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Written by: Matthew Weinstein

Working Families Benchmarking Project

2021 edition

Utah vs. Arizona

New Economic Benchmarking Report Finds Utah Ahead of Arizona in Most Key Metrics of Economic Opportunity and Standard of Living

Salt Lake City, May 6, 2021 - Voices for Utah Children released today the fourth in its series of  [economic benchmarking reports](#) that evaluate how the Utah economy is experienced by median- and lower-income families by benchmarking Utah against another state. This year's report, authored by Taylor Throne and Matthew Weinstein with support from interns from the University of Utah Department of Economics, compares Utah to its southern neighbor, Arizona. Utah and Arizona have a nearly identical proportion of working age adults (18 to 64 years), increasingly diverse populations, and ready access to outdoor recreational opportunities here in the American Southwest. The findings in this year's report shed light on some of Utah's greatest strengths as well as where we can continue to improve.

Voices for Utah Children's State Priorities Partnership Director Matthew Weinstein commented, "The main takeaways from this report and the others in the series are that Utah's economic successes put us in a position to make the new upfront investments we need to make now -- in education, public health, poverty prevention, and closing majority-minority gaps -- so that we can achieve our true potential and

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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follow in the footsteps of states like Colorado and Minnesota that have become high-wage states and achieved a higher standard of living, and do it in such a way that all our children can have a better future."

The report release presentation took place online and can be viewed at <https://fb.watch/5jZBVxpKOY/> . The presenters included both Taylor Throne and Matthew Weinstein as well as a special guest, David Lujan, Director of the Arizona Center for Economic Progress, to share the Arizona perspective on the report.

Utah's Top Economic Advantages: Hard Work & Strong Families Allow Utah to Enjoy High Household Incomes and Low Poverty

Utah enjoys a higher real median household income than Arizona, ranking #11 nationally, although there are significant gaps between the median wage of different racial and ethnic groups. Utah's higher incomes are due largely to our high labor force participation rates and our preponderance of two-worker (often two-parent) households.

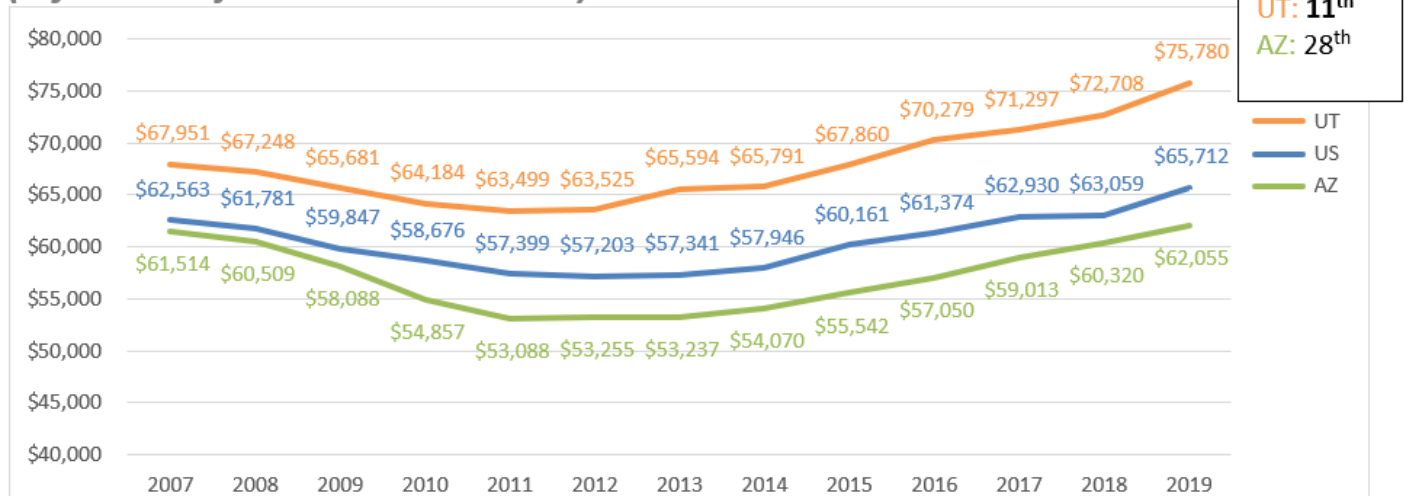
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Real Median Household Income, 2007-2019

(Inflation adjusted to 2019 dollars)



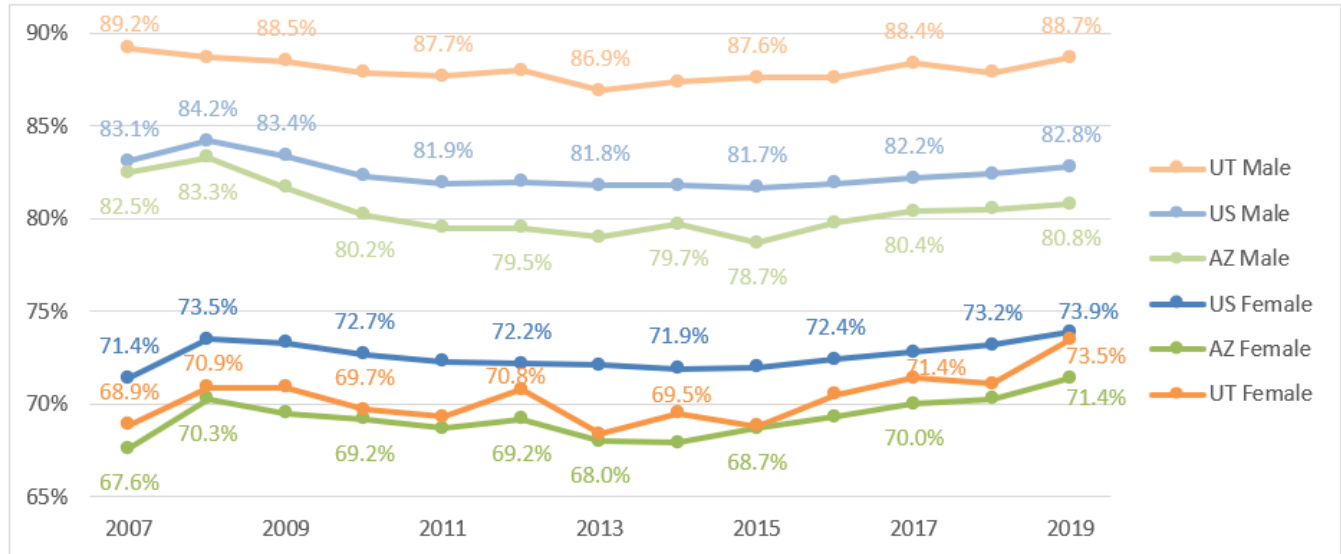
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Income in the past 12 months (in 2019 inflation-adjusted dollars)," Table ID: S1901, ACS 1-Year Estimates, https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=table%20S1901&g=0100000US_0400000US04,49. Note: Inflation adjusted using CPI-U, U.S. City Average, all items, 1982-84=100.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

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Labor Force Participation Rates Ages 20-64 by Sex, 2007-2019



