

# The Edge of Seventeen

*What Does It Mean To Be a Young Adult  
in America in 2024?*

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# Introduction

**Who is an adult? Or, more specifically where the law is concerned, when is someone an adult? At what age can young people make various decisions that affect their lives, and how do those rules vary within and across states?**

Throughout modern American history, policymakers have usually addressed these questions piecemeal, issue by issue. Often they have done so in response to political flare-ups of the moment, without much regard for the standard they or their predecessors set on other issues. The result is a patchwork of policies on age restrictions without a clear set of guiding principles — mirroring the lack of clarity in society more broadly about what “adulthood” in America means in 2024.

This confusion has real-world consequences not just for the young people whose lives are shaped to varying degrees by incoherent policies, but also for institutions that have to enforce or deal with the fallout from those policies — especially schools.

We set out to identify how states have approached age restrictions on a range of different issues.<sup>1</sup> We started by collecting data on 36 different actions or policies governing the age at which individuals could engage in an activity or make certain decisions (Appendix A). Many of these issues are directly relevant to schools, such as compulsory attendance laws or laws affecting student privacy and academic or medical records. Some are intertwined with schools, such as rules around employment, driving, or social media access.

Other issues we analyzed — such as when someone can legally gamble, get a tattoo, or consent to sex — are outside schools’ purview (beyond the role of school staff as mandatory reporters) but still relate to the transition from adolescence to adulthood.

We found no clear consensus on what it means to be “an adult” across this range of policies. Definitions vary by topic, and they vary across and within states. Some of that variation is due to practicalities and logistics, such as when someone becomes eligible to drive a car.

Some of the variation is due to regional differences: For example, rural states tend to allow individuals to possess a firearm at younger ages than more urbanized states do. And some of the differences come down to political preferences around things like gambling, abortion, medical decisions, rights of transgender youth, and marriage.

We analyzed the data in two different ways. First, we looked at the coherence of laws *within* states, which we call “absolute” coherence. In other words, does a given state generally apply the same or different age cutoffs for different decisions? The lack of coherence we found overall is illustrative and startling (Appendix B).

- In **Colorado**, you can get an abortion at age 14 and get married at age 16, but you cannot gamble at a casino until you are age 21.
- In **Florida**, you can get a license to drive at age 16 and get married at age 17, but if you still attend a public K-12 school, you may face corporal punishment, and school personnel cannot be required to use your preferred pronouns.
- In **Illinois**, at age 12, you can seek mental health care, get an abortion, and work in agriculture during school hours; however, you must be age 21 to gamble at casinos or recreationally smoke marijuana.

- In **Mississippi**, you can get married at any age with parental consent, but even if your parents consent, you cannot get gender-affirming care until age 18.
- In **Utah**, you can get married, get a license to drive a car, and work during school hours in agriculture at age 16, but you cannot consent to sex (outside of marriage) until age 18.

Second, we looked at the coherence of laws on the same subjects across states, which we call “relative” coherence. In other words, which states are more or less permissive on a given policy compared to others? We identified several states that were notably permissive or restrictive overall — but we also found that states were rarely outliers across all the policy dimensions we studied (another reflection of the lack of overall coherence). More commonly, states that restricted young people’s decisions in certain areas were more permissive in others.

**This analysis does not argue for or against specific policies or offer recommendations for the “right” age restrictions on any topic (although the authors certainly have their own views).**

We use terms like “**permissive**” or “**restrictive**” not in any pejorative sense but to describe where states fall on a spectrum of autonomy. Similarly, we use the term “**coherence**” to describe how a state approaches these questions, even if policymakers believe the different age cutoffs for different types of decisions make sense for their state.

Our goal is to help leaders, policymakers, members of the news media, and others zoom out from debates about individual issues to see the bigger picture of age restrictions within states and across the country.

The policies we analyze are ever-changing — and the issues evolving the fastest are not always the ones that generate the biggest headlines. For example, marriage has been one of the most active areas of age-related legislation in recent years. Since 2018, partly as the result of advocacy campaigns, 12 states have changed their laws and set age 18 as the minimum age for marriage, effectively banning what proponents of these laws call “child marriage.”<sup>2</sup> Other areas of active policymaking include social media, online access to porn, and laws related to gender identity and medical care, including abortion. As such, this analysis should be taken as a snapshot at a given moment in time.<sup>3</sup> Across a wide range of issues, this analysis asks, “What does it mean to be a young adult in America in 2024?”

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# Why Focus on Coherence?

**The concept of “legal coherence” means that laws and principles should be consistent and interconnected. In a coherent system, laws form a logical and aligned framework and do not contradict one another.**

A legal system needs coherence to avoid confusion, uncertainty, and difficulties in applying and interpreting the law. But incoherence may also be a reasonable response to unique circumstances in a particular state or related to specific issues.

In this analysis, we explicitly looked for areas of incoherence across laws on age restrictions and ignored policies where there is broad consensus. For example, the age to drink alcohol is 21 in all states, due to federal policy. Every state passed this minimum legal drinking age when faced with losing federal highway funding, so there is no longer any meaningful differentiation across states on this issue.<sup>4</sup> Other privileges not considered in this analysis since they are entirely or nearly standardized include voting and purchasing tobacco and vaping products. We noted instances where parental consent is required and also excluded policies that only affect individuals who have taken the legal steps necessary to become emancipated minors.<sup>i</sup>

**Overall, we examined 36 actions or policies across six categories:**

- 1. Sex, Porn, and Marriage:** Ages of sexual consent, consent to marry, and the “floor” for marriage and exceptions, plus laws governing online porn, social media, and “sexting” (digitally text messaging sexually explicit images or messages) among minors.
- 2. Habits, Vices, and Expression:** Minimum ages for smoking marijuana, getting piercings and tattoos, and gambling.
- 3. Education, Employment, and Driving:** Age of compulsory school attendance, employment including different types of jobs and rules governing parental consent, and driving from learner’s permits to full driving privileges.
- 4. Medical Issues:** “Mature minor” laws governing general medical care, immunizations, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, and mental health, as well as abortion and laws governing medical treatment around gender identity.
- 5. Guns:** Age to possess a handgun, possess a rifle or shotgun, and carry a concealed firearm.
- 6. Privacy and Punishment:** Laws governing privacy matters, including at what age parents can no longer access a child’s academic or medical records, and if the state allows corporal punishment.

