

2015 Index of Culture and Opportunity

The Social and Economic Trends that Shape America



**INSTITUTE FOR
FAMILY, COMMUNITY,
AND OPPORTUNITY**

Edited by
**Jennifer A. Marshall
Christine Kim**

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The Heritage Foundation's *2015 Index of Culture and Opportunity* is dedicated to Joseph C. and Elizabeth A. Anderlik in gratitude for their generosity and leadership.

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launched the online version with a larger horizon in view. We are grateful for the cooperative spirit among these colleagues and their initiative to enhance and expand the reach of this *Index*.

Jennifer A. Marshall
Christine Kim
*Institute for
Family, Community,
and Opportunity*

Preface

Jim DeMint

As we publish the second *Index of Culture and Opportunity*, I am reminded of the differences between how Washington operates and how real life happens across America. Inside the Beltway, federal policymakers tend to think in terms that separate “economic” policy from “social” policy. But life in homes and communities around the country doesn’t organize into such neat categories.

I came to understand the dynamic interplay between culture and opportunity through personal experience. My wife gave birth to our fourth child just a year after I took the leap to launch my own business. As our children grew, our involvement with their activities resulted naturally in a network of personal relationships with parents of their fellow soccer players, families of students in their school, other members in our church congregation, and fellow volunteers in various projects.

Business activities, social gatherings, civic events, and raising a family blended together. A meeting to plan a charity function could involve a business contact or conversation with another parent seeking to improve our schools. The result of such relationships was a thriving community with a healthy business climate, young people with a vision for their future, and neighbors genuinely concerned for one another.

This *Index* tracks how such intertwined cultural and economic dynamics shape opportunity. As Bob Woodson writes here, culture molds our capacity to grab hold of opportunity. A committed neighborhood leader, for example, can nurture a young adult’s internal compass—the ethic and sense of direction needed to sustain self-sufficiency.

Trends in culture interact—for better or for worse. As Yuval Levin writes in the introduction, our society is the product of an “organic outgrowth” that begins in the family, which forms loving relationships that serve as a model for virtually every other interaction throughout life, from neighborhood bonds to national allegiance.

When the family structure disintegrates, children tend to struggle with attachments to their community that create opportunities. Martin Brown and Kay Hymowitz, commenting on single parenting and unwed births, explain that children in households without a father tend to fare worse than their peers in intact families on measures like emotional well-being, drug use, academic performance, and poverty.

This cultural decline did not emerge entirely on its own: Perverse incentives created by public policies have contributed to social breakdown. The law is a teacher, and decades of policies undermining families and communities have taught neighbors to depend on the government rather than each other, with dire consequences for the very people those policies were designed to help.

Knowing the direction of social and economic trends—as well as their interrelationships—can serve as a valuable starting point as we consider how to enhance the prospects of the rising generation and ensure our nation’s future. This requires voluntary actions by individuals and groups in our civil society, as well as policy reforms in government.

We at Heritage are pleased to provide this tool to build that understanding.

—*Jim DeMint is President of The Heritage Foundation.*

Overview of the 2015 *Index of Culture and Opportunity*

Jennifer A. Marshall and Christine Kim

The *2015 Index of Culture and Opportunity* takes stock of the cultural ecosystem that is needed to sustain freedom and opportunity. Through charts that track social and economic changes, and expert commentary that explains the trends, the *Index* reports on important indicators in American society and analyzes what they mean for our future.

What We Track

The *Index* tracks social and economic factors related to culture, poverty and dependence, and general opportunity in America. It monitors trends for 31 indicators, based on regularly updated national data and organized into three categories:

- **Cultural indicators**, including data on family, religious practice, and civil society;
- **Poverty and dependence indicators** related to marriage and poverty, workforce participation, and welfare spending and participation; and
- **General opportunity indicators**, such as measures of education, jobs and wealth, and economic freedom.

How We Track

For each indicator, a chart provides the most recent year of data available as of March 2015 and historical data over the past one, five, and 10 years.¹ In the chart, a red line designates the main indicator; in some cases, related data are displayed alongside

using grayscale lines. A key above each chart shows the change over one-year, five-year, and 10-year periods (with exceptions in the case of a few indicators).

The primary focus of this *Index* and the commentators' contributions is the 10-year change and its direction. That decade-long window allows us to observe what has happened over a longer period of time rather than focusing on short-term variations. This greater time horizon gives readers a feel for what has been happening regardless of changes in government or the state of the economy at any particular time. While examining annual data is helpful in some instances, it may not always be the most reliable approach for determining overall movement of a particular societal trend. This is particularly true with data that are affected by the business cycle, such as labor market and poverty indicators. It is also true for cultural trends that typically change quite gradually.

Commentary Providing Context

One of the distinguishing features of the *Index of Culture and Opportunity* is expert commentary that interprets the indicator data. Researchers at The Heritage Foundation and scholars and commentators from other organizations offer their insights in introductory essays and short commentaries to accompany a number of the charts.

As Yuval Levin, Hertog Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and editor of *National Affairs*, observes of this annual *Index* in his introduction to this volume, "The trends it follows chart the state of

the core prerequisites for a flourishing society. The questions it asks are those that conservatives take to be essential to understanding the state of American life.”