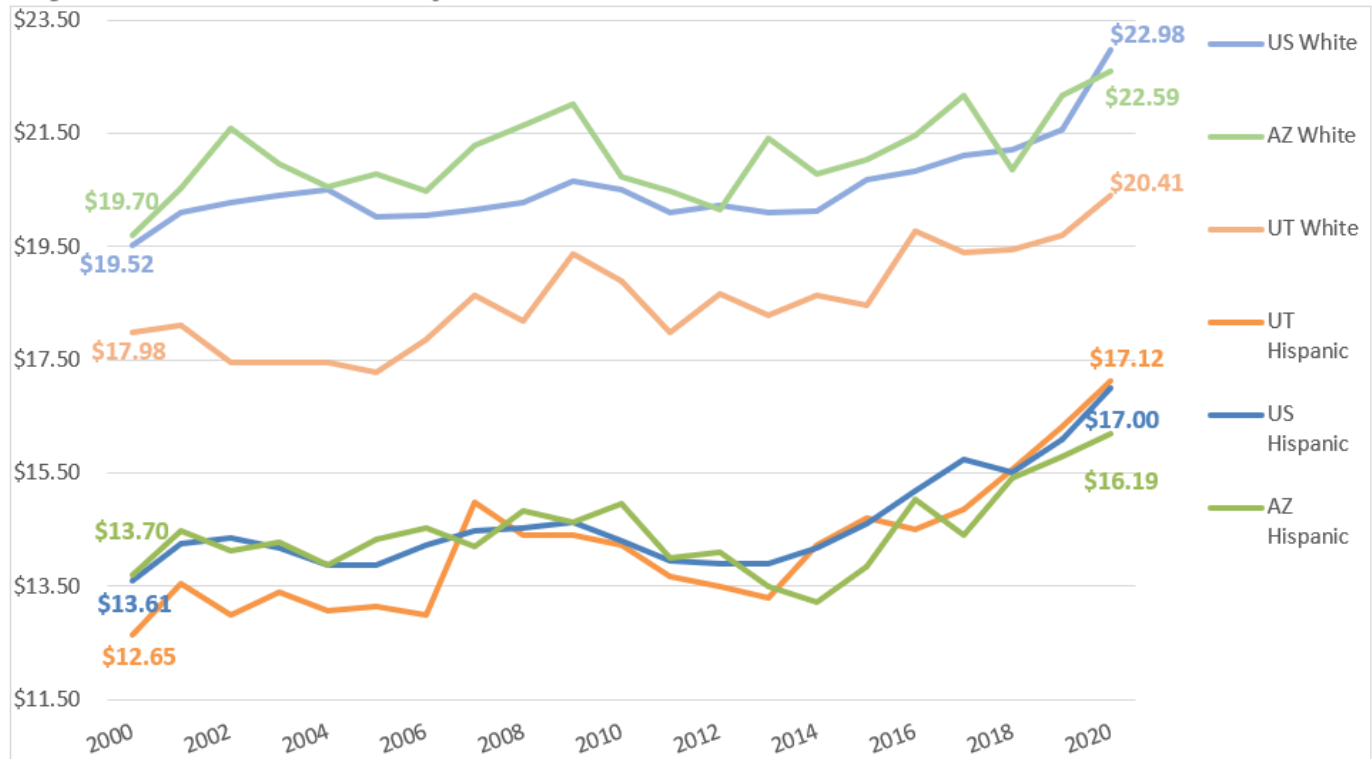
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Employment Status Table ID: S2301, American Community Survey 1-year estimates, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Table%20ID%20S2301&tid=ACST1Y2019.S2301>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

Written by: Matthew Weinstein

Real Median Wage by Race & Ethnicity, 2000-2020 (Inflation adjusted to 2020 dollars)



Source: EPI analysis of Current Population Survey microdata (accessed April 13, 2021). Note: Inflation adjusted using R-CPI-U-RS, all items, 1977-2020.

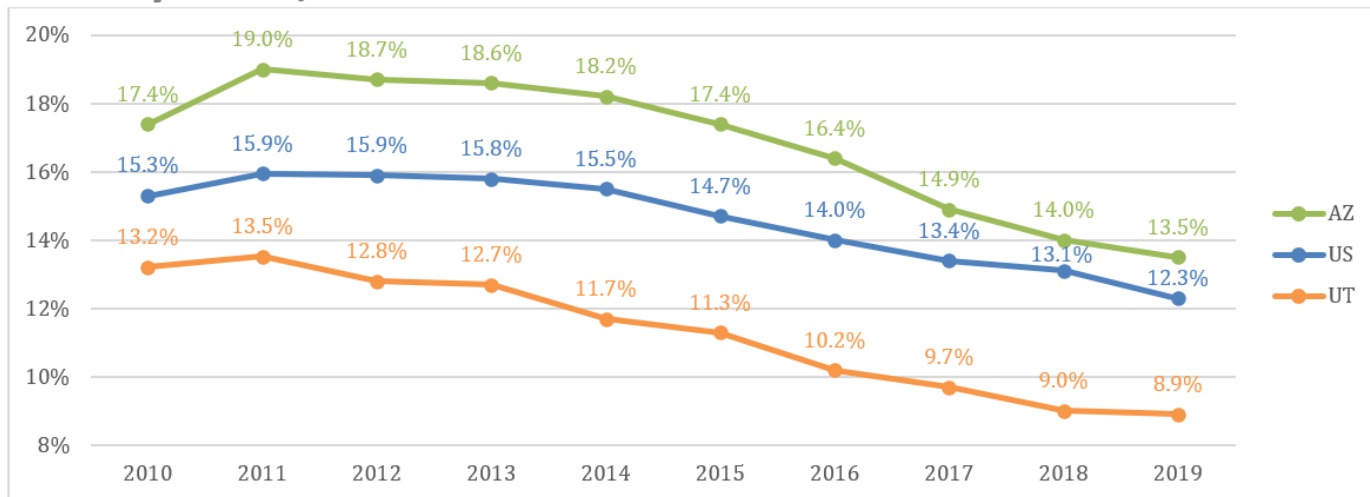
Utah Has Lower Poverty Rates Overall But Still Suffers from Large Racial/Ethnic Gaps

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

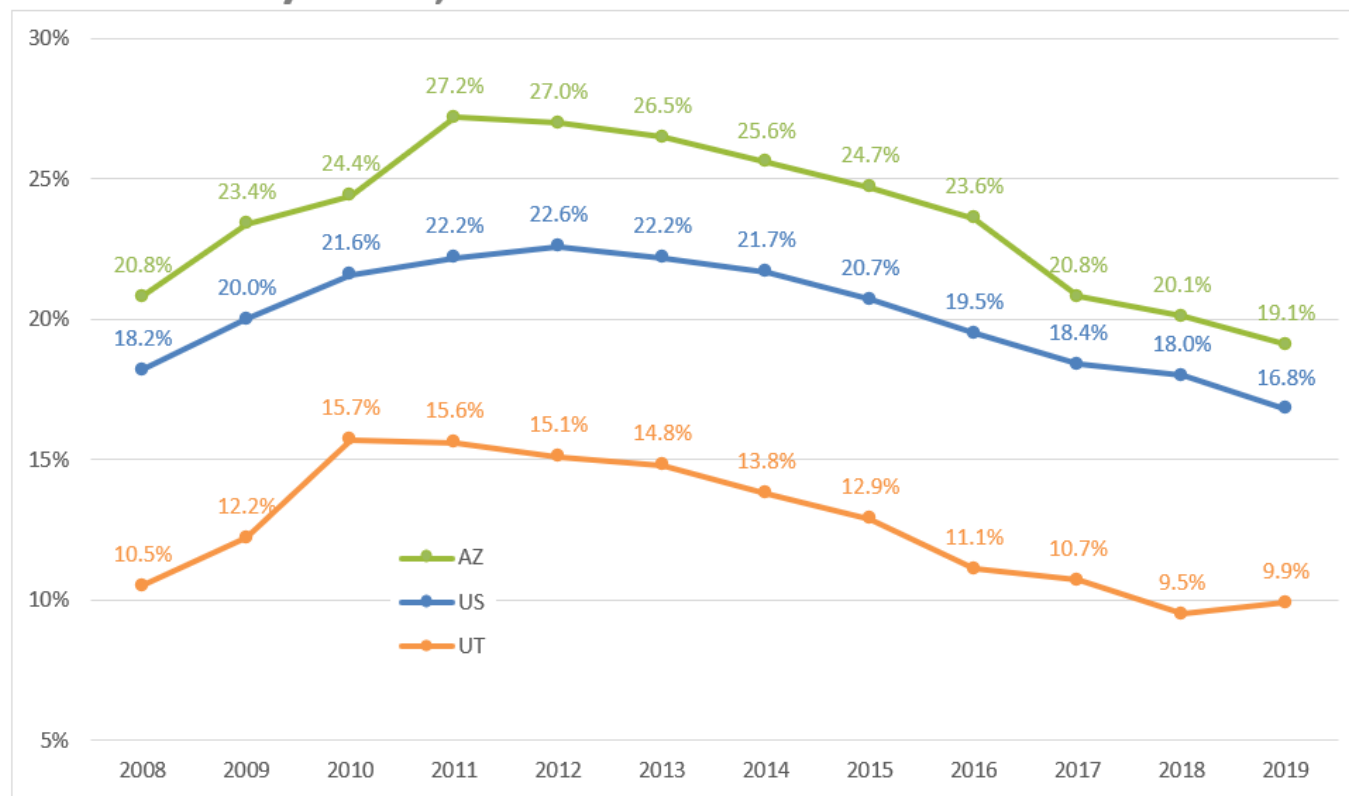
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Poverty Rates, 2007-2019



Source: Census Bureau, Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, Table ID: S1701, ACS 1-Year Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all>.