# Absolute (Intrastate) Coherence

**This analysis provides a nationwide snapshot of absolute coherence within each state and the District of Columbia across key age-aligned policies (Table 1).**

Analyzed age ranges span the youngest age (or floor) for marrying (often requiring parental or court-ordered approval); the legal age to gamble and to smoke recreational marijuana; the youngest age a minor can work in agriculture during school hours; the age to get a driver's license at the intermediate level (e.g., with some restrictions); the youngest age a "mature minor" can ask for mental health care; and the age a minor can get an abortion, in some cases requiring parental or court-ordered approval. For each state, cream color coding indicates the issue with the lowest minimum age across the selected policies; orange color coding indicates the highest age.

Three activities are illegal in some states: casino gambling, smoking marijuana recreationally, and obtaining an abortion — as indicated by white color coding. When cross-referenced with the interstate coherence, more permissive states have zero or only one type of activity banned. In contrast, the most restrictive states generally have one or two activities banned. Only one of the 10 most restrictive states, Arizona, does not have any of these bans in place (Table 2, Hawaii through Nebraska).

**Overall, every state has some inconsistencies in age restrictions and some states have extreme inconsistencies.**

- **Hawaii** bans gambling and recreational marijuana, but the age ranges for the other snapshot activities are relatively young, from abortion without parental consent at any age, to driving and working in agriculture during school hours at age 16.
- **Washington** does not ban any highlighted activities and allows abortion without parental consent, but it prohibits minors from working in agriculture during school hours.

- **Maine** is permissive with medical-related activities but strict with gambling and recreational marijuana use.
- **Michigan** allows a 14-year-old to seek mental health care and get an abortion with parental or court consent; a 16-year-old to work in agriculture during school hours and get a driver's license; and an 18-year-old to get married and gamble, and it requires an individual to be age 21 to smoke marijuana recreationally.
- **Tennessee** bans abortion, casino gambling, and recreational marijuana. At age 12, one can work in agriculture during school hours; at age 16, one can get a driver's license and seek mental health care; and at age 17, one can marry.
- **California** does not set a floor on marriage if parental or court consent is provided. A minor of any age can get an abortion without consent and seek mental health care at age 12. A 16-year-old can get a driver's license and work in agriculture during school hours; an 18-year-old can gamble at a casino. Recreational marijuana can be smoked at age 21.



**TABLE 1: ABSOLUTE (INTRASTATE) COHERENCE**

A nationwide snapshot of absolute coherence within each state and the District of Columbia across key age-aligned activities.

■ Youngest Age  
 ■ Oldest Age

*Illegal* = Banned or Unavailable

State	Sex, Porn and Marriage	Habits, Vices, and Expression		Education, Employment, and Driving		Medical Issues	
	Marriage "Floor"	Gambling at Casinos	Recreational Marijuana Use	Agricultural Work During School Hours	Intermediate Driving Privileges	"Mature Minor" (Mental Health Care)	Abortion for Minors
	Ages						
Alabama	16	19	Illegal	12	16	14	Illegal
Alaska	16	Illegal	21	16	16	18	12
Arizona	16	21	21	16	16	18	14
Arkansas	16	21	Illegal	16	16	12	Illegal
California	14	18	21	16	16	12	12
Colorado	16	21	21	16	16	15	14
Connecticut	18	21	21	16	16.33	12	12
Delaware	18	21	21	12	16.5	18	16
District of Columbia	16	Illegal	21	16	16.5	12	12
Florida	17	21	Illegal	12	16	13	13
Georgia	17	18	Illegal	12	16	18	13
Hawaii	15	Illegal	Illegal	16	16	14	12
Idaho	16	18	Illegal	16	15	14	Illegal
Illinois	16	21	21	12	16	12	12
Indiana	16	21	Illegal	12	16.25	18	Illegal
Iowa	16	21	Illegal	16	16	18	13
Kansas	15	21	Illegal	12	16	18	14
Kentucky	17	Illegal	Illegal	12	16.5	16	Illegal
Louisiana	16	21	Illegal	12	16	18	Illegal
Maine	17	21	21	16	16	12	12
Maryland	17	21	21	12	16.5	12	13
Massachusetts	18	21	21	14	16.5	16	16
Michigan	18	18	21	16	16	14	14
Minnesota	18	18	21	16	16	12	12
Mississippi	13	21	Illegal	12	16	18	Illegal
Missouri	16	21	21	16	16	18	Illegal
Montana	16	18	21	14	15	16	16
Nebraska	17	21	Illegal	12	16	19	14
Nevada	17	21	21	14	16	18	12
New Hampshire	16	21	Illegal	16	16	18	13
New Jersey	18	21	21	16	17	16	12
New Mexico	13	21	21	14	15.5	14	12
New York	18	18	21	16	16.5	12	12
North Carolina	16	21	Illegal	12	16	12	14

**TABLE 1: ABSOLUTE (INTRASTATE) COHERENCE** (continued)

A nationwide snapshot of absolute coherence within each state and the District of Columbia across key age-aligned activities.

Youngest Age
  Oldest Age
 Illegal = Banned or Unavailable

State	Sex, Porn and Marriage	Habits, Vices, and Expression		Education, Employment, and Driving		Medical Issues	
	Marriage "Floor"	Gambling at Casinos	Recreational Marijuana Use	Agricultural Work During School Hours	Intermediate Driving Privileges	"Mature Minor" (Mental Health Care)	Abortion for Minors
	Ages						
North Dakota	16	21	Illegal	14	15	18	Illegal
Ohio	17	21	21	16	16	14	14
Oklahoma	13	18	Illegal	12	16	14	Illegal
Oregon	17	18	21	16	16	14	12
Pennsylvania	18	21	Illegal	12	16.5	18	14
Rhode Island	18	18	21	12	16.5	18	14
South Carolina	16	21	Illegal	16	15.5	16	17
South Dakota	16	21	Illegal	12	14.5	18	Illegal
Tennessee	17	Illegal	Illegal	12	16	16	Illegal
Texas	16	21	Illegal	12	16	12	Illegal
Utah	16	Illegal	Illegal	16	16	18	14
Vermont	18	Illegal	21	14	16	12	12
Virginia	16	Illegal	21	16	16.25	12	14
Washington	13	18	21	18	16	13	12
West Virginia	16	21	Illegal	12	16	14	Illegal
Wisconsin	16	21	Illegal	18	16	14	14
Wyoming	16	18	Illegal	12	16	18	14



# Relative (Interstate) Coherence

**This analysis also examines patterns and trends across the country for the full list of 36 actions or policies.**

We ranked states based on the age at which they allow individuals to make various decisions or participate in activities such as driving, working, and consenting to sex. (As mentioned in the Introduction, rankings are purely descriptive and do not reflect a judgment on the underlying policies.)

However, we did make judgment calls for states that imposed a similar age requirement but added other rules or permissions. For example, many states require young people to wait until age 18 to get their ears pierced unless they have parental consent, but states apply different parental consent policies. In that instance, we deemed a state requiring a parent to attend the ear piercing in person as slightly less permissive than a state where a parent could simply sign a form. Actions or policies within a category were all weighted equally; likewise, each category was weighted equally in calculating the overall state rankings.

