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UTAH SOCIAL CAPITAL SERIES

PART V



THE SOIL OF COMMON GROUND

Social Cohesion in Utah

MARCH 2022

THE SOIL OF COMMON GROUND

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Research Report 798

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INTRODUCTION

This installment in the Utah Social Capital Series seeks to measure social cohesion. While notions of social cohesion are woven throughout the topics contained in this series, this report places special emphasis on background factors that facilitate broad-based interactions across Utah communities, perhaps even supporting cohesion of the state as a whole.

BACKGROUND

For the purposes of this series, the Utah Foundation defines social cohesion as the foundational commonalities that allow a population to function effectively as a group and open the way for individuals to participate in that whole. A variety of factors could be selected to suggest the relative level of social cohesion. For instance, tribal allegiances like a common ethnicity or political outlook could suggest relative cohesion in one place or another, although in widely varying degrees. An emphasis on them may also create fragmentation. In this report, however, we focus on more practical indicators of broad-based cohesion. We do this by employing three lenses: economic stratification, language and the extent to which the population is homegrown.

MIDDLE-CLASS STRENGTH

In recent years, analysts have been documenting the increased sorting of Americans by class and the nation's increasing income disparities. They have also examined their deleterious effects both on those stuck at the bottom of the income ladder across generations and on the cohesion of society as a whole.¹ The data indicate a long-term ascent in the wealth held by the upper class and a long-term decline in the middle class.²

A larger middle class suggests less economic stratification and therefore greater social cohesion. The following analysis uses the share of the population in middle-class households as the primary measure of how well a state is doing with regard to economic stratification.

In this report, the Utah Foundation defines the middle class as the share of a state's population earning between two-thirds and twice the median income. We gathered data from the U.S. Census Bureau. For more information, view the Appendix.

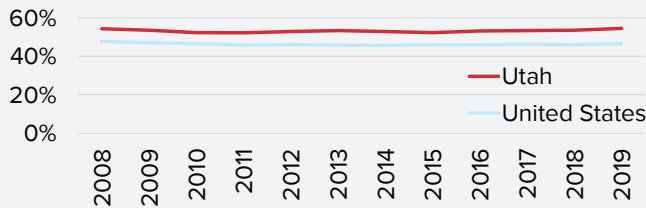


KEY FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT

- Utah has a remarkably strong middle class. As of 2019, Utah's middle class remained not just ahead of the nation as a whole – but ahead of every other state. In fact, not only was Utah No. 1, it was outperforming the second strongest state by a notable margin.
- Utah's percentage of children with limited English proficiency is in the bottom half of all states. This contrasts somewhat with the adult population; Utah has the 22nd highest share of adults with limited English proficiency.
- The share of Utah residents born in the state ranks 19th highest in 2019. Utah is unique among Mountain States in its robust population of state natives; most states in the region are well below average on this count, and some rank among the very lowest. Utah's proportion of state natives is more than double that of neighboring Nevada.

Utah's middle class is above 50% of households.

Figure 1: Share of Households in Middle Class, Utah and the United States, 2008-2019



For source information on all figures, see the Appendix.

Utah's Middle Class Over Time

During the past decade, Utah's middle class has remained solidly above a 50% share of households in the state. Beginning in 2016, the size of Utah's middle class began trending somewhat upward, and by 2019 had reached a level not seen since 2008.

Utah and the Nation

During the past decade, the strength of Utah's middle class has tracked ahead of the nation at large with remarkable consistency. As of 2019, Utah's middle class remained not just ahead of the nation as a whole – but ahead of every other state. In fact, not only was Utah No. 1, it was outperforming the second strongest state by a notable margin.

In 2019, Utah had the largest proportion of households in the middle class in the U.S.