Child Poverty Rates, 2008-2019



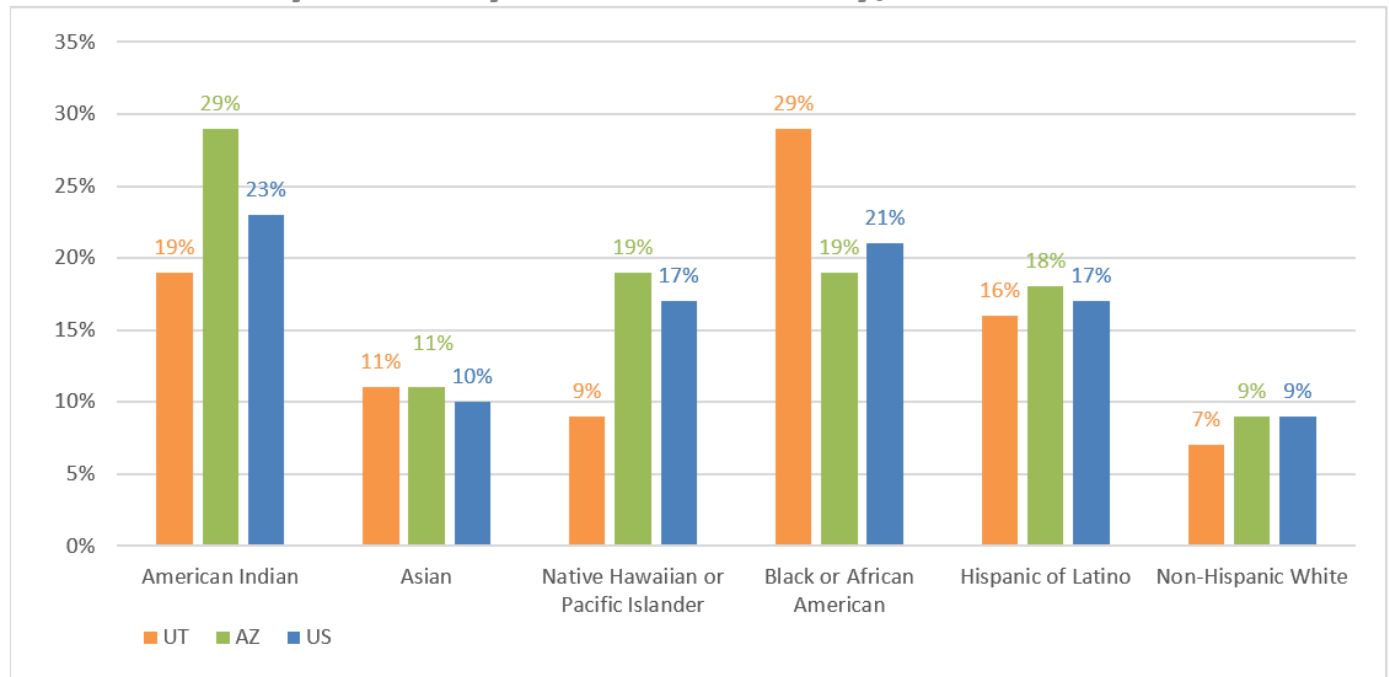
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Poverty Status in the past 12 months, Table ID: S1701, ACS 1-Year Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all?q=child%20poverty%20>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

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Adult Poverty Rates by Race & Ethnicity, 2019



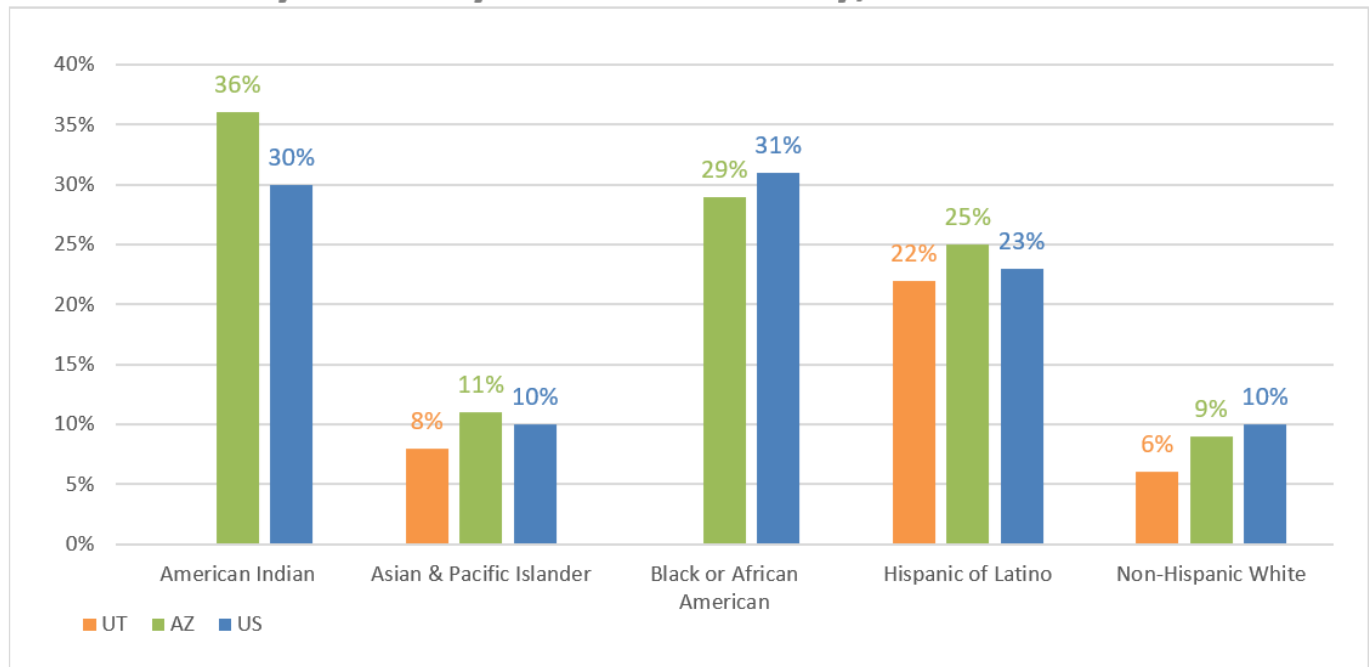
Source: Census Bureau, Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months, Table ID: S1701, ACS 1-Year Estimates, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/all>. Kids Count Data Center, Children in poverty by race and ethnicity in the United States, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/44-children-in-poverty-by-race-and-ethnicity?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/1/any/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/10,11,9,12,1,185,13/324,323>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

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Child Poverty Rates by Race & Ethnicity, 2019