**To review rankings or dive deeper into a specific issue's dataset, visit [The Edge of Seventeen](#).**

Consolidated results are shown on Page 11 (Table 2). For each of the categories, we define an "extreme" outlier as a state being 1.5 standard deviations above or below its peers. We considered a state a "moderate" outlier if it was between 1.0-1.5 standard deviations above or below its peers, and we identified a state as a "mild" outlier if it was between 0.5-1.0 standard deviations above or below the mean. Boxes shaded darker gray are those states allowing greater freedom at younger ages, whereas boxes shaded darker orange require individuals to wait longer for the same types of decisions. Boxes left in white indicate those states are not outliers and are near the national average.

Nine states were most consistently permissive, with an overall (total) moderately or extremely permissive ranking. Eight states were most consistently restrictive, with an overall (total) moderately or extremely restrictive ranking. Other findings include:

- Every state has two or more categories where it is at least a mild outlier.
- Most states (43 and the District of Columbia) have a mix of permissive and restrictive outliers. The only exceptions were three states — Maine, Montana, and Wyoming — with outlier categories only on the permissive side, and four states — Arizona, Nebraska, Utah, and Wisconsin — with only restrictive outliers.
- Eight states — Alabama, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Vermont, and Washington — are outliers in all six categories, but include a mix of permissive and restrictive approaches depending on the issue area.
- Eighteen states have at least one moderately or extremely permissive category *and* one moderately or extremely restrictive category. These states represent locations where young people face the most inconsistent regulations and laws based on age.

- Three states — Missouri, New York, and North Dakota — have at least one extremely restrictive and one extremely permissive category.
- Prior to our analysis, one projection was that Democratic-leaning (blue) states would be more permissive and Republican-leaning (red) states would be more restrictive. Interestingly, this did not develop in the top 10 permissive states, where four are Republican- and six are Democratic-controlled. However, there appears to be political coherence on the more restrictive side, where of the 10 most restrictive, eight states are Republican-leaning and only two are Democratic-leaning.
- The Privacy and Punishment category had six states fall into the most extremely restrictive realm.
- Two categories have the most extremely permissive states, with four each in Education, Employment, and Driving; and Guns.
- The category with the fewest outliers is Medical Issues with 20 neutral states. In comparison, the Sex, Porn, and Marriage category only has 13 states that are neutral.

The following sections provide more detail about each of the six categories.



**TABLE 2: RELATIVE (INTERSTATE) COHERENCE**

A nationwide snapshot of patterns and trends within each state and the District of Columbia across 36 different actions or policies.

Extremely Permissive
  Extremely Restrictive  
 Moderately Permissive
  Moderately Restrictive  
 Mildly Permissive
  Mildly Restrictive

State	Sex, Porn and Marriage	Habits, Vices, and Expression	Education, Employment, and Driving	Medical Issues	Guns	Privacy and Punishment	Overall
Montana							
Maine							
Minnesota							
New Hampshire							
Wyoming							
Vermont							
California							
Oregon							
New Mexico							
Maryland							
Iowa							
Washington							
South Dakota							
Nevada							
Arkansas							
West Virginia							
Rhode Island							
Pennsylvania							
North Carolina							
District of Columbia							
Kansas							
New York							
North Dakota							
Delaware							
Michigan							
Missouri							
Illinois							
Alabama							
South Carolina							
Oklahoma							
Tennessee							
Connecticut							
Kentucky							
Ohio							
Idaho							
Alaska							

**TABLE 2: RELATIVE (INTERSTATE) COHERENCE** *(continued)*

A nationwide snapshot of patterns and trends within each state and the District of Columbia across 36 different actions or policies.



State	Sex, Porn and Marriage	Habits, Vices, and Expression	Education, Employment, and Driving	Medical Issues	Guns	Privacy and Punishment	Overall
Massachusetts							
Georgia							
New Jersey							
Virginia							
Colorado							
Hawaii							
Texas							
Mississippi							
Louisiana							
Wisconsin							
Arizona							
Florida							
Indiana							
Utah							
Nebraska							

# Category-Level Interstate Coherence Results

## Sex, Porn, and Marriage

**This category includes five actions or policies measuring:**

- The age someone can legally consent to have sex.
- The age someone can legally consent to marriage *without* parental consent.
- The age someone can legally consent to marriage *with* parental consent.
- Whether the state has a sexting law for those under age 18.
- Whether the state has laws about accessing online porn or limiting social media access prior to age 18.

Thirty-two states set the age of sexual consent at 16, eight states set the age at 17, and 11 states require a young person to wait until age 18.<sup>5</sup> Forty-nine states have set the age of marriage without parental consent at age 18, but four states do not currently have a minimum age for marriage if there is parental consent. In those instances, where available, we used the lowest documented age of marriage since 2000, or age 13, whichever was lower.

While it has not made big headlines, marriage has been one of the most active areas of age-related legislation in recent years. Since 2018, 12 states have set 18 as the minimum age for marriage, effectively banning child marriage (defined as an individual younger than age 18 entering into matrimony).<sup>6</sup> Additionally, in that same time frame 20 states have raised their minimum age of marriage to 16 or 17 and/or removed previously outlined exceptions for pregnancy. Four states currently do not have a minimum age for marriage due to exceptions for parental consent (California, Mississippi, New Mexico, and Oklahoma).<sup>7</sup> In March 2024, Washington banned child marriage by moving the minimum age to 18 (effective June 2024).<sup>8</sup> In April 2024, Virginia also signed a bill to end child marriage, becoming the first Southern state to establish 18 as its

minimum age.<sup>9</sup> Eight additional states currently have legislation, at various stages of progression, to set the minimum age for marriage at 18.<sup>10</sup>

Estimates vary based on methodology, but from 2000 to 2018, somewhere between 207,000 and 300,000 individuals in the United States entered marriage before age 18. The vast majority of these were young girls.<sup>11</sup> While most of these individuals were ages 16-17, children as young as ages 10-12 were documented as getting married during the first two decades of the 21st century in the U.S.<sup>12</sup> Over time, the annual number of child marriages has declined from more than 76,000 in 2000 to fewer than 2,500 in 2018.<sup>13</sup> Child marriages can be harmful to individuals younger than age 18, with adverse effects on education, health, and earnings.<sup>14</sup> The practice of child marriage can also allow criminal sexual acts, what is commonly known as statutory rape, due to the age difference between the older individual, usually a man, and the younger individual, typically a girl, to be permitted and even legalized through marriage. It is estimated that at least 60,000 marriages nationally fell into this category between 2000 and 2018.<sup>15</sup>

