colorado also fall among the top ten, and Wyoming ranks eleventh, there is a wide gap between these two sets of states. New Mexico, on the other hand, has the fourth-lowest family health.

Over time, the Mountain States seem to have separated into two different categories. Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico have all seen steady decreases over the past 12 years. Idaho, Montana, Arizona, and Nevada have all experienced dips, followed by subsequent recoveries. This appears to be related to the rise and subsequent decline in the use of electronic devices during the pandemic, as well as trends among adults per household. While almost all Mountain States saw a similar pattern in terms of peak electronic device usage during the pandemic, the states with continued declines had other factors that declined faster than the electronic devices rebound.

## Utah and the Nation

Utah’s high rankings of family structure (married adults, births to married mothers, and adults per household) have helped Utah maintain its lead among the nation. However, factors measuring the quality of interactions between family members have been responsible for Utah’s decrease over the past 12 years, moving Utah closer to the national score.



## CONCLUSION

Utah has the second-highest family health in the nation. This is due to the Beehive State's family structure (the share of adults married, children born to married mothers, and adults per household), which is by far the best in the nation. This is responsible for 80% of Utah's family health sub-index score. However, indicators looking at the quality of family interactions are much weaker in Utah.

Utah strongly leads the nation in terms of adults per household and in terms of married adults aged 35 to 64 – well above the national rate. The neighboring state of Idaho occupies the second spot nationally for married adults. But two other Mountain States – New Mexico and Nevada – are in the bottom five nationally.

Utah also strongly leads the nation in births within wedlock, and births to married women are far above the national rate. On this metric, two neighboring states again occupy the second and third spots nationally – this time, Colorado and Idaho. But, once again, New Mexico and Nevada bring up the rear in the nation's bottom five.



Sandy, Utah

Utah also performs well in the number of adults in the home. This family structure metric, which include cohabitating partners, multi-generational family structures, or even adult children still living at home, has been slowly increasing. While this may have positive ramifications for social capital, the increase may be fueled in part by the rapid increase in housing prices, which may encourage adult children to continue living with their parents, as well as other forms of doubling up to keep costs down. The four western Mountain States all fall among the top ten states for the average number of adults per household, and Utah has the third-highest shares of adults per household in the nation.

But despite Utah's outstanding performance on family formation and structure, the Beehive State had performed poorly on family activities. These trends began to form before the pandemic hit. While there was some recovery after the pandemic, it was insufficient, and these trends continue to worsen or remain stable.

Prior to the pandemic, Utah, along with Nevada and Arizona, languished in the bottom 10 states in reading to young children. Reading to children had been in rapid decline in Utah. 2020 reversed this trend dramatically as families spent more time at home, sending Utah just above the national rate. However, since then, Utah has leveled off and tried to recover. In 2023, Utah's rate is slightly below the national average.

As reading to younger children declined, the consumption of technology by older children had been rising. Utah has a slightly higher share of children using electronic media than the national rate. In past years, Utah was consistently below the national rate. However, this shifted in 2023. The other Mountain States vary in this metric. Nevada has the highest share in the nation, while Colorado and Montana are among the bottom five states nationally.

Also alarming has been the significant decline in Utah families eating together daily. While most Mountain States perform well on this metric – with New Mexico and Nevada in the top 10 and New Mexico a strong No. 1 – Utah's decline had led it down to the 10th worst by 2023. Although Utah's massive rebound during the 2020 pandemic helped the state outperform

others, placing in the top 10 states for family meals, the share decreased in the following years.

Utahns time spent with their family has fluctuated over the past 17 years, sometimes above average and sometimes below. Currently, Utah's rate is near the national average.

Utah has reason to brag about its excellent statistics on family formation and structure. It is the undisputable national leader in this respect. However, while Utah families may be well-formed, the interactions within those families have, for years, been of poor and declining quality. Unless Utah can maintain the 2020 turnaround in family meals and reading – and reduce youth technology usage – the consequences for children will unfold over time. This may have adverse effects on future family formation.