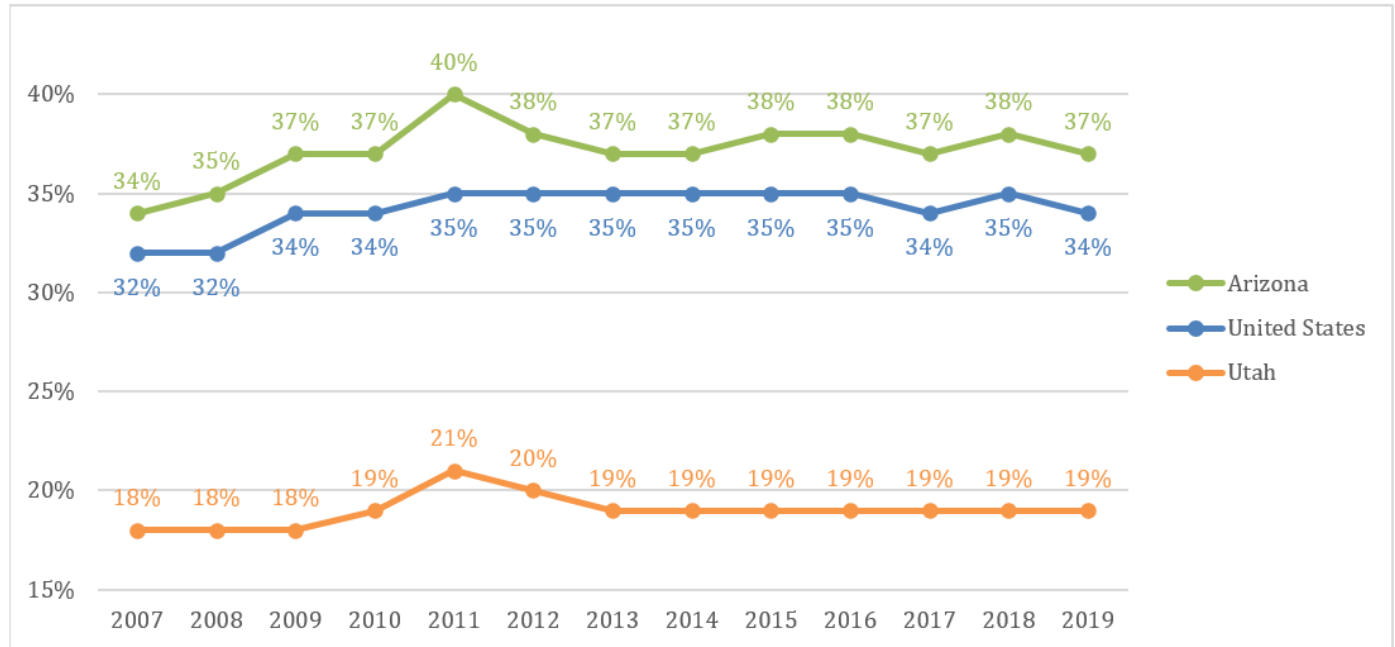
Source: See Figure 58. Note: the estimates for Utah's American Indian and Black races have been suppressed due to a large confidence interval.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Percentage of Children Living in Single-Parent Families, 2007-2019



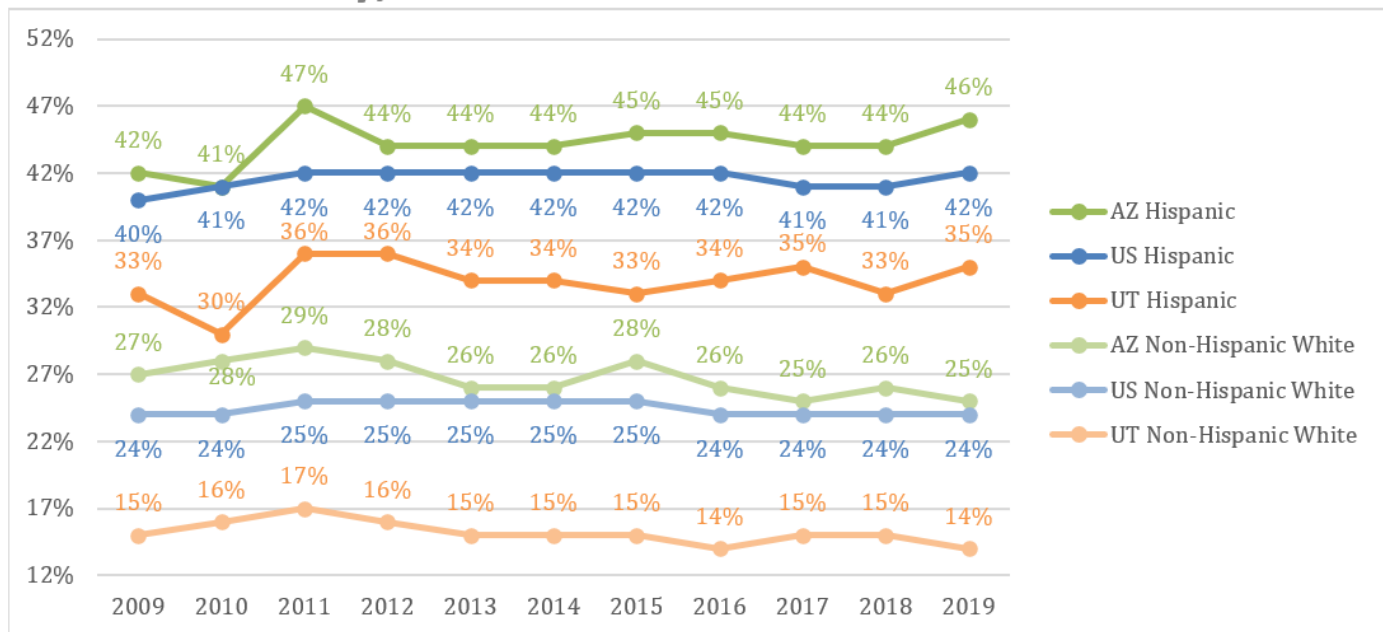
Source: Kids Count Data Center, Children in single-parent families in the United States, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#USA/2/23/2488,24,2592,26,2721/char/0>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Percentage of Children Living in Single-Parent Families by Race & Ethnicity, 2009-2019



Source: Kids Count Data Center, Children in single-parent families by race in the United States, <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/dataset/USA/2/27/14883425932512711451/0>