Currently, 27 states have laws prohibiting sexting among minors.<sup>16</sup> Each state law includes wording about “minors sending images that are sexual in nature.” Twenty-five of these states, with the exception of Illinois and Oklahoma, address the “issue of minors receiving sexually-themed images.”<sup>17</sup>

We combined the protection of minors in one category that includes restricting access to porn, as well as other social media and online security measures. Twelve states have laws prohibiting persons ages 18 or younger from accessing online porn, a recent legislative trend.<sup>18</sup> A Louisiana law passed in 2022 and effective as of January 2023 was the first in the nation to require “reasonable age verification methods” to ensure online consumers of pornographic content are age 18 or older.<sup>19</sup> Seven additional states passed legislation in 2023, and four

have done so prior to April 2024 to limit access to online porn.<sup>20</sup> Similar to Louisiana’s restrictions, these laws require age verification for consumers of online pornographic content, and the online provider may not retain any identifying information about the consumer once access has been granted. At least 17 other states have introduced similar legislation. Eight of the 12 states that ban online porn also provided additional protections for social media consumption. These range from a ban on TikTok in Montana to protecting minors from harmful social media algorithms in Illinois and deceptive online practices in Texas.

Four states that have not limited access to porn have enacted other types of protective legislation related to social media and minors.<sup>21</sup> This is part of another recent trend, with many states introducing and/or passing legislation regarding social media access. Only 14 states *did not* introduce social media-related legislation in 2023.<sup>22</sup> On March 25, 2024, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed an “Online Protections of Minors” bill. The bill requires specific social media platforms to verify the ages of users, prohibits young people under age 14 from opening social media accounts, and requires parental consent for 14- and 15-year-olds to create social media accounts, among other safeguards.<sup>23</sup> As of this analysis’ publication, at least seven additional states had active legislation — bills that passed one or both chambers or were awaiting gubernatorial approval. Ohio passed a bill earlier this year requiring parental consent to create social media accounts for minors under age 16. The governor signed it, but a federal judge ruled it unconstitutional.<sup>24</sup>

Across the Sex, Porn, and Marriage category, no states are extremely permissive outliers, but nine states are moderately permissive. On the other end, four states are extremely restrictive outliers, including Florida, New York, Utah, and Virginia. Notably, New York is a relative outlier on this side of the list, but it is a relative outlier on the age of sexual consent (17 versus 16), it sets a hard floor for marriage at age 18, and it also has a law prohibiting sexting among minors.

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*While it has not made big headlines, marriage has been one of the most active areas of age-related legislation in recent years.*

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## Habits, Vices, and Expression

**This category captured state policies around eight different actions or policies:**

- The minimum age to use marijuana for medicinal or recreational purposes, if at all.
- The age to legally gamble in four different ways, including the lottery, parimutuel betting, casinos, and charity bingo/pull tabs.
- The age for someone to get a tattoo or their ears pierced, with or without parental consent.

We considered including the age at which someone could legally vape or use tobacco products, but we did not find any meaningful distinctions across these categories and eventually dropped them from the rankings (although we recognize that schools often have to grapple with tobacco use regardless of the law). The relatively universal age to purchase vaping or tobacco products is due to 2019 federal legislation raising the “federal minimum legal sales age for all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, from 18 to 21 across the United States.”<sup>25</sup> As recently as 2016, the majority of states allowed tobacco purchases by 18-year-olds, but by 2019, most states had established 21 as the minimum age to purchase tobacco products. Similarly, many states set the minimum age to purchase vaping products at 18 or 19 as recently as 2018. By Dec. 31, 2023, “all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands ... passed legislation prohibiting the sale of e-cigarettes to underage persons [under age 21].”<sup>26</sup>

In this category, two states, Maine and New York, came out as extremely permissive. Those two are among the states that allow recreational marijuana use beginning at age 21; they both allow marijuana for medical purposes at even younger ages, they are both less restrictive on gambling, and they require less parental oversight over ear piercing.

Nevada was a notable exception on tattoos, given that it was the only state that did not set a minimum age requirement or regulate tattoo parlors. The Southern Nevada Health District does specify that tattoos are prohibited for minors under age 14, and tattoos for minors ages 14 to 17 require parental consent and presence during the procedure.<sup>27</sup>

Because it does not allow gambling of any type for any age, Utah is on the extremely restrictive side for this category. It is joined by four more states, including Hawaii, Iowa, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Those states tend to be more restrictive on marijuana usage and less favorable to different forms of gambling.





## Education, Employment, and Driving

This category features 10 actions or policies focused on governing:

- Compulsory education laws defining the minimum and maximum ages at which children and minors are required to attend school.
- Employment rules and paperwork requirements for agricultural work during and outside school hours (three actions and policies). Rules for employment certificates and age certification for traditional work (two actions and policies).
- The age at which someone can get a driver's permit, the age for an intermediate license with restrictions, and the age at which they can get a full driver's license (no restrictions).

Half the states require children to start school at age 6, although 12 states go as low as age 5 and one state, Washington, has set the starting age as late as age 8. Similarly, about half the states require students to continue attending school until age 18 if they have not yet graduated, although most have some exceptions for home-schooling, disabilities, or incarceration. On the other hand, 17 states only require students to attend until age 16, and one state, Texas, sets the age at 19 absent graduation, a GED, or parental consent.

An even wider age range exists for when states allow children to begin working for pay in agricultural work. Twenty-one states allow someone as young as age 12 to do paid agricultural work during the school day, while two states, Washington and Wisconsin, require someone to wait until age 18.

There is also a wide variety of approaches to how tightly states regulate teenage employment. States like Massachusetts, Michigan, and New York require both age and employment certificates for anyone working under age 18. In contrast, a number of states, including Arizona, Florida, and South Dakota, do not require either type of certificate. Many states do one or the other, or apply different ages for different types of certificates required.