Each of the three sections of indicators begins with an overview essay. For the section on cultural indicators, University of Nebraska political philosopher Carson Holloway, visiting fellow in the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics at The Heritage Foundation, explains why the moral character of society matters. For the poverty and dependence section, Douglas Besharov and Douglas Call of the University of Maryland explore the relationship between labor force disengagement and social safety-net programs. In the final section on opportunity, education researchers Anna Egalite of Harvard and Patrick Wolf of the University of Arkansas examine how school choice shapes children, parents, and society.

Within each section, a variety of experts comment on specific indicators and trends: what they mean and why they matter for culture and opportunity in America. Some write from their decades-long experiences in the field and others from their extensive empirical research. Their commentaries guide non-specialists through the data, parsing the important details but also explaining the broader landscape. Drawing from their wide-ranging expertise, the contributors also incorporate additional relevant data and research that enrich the reader’s overall understanding.

Why It Matters

The Heritage Foundation seeks to advance conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. This *Index* is part of a set designed

to assess our nation’s strength in these areas, along with the *Index of Economic Freedom* and *Index of U.S. Military Strength*. Together, these indexes measure America’s economic, social, and military strength to help inform policy and cultural conversations both in Washington and across America.

Policymakers will find the foundational data they need to address issues involving:

- Marriage, family, and civil society;
- Welfare reform;
- Reduced spending;
- Economic growth; and
- The opportunity of individuals in a free society to improve their circumstances.

Individuals can use this *Index* to inform their own efforts to shape the future of our culture, whether by raising the next generation, devoting efforts to overcoming neighborhood challenges, or participating in the public policy process.

Personal responsibility, concern for our neighbors, and public policy all influence the culture of opportunity. The *2015 Index of Culture and Opportunity* will equip those who are seeking to advance an America where freedom, opportunity, prosperity, and civil society flourish.

—**Jennifer A. Marshall** is Vice President for the *Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity*, and the *Joseph C. and Elizabeth A. Anderlik Fellow*, at The Heritage Foundation. **Christine Kim** is a *Policy Analyst in the Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity*.

1. For several indicators for which annual data are not available, the intervals vary.

Executive Summary

The Heritage Foundation’s *Index of Culture and Opportunity* tracks 31 social and economic indicators that shape opportunity in America. It presents the most recent data as well as longer-term trends for each indicator, focusing in particular on the past 10 years of available data to discern the trajectory of our culture.

In addition, experts from a variety of disciplines and organizations offer commentary to contextualize these trends and explain why they matter. As a number of the commentators observe, opportunity requires a particular cultural ecosystem to flourish. This *Index* reports on the health of that environment.

		RIGHT DIRECTION	WRONG DIRECTION
Culture	Marriage Rate (p. 22)		○
	Divorce Rate (p. 23)	●	
	Total Fertility Rate (p. 25)		○
	Single-Parent Households (p. 26)	●	
	Teen Drug Use (p. 27)		○
	Abstinence Among High Schoolers (p. 28)		○
	Abortion Rate (p. 30)	●	
	Religious Attendance (p. 32)		○
	Volunteering (p. 32)		○
	Violent Crime Rate (p. 34)	●	
Poverty & Dependence	Labor Force Participation Rate (p. 45)		○
	Unwed Birth Rate (p. 46)		○
	Self-Sufficiency (p. 48)		○
	Total Welfare Spending (p. 50)		○
	Subsidized Housing Participation (p. 52)		○
	Food Stamp Participation (p. 52)		○
	TANF Participation (p. 54)	●	
	TANF Work Participation Rate (p. 54)		○
General Opportunity	Reading Proficiency (p. 66)		○
	Charter School Enrollment (p. 66)	●	
	Private School Choice Participation (p. 67)	●	
	High School Graduation Rate (p. 69)	●	
	Student Loan Debt (p. 71)		○
	Employment-Population Ratio (p. 73)		○
	Unemployment Rate (p. 73)		○
	Job Openings Rate (p. 74)	●	
	Job Hires Rate (p. 74)		○
	Money Taxed Away by Federal Government (p. 75)		○
	Start-Up Job Share (p. 75)		○
	Major Federal Regulations (p. 76)		○
	Economic Freedom (p. 78)		○

Highlights from the 2015 Indicators

Section 1: Culture

- The marriage rate continues its decades-long decline. From 2002 to 2012, it fell by more than 9 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women age 15 and older. “Just as no-fault divorce altered the institution of marriage, ... altering the very heart of the sexual structure of marriage is shaking the marriage ecosystem,” explains Mark Regnerus (p. 21).
- More than one in four children live in single-parent households. Martin Brown notes what this means for America: “In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan documented the increase in the number of single-parent households among blacks, and he appropriately sounded the alarm about the increasing breakdown of the black family. Today, this alarm should sound for the entire nation” (p. 26).
- The abortion rate declined to pre-*Roe v. Wade* levels in 2011, the most recent year for which published data are available. Charmaine Yoest explains the scientific and legal advances that have brought about what she describes as a “seismic shift” over the past several decades (p. 31).
- From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of volunteers in America declined by 3.5 percentage points to 25.3 percent. Despite the “exceptional endeavors” by some caring Americans, Marvin Olasky laments that “the distinctive character of America’s volunteer effort that de Tocqueville witnessed almost two centuries ago is much more difficult to discern today” (p. 33).