Educational Attainment: Utah Ahead of Arizona But Falling Behind the Nation

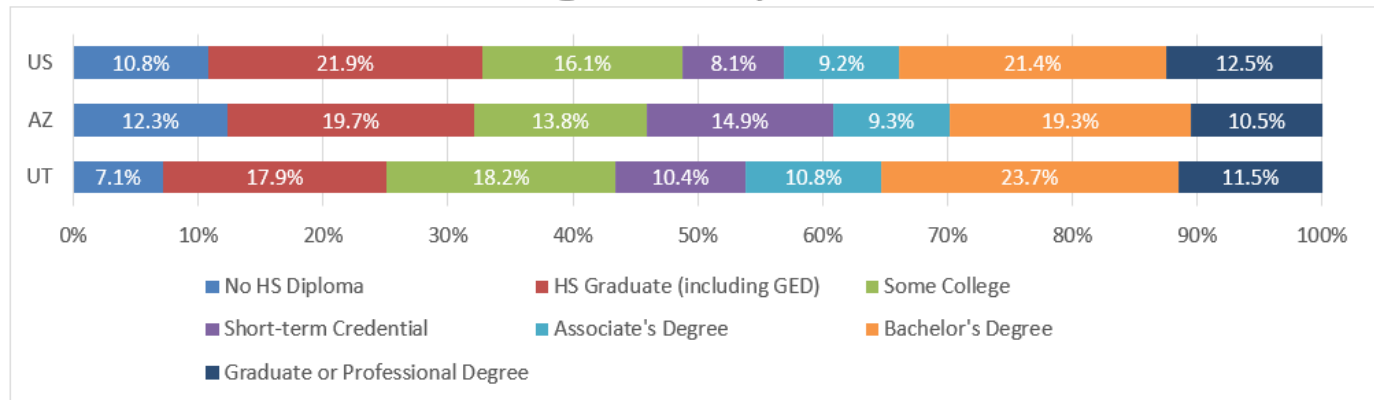
The charts below from our latest benchmarking report compare Utah, Arizona and the nation as a whole on educational attainment. Historically Utah was well ahead of the nation, but more recently evidence has mounted that the younger generation of Utahns is not keeping up with the nation's gains at the level of higher education. Moreover, there are stark racial/ethnic gaps in both states and the nation as a whole.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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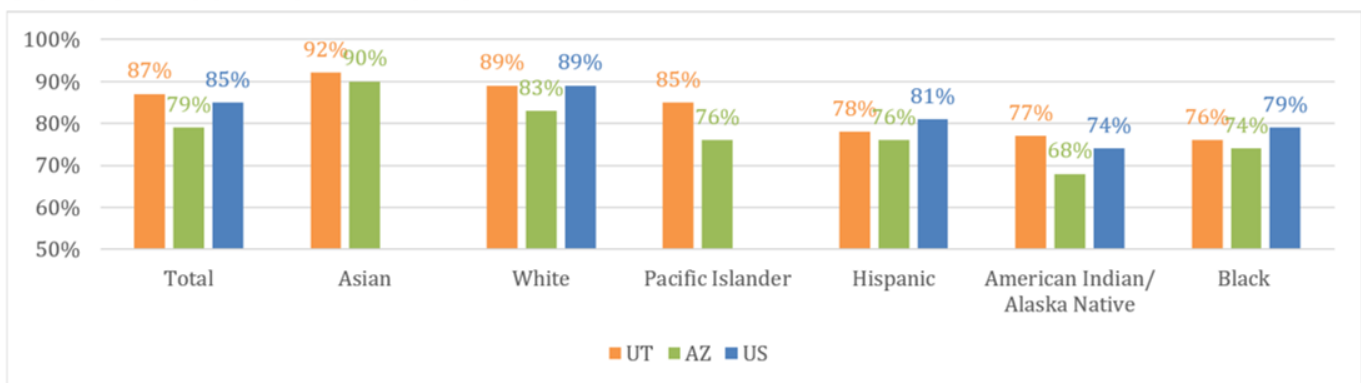
Educational Attainment Ages 25-64, 2019



Source: A Stronger Nation, Tracking America's Progress toward 2025, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2020/#nation>.

Utah's high school graduation rates are at or below national averages for most racial/ethnic categories, including our two largest groups, Whites and Latinos.

Figure 33 – High School Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity for School Year 2017-2018



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Public high school 4-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR), by selected student characteristics and state: 2010-11 through 2017-18," https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_219.46.asp.

Note: The US rate for the Asian & Pacific Islander race were only available together.

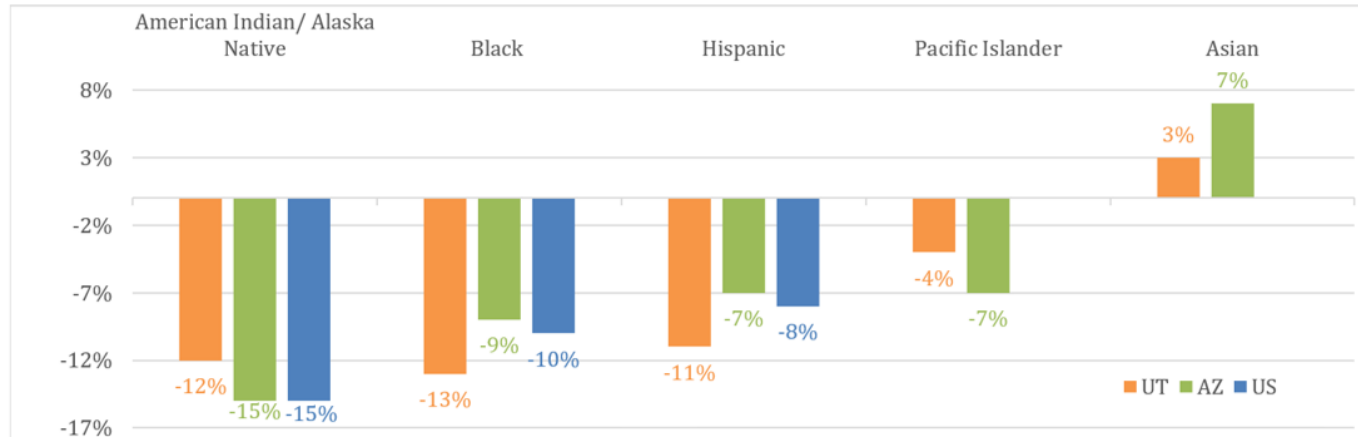
We're also very concerned that Utah's gap between high school graduation rates for Whites and Latinos is larger than nationally.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

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Figure 34- Percentage Point Difference between the Graduation Rates of non-White & non-Hispanic White Students, SY 2017-2018

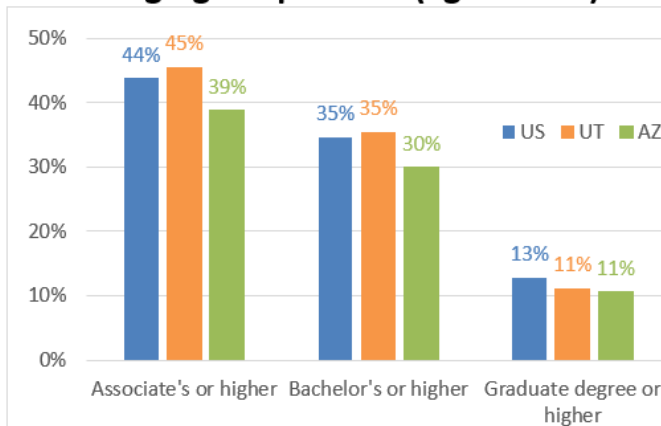


Source: See Figure 33.

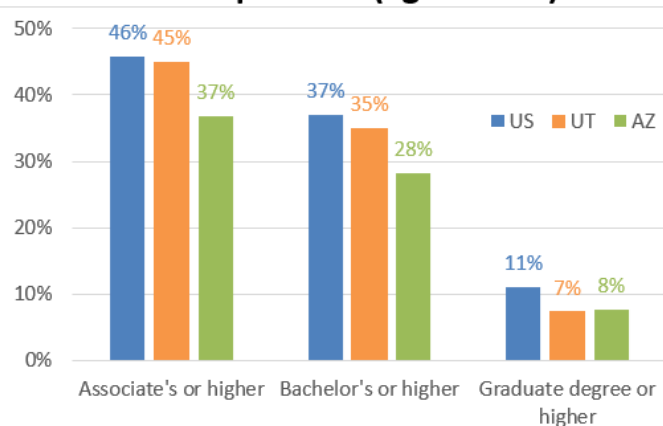
The chart below illustrates the way that Utah's younger generation of adults has fallen behind the higher education attainment of the Millennial generation nationally.