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*Twenty-one states allow someone as young as age 12 to do paid agricultural work during the school day, while two states, Washington and Wisconsin, require someone to wait until age 18.*

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Over the past few years, there has been an increase in child labor law violations; at the same time, at least 28 states from 2021 to 2024 introduced legislation to roll back certain aspects of child labor laws, with at least nine states passing these bills in 2023 and 2024.<sup>28</sup> Four of these states (Indiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Tennessee) passed measures to lower the age of work in establishments selling liquor, and New Hampshire also extended work hours; Arkansas eliminated age verification and parent/guardian approval; Iowa lowered the minimum age for child care workers and raised the child-to-staff ratio; New Jersey extended work hours and increased the time between breaks; West Virginia eliminated a requirement for work permits at ages 14 and 15; and Florida removed restrictions on minors who work, particularly for 16- and 17-year-olds.<sup>29</sup>

At least 16 states have introduced legislation since 2023 to protect minors through child labor laws, including nine states that have introduced "child actor" bills, particularly for minors who are part of monetized video blogging, also known as vlogging.<sup>30</sup>

State policies around driver's licenses cover a smaller age range but still vary widely. Full driving privileges mean an individual can drive any number and type of passenger at any time of the day or night. Five states allow individuals to get full driving privileges at age 16, but 17 states require waiting until age 17, and another 17 states require waiting until age 18. The remaining states fall somewhere between, such as age 16 and 6 months. States also establish the earliest age for a learner's permit and an intermediate age when a driver can get their license but may be limited by a curfew, as well as which and how many passengers they can transport. For instance, some states permit transporting a sibling, but not a peer. The three-tier system is thanks to a movement to graduated driver's licensing programs that began in some states in the early 1990s. Between 1996 and 2006, nearly every state "adopted a learner period of [two] months or more, a minimum supervised practice hours requirement for the learner period, or a night or passenger restriction once initially licensed."<sup>31</sup> More recently, the trend has shifted from when teenagers could drive to a notable decrease in the number of teenagers actively seeking a license.<sup>32</sup>

Overall, the Mountain West states tend to be the most permissive in this category, with Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and Wyoming as extremely permissive outliers. For example, Idaho offers a learner's permit for supervised driving at age 14.5 after passing an approved driver's education program. Intermediate driving privileges award an Idaho driver's license at age 15 to individuals who pass written knowledge and road skills tests but limit driving to daylight hours unless accompanied by a licensed adult. Full privileges are attained at age 16 if the individual has been licensed for at least six months.<sup>33</sup> Idaho also ends compulsory school attendance at age 16.

At the opposite end of the Education, Employment, and Driving category, five Eastern states are extremely restrictive: Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Virginia. Connecticut, for example, has a compulsory education law that extends until age 18 (with an exception for earlier graduation), the same year individuals become eligible for full driving privileges.



## Medical Issues

**This category includes seven different actions or policies, including:**

- “Mature minor” laws governing four areas: general medical care, immunizations, STI testing, and mental health care.
- Availability of abortion for minors, including with parental consent requirements.
- Laws governing medical treatment related to gender identity: medical provider shield laws and laws prohibiting certain types of gender-affirming care prior to age 18.

In general, a “mature minor doctrine” serves as a “common-law rule that allows an adolescent who is mature to give consent for medical care ... including the areas of emergency care, sexually transmitted diseases, drug treatment, mental health care, pregnancy, contraception, and emancipation.”<sup>34</sup> For our rankings, we took into account mature minor laws and the ages at which individuals are allowed to make their own decisions around general medical care, immunizations, STI testing, and mental health care.

For abortion, states that do not allow it at all were rated as the most restrictive, but even states that do allow it made different decisions about age and parental consent policy. For example, we deemed those with specific age restrictions (e.g., age 16 or 17) less permissive than states that did not set an age requirement. Instead, we relied on parental (or a judge’s) consent, followed by states that require only a parent notification. Many state laws have shifted since the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision in 2022. Fourteen states that previously required parental, guardian, or court consent prior to a minor having an abortion now have a total (or near-total) ban on abortion.<sup>35</sup>

Since the start of 2022, 15 states have gender-affirming “shield” laws or executive orders protecting health care access for transgender individuals.<sup>36</sup> Another 24 states currently ban what is considered by transgender advocacy groups as the “best practice medication and surgical care for transgender youth,” or components of that care, although in five of those states, the bans are not in effect due to court orders or executive orders.<sup>37</sup> There is substantial disagreement among medical professionals about appropriate care in this area, and many Western European countries have adopted more restrictive standards. But for this analysis, we cite the standard favored by advocates to delineate various laws and regulations.<sup>38</sup> One state, Arizona, has both a shield law *and* a ban on surgical care, but that ban currently is overruled by executive order. The remaining 12 states do not ban “best practice medical care” but also do not have a shield law.<sup>39</sup>

Fourteen states passed legislation in 2022 or 2023 “specifying requirements for practitioners to notify parents of a student’s use of pronouns that are inconsistent with their biological sex.”<sup>40</sup> These laws vary from requiring parental notification of a student’s preference to prohibiting school personnel from “giving false or misleading information” to parents about a student’s gender identity to not requiring school personnel to adopt a student’s preferred pronouns — or only adopting them if given parental consent.<sup>41</sup>

Across the entire Medical Issues category, three states — Minnesota, New York, and Oregon — scored as extremely permissive states. Oregon, for example, allows someone to consent to medical care as young as age 15. Nebraska and North Dakota are the two extremely restrictive states. Nebraska, for example, does not have an explicit policy on medical care for minors and state law says the age of maturity is 19. North Dakota is one of 19 states that does not have a policy around mental health services for young people.

## Guns

**This category consists of three age-based actions or policies:**

- The age at which someone can possess a handgun.
- The age at which someone can possess a rifle or shotgun.
- The legal age to carry a concealed firearm.

Federal law requires that an individual must be age 18 to *purchase* any kind of firearm and in some cases older to purchase certain types of firearms such as a handgun, with exceptions for some types such as air-powered guns.<sup>42</sup> Yet, as Everytown for Gun Safety notes, while federal law requires a person to be age 18 to possess a handgun and age 21 to purchase a handgun from a federal firearms dealer, there is no federal minimum for possessing shotguns and rifles. There are also exceptions for employment, military service, and hunting. And the federal policy cannot be policed by state or local officials without similar state prohibition(s).<sup>43</sup> As a result, young people in many states can possess rifles, shotguns, and handguns before the age of 18 in some situations.

Four states — Maine, Missouri, Montana, and New Hampshire — are extremely permissive states in the gun category. These states do not set a minimum age to possess a firearm, and they are part of a group of 19 states that set age 18 as the minimum age to carry a concealed weapon. There are no states ranked either moderately or extremely restrictive in this category.

On the restrictive end of the Guns category, 21 states are ranked mildly restrictive with policies that mirror the federal prohibition; they set minimum ages for possession of handguns and require individuals to be at least age 21 before they can carry a concealed firearm in public.