Figure 2: Share of Households in Middle Class by state, 2019



FORMAT OF THE UTAH SOCIAL CAPITAL SERIES

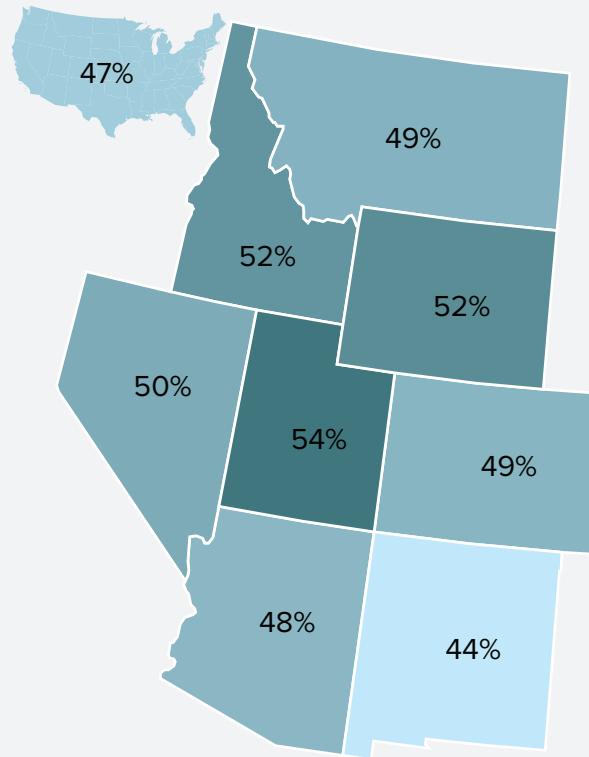
Social capital refers to the bonds between neighbors and among networks, which they can use to benefit themselves and the group as a whole. Social capital takes many forms. With this series, the Utah Foundation seeks to be comprehensive, gathering data on roughly 30 metrics. We sorted them into seven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

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

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

Utah, Idaho and Wyoming have the nation's strongest middle class.

Figure 3: Share of Households in Middle Class, Mountain States, 2019



The Middle Class in the Mountain States

For the past decade, Utah has remained the top performer among the eight Mountain States in terms of the strength of its middle class. In fact, 2019 saw Utah as part of a cluster of Mountain States with a robust middle class, with Wyoming ranking No. 2 and Idaho ranking No. 3 in the nation. Several other Mountain States (Nevada, Montana, Colorado and Arizona) showed up in the top half of states. Only one state in the region, New Mexico, fared relatively poorly. It has one of the smallest middle classes in the nation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

For better or worse, English has always been the principal language of economic life in the U.S. and, indeed, is the language of commerce and diplomacy internationally. In order to fully participate in the benefits of economic life in this country, English language proficiency is a necessity nearly everywhere. English language also opens the door to education and participation in wider community life. If a significant proportion of the population lacks English proficiency, their social capital will be impaired. Further, the social capital of the whole will be diminished by the language barriers between language groups. While those lacking English fluency may build social capital within their language group, they will be constrained in expanding their social borders beyond that group. Recent Utah Foundation research has touched on the educational and economic importance of English proficiency.³

In this section we examine two categories of the population in terms of limited English proficiency: the student-age population and the adult population. A key part of the American Dream is the accessibility of education. For students with limited English

The percentage of Utah children with limited English proficiency has fallen faster than the percentage of adults facing that challenge.

Figure 4: Share of Children with Limited English Proficiency, Utah and the United States, 2009-2020

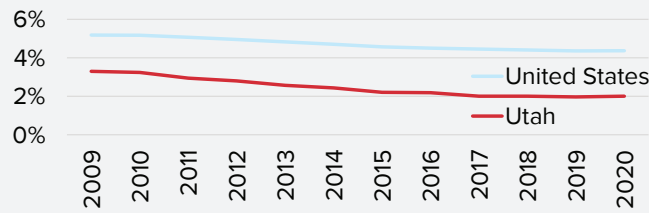
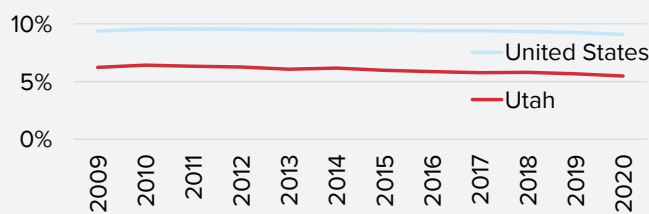