Educational Attainment by Age Group, 2019

Working Age Population (ages 25-64)



Millennial Population (ages 25-34)



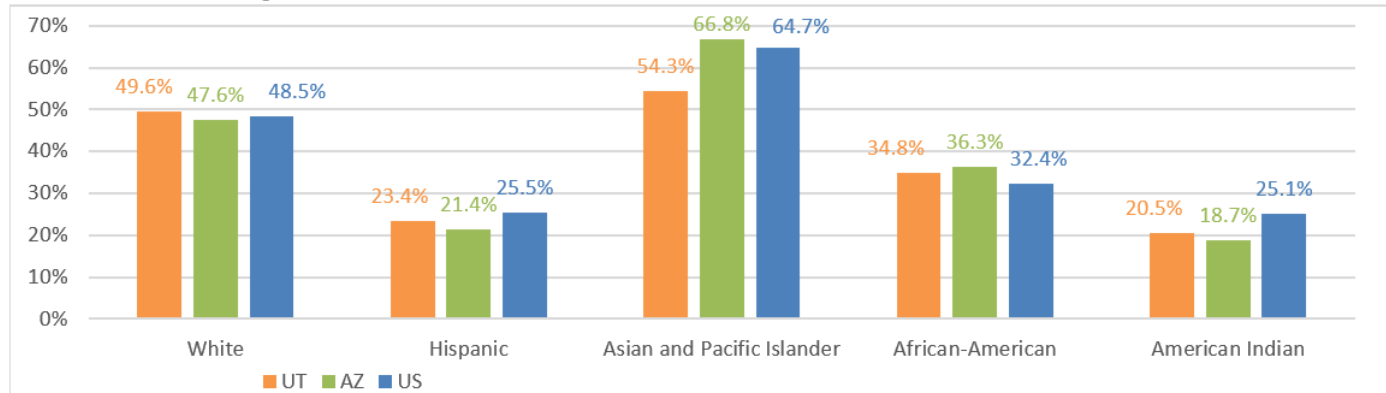
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Sex by Age by Educational Attainment for the Population 18 years and over", Table B15001, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Table%20B15001&tid=ACSDT1Y2019.B15001&hidePreview=false>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

Published: Sunday, 12 November 2017 11:31

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Post-Secondary Educational Attainment, Ages 25-64 by Racial & Ethnic Groups, 2019



Source: Lumina Foundation, Utah's attainment rates across five racial and ethnic groups, <https://www.luminafoundation.org/stronger-nation/report/2021/#state/UT&s-esid=byAttainment&s-ecmps=AZ>. Note: Attainment rate is defined as at least an associate degree, relevant workforce certificate or industry certification.

Can Utah Learn Any Lessons from Arizona's Strengths?

Besides Arizona's #11 rank for equal gender wage ratio (while Utah ranks #49), Arizona has more of its children in full-day kindergarten, has a lower 10th percentile hourly wage, and higher productivity. Arizona's higher 10th percentile hourly wage is likely due to their higher minimum wage, although they do have more people earning poverty level wages overall. Meanwhile, Utah has fewer people earning poverty level wages overall, but those at the 10th percentile for hourly wages earn less than their Arizonian counterparts.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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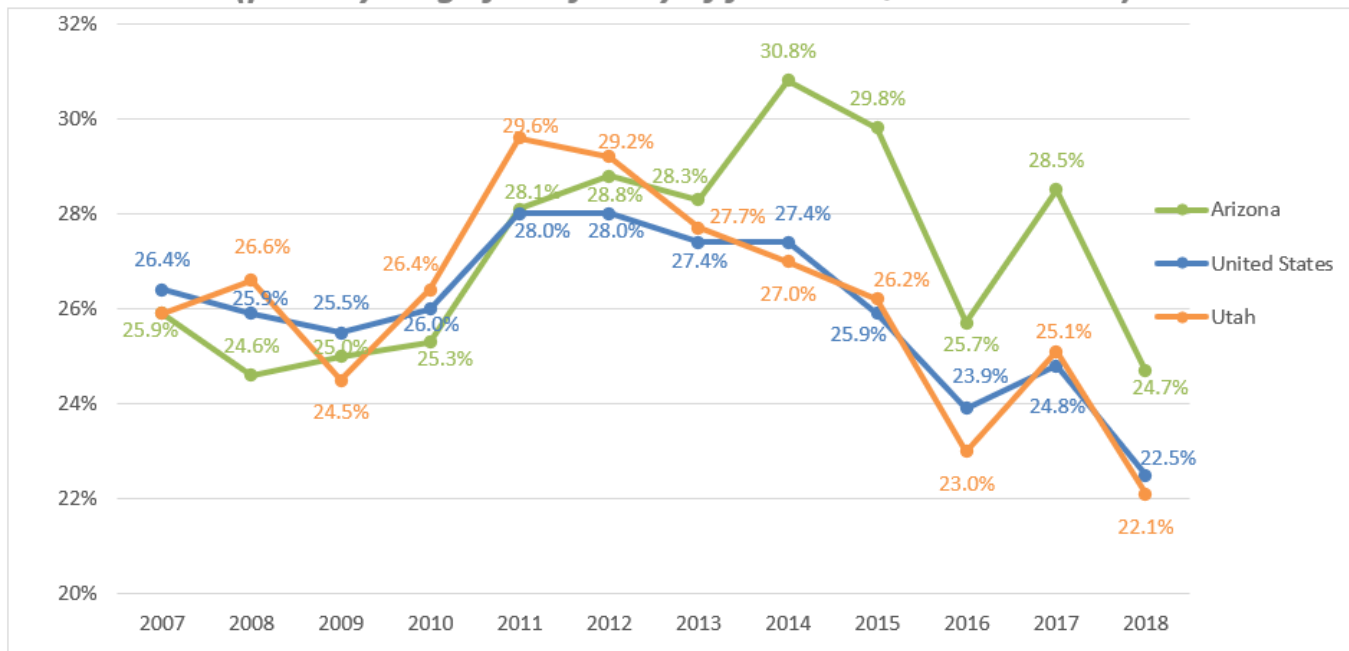
Minimum Wage and 10th Percentile Wage

(*"winner" bolded and shaded*)

	UT		AZ		US
Minimum wage/hr. (2021)	\$7.25		\$12.15		\$7.25
Minimum wage inflation index (2021)	No		Yes		No
Hourly Wage & rank in 10 th percentile in (2019)	\$9.99	30 th	\$10.90	12th	\$10.07

Sources: US Department of Labor, State Minimum Wage Laws, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/minimum-wage/state>; EPI analysis of Current Population Survey microdata (accessed March 18, 2021).

Share of Workers Earning Poverty Level Wages, 2007-2018 (*poverty wage for a family of four was \$12.36 in 2018*)



Source: Source: EARN | State of Working X Data Library, Share of workers earning below the poverty wage: Economic Policy Institute

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Gender Pay Gap

(“winner” bolded and highlighted)

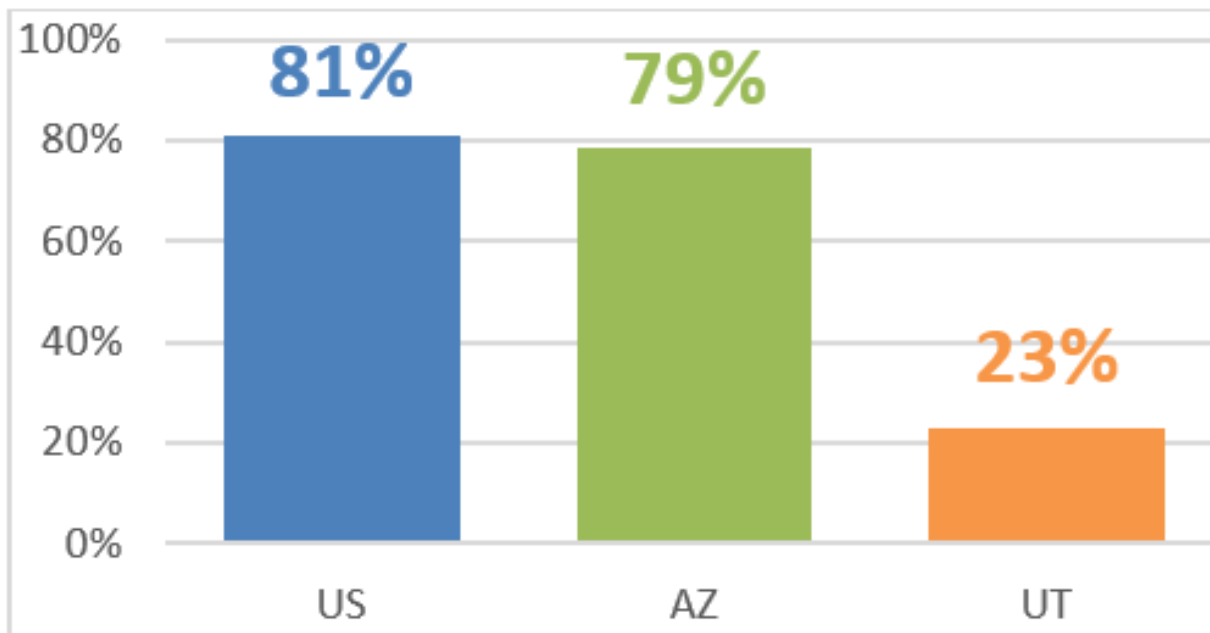
<i>Ranking: 1 is best, 50 is worst</i>	UT	UT Rank	AZ	AZ Rank
Gender Wage Ratio of Women’s to Men’s Earnings, 2019	70%	49 th	83%	11th
Projected year to close gender pay gap at current rate, 2015	2106	47 th	2047	6th
	UT	UT Annual Loss	AZ	AZ Annual Loss
What Mothers Make for Every Dollar Fathers Make	59¢	\$25,455	75%	\$13,204