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*Young people in many states can possess rifles, shotguns, and handguns before the age of 18 in some situations.*

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Even with school shootings and increasing rates of gun suicide, there has not been recent gun control legislation. In January 2024, the White House initiated a safe firearms storage campaign. The U.S. Department of Education issued guidance and communication templates to school leaders to encourage families to recognize the importance of safe firearm storage.<sup>44</sup> The U.S. Department of Justice created an online guide to support this effort.<sup>45</sup> In April 2024, Tennessee passed a bill requiring K-12 students to receive “age-appropriate and grade-appropriate instruction on firearm safety” beginning in the 2025-26 school year.<sup>46</sup>



## Privacy and Punishment

This category consisted of three actions or policies including:

- Whether a state has laws governing an underage person's privacy, such as when parents no longer have legal access to their child's academic or medical records.
- If the state applies due process provisions to school-based disciplinary infractions.
- If the state allows corporal punishment in schools.

The federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act applies in all states, but some states have additional laws that either give more privacy to students or guarantee parents more access to information about their child. For example, states like Texas and Utah specify that custodial *and* noncustodial parents have full access to their child's written records. On the other side, states like North Carolina and North Dakota protect certain medical records from being released to parents without the student's permission.

Currently, there are 17 states that have not banned corporal punishment, although the practice of it is considered increasingly rare.<sup>47</sup> States that allow corporal punishment include Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>48</sup> Idaho was the most recent state to prohibit the practice in April 2023.<sup>49</sup>

Only one state — Pennsylvania — emerged as extremely permissive in the Privacy and Punishment category. It restricts parents' access to student records if they have a documented history of violence against the student, extends due process rights to a school's decision to expel a student, and does not allow corporal punishment in schools. On the other side, six states — Arizona, Indiana, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas — are extremely restrictive in the Privacy and Punishment category. These states give parents additional rights to monitor their child's records, do not extend due process rights to school-based infractions, and allow corporal punishment in schools.



# Appendix A

Source note: We relied on websites and organizations that track specific issues on a state-by-state basis. Most are regularly updated by the host organization, and these dates are noted. We acknowledge that in some cases the host organizations are also advocates for one policy or another; in these cases we cross-checked data points with other sources to confirm their accuracy.

## CATEGORY SOURCES CONSULTED

Actions and Policies	Source(s)
The age someone can legally consent to have sex.	Age of Consent, " <a href="#">United States Age of Consent Map</a> ," 2023.
The age someone can legally consent to marriage without parental consent.	FindLaw, " <a href="#">State-by-State Marriage 'Age of Consent' Laws</a> ," 2024.
The age someone can legally consent to marriage with parental consent.	Unchained At Last, " <a href="#">Child Marriage – Progress</a> ," 2024.
Whether the state has a sexting law for those under age 18.	World Population Review, " <a href="#">Sexting Laws Per State</a> ," 2024.
Whether the state has laws about accessing online porn or limiting social media prior to age 18.	National Decency Coalition, " <a href="#">State Age Verification Bill</a> ," 2024. National Conference of State Legislatures, " <a href="#">Social Media and Children 2023 Legislation</a> ," 2023. Internet research of states with recent social media legislative activity, 2024.
**The minimum age to use marijuana for medicinal or recreational purposes, if at all.	Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, " <a href="#">Marijuana Laws</a> ," 2024.
**The age to legally gamble, including the lottery, parimutuel betting, casinos, charity bingo/pull tabs.	World Casino Directory, " <a href="#">Minimum Age to Gamble in United States of America</a> ," Date Unclear.
**The age for someone to get a tattoo or their ears pierced, with or without their parent's consent.	Allen Financial Insurance Group, Inc., " <a href="#">Tattoo Regulation and Body Piercing   State Laws, and Statutes</a> ," Date Unclear (spot-checked via internet searches).
**Compulsory education laws and the ages at which children and minors are required to attend school.	Education Commission of the States, " <a href="#">50-State Comparison: Free and Compulsory School Age Requirements</a> ," 2020. Justia, " <a href="#">Compulsory Education Laws: 50-State Survey</a> ," 2023.
**Employment rules and paperwork requirements for agricultural work during and outside school hours. Rules for employment certificates and age certification for traditional work.	U.S. Department of Labor, " <a href="#">State Child Labor Laws Applicable to Agricultural Employment</a> ," 2024. Minimum-Wage.org, " <a href="#">Learn about your employee rights</a> ," 2024 (supplemental for some states). U.S. Department of Labor, " <a href="#">Employment/Age Certificate</a> ," 2024.

**Note:** \*\* signifies areas where more than one action and/or policy is counted.

**CATEGORY SOURCES CONSULTED** (continued)

Actions and Policies	Source(s)
**The age at which someone can get a driver's permit, the age for an intermediate license with restrictions, and the age for a full driver's license without restrictions.	Governors Highway Safety Association, " <a href="#">Teen and Novice Drivers</a> ," 2024.
***"Mature minor" laws governing general medical care, immunizations, STI testing, and mental health care.	American Academy of Pediatrics, " <a href="#">State-by-State Variability in Adolescent Privacy Laws</a> ," 2022. D.C. Department of Health, " <a href="#">Minor's Health Consent</a> ," D.C. Statute.
Abortion laws.	CNN, " <a href="#">See where abortions are banned and legal — and where it's still in limbo</a> ," 2024. Planned Parenthood, " <a href="#">Parental Consent and Notification Laws</a> ," 2024. Abortion Finder, " <a href="#">Find Verified Abortion Care &amp; Support</a> ," 2024.
**Laws governing medical treatment related to gender identity, including whether a state prohibits certain types of gender-related care before age 18 and whether a state offers a shield law for care providers.	Movement Advancement Project, " <a href="#">Transgender Healthcare 'Shield' Laws</a> ," 2024. Human Rights Campaign, " <a href="#">Map: Attacks on Gender Affirming Care by State</a> ," 2024.
The age at which someone can possess a handgun.	Everytown for Gun Safety, " <a href="#">Gun Law Navigator: Minimum Age</a> ," 2024. National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action, " <a href="#">Guide To The Interstate Transportation Of Firearms</a> ," 2024.
The age at which someone can possess a rifle or shotgun.	Everytown for Gun Safety, " <a href="#">Gun Law Navigator: Minimum Age</a> ," 2024. National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action, " <a href="#">Guide To The Interstate Transportation Of Firearms</a> ," 2024.
The legal age to carry a concealed firearm.	Everytown for Gun Safety, " <a href="#">Gun Law Navigator: Minimum Age</a> ," 2024. National Rifle Association Institute for Legislative Action, " <a href="#">Guide To The Interstate Transportation Of Firearms</a> ," 2024.
Whether a state has laws governing an underage person's privacy, such as when parents no longer have legal access to their child's academic or medical records.	FindLaw, " <a href="#">State Laws</a> ," 2017 to 2023 depending on state; spot-checked via internet searches).
If the state applies due process provisions to school-based disciplinary infractions.	National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments, " <a href="#">Discipline Compendium</a> ," Date Unclear.
If the state allows corporal punishment in schools.	National Association of State Boards of Education, " <a href="#">Corporal Punishment</a> ," Date Unclear.

