



FAMILY CULTURE

RI RANKS 25TH NATIONALLY, LAST IN NEW ENGLAND

TABLE 11

FAMILY CULTURE MAJOR INDEX RANKINGS		
Measure	National Rank	New England Rank
Family Culture	25th	6th
Violent Crime	5th	3rd
Property Crime	17th	6th
Births to Unwed Mothers	43rd	6th
Religion	35th	1st
Educational Attainment	29th	6th

Source: Rhode Island Center for Freedom and Prosperity and American Conservative Union Foundation

Births to Unwed Mothers

► **Rhode Island ranks 43rd nationally and last in New England on this FPI sub-index**

While many would guess that divorce is the biggest driver of single parenthood, the reality is that unwed births, on the margin, are the primary creator of single-parent households. The greatest indicator of whether or not a couple will be together in five years is whether or not the two were married at the time their child was born. Two-thirds of unmarried couples will separate within five years, while 82 percent of married couples will still be together.²⁸

Children from single-parent homes have significantly worse outcomes. For instance, they are more prone to criminal activity in their youth (more than twice as likely to be arrested) and young adulthood

28 Rector, Robert, "Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty," The Heritage Foundation, Domestic Policy Studies Department, Special Report, No. 117, September 5, 2012. http://thf_media.s3.amazonaws.com/2012/pdf/sr117.pdf



(three times more likely to be in jail by age 30) relative to children from intact married families.²⁹

In 2014, 45 percent of all births in Rhode Island were to unwed mothers, which is higher than the national average of 41 percent. Rhode Island 43rd — or eighth highest — on the 2016 FPI sub-index for births to unwed mothers.

Church Attendance

► **Rhode Island ranks 35th nationally but first in New England on this FPI sub-index**

Government should never be involved in addressing its citizens' religious practices or many other personal and cultural issues. These are best left for communities and civil society to address. However, government data does demonstrate the strong correlation between regular church attendance (or increased religiosity) and positive social outcomes.

For instance, research shows that greater religiosity correlates with lower crime rates,³⁰ reduced drug use,³¹ and greater academic performance.³² Additionally, religion and, relatedly, marriage are two proven bulwarks against the Demographic Winter from which Rhode Islanders are suffering.³³ Policymakers should therefore consider whether state laws and regulations impede or crowd out religious engagement or infringe upon religious freedom.

Rhode Island has a relatively high level of religiosity, with 36 percent of the population reportedly participating in weekly church attendance in 2014. This is higher than neighboring New England states but ranks only 35th nationally on the religion sub-index of the 2016 FPI.



29 Carlson, Marcia J., "Trajectories of Couple Relationship Quality after Childbirth: Does Marriage Matter?" Center for Research on Child Wellbeing, Working Paper #2007-11-FF, April 2007. <http://crcw.princeton.edu/workingpapers/WP07-11-FF.pdf>
 30 Johnson, Byron R., "The Role of African-American Churches in Reducing Crime Among Black Youth," Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2008. http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/ISR_Role_African_American.pdf
 31 Johnson, Byron R., "A Better Kind of High: Religious Commitment Reduces Drug Use Among Poor Urban Teens," Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2008. http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/ISR_Better_High.pdf
 32 Regnerus, Mark D., "Making the Grade: The Influence of Religion Upon the Academic Performance of Youth in Disadvantaged Communities," Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion, 2008. http://www.baylorisr.org/wp-content/uploads/ISR-Making-Grade_071.pdf
 33 Fagan, Patrick and Potrykus, Henry, "Marriage, Contraception, and the Future of Western Peoples," Marriage and Religion Research Institute, November 30, 2011. <http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF11K50.pdf>

Education

► Rhode Island ranks 29th nationally but last in New England on this FPI sub-index

Educational attainment is a vital cultural value that can yield substantial economic returns. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reports that, in 2014, the median weekly earnings of a person with less than a high school diploma was only \$488. Earnings jump with higher levels of educational attainment: associate’s degree (\$792), bachelor’s degree (\$1,101), and doctoral degree (\$1,591).³⁴

While Rhode Island’s post-secondary educational system ranks in the middle of the pack nationally on the 2016 FPI (23rd), the state is failing to provide equal opportunity for all students to achieve past high school, either in being prepared for college or in being successful in life via a trade. Consistently, the educational status quo favors the wealthy and well-connected and traps far too many minority and low-income students in underperforming schools without providing for their most basic educational needs or alternative vocational options.

In fact, despite spending similar amounts of money per student in the K–12 system, Massachusetts has been producing far more students capable of achieving higher career and educational levels — ranking 2nd on this sub-index of the 2016 FPI.³⁵

Poor educational value for taxpayers? As one of the higher per-pupil-spending states in the nation, Rhode Island is not offering its taxpayers a good return on their investment in education.³⁶



34 “Earnings and Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment,” U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 12, 2016. http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm

35 Borg, Linda, “Why Massachusetts Schools Beat Rhode Island,” *Providence Journal*, October 15, 2016. <http://www.providencejournal.com/news/20161015/why-massachusetts-schools-beat-rhode-island>

36 “2015 Report Card on Rhode Island ‘Competitiveness’” <http://rifreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/RICFP-RIReportCard-2015.pdf>