Source: American Association of University Women (AAUW), Gender Pay Gap by State, <https://www.aauw.org/resources/article/gender-pay-gap-by-state/>; Institute for Women’s Policy Research (IWPR), Status of Women in the States: Projected Year the Wage Gap Will Close by State 2020 Report, <https://iwpr.org/>; NWLC, Wage Gap for Mothers by Race, State by State, <https://nwlc.org/resources/the-wage-gap-for-mothers-state-by-state-2017/>.

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Figure 29 – Percentage of Kindergartners in Full-Day Programs



Source: UT data: Calculations based on kindergarten enrollment for SY2019-20 reported by school districts & charter schools, captured by the Utah State Board of Education; AZ State Data: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), Current Population Survey: from Oct. 2017-19. <https://doi.org/10.18128/D030.V7.0>; National Data: U.S. Census Bureau, "School Enrollment in the United States: Oct. 2017-19 - Detailed Tables," <https://www.census.gov/topics/education/school-enrollment/data/tables.2019.html>.

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Summary of Key Findings

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Part I: Economic Opportunity

("winner" highlighted and bolded)

Business Climate Metrics

Business climate average rank 2019-2020

Utah

Arizona

8th

16th

Kauffman Index of entrepreneurship activity and rank 2018

.49

17th

.11

27th

Productivity and GDP

Real GDP per worker 2019 (US = \$93,674)

\$79,357

37th

\$81,524

34th

Change in real GDP 2007-2020 (US = 17.9%)

35.4%

12.6%

Change in Real GDP per capita 2007-2020 (US = \$4,050, 7.8%)

\$3,956 (8.3%)

-\$2,971 (-6.4%)

Employment

Unemployment rate 2020 (US = 8.1%)

4.7%

7.9%

Labor force participation rate, ages 20-64, 2019

(US: all = 78.3%, men = 82.8%, female = 73.9%)

All: 81.2%

M: 88.7%

F: 73.5%

All: 76.1%

M: 80.8%

F: 71.4%

Percentage point change in the labor force participation rate for age 16+ 2007-2020 (US = -4.3%)

-4.9%

-2.5%

Education

Public K-12 spending per pupil & rank 2018 (US = \$12,612)

\$7,628

50th

\$8,239

47th

K-12 education funding distribution fairness rank 2018

2nd

24th

Percentage & rank of 3- and 4-year-olds below 200% of poverty level not enrolled in school 2015-2019 (US = 59%)

62%

25th

70%

44th

Percentage in full-day kindergarten 2017-2019 (US = 81%)

23%

79%

NAEP average rank of 4th and 8th grade math and reading scores 2015-2019

11th

34th

High school graduation rates by race/ethnicity SY 2017-18

(US: White = 89%, Latinx = 81%, Native Amer. = 74%, Black = 79%)

White: 89%

Latinx: 78%

White: 83%

Latinx: 78%

Native: 77%

Black: 76%

Native: 68%

Black: 74%

Average higher education state spending per full-time student & rank 2019 (US avg = \$7,198)

\$7,646

19th

\$2,417

50th

Percentage with Bachelor's degree or higher, ages 25-64, 2019

(US: all = 34.6%, men = 32.0%, women = 37.1%)

All: 35.4%

M: 36.2%

F: 34.6%

All: 29.9%

M: 27.9%

F: 31.8%

Percentage with bachelor's degree or higher of Millennials (ages 25-34), 2019 (US: all = 36.9%, men = 32.9%, women = 41.1%)

All: 35.0%

M: 33.1%

F: 36.9%

All: 28.2%

M: 25.7%

F: 30.8%

Income and Gender Equity + Mobility

Gini Index of income inequality state rank 2019 (1 most equitable)

1st

22nd

Intergenerational mobility rank of U.S. 50th largest metros

1st (SLC)

28th (Phoenix)

Gender wage ratio of women's to men's earnings & rank 2019

(US = 82%)

70%

49th

83%

11th

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Part II: Standard of Living ("winner" highlighted and bolded)	Utah		Arizona	
Income & Wages				
Real median household income & rank 2019 (US = \$65,712)	\$75,780	11 th	\$62,055	28 th
Median hourly wage & rank 2020 (US = \$20.92)	\$19.89	29 th	\$19.87	30 th
Median hourly wage adj for cost-of-living 2019 (US = \$19.33)	\$19.17		\$18.99	
Minimum wage 2021 (US = \$7.25)	\$7.25		\$12.15	
10 th percentile hourly wage & rank 2019 (US = \$10.07)	\$9.99	30 th	\$10.94	12 th
% of workers earning below poverty wage 2018 (US = 22.5%)	22.1%		24.7%	
Poverty				
Poverty rates 2019 (US: all = 12.3%, child = 16.8%)	All: 8.9%		All: 13.5%	
	Child: 9.9%		Child: 19.1%	
Hispanic poverty rates 2019 (US: all = 17.2%, child = 23%)	All: 15.8%		All: 18.4%	
	Child: 22%		Child: 25%	
Share & rank of children in single-parent households 2019 (US: all = 34%, Hispanic = 42%) (1 is the lowest)	All: 19%	1 st	All: 37%	36 th
	Hispanic: 35%	1 st	Hispanic: 46%	26 th
Child food insecurity rate & rank 2019 (US = 15.2%)	12.1%	4 th	19.0%	37 th
Child homelessness rate 2018 (US = 2.7%)	2.0%		2.0%	
Cost of Living				
BEA Cost of Living Price Index 2019 (US = 100)	96.5		96.3	
Household renting cost burden rank 2019 (1 is lowest)	12 th		25 th	
State & local own-source public revenue (taxes) as percentage of personal income & rank 2018 (1 is highest) (US = 15.1%)	16.3%	15 th	12.8%	48 th
Quality of Life Metrics				
Commute time to work in minutes 2019 (US = 27.6)	22.5		26.6	
Homeownership rate & rank 2019 (US = 64.6%)	71.9%	8 th	65.8%	31 st
Kids Count overall ranking 2020	4 th		42 nd	
Health				
State health system performance rank (Commonwealth Fund rank 2018/US News rank 2019)	9 th /12 th		33 rd /24 th	
Percentage without health insurance & rank 2019 (US: all = 9.2%, child = 5.7%)	All: 9.7%	33 rd	All: 11.3%	41 st
	Child: 8.3%	45 th	Child: 9.2%	47 th
Percentage of Hispanics without health insurance & rank 2019 (US: all = 18.7%, child = 9%)	All: 23.4%	37 th	All: 18.6%	26 th
	Child: 17%	43 rd	Child: 11%	32 nd
Most polluted metropolitan areas by PM2.5 & rank 2016-2018	7 th worst for Salt Lake-Provo-Orem		10 th worst for Phoenix-Mesa	
Civic Engagement				
Percentage of eligible adults that voted in 2020 general election & rank (US = 67%)	69%	22 nd	66%	30 th
Volunteerism rank 2018 (CNCS)	1 st		34 th	

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The full 56-page report is  [available here as a pdf download.](#)

Policy Implications

Racial/Ethnic Gaps

Racial and ethnic gaps remain a major challenge in the nation overall, and Utah and Arizona are no exception. Disparities in Utah between minority racial & ethnic groups compared to their White non-Hispanic peers are evident in high school graduation rates, wages, gender pay gaps, poverty rates, and uninsured rates. Addressing these gaps through an upfront investment in education would likely increase educational attainment, wages, and standard of living overall and would therefore contribute to reducing racial and ethnic gaps in the future.