**Note:** \*\* signifies areas where more than one action and/or policy is counted.



# Appendix B

## STATE AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EXAMPLES OF ABSOLUTE INCOHERENCE

State	<i>A young person in this state...</i>
Alabama	...can possess a rifle or shotgun at any age, but cannot buy cigarettes until age 21.
Alaska	...can get an abortion without parental consent at any age, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Arizona	...can drive unsupervised at age 16, but cannot play the lottery until age 21.
Arkansas	...can get married at age 17 with parental or court consent, but cannot take medicinal marijuana until age 21.
California	...can work and get an abortion without parental consent at age 12, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Colorado	...can get tested for an STI at age 13, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Connecticut	...can get an abortion without parental consent at 12, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Delaware	...can work in agriculture during the school day at age 12, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
District of Columbia	...can get married at age 16, but cannot smoke marijuana (medicinal or recreational) until age 21.
Florida	...can start work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but cannot change their pronouns at a public K-12 school.
Georgia	...can possess a rifle or shotgun at any age, but cannot seek mental health care without parental approval until age 18.
Hawaii	...can work in agriculture outside school hours at age 10, but cannot choose to get immunizations until age 18.
Idaho	...can drive without supervision at age 15, but their parents must be notified in advance if they are being asked to take a survey about sex or sexuality-related topics in a public K-12 school.
Illinois	...can work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but cannot go to a casino or recreationally smoke marijuana until age 21.
Indiana	...can consent to sex at age 16, but their parents must be notified in advance if they are being asked to take a survey about anything related to sexuality in a public K-12 school.
Iowa	...can work in agriculture outside school hours at age 12, but cannot change their name or pronouns at a K-12 public school without parental notification.
Kansas	...can work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but cannot seek mental health care without parental consent until age 18.
Kentucky	...can consent to sex at age 16, but school personnel are not required to use their preferred name or pronouns in K-12 public schools.
Louisiana	...can drive at age 16, but cannot change their name or pronouns in K-12 public schools.
Maine	...can possess a gun or rifle at any age, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Maryland	...can get married at age 17, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Massachusetts	...can be excused from school to work at age 14, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Michigan	...can consent to sex at age 16, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Minnesota	...can do agricultural work outside of school hours at age 12, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.

**STATE AND DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EXAMPLES OF ABSOLUTE INCOHERENCE** (continued)

<b>State</b>	<b><i>A young person in this state...</i></b>
Mississippi	...can get married at any age with parental consent, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Missouri	...can get married at age 16, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Montana	...can possess a gun or rifle at any age, but also need parental permission at any age to change their name or pronouns at school, and teachers cannot be compelled to use them.
Nebraska	...can drive at age 16, but cannot seek mental health care without parental consent until age 19.
Nevada	...can start working full-time at age 14 to support a parent, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
New Hampshire	...can work in agriculture outside school hours at age 12, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
New Jersey	...can get an abortion at any age without parental consent, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
New Mexico	...can possess a rifle or shotgun at any age, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
New York	...can work in agriculture outside school hours at age 12, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
North Carolina	...can consent to sex at age 16, but their parents can ask to review materials they wish to withdraw from the public school library up to age 18.
North Dakota	...can drive at age 15, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Ohio	...can marry at age 17, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Oklahoma	...can consent to sex at age 16, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Oregon	...can start working in agriculture outside school hours at age 9 if they are picking berries or beans for intrastate use, but cannot go to a casino until age 18.
Pennsylvania	...can possess a rifle or shotgun at any age, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Rhode Island	...can consent to sex at age 16, but cannot seek mental health care without parental consent until age 18.
South Carolina	...can drive at age 15.5, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
South Dakota	...can drive at age 14.5, but cannot seek mental health care without parental consent until age 18.
Tennessee	...can work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but school administrators and teachers are not required to use their chosen name/pronouns in public K-12 schools.
Texas	...can work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Utah	...can work in agriculture outside school hours at age 12, but cannot request mental health care without parental approval until age 18.
Vermont	...can get an abortion at any age without parental consent, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
Virginia	...can work at 14, but cannot receive gender counseling at a public K-12 school without parental consent until age 18.
Washington	...can get an abortion at any age without parental consent, but cannot smoke marijuana recreationally until age 21.
West Virginia	...can work in agriculture during school hours at age 12, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Wisconsin	...can get married at age 16, but cannot go to a casino until age 21.
Wyoming	...can possess a rifle or shotgun at any age, but cannot seek mental health care without parental consent until age 18.

