Single dads seem to head West: Fifteen of the top 20 cities for single fathers are in California, new data show.

"California has always given permission to people who want a new lifestyle, whether it is divorce itself or living as a single dad," says Warren Farrell, author of Father and Child Reunion.

"California has this reputation: You won't be ostracized the way you might be in other places," he says, adding that some wealthier California dads have both the money and education needed to win many child custody cases.

The rankings, which include only cities of 100,000 or more, were crunched by USA TODAY from a new wave of Census data released Wednesday.

The number of households headed by single fathers increased by almost 62% in the past decade. As with single moms, there may be another adult present who helps with the parenting. That could include the householder's own mother or a live-in partner.

Philip Cohen, a sociologist at the University of California-Irvine, speculates that some California judges may be more willing to award custody of children to men, reflecting the state's acceptance of "alternate family arrangements."

California tends to be "socially and culturally progressive, a trendsetter," says James Levine of the Families and Work Institute, a non-profit family advocacy organization.

When he began his family research 30 years ago, Levine says, he found California to be at the forefront of states with dads who had "primary nurturing roles," whether they were single with primary custody, had adopted children, or were married dads choosing to work part-time to spend more time with their kids. Single moms tend to be concentrated in urban centers. They are then closer to public and private resources, Jason Fields of the Census Bureau says. Their numbers are much greater than those of single dads and account for greater percentages of a city's households. The top cities: Hartford, 20%; Detroit, 19%; and Flint, Mich., tied with Gary, Ind., 18%.