## APPENDIX

### The Share of Adults 35-64 Currently Married

The Utah Foundation used the public use microsample (PUMS) dataset from the American Community Survey (ACS) for data on married individuals. Individuals were considered married if they were between the ages of 35 and 64 and lived in a married couple household. Data were available for 2008-2023.

### Share of Births to Married Women

Birth rate data were collected from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention database on Natality, 2007-2023.<sup>23</sup> The Utah Foundation looked at births only where mothers were reported as married or unmarried and did not consider cases where mothers were not asked or undetermined cases. The difference between this metric and married mothers as a share of all births is minimal. Before 2017, the data were identical. As of 2017, California stopped reporting to the CDC, so the data for the state is unavailable for comparison for recent years. Data were available from 2007 to 2023.

### Average Adults per Household

Data on the average number of adults per household were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey Public Use Microsample. Data were available from 2008 to 2023. The number of adults in a household included any individual in the household over the age of 18.

### Share of Children 5 and under Read to Every Day

Data for children who were read aloud to were collected in the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), which was administered in 2007 and 2011/12 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and from 2016 to 2019 by the U.S. Census Bureau. The NSCH is a questionnaire sent to parents and other guardians of children across all 50 states and the District of Columbia, with a minimum of 100,000 respondents per year from 2007 to 2012 and a minimum of 20,000 respondents per year from 2016 to 2019. Between 2007 and 2012, the survey was conducted via telephone methodology, and between 2016 and 2023, it was conducted via mail and internet-based communications. Each response was assigned a weight based on the number of respondents from the same state to ensure equal geographic

---

23 Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023, "Natality, 2007-2023 Request," <https://wonder.cdc.gov/controller/datarequest/D66>.

representation when aggregating the data.<sup>24</sup> Between 2007 and 2019, this question in the NSCH inquired about how many nights a week the child was read to, and the dataset only included children aged five and younger.<sup>25</sup> Data were available for 2007, 2011/2012, and 2016-2023.

### **Share of Children 6-17 that Watched TV 4+ Hours in the Past Weekday**

Data for children watching TV were collected in the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), which was administered in 2007 and 2011/12 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in 2016-23 by the Census Bureau. See details about the NSCH, above. Between 2007 and 2017, this question in the NSCH was asked about how many hours on an average weekday the child spent "in front of a TV watching TV programs, videos, or playing video games?"<sup>26</sup> In 2018-19, the question was combined with the formerly separate metric for time spent using a computer or other electronic device to read "about how much time did this child spend in front of a TV, computer, cellphone, or other electronic device watching programs, playing games, accessing the internet, or using social media?"<sup>27</sup> The Utah Foundation standardized measures to count those who spent 4+ hours in the past week. Data were available for 2007, 2011/2012, and 2016-2023.

### **Share of Children 6-17 that Spent 4+ Hours on Electronic Devices in the Past Weekday**

Data for children using electronics were collected in the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), which was administered in 2007 and 2011/12 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in 2016-19 by the Census Bureau. See details about the NSCH, above. This question was first introduced in the NSCH in 2011, when it asked about how many hours on an average weekday the child spent "with computers, cell phones, handheld video games, and other electronic devices?"<sup>28</sup> In 2016-17, the wording was changed slightly to clarify that the time must be spent doing things other than schoolwork. In 2018-19, the question was combined with the formerly separate metric for time spent watching TV to read "about how much time did this child spend in front of a TV, computer, cellphone, or other electronic device watching programs, playing games, accessing the internet, or us-

---

24 "National Survey of Children's Health - Data Resource Center For Child And Adolescent Health". *Childhealthdata.Org*, [www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH](http://www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH).

25 "2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health SAS Code For Data Users", *Childhealthdata.Org*, [www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook\\_-2011-2012-nsch-v1\\_05-10-13.pdf](http://www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook_-2011-2012-nsch-v1_05-10-13.pdf).