“Both the Founders and the most insightful analysts of the kind of government the Founders created have understood well that the preservation of the regime of individual rights requires a healthy moral culture. Religion, the family, and the spirit of private, voluntary association are essential to fostering the virtues of character that alone can sustain a free government dedicated to the protection of the rights of individuals.”

—Carson Holloway,
“The Culture of Freedom” p. 17

Section 2: Poverty & Dependence

- In 2013, 40.6 percent of children were born to unwed mothers, an increase of 6 percentage points since 2003; however, for the past five years, the percentage of unwed births has remained relatively stable. “[S]ocial scientists began to reach a consensus in the late 1990s that the children of single mothers were doing worse than the children of married mothers on just about every measure they studied,” writes Kay Hymowitz (p. 46).
- From 2004 to 2014, total federal and state government spending on welfare programs increased by \$250 billion (in constant 2014 dollars). “Far from being a compassionate series of programs worthy of defense against reform, the current welfare architecture has been a disaster for struggling communities and has done its gravest disservice to recipients themselves,” explains Paul Winfree (p. 50).
- From 2004 to 2014, the number of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps) participants nearly doubled to 46.5 million individuals even as the unemployment rate dropped. “One out of seven Americans received SNAP benefits in 2014,” notes Maura Corrigan, “and the program cost \$74.1 billion—the second largest means-tested welfare program” (p. 53). The number of subsidized housing recipients increased as well, rising by about 1.3 million between 2004 and 2013.

“The challenge will be to reform the welfare system further to get work incentives right.... Welfare reform will require recognizing the economic realities faced by those who are in need and reforming welfare to ensure that it promotes self-sufficiency rather than undermining it by discouraging work.”

—Douglas J. Besharov and Douglas M. Call,
“Declining Labor Force Participation and the Expanding Social Safety Net” p. 44

Section 3: General Opportunity

- From 2004 to 2014, the number of students participating in school choice programs more than tripled to nearly 354,000. As Juan Williams argues, school choice “treats children not as mere data points but as thinking, feeling, and multifaceted people—each with a unique, God-given potential that deserves the chance to flourish” (p. 68).
- In 2014, there were 126 new major federal regulations that are expected to cost \$100 million or more each year, an increase of 46 compared to 2004. “[S]ince 2012,” writes Karen Harned, “at least one in five small-business owners identify government regulations as their most important problem” (p. 76). She continues: “For the American small-business owner, the opportunity costs of federal regulation are all too often crowding out investment and hiring” (p. 77).
- From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of high school students who graduated on time increased by 8 percentage points. “America badly needed the recent small improvement in graduation rates. She needs much more still,” concludes Matthew Ladner (p. 70).
- Since 2005, U.S. economic freedom has declined by 3.7 points, according to The Heritage Foundation’s *Index of Economic Freedom*. As Anthony Kim notes, “Increased tax and regulatory burdens, aggravated by favoritism toward entrenched interests, have undercut America’s historically dynamic entrepreneurial growth and confined the U.S. economy to the rank of only ‘mostly free’” (p. 78).

“School choice can play an important role in helping families achieve economic mobility. Whether through vouchers, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts, charters, homeschooling, magnets, online options, or interdistrict or intradistrict open-enrollment programs, choice-based reforms reposition parents at the heart of their children’s education and opportunity.”

—Anna J. Egalite and Patrick J. Wolf,
“Achieving Economic Mobility Through School Choice” p. 63

Summary Observations

Culture matters, as observed by several of the *Index's* commentators. High schoolers in an achievement-oriented environment are more likely to avoid risk behaviors and make healthy choices for their future. Communities that champion marriage will see stronger families and better well-being for their children. And those who place educational choice in parents' hands can expect to see improved student outcomes. A culture that values mutual aid among its citizens and the inherent dignity of work and self-sufficiency will be less dependent on the government and more upwardly mobile. Freedom and opportunity depend on the character of the culture.

Correctly diagnosing the root causes of our social challenges is crucial. The typical liberal diagnosis of social and economic problems is that they are caused by "the system," and their preferred solutions hinge on more government intervention through increased spending and greater regulation. However, failing to address the true sources of a problem is likely only to exacerbate it.

Take the alleviation of poverty, for example. In the War on Poverty, rather than focusing on incentives that would address family breakdown and non-work, the government opted for spending as its primary strategy. Decades of expanding government antipoverty programs and trillions of dollars later, poverty has not declined significantly. The same may be observed in education. Years of increasing expenditure and expanding federal intervention have not led to greater achievement. Recent innovations in school choice, however, have *already* shown promising results.

Paying attention to the cultural ecosystem is critical. In an environment of mutual care, the well-being of individuals, communities, and society at large is understood to be interdependent. Issues are interconnected as well: Changes in one sector can reverberate across the entire system. Marriage, family, child well-being, education, employment, poverty, economic mobility and growth, and entrepreneurship all relate to each other, as the *Index's* indicators and commentaries demonstrate.