Figure 5: Share of Adults with Limited English Proficiency, Utah and the United States, 2009-2020



of school-aged children with limited English proficiency – such as Texas, California, New York, New Jersey and Florida. Utah’s percentage is far below these states and in fact is in the bottom half of all states.

This contrasts somewhat with the adult population, where Utah has the 22nd highest share of adults with limited English proficiency.

proficiency, the education system may not confer the same advantages. For adults lacking English proficiency, many are already struggling with diminished social opportunities and economic outcomes.

Utah’s English Proficiency Over Time

Utah’s share of school-aged children who have limited English proficiency has fallen during the past decade, from more than 3% to 2%.

The adult population with limited English proficiency is much larger and has held steady at around 6%. However, even that number has fallen somewhat.

Utah and the Nation

During the past decade, the percentage of Utahns with limited English proficiency has held consistently lower than the nation at large. While the percentages for both children and adults nationally have trended generally downward, the downward trends in Utah have been more pronounced.

Interestingly, 42 states have below average population shares of school-aged children with limited English proficiency. This is because the most populated states in the country are among those with the largest shares

The percentage of Utahns with limited English proficiency is not particularly high, though higher for adults than children.

Figure 6: Share of Children with Limited English Proficiency by State, 2020

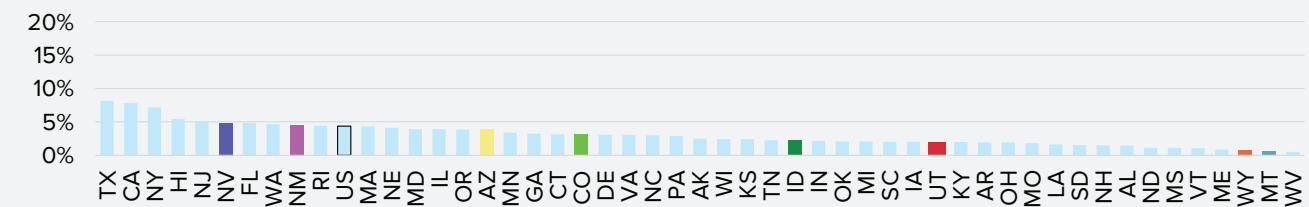
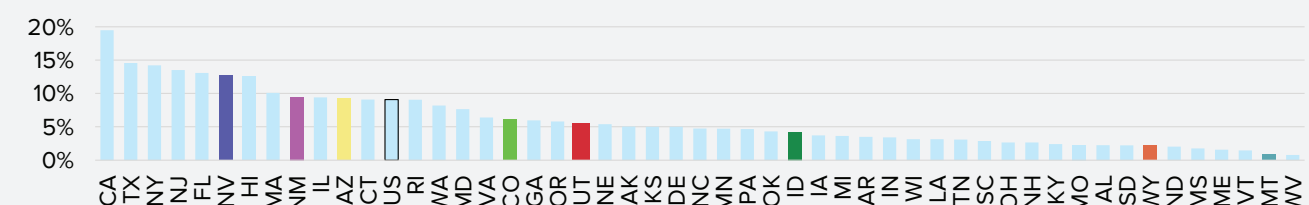


Figure 7: Share of Adults with Limited English Proficiency by State, 2020



Utah is in the lower half of the Mountain States for the percentage of both children and adults with limited English proficiency.