The Link Between Education and Income

The link between education and income is well-established. States with higher education levels generally have higher levels of worker productivity, wages, and incomes. In the current comparison with Arizona, Utah's higher education levels make for higher levels of wages and income. The lesson for Arizona would be raise education levels to raise the state's standard of living. The same applies to Utah, where the Legislature has struggled to turn seemingly large dollar increases in education funding every year into increases in real per-pupil investment sufficient to get Utah out of last place in the national ranking.

The latest data from the Census Bureau reports that Utah remains in last place in per-pupil education investment at \$7,628, with Arizona only slightly better at \$8,239 and 47th in the nation (for FY 2018). While Utah has done well for its meager investment levels, achieving impressive gains in educational performance as measured by NAEP 4th and 8th grade math and reading scores (see Figure 31, page 25), will we be able to continue to advance while remaining in last place?

While Utah “does more with less” in education compared to other states, we have growing challenges to address. Utah has racial/ethnic education gaps which are larger than the national average, for example for Hispanic and American Indian high

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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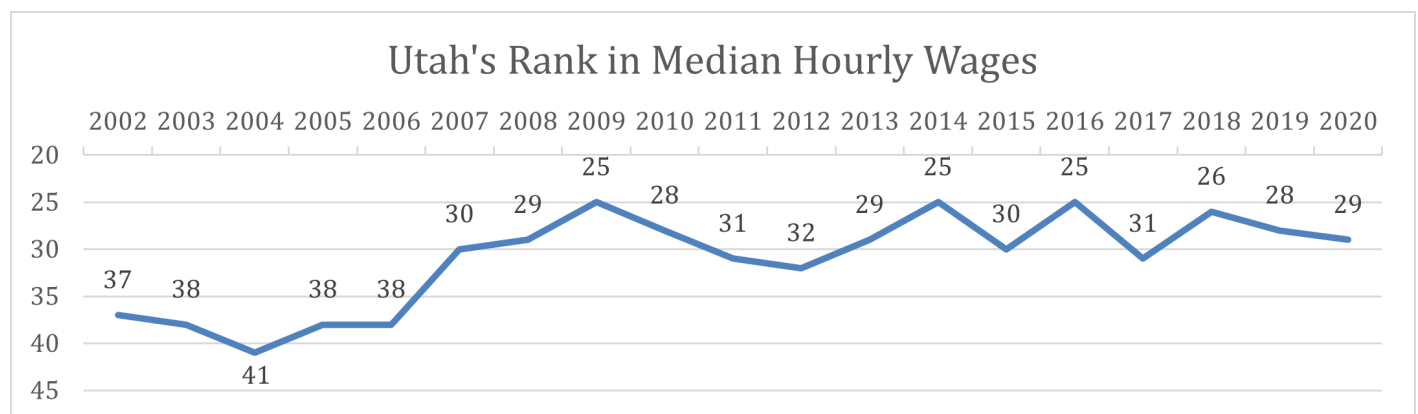
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school graduation rates (see Figure 33, page 26). Utah's pupil-to-teacher ratio is 22.9, ranking 48th while the national average is 16 (see Figure 22, page 21). Moreover, Utah teacher pay has also fallen over the past 50 years by 1.8% while nationally teacher salaries have increased 6.7% (see figure 24, page 22).

At the college level, Utah historically was always ahead of the national average for attainment of bachelor's degrees and above. But Census data show Utah's lead shrinking relative to the nation with each successive generation, to the point now that Utah millennials (ages 25-34) are behind their peers nationally, despite relatively generous state support and low tuition levels.

Can Utah Become a High-Wage State?

For many years, economists have debated whether Utah is a low-wage state, as the Utah Foundation discussed in their 2008 report, "Is Utah Really a Low-Wage State?"^[1] That report argued that our seemingly low wages were explained by our younger demographic profile and lower cost of living. While this report does not examine how wages intersect with age demographics, Utah ranks 29th in median hourly wages, compared to 41st in 2004 (see chart below). When adjusted for our low cost of living, Utah's median hourly wage in 2019 was \$19.17, just 16 cents lower than the national level. These data seem to demonstrate that Utah has gone from being a low-wage state a generation ago to middle-wage status today, a considerable accomplishment.



One question Utah leaders may now wish to consider is, is that good enough? Should we declare, "Mission Accomplished"? Or is Utah in a position, like Colorado and Minnesota before us, to become, over time, a high-wage state and set our sights

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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on taking the necessary steps today to achieve that goal over the years and decades to come?

Similarly, how do we include those earning the lowest wages in the gains Utah has made and will potentially make in the future? Utah is not even a half percentage point lower than the national share of workers earning poverty level wages (see Figure 55, page 38) and lags behind the nation's 10th percentile wage, ranking 30th (see Figure 54, page 37). Even as the state with the lowest income inequality ranking in the nation (see Figure 45, page 31), Utah suffers from a tremendous gap between low-income workers and the rest of the income scale.

The main lesson that emerges from the Working Families Benchmarking Project reports comparing Utah to Colorado, Minnesota, Idaho and now Arizona is the following: Higher levels of educational attainment translate into higher hourly wages, higher family incomes, and an overall higher standard of living. The challenge for policymakers is to determine the right combination of public investments in education, infrastructure, public health, and other critical needs that will enable Utah to continue our progress and achieve not just steady growth in the quantity of jobs, but also a rising standard of living that includes moderate- and lower-income working families from all of Utah's increasingly diverse communities.

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE BENCHMARKING PROJECT:

KUTV-2: <https://kutv.com/news/local/utah-vs-arizona-new-report-shows-utah-leads-neighbor-in-most-economic-categories>

Facebook Live Event discussing the report overall joined by David Lujan, Director of Arizona Center for Economic Progress at Children's Action

Alliance: https://fb.watch/68E_JarLMT/

Facebook Live Event focusing on women in higher education, the gender pay gap, and income equality with panelists: Dr. Susan Madsen, Founder and Director of the Utah Women & Leadership Project; Marshall Steinbaum Ph.D., Associate Professor at the University of Utah's department of Economics; and Gabriella Archuleta JPP MPP, Policy Analyst with YWCA Utah. <https://fb.watch/68FoEVvGwY/>

Utah Economic Benchmarking Project 2021: Utah vs Arizona

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Facebook Live Event focusing on Utah's economic success and economic development strategy with panelists: Howard Stephenson MPA, former Utah Senator; Phil Dean MS MPA, public finance senior research fellow at the Gardner Institute; and Thomas Maloney PhD., Professor, Department of Economics, University of Utah. <https://fb.watch/6r25O5rdDd/>

Facebook Live Event focusing on education in Utah from pre-school to higher education, focusing on educational attainment & closing racial and ethnic gaps with panelists: Carrie Mayne, Chief Economist for Utah System of Higher Education; Andrea Rorrer PhD., Director of the University of Utah's Education Policy Center; and Anna Thomas MPA, Senior Policy Analyst at Voices for Utah Children. <https://fb.watch/7iKYaR9Zy4/>