Consequences are lasting but not irreversible. Social and economic trends, good or bad, may last for decades. Americans today are still living with the consequences of the sexual revolution in the 1960s and '70s. In the ensuing decades, divorce, abortion, and unwed birth rates accelerated. But even such seemingly unrelenting trends can reverse course through policy and cultural efforts.

The abortion rate, for example, has fallen back to pre-*Roe* levels. The divorce rate plateaued and then started to decline (although it still remains high). The crime rate has dropped, and a greater proportion of younger high school students are remaining abstinent. The 1996 welfare reform ended entitlement in one broken government program and helped able-bodied adults back to work. Selfless grassroots leaders, "healing agents" who make themselves available 24/7 for the long haul, continue to revitalize and restore hope to their neighborhoods. The school choice movement is putting educational decisions back in the hands of parents. With perseverance, we can accomplish positive change.

Policy Implications

The right solutions require courage and innovation. Leaders will need to challenge the status quo and make a compelling case for a new direction that emphasizes the significance of family, civil society, and policy reform. Policymakers must acknowledge that family breakdown is a primary cause of child poverty and implement policy that strengthens marriage and alleviates hardship for families. In education, leaders should heed research suggesting that choice options could bolster high school graduation and college enrollment, which have lasting economic implications. And for civil society to thrive, laws should protect, not limit, religious liberty.

Policymakers at all levels of government—local, state, and federal—can play a role. The data, research, and commentaries offered in the *Index* command the following proposals:

- Pursue policy that promotes life, marriage, and religious liberty (p. 17, p. 23, p. 26, p. 31, p. 46).
- Pursue limited government that encourages the role of civil society agents and organizations (p. 33, p. 48).
- Promote student-centered education choice options (p. 63, p. 67, p. 69).
- Teach and reinforce, throughout high school, sexual risk avoidance and healthy relationship skills and messages (p. 28).
- Advance comprehensive welfare reform, focusing on restoring self-sufficiency through work and eliminating work disincentives in social safety-net programs (p. 43, p. 50, p. 53).
- Reduce governmental regulations that impede entrepreneurship and the growth of small businesses (p. 76, p. 78).
- Identify and study effective and successful strategies and approaches (p. 48).

Introduction: Assessing the Intergenerational Compact

Yuval Levin

The index before you is more than a book of statistics—more even than a diagnosis of America’s economy and culture. It is first and foremost a corrective to a misguided way of thinking about society that too often holds sway in American politics.

The nature of America’s political and policy debates can sometimes foster a profound misunderstanding of the nature of American society—and indeed of all human societies. To make challenges easier to understand and address, people divide politics into discrete “issues” and try to take them up individually. There are education debates, welfare debates, and entitlement debates. There are infrastructure bills and immigration bills and defense bills. There is a health care system and a financial system and a transportation system.

Dividing up public affairs in this way presents each “issue” as a distinct set of problems in search of a distinct set of solutions, and political debates proceed as arguments about the nature of the problems and the desirability of various proposed solutions in each case.

This is a sensible way to think about a lot of the challenges America faces, but it is inadequate when it comes to the most important and most difficult challenges—those that have to do with the underlying health and strength of the nation as a whole and therefore with the prerequisites for human flourishing, for prosperity, for opportunity, and for liberty in this country. Americans have clearly had the sense in recent years that the country is in some trouble on this front—that too many of our fellow citizens are

denied the opportunity to lead flourishing lives, that prosperity and economic mobility are too often out of reach, and that the liberty that gives meaning and substance to the American Dream is in danger.

Thinking about these broadest and deepest of our public problems brings out most powerfully some of the key differences between conservatives and liberals in America. The left and the right think about society in different ways.

For conservatives, a society is ultimately and above all an intergenerational compact—a kind of sacred trust across time—for the protection of fundamental natural rights and the advancement of essential human goods. We the living members of American society are graced with a magnificent inheritance and are entrusted to preserve and refine its strengths, to work to mitigate its weaknesses, and to pass it along in even better condition to those who will come after. Conservatives understand society as an organic outgrowth—a kind of sum and substance—of a set of social arrangements that begin in loving family attachments, spread outward into personal commitments and relationships in civil society and local communities, reach further outward toward broader state and regional affinities, and conclude in a national identity that among its foremost attributes is dedicated to the principle of the equality of the entire human race.

Society is thus like a set of concentric rings, beginning with the most concrete and personal of human connections and concluding with the most abstract and philosophical of human commitments. Each

ring, starting from the innermost sanctum of the family and the individuals who compose it, anchors and enables the next and is in turn protected by it and given the room to thrive. The outermost ring of society is guarded and sustained by the national government, which is charged with protecting the space in which the entire society can thrive—the space between the individual and the nation as a whole, the space occupied by society. This means that it must neither invade that space nor allow it to collapse.

Liberals proceed from a rather different general understanding of the nature of society. The left's social vision tends to consist of individuals and the state so that, essentially, all common action is ultimately government action. On this view, the government's purpose is to liberate individuals from material want and moral sway. As former Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) put it at the Democratic National Convention in 2012, "There are things that a civilized society needs that we can only do if we do them together, and [when] we do them together that's called government."¹

The mediating institutions that fill the space between the individual and the government are often viewed by the left with suspicion. They are seen as instruments of division, prejudice, and selfishness or as power centers lacking in democratic legitimacy.