# Endnotes

- 1 Some city or regional governments may add further restrictions, but this analysis is focused on state-level policies.
- 2 "About Child Marriage in the US," <https://www.unchainedatlast.org/laws-to-end-child-marriage/>.
- 3 Because of the many moving pieces, we cut off our review to policies formally adopted as of April 15, 2024.
- 4 "History of the MLDA," in Traci L. Toomey, Carolyn Rosenfeld, and Alexander C. Wagenaar, "The Minimum Legal Drinking Age," *Alcohol Health and Research World* 20, no. 4 (1996): 213–218, [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6876521/#:~:text=1975%3B%20Williams%20et%20al.,all%20States%20\(Wolfson%201995\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6876521/#:~:text=1975%3B%20Williams%20et%20al.,all%20States%20(Wolfson%201995)).
- 5 Rather than calling it out separately throughout, for here and all other state counts, we count Washington, D.C. as a "state."
- 6 "About Child Marriage in the US," Unchained at Last, <https://www.unchainedatlast.org/laws-to-end-child-marriage/>; the twelve states are Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington.
- 7 Mariel Padilla, "The 19th Explains: Why Child Marriage Is Still Legal in 80% of US States," *The 19th*, July 5, 2023, <https://19thnews.org/2023/07/explaining-child-marriage-laws-united-states/>.
- 8 Wa. H.B. 1455 (2023–24), <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1455&Initiative=false&Year=2023>.
- 9 Va. H.B. 994 (2024), <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?241+sum+HB994>; "Virginia Makes History as 12th State and First in the South to End Child Marriage," Tahirih Justice Center, April 9, 2024, <https://www.tahirih.org/news/virginia-makes-history-as-12th-state-and-first-in-the-south-to-end-child-marriage/#:~:text=Tahirih%20Updates-,Virginia%20Makes%20History%20as%2012th%20State%20and%20First,South%20to%20End%20Child%20Marriage&text=Falls%20Church%2C%20VA%20%E2%80%94Today%2C,age%20of%2018%20without%20exceptions>.
- 10 "Child Marriage Legislation: Progress Map," Unchained at Last, <https://www.unchainedatlast.org/child-marriage-progress/>; Additional author research done via LegiScan bill tracking: <https://legiscan.com/>. The eight states are California, Hawaii, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and South Carolina.
- 11 Unchained at Last, an advocacy organization working to end child marriage in the US, estimates 297,033 children were married in the US between 2000 and 2018. "United States' Child Marriage Problem: Study Findings," Unchained at Last, April 2021, <https://www.unchainedatlast.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Study-PDF-FINAL-1.pdf>; another estimate of 207,459 child marriages between 2000 and 2015 for a project done by Frontline, Public Broadcasting Service, acknowledged gaps in data collection that they believed resulted in an estimate lower than the actual. Anjali Tsui, Dan Nolan, and Chris Amico, "Child Marriage in America: By the Numbers," *Frontline*, July 6, 2017, <http://apps.frontline.org/child-marriage-by-the-numbers/>.
- 12 "United States' Child Marriage Problem: Study Findings," Unchained at Last, 5.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Mara Steinhaus and Lyric Thompson, "No Exceptions: A Synthesis of Evidence on the Prevalence and Impact of Child and Early Marriage in the United States and How This Compares to Existing Global Evidence," International Center for Research on Women, 2020, [https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/child-marriage-in-the-US-prevalence-impact\\_8-2020\\_ICRW.pdf](https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/child-marriage-in-the-US-prevalence-impact_8-2020_ICRW.pdf).
- 15 "United States' Child Marriage Problem: Study Findings," Unchained at Last, 2.
- 16 "Sexting Laws by State 2024," *World Population Review*, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/sexting-laws-by-state>. The states are Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia.
- 17 "Sexting Laws by State 2024," *World Population Review*.
- 18 "State Age Verification Bill," National Decency Coalition, <https://decencyusa.org/state-age-verification-bill/>. The states banning access to online porn (and in some cases other material deemed harmful) are Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia. Note Maryland is included in this total, with S.B. 571 awaiting the governor's signature as we went to publication.
- 19 Va. H.B. 142 (2022), <https://legis.la.gov/legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=1289498>.
- 20 "State Age Verification Bill," National Decency Coalition. Six additional states had bills pending in April 2024: Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.
- 21 "Social Media and Children 2023 Legislation," National Conference of State Legislatures, updated January 26, 2024, <https://www.ncsl.org/technology-and-communication/social-media-and-children-2023-legislation>; the states with social media-related legislation include California, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York.
- 22 "Social Media and Children 2023 Legislation," National Conference of State Legislatures. Note some of these states have subsequently introduced and/or passed legislation in 2024.
- 23 "Governor DeSantis Signs Legislation to Protect Children and Uphold Parental Rights," Florida Governor's Office, March 25, 2024, <https://www.flgov.com/2024/03/25/governor-desantis-signs-legislation-to-protect-children-and-uphold-parental-rights/>.
- 24 Nate Raymond, "US Judge Blocks Ohio Law Restricting Children's Use of Social Media," *Reuters*, February 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-judge-blocks-ohio-law-restricting-childrens-use-social-media-2024-02-12/>.
- 25 "Glossary: Restrictions on Sales to Underage Persons, Minimum Age," in "STATE System E-Cigarette Fact Sheet," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/statesystem/factsheets/ecigarette/ECigarette.html#:~:text=A%20federal%20law%20enacted%20on,21%20across%20the%20United%20States>.
- 25 **The Edge of Seventeen: What Does It Mean To Be a Young Adult in America in 2024?**

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 “Section 7–Patrons: 7.1.4,” Southern Nevada Health District, <https://www.southernnevadahealthdistrict.org/permits-and-regulations/body-art/regulations/southern-nevada-health-district-regulations-governing-the-sanitation-and-safety-of-tattoo-establishments/section-7-patrons/#:~:text=Tattoo%20procedures%20performed%20upon%20a.legal%20documentation%20stating%20this%20fact.>
- 28 Nina Mast, “Child Labor Remains a Key State Legislative Issue in 2024,” *Working Economics Blog*, Economic Policy Institute, February 7, 2024, <https://www.epi.org/blog/child-labor-remains-a-key-state-legislative-issue-in-2024-state-lawmakers-must-seize-opportunities-to-strengthen-standards-resist-ongoing-attacks-on-child-labor-laws/>.
- 29 Jennifer Sherer and Nina Mast, “Child Labor Laws Are Under Attack in States across the Country,” Economic Policy Institute, March 14, 2023, <https://www.epi.org/publication/child-labor-laws-under-attack/>; Nina Mast and Jennifer Sherer, “Florida Legislature Proposes Dangerous Rollback of Child Labor Protections,” *Working Economics Blog*, September 29, 2023, <https://www.epi.org/blog/florida-legislature-proposes-dangerous-roll-back-of-child-labor-protections-at-least-16-states-have-introduced-bills-putting-children-at-risk/>; Mast, “Child Labor Remains a Key State Legislative Issue in 2024.”
- 30 “Child Labor,” Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/research/child-labor/>; the states are Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio.
- 31 Allan F. Williams, Anne T. McCartt, and Laurel B. Sims, “History and Current Status of State Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Laws in the United States,” *Journal of Safety Research* 56 (2016): 9–15, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022437515001012>.
- 32 Joel Mathis, “Why US Teens Aren’t Getting Their Driver’s Licenses,” *The Week*, February 16, 2023, <https://theweek.com/travel/1020987/why-us-teens-arent-getting-their-drivers-licenses>.
- 33 If a 16-year-old has not been licensed for six months, Idaho limits “the number of passengers in the vehicle who are under the age of 17 to not more than one passenger, unless the passengers are related to the driver by blood, adoption, or marriage.” Idaho’s Graduated Driver’s Licensing (GDL) Program, Idaho Transportation Department, [https://itd.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/3506\\_GDLfactsheet.pdf](https://itd.idaho.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/3506_GDLfactsheet.pdf).
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## About Beta by Bellwether

Beta by Bellwether is an initiative to jump-start bold solutions to structural problems in the education sector. Beta moves beyond imagining a new sector by bringing together viewpoint- and experience-diverse teams from across education to create blueprints and tools for leaders around the United States. Our goal is to help build an education system that better serves all young people — particularly those from systemically marginalized communities — and models a new way forward for the sector. For more, visit [bellwether.org/beta](https://bellwether.org/beta).

## About Bellwether

Bellwether is a national nonprofit that exists to transform education to ensure systemically marginalized young people achieve outcomes that lead to fulfilling lives and flourishing communities. Founded in 2010, we work hand in hand with education leaders and organizations to accelerate their impact, inform and influence policy and program design, and share what we learn along the way. For more, visit [bellwether.org](https://bellwether.org).

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