Figure 8: Share of Children with Limited English Proficiency in the Mountain States, 2020

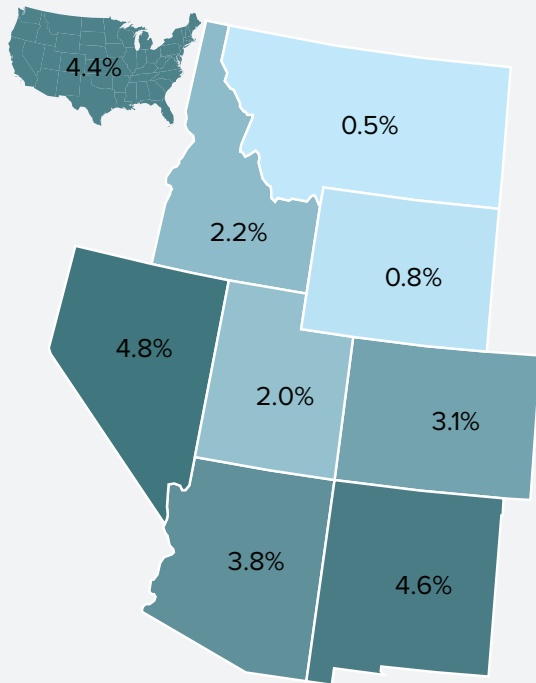
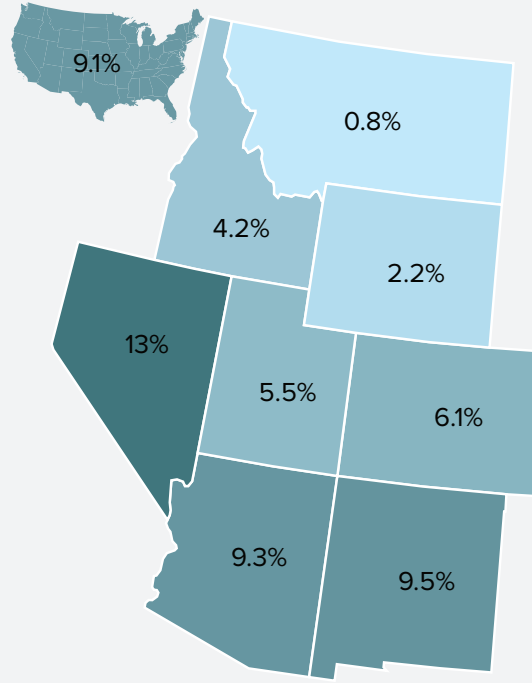


Figure 9: Share of Adults with Limited English Proficiency in the Mountain States, 2020



English Proficiency in the Mountain States

Most of the Mountain States have seen a similar downward trend in the population with limited English proficiency. Arizona, Colorado and Nevada in particular have seen significant declines in the proportion of children with limited English proficiency.

However, there is wide variation among the Mountain States, with Nevada, New Mexico and Arizona among the U.S. states with the highest percentages both for children and adults; Wyoming and Montana are among the very lowest. In 2020, Utah had the third-lowest share of school-aged children and the fourth-lowest share of adults with limited English proficiency among the Mountain States.

THE SHARE OF POPULATION BORN IN-STATE

Networks are likely to be stronger when individuals live in a single place over a long period of time. They are more likely to be aware of the resources available in their local areas and more likely to be integrated into the community. However, a large proportion of state natives may in some cases indicate economic stagnation where there are limited job opportunities to draw new residents. This appears to be the case, for instance, across the Rust Belt.

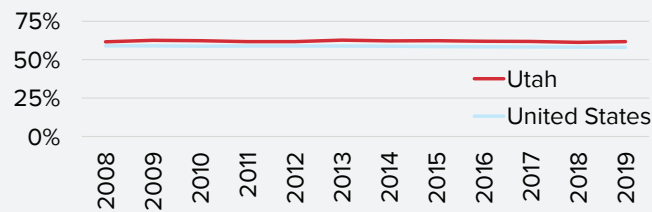
Utah’s In-State Population Over Time

During the last decade, Utah’s share of people born in-state fluctuated somewhat, but remained above 60%. Due in part to certain economic characteristics such as economic diversification and growth, Utah both attracts and retains inhabitants.⁴ In ad-

Utah's unique culture may help ground its citizens in the state and draw them back once they leave.