Liberals have frequently sought to empower the government to undercut the influence of these institutions and put in their place public programs and policies motivated by a single, cohesive understanding of the public interest. Their hope is to level the complex social topography of the space between the individual and the government, breaking up tightly knit clusters of citizens into individuals but then uniting all of those individuals under the national banner—allowing them to be free of family or community norms while building solidarity through the common experience of living as equal citizens of a great nation.

This basic difference of social visions helps to explain why conservatives and liberals sometimes understand our society's deepest problems so differently. To many liberals, who view society as a compact among individuals for their mutual material betterment, the persistence of entrenched poverty, family breakdown, social dysfunction, and poor mobility in many communities in America looks like

a function of a failure to allocate resources properly. Liberals often blame these phenomena on selfish interests that they believe actively stand in the way of social progress. Their solution is to double down on the basic liberal approach to social policy: to promote public programs that address economic imbalances through redistribution.

To conservatives, who view society as an intergenerational compact for the preservation of the prerequisites for human flourishing to be advanced through the complex, layered architecture of our mediating institutions, the persistence of such daunting social problems suggests a breakdown of these core institutions, especially those that are deepest and closest to the core: the family and civil society.

Because our most important social institutions are those that are most defined by intergenerational obligations, our most significant social problems are often those that arise at the juncture of the generations: failure of family formation, failure to meet parental obligations, failure to protect the very youngest and the very oldest—the most innocent and vulnerable among our fellow citizens.

Because freedom is ultimately made possible by and exists for the sake of our most direct and personal commitments, the greatest challenges to liberty are challenges to the freedom of action of our institutions of civil society—challenges that are often advanced under the banner of liberating individuals but that actually take the form of restricting dissent and constraining expression and action (as we have seen of late, for instance, in some prominent public battles over religious liberty).

Because liberals tend to ignore the significance of much that happens at the juncture of the generations and much that is done by our mediating institutions, they often find themselves perplexed by the deepest and most enduring social problems we confront—unable to explain the problems' persistence except by inventing scapegoats to blame and incapable of addressing them except by frantically moving money around in the hope of finding just the right balance of payments to heal our society.

Conservatives, on the other hand, know that explaining the persistence of entrenched, intergenerational poverty—despite half a century of massive public programs to address it—requires taking into account the interconnectedness of the

1. "Democratic National Convention Day 3," C-SPAN, September 6, 2012, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?307933-1/democratic-national-convention-day-three> (accessed June 18, 2015).

generations and the institutions that make up communities. Conservatives blame neither any malice of the wealthy and powerful nor any failure of will among the poor, but instead the intrinsic inclination of all human beings to fall into self-serving apathy or self-defeating vice in the absence of sound social institutions and norms. Conservatives understand that material poverty and spiritual disorder exacerbate one another in an ever-intensifying spiral of misery that can be broken only by material support and social order—a blend of aid and love that must be delivered in person. A true social safety net has to involve more than a government check.

That is why liberals seeking to describe the most significant challenges our country now confronts tend to resort to abstract portraits of inequality while conservatives point to the key indicators of social health and human flourishing—that is, to the state of American families and of civil society.

That is what this index does and why it does it. The institutions it tracks are those that fill the space between the individual and the state: families, schools, local religious and civic institutions, and a robust free economy. The trends it follows chart the state of the core prerequisites for a flourishing society. The questions it asks are those that

conservatives take to be essential to understanding the state of American life.

And the answers it finds are, in all too many cases, quite distressing. Family breakdown, an enervation of civil society, a dearth of educational and economic opportunities, and a lack of social mobility stand in the way of far too many Americans. Not all of the trends are depressing; even some crucial ones like teen pregnancy and abortion rates are moving in the right direction. But the general picture for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged Americans is one of social and economic disadvantage building upon one another in a cycle of ruin that the nation must not abide.

This diagnosis does not come complete with neat prescriptions. Addressing America’s current social and economic dysfunction will be no easy feat. But in order to try, society needs a clear picture of the challenges it confronts. That means first asking the right questions, an endeavor often thwarted by the politics of “issues” and the radical individualism that is so endemic today.

In that respect, at least, this index is not merely an insightful diagnosis but the beginning of a cure.
—*Yuval Levin is Hertog Fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center and editor of National Affairs.*

Section One

Culture

Culture Summary

- The marriage rate continues its decades-long decline. From 2002 to 2012, it fell by more than 9 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women age 15 and older. “Just as no-fault divorce altered the institution of marriage, ... altering the very heart of the sexual structure of marriage is shaking the marriage ecosystem,” explains Mark Regnerus (p. 21).
- More than one in four children currently live in single-parent households. Martin Brown notes what this means for America: “In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan documented the increase in the number of single-parent households among blacks, and he appropriately sounded the alarm about the increasing breakdown of the black family. Today, this alarm should sound for the entire nation” (p. 26).
- The abortion rate declined to pre-*Roe v. Wade* levels in 2011, the most recent year for which published data are available. Charmaine Yoest explains the scientific and legal advances that have brought about what she describes as a “seismic shift” over the past several decades (p. 31).
- From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of volunteers in America declined by 3.5 percentage points to 25.3 percent. Despite the “exceptional endeavors” by some caring Americans, Marvin Olasky laments that the “distinctive character of America’s volunteer effort that de Tocqueville witnessed almost two centuries ago is much more difficult to discern today” (p. 33).

Culture Indicators

	RIGHT DIRECTION	WRONG DIRECTION
Marriage Rate (p. 22)		○
Divorce Rate (p. 23)	●	
Total Fertility Rate (p. 25)		○
Single-Parent Households (p. 26)	●	
Teen Drug Use (p. 27)		○
Abstinence Among High Schoolers (p. 28)		○
Abortion Rate (p. 30)	●	
Religious Attendance (p. 32)		○
Volunteering (p. 32)		○
Violent Crime Rate (p. 34)	●	

The Culture of Freedom

Carson Holloway

Why should American conservatives care about the moral character of the culture? What does it matter if Americans are becoming less attached to religion, family, and community? Conservatism is a political movement, and it might not be immediately clear that these cultural trends are of political interest.

American conservatism takes its bearings from the principles of the American founding, the cornerstone of which is the idea of natural rights. Governments are instituted, in the words of the Declaration of Independence, to protect the rights of individuals to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” The freedom of the individual would therefore appear to be the aim of the American project.

From this point of view, it might seem that conservatives should not concern themselves with the moral character of American culture. After all, the Declaration of Independence does not say that it is a primary task of government to foster a particular kind of culture. Rather, the government should guarantee the security of individual rights and individual liberty, the exercise of which presumably will generate whatever kind of culture is consistent with the desires of most Americans. It might appear that from the standpoint of the founding, by which conservatives are supposed to be guided, the moral character of our culture is not a political concern.

This view, though perhaps understandable, is nevertheless mistaken. Both the Founders and the most insightful analysts of the kind of government the Founders created have understood well that

the preservation of the regime of individual rights requires a healthy moral culture. Religion, the family, and the spirit of private, voluntary association are essential to fostering the virtues of character that alone can sustain a free government dedicated to the protection of the rights of individuals.

The Founders were firm believers in individual rights and individual freedom, but they were not naively optimistic about human nature. They knew that human beings are very much prone to violate each other’s rights. They believed—following John Locke, the great English philosopher of natural rights—that this is why governments were established in the first place.

The Founders, in other words, did not believe that the spontaneous exercise of man’s freedom would necessarily lead to good outcomes. The invisible hand may govern markets, but it does not oversee the political community. Some discipline is required, and governments are instituted to provide that discipline so that the exercise of each person’s freedom is compatible with the rights of others.

Government alone, however, is not a sufficient solution to this problem. If selfish individuals in the absence of government will use their individual power to violate the rights of others, it is also quite possible that selfish individuals within civil society will use the power of government to commit the same violations. What is needed in addition, therefore, is a strong moral culture that teaches each citizen the importance of the dignity and rights of his fellow citizens.

Religion, the Founders believed, was a key support for such a moral culture. In this, again, they followed Locke, who treated religion not as a matter of indifference to the regime of natural rights but instead as an essential support for it. Locke taught in his famous *Second Treatise of Civil Government* that the very idea of natural rights depended on the understanding that each human being is created by God. In Locke's words, no one may arbitrarily "take away" the "life, the liberty, health, limb or goods of another," because every human being is "the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise maker."¹ This teaching is famously echoed in the Declaration of Independence, which teaches that human beings are "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights."

Accordingly, the leading American Founders emphasized the importance of religion as a support for the natural rights regime. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson suggested that "the liberties of a nation" cannot "be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are the gift of God" and that "they are not to be violated but with his wrath."² Similarly, in his Farewell Address, George Washington instructed his fellow citizens that "religion and morality are indispensable supports" to "political prosperity." Like Jefferson, Washington linked the religiosity of the citizens to the ability of the government to protect the rights of all: "Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice?"³

The Founders also believed that the family was essential to sustaining the regime that protects our rights. Thus, James Wilson—one of the greatest legal minds among the Founders—wrote in his *Lectures on Law* that "reason," "history," and "holy writ" all teach that "marriage" is "the true origin of society." Marriage, he continued, was, more than any other institution, the source of the "peace and harmony" that mankind has enjoyed.⁴

Americans' respect for their familial duties, Alexis de Tocqueville later observed, supported the decent and orderly politics that America was able to achieve. According to Tocqueville, the Europeans of his day did not approach marriage with anything like the respect that the Americans displayed. As a result, the European learned from his experience of family life a "scorn for natural bonds" and a "taste for disorder"

that harmed the community. As Tocqueville summed up the contrast, "the European seeks to escape his domestic sorrows by troubling society," while "the American draws from his home the love of order, which he afterwards brings into affairs of state."⁵

Tocqueville's effort to link the "natural bonds" of the family to the health of the larger social order represents a simple but essential chain of reasoning. Respect for the duties of family life is respect for the rights of other members of the family. Those bonds—the bonds that link husband and wife, parents and children—are natural; the bonds that link citizens are more conventional. People who disdain their familial duties can hardly be expected to respect the rights of their fellow citizens, while people who fulfill their familial duties are receiving the training that prepares them to respect the rights of their fellow citizens.