26 "2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health SAS Code for Data Users", *Childhealthdata.Org*, [www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook\\_-2011-2012-nsch-v1\\_05-10-13.pdf](http://www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook_-2011-2012-nsch-v1_05-10-13.pdf).

27 "NSCH Codebook", *Census.Gov*, [www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s\\_keyword=](http://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s_keyword=).

28 "2011-2012 National Survey of Children's Health SAS Code for Data Users", *Childhealthdata.Org*, [www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook\\_-2011-2012-nsch-v1\\_05-10-13.pdf](http://www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook_-2011-2012-nsch-v1_05-10-13.pdf).

ing social media?”<sup>29</sup> The Utah Foundation standardized measures to count those who spent 4+ hours in the past weekday. Data were available for 2007, 2011/2012, and 2016-2023.

### **Share of Families Eating a Meal Together Daily**

Data for children eating meals with their families was collected in the National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH), which was administered in 2007 and 2011/12 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and in 2016-19 by the Census Bureau. See details about the NSCH, above. Between 2007 and 19, this question in the NSCH was asked about how many days during the past week all family members in a household ate meals together.<sup>30</sup> The Utah Foundation standardized measures to count those who ate a meal together every day. Data were available for 2007, 2011/2012, and 2016-2023.

### **Time Spent with Family during Food Preparation and Eating, Sports, Exercise, Socializing, and Leisure**

Data was collected from the American Time Use Survey produced by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data were restricted to the activity codes of “Eating and Drinking” (11), “Socializing/Leisure” (12), and Sports/Exercise (13). Time spent with family included any of the aforementioned activities where the person involved was a spouse or partner, a household relative, or a non-household relative. (Who codes 20-27, 40,51-53). Data were available from 2003 to 2023.

---

29 “NSCH Codebook”, *Census.Gov*, [www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s\\_keyword=](http://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s_keyword=).

30 “2011-2012 National Survey of Children’s Health SAS Code for Data Users”, *Childhealthdata.Org*, [www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook\\_-2011-2012-nsch-v1\\_05-10-13.pdf](http://www.childhealthdata.org/docs/nsch-docs/sas-codebook_-2011-2012-nsch-v1_05-10-13.pdf).

31 “NSCH Codebook”, *Census.Gov*, [www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s\\_keyword=](http://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/uccb/nschdict?s_keyword=).



# UTAH FOUNDATION

RESEARCH • ANALYZE • INFORM

## PLATINUM MEMBERS

The **Brent and Bonnie Jean Beesley** Foundation



**GEORGE S. AND DOLORES DORÉ ECCLES**  
FOUNDATION



THE CHURCH OF  
**JESUS CHRIST**  
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS  
FOUNDATION

## GOLD MEMBERS



LAWRENCE T. & JANET T.  
**DEE FOUNDATION**



## SILVER MEMBERS

**American-Pacific Corp.  
Deloitte  
Fidelity Investments  
Garbett Family Foundation**

**Intermountain Health  
The Kanter Family Foundation  
Molina Healthcare  
Mountainland Association  
of Governments**

**Northrup Grumman  
Staker Parson Companies  
WCF Insurance  
Wells Fargo**

## BRONZE MEMBERS

BBG Real Estate Services  
Brigham Young University  
Ronna Cohen  
Community Foundation of Utah  
Cottonwood Heights  
Davis County Chamber  
Denise Dragoo  
Granite School District  
HDR Engineering

Holland & Hart  
Magnum Development  
my529  
Revere Health  
Salt Lake Chamber  
Salt Lake Community College  
Sandy City  
Snow College  
Suazo Business Center

United Way of Salt Lake  
University of Utah  
Utah State University  
Utah System of Higher Education  
Utah Tech University  
Utah Valley University  
Wasatch Front Regional Council  
Weber State University  
West Jordan