Utah's population born in-state has remained above 60% during the past decade.

Figure 10: Share of Population Born in State, Utah and United States, 2008-2019



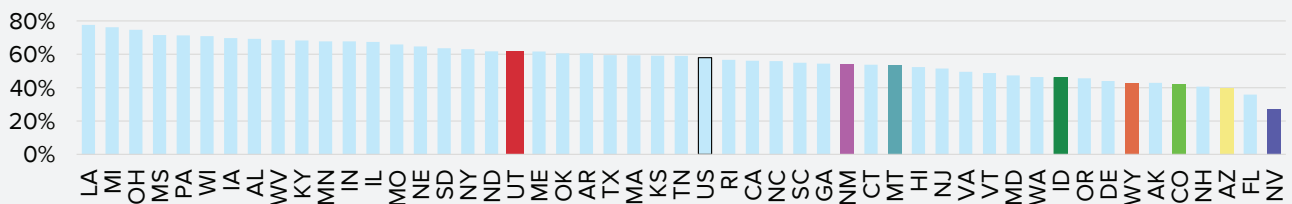
dition, Utah's high birth rate ensures a relatively high number of young people per household who may be more likely to have been born in the state because of their proximity in time to their birth. Finally, Utah's unique culture may help ground its citizens in the state and draw them back if they leave.

Utah and the Nation

Utah's share of residents born in the state ranks 19th highest in 2019. Utah is alone among all Western states in its position above the national average. Most of the other states above 60% are located across the Rust Belt and Midwest, or in the deep South.

Utah is alone among all Western states in its position above the national average for homegrown population.

Figure 11: Share of Population Born in State by State, 2008-2019



Population Churn in the Mountain States

Utah has the largest share of state natives in its population when compared with the rest of the Mountain States. However, the region in general has a low proportion of such people. Nevada has the very lowest proportion of state natives in the nation; at less than 30%, Nevada is far below Utah. Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming and Idaho also have particularly low percentages.

CONCLUSION

Utah performs strongly on all three measures of social cohesion examined in this report. This is particularly true of perhaps the most important of the three: the strength of Utah's middle class.

This state has the largest proportion of middle-class households in the U.S. The state consistently outperforms the nation at large in this respect; it is joined in the top three by neighboring Idaho and Wyoming. In fact, among all eight Mountain States, only New Mexico performs poorly on this metric.

Utah does not have a particularly high population with English language challenges, and in fact the proportion is trending downward, particularly among children. This indicates a diminishing challenge for the education system.

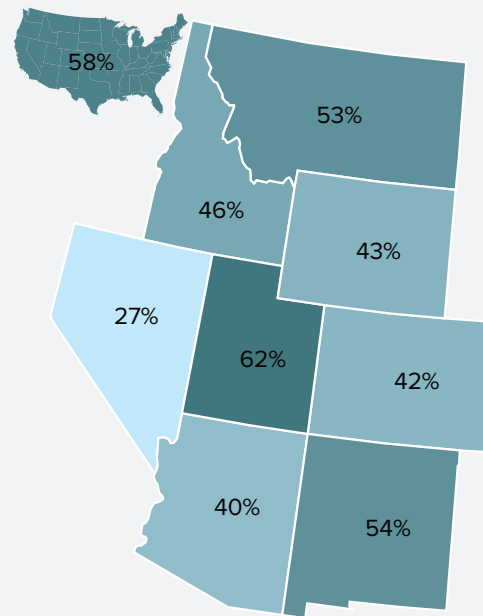
It also indicates opportunities for a widening swath of Utahns to take fuller advantage of the social and economic benefits that English language proficiency confers.

Utah is unique among Mountain States in its robust population of state natives; most states in the region are well below average on this count, and some rank among the very lowest. Utah's proportion of state natives is more than double that of neighboring Nevada.