Of course, we cannot think clearly and consistently about our duties to marriage and family, much less learn to respect those duties, if these vital social institutions, and the duties they involve, can be redefined at will by the government. This is why it is so troubling that the Supreme Court has just decided to jettison the traditional and natural definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman. A political power to redefine such a fundamental institution implies that we have no natural duties, that all our duties are conventional. In the long run, such an understanding can only undermine the citizen's sense of obligation to others.

Tocqueville also observed that Americans' habit of voluntary social cooperation was essential to their ability to maintain the free and limited government they had inherited from the Founders. According to him, the Americans of his day had perfected the "art of association." By the exercise of this art, they addressed social problems and improved the intellectual, cultural, and moral quality of their civilization through voluntary cooperation without the exercise of government power. As he suggested in another context, it is a bad bargain to have a government that can provide for all of the citizens' needs and pleasures if such a government is also "absolute master" of everyone's "freedom" and "life, if it monopolizes movement and existence to such a point that everything around it must languish when it languishes, that everything must sleep when it sleeps, that everything must perish if it dies."⁶

Accordingly, the American capacity for voluntary association is essential to keeping the government

within reasonable limits that are compatible with the continued flourishing of individual liberty.

The rights doctrine on which America is founded might appear to be a doctrine of pure individualism and self-regard. On the contrary, the preservation of rights and freedom depends in the end on the ability of citizens to care about each other. As Tocqueville observed, there “is no vice of the human heart that agrees” with despotism “as much as selfishness: a despot readily pardons the governed for not loving him, provided they do not love each other.”⁷ In the absence of mutual concern, they will not be able to cooperate to protect the rights of all.

The mutual care of citizens for each other, however, is supported by religion, the family, and the spirit of voluntary service to the community. These things are essential to the preservation of the freedoms that the Founders established, and that is why their flourishing is a proper concern of American conservatism.

—*Carson Holloway is currently a Visiting Fellow in American Political Thought in the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics, of the Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity, at The Heritage Foundation, and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.*

The Erosion of the Marriage Ecosystem

Mark Regnerus

Advocates of same-sex marriage have often mocked those who assert that a legal alteration in the very structure of marriage will most certainly affect the institution itself. Now that the Supreme Court has imposed same-sex marriage on the entire nation, these competing hypotheses will play out for all to see.

Same-sex marriage does not merely add access for those couples that desire it. It also reflects a more significant and comprehensive, if subtle, shift in the wider relationship “ecosystem.” To borrow from the lexicon of environmental scholars, such a change will act back upon the entities from which it sprang. That is what happens when social structures shift.

Just as no-fault divorce altered the institution of marriage—enshrining the rights of parents to disband their unions at will and to prevent the other parent from daily participation in the life of their own children—altering the very heart of the sexual structure of marriage is shaking the marriage ecosystem. These changes have led us to balk at sexual difference and all that it entails, as Pope Francis explained in his recent encyclical on human ecology.

The costs to the ecosystem are not all immediate, of course, but to solidify in law the mentality that marriage is no longer rooted in the physicality of biosexual difference and has nothing essential to do with the fruit of sexual unions is to set in motion a series of further shifts that are not easily halted. Just as environmental changes have ripple effects, the following alterations in marriage are to be expected.

First, children’s needs will become more easily set aside or redefined. It is already difficult to speak sensibly of the idea that a child might need a mother and a father. An altered institution will cater more carefully to its target consumers—adults—and what they wish for rather than what children need—communities that encourage and safeguard their parents’ unions rather than pay them no heed or play neutral in the name of “fairness.”

Following upon the first shift, it is also clear that interest in having children will likely recede further. This will not amount to a wholesale plunge in the birthrate, but the more we perceive marriage as having nothing to do with children, the more a life without them will appear compelling.

Finally, the law will take a more central place in family life. It is ironic, given the call for the state to get out of the bedroom and out of our marriages, but the increasing complexity of families must be arbitrated somehow in the wake of weakened norms and traditions.

This list could continue, but it is unfair and untrue to blame all of this on legal recognition of same-sex marriage. Marriage has been in the throes of deinstitutionalization for some time. Indeed, legal same-sex marriage has become possible *because* of the declining marriage rate. A weakened institution was easier to alter than a strong one was. Therein lay the seeds for further change.

Of course, same-sex marriage will change the institution: That’s how social change works. University of Virginia sociologist James Hunter asserts that

culture change such as we are witnessing is a work of legitimation and delegitimation, of naming one thing normal and right and its competition inferior, ridiculous, or just plain wrong. Hunter calls this the power of “legitimate naming,” a move that, when successful, penetrates the structure of our imagination, the frameworks for how people think and converse.

The reality of marriage, however, is robust. After the dust settles—and it may take decades—the

longstanding meaning of marriage will reemerge, because it is not nearly so subject to social construction as many claim it is.

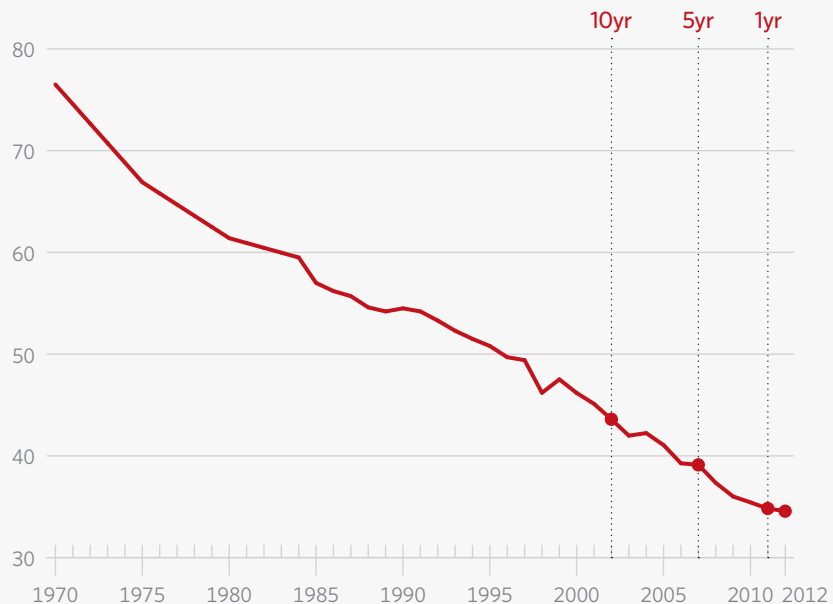
—**Mark Regnerus** is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, Research Associate at its Population Research Center, and a Senior Fellow at the Austin Institute for the Study of Family and Culture.

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 9.0 5-year ▼ 4.6 1-year ▼ 0.3

Marriage Rate

From 2002 to 2012, the marriage rate dropped by 9.0 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women ages 15 and older.

MARRIAGES PER 1,000 UNMARRIED FEMALES AGES 15 AND OLDER



Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, and U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 0.5 5-year ▼ 0.2 1-year ▼ 0.2

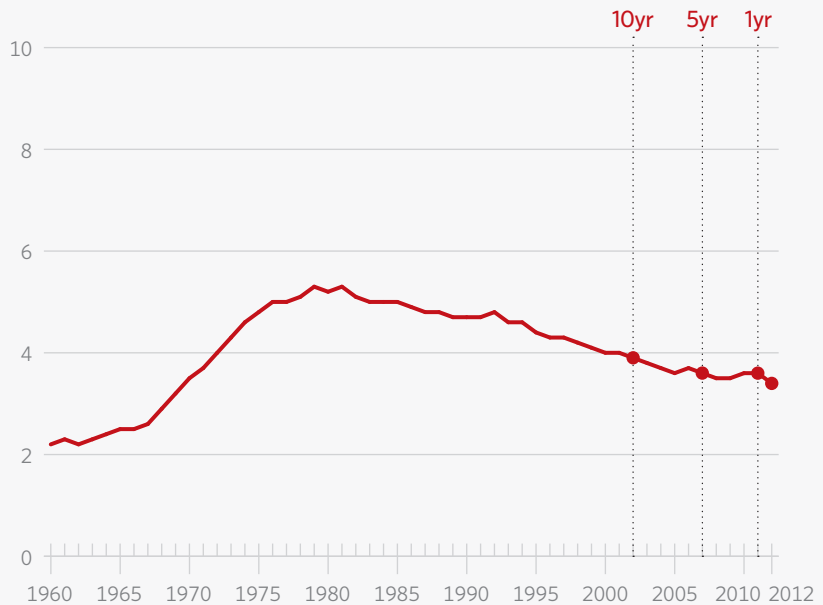
Divorce Rate

From 2002 to 2012, the divorce rate remained relatively stable, decreasing by 0.5 divorces per 1,000 people.

Note: Data in this chart are based on divorces per 1,000 total population, i.e., the crude divorce rate. In 1996, the National Center for Health Statistics began collecting only provisional divorce rate data, based on preliminary counts of divorce certificates from states. See Indicator Sources on p. 90 for further detail.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.

NUMBER OF DIVORCES PER 1,000 TOTAL POPULATION



With an Eye on the Children: The Effects of Divorce on Society

Patrick F. Fagan

When parents divorce, at least one of them profoundly rejects the other. Though this rejection is normally aimed at the other spouse and not at the children, the whole family—including the children—is seriously affected.

Among social scientific studies on the effects of non-intact family life on children, research on the effects of divorce is the widest and deepest.¹ Because the children of the divorce revolution are now a significant portion of the American population, a review of these effects tells much about the personal and social characteristics of a large fraction of today's adult citizens of the United States. The effects of the divorce of their parents are experienced in all the basic aspects of life: family, faith, education, income, health, and citizenship expressed in taking care of the common good. Research shows that divorce is neither a positive cultural phenomenon nor a strengthening experience for adults or children. While the following findings do not describe every child's experience and every relationship, they do hold in the aggregate at the national level.

Divorce weakens relationships: between mother and child, father and child, and children and their grandparents.

Divorce affects children's education. Compared to peers in intact families, younger children of divorced parents tend to perform more poorly in reading, spelling, and math, and they are more likely to repeat a grade and miss classes more frequently. They are also more likely to have lower expectations of going to or completing college; on average, they enjoy significantly lower odds of attending college and, if they do attend, of graduating.

Due to its intergenerationally weakening effect, one of the most debilitating effects of divorce appears in sexual relationships: Children of divorce are, on average, more approving of premarital sex, cohabitation, and divorce, and are more