While other states may rank high on one measure used in this report, they may rank low on another; for instance, Louisiana has both the very highest proportion of in-state population and the very lowest proportion of middle-class households. But in Utah the three measures in this report combine to suggest a comparatively high level of social cohesion. They tell of a place where people can find a good deal of common ground economically, where stratification is limited, where language does not pose a major impediment to social interconnection, and where a good proportion of the population feels rooted. Across the measures of social cohesion collectively, Utah appears to outperform all of the other Mountain States – and indeed all other Western states. Using the metrics contained in this report, it might be argued that Utah is one of the most socially cohesive states in the nation.

Utah has more than twice Nevada's proportion of state natives.

Figure 12: Share of Population Born in State, in the Mountain States, 2019



Utah performs strongly on all three measures of social cohesion examined in this report. This is particularly true of perhaps the most important of the three: the strength of Utah's middle class.

APPENDIX: TECHNICAL DATA

The Share of Population in Middle Class Households

There are a number of ways to define “middle class.” The Utah Foundation chose to define it as the share of households that earn between two-thirds and twice the median income. To calculate middle class, the Utah Foundation used the public use micro-sample (PUMS) dataset from the American Community Survey (ACS). The median income was generated for each year for each state. And those households earning more than two-thirds median income but less than double median income were classified as middle class. Data were available from 2008-2019.

The Share of the Student-age Population with Limited English Proficiency

The U.S. Department of Justice defined limited English proficiency as those who self-identify as speaking English less than “very well” and speak a language other than English in the home.⁵ The U.S. Census Bureau uses the American Community Survey to collect data to identify these individuals.⁶ This metric looks at school-aged residents (5-17 years of age) that meet this definition. Data were available from 2009-2019.

The Share of the Adult Population with Limited English Proficiency

The U.S. Department of Justice defined limited English proficiency as those who self-identify as speaking English less than “very well” and speak a language other than English in the home.⁷ The U.S. Census Bureau uses the American Community Survey to collect data to identify these individuals.⁸ This metric looks at school-aged residents (5-17 years of age) that meet this definition. Data were available from 2009-2019.

The Share of Population Born in the State of Current Residence

Data on the share of residents born in the state in which they currently reside were collected from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey Data tables.⁹ Data were available from 2008-2019.

ENDNOTES

1 For examples, see Daly, Martin, *Killing the Competition: Economic Inequality and Homicide*, London: Routledge, 2016; Horowitz, Juliana, et al., “Trends in Income and Wealth Inequality,” Pew Research Center, Jan. 9, 2020; Murray, Charles, *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*, New York: Crown Forum, 2013; and Stiglitz, Joseph, *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2013.

2 Cilluffo, A., and Cohn, D., “6 demographic trends shaping the U.S. and the world in 2019,” Pew Research Center, Apr 11, 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/11/6-demographic-trends-shaping-the-u-s-and-the-world-in-2019/.

3 See Utah Foundation, *A Level Playing Field? Funding for Utah Students at Risk of Academic Failure*, August 2018. See also Utah Foundation, *El Estado de los Latinos en Utah: A Look at Utah's Hispanic/Latino Population*, February 2021.

4 Harris, E., Perlich, Pam, *Utahns on the Move: State and County Migrations Age Patterns*, Kem. C. Gardner Policy Institute, Sept. 2019.

5 U.S. Department of Justice, 2020, “Source and Methodology,” www.lep.gov/source-and-methodology.

6 U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, “Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over,” <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACS5Y2012.B16001>.

7 U.S. Department of Justice, 2020, “Source and Methodology,” www.lep.gov/source-and-methodology.

8 U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, “Language Spoken at Home by Ability to Speak English for the Population 5 Years and Over,” <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACS5Y2012.B16001>.

9 U.S. Census Bureau, 2019, “Place of Birth by Nativity and Citizenship Status,” <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?tid=ACS1Y2019.B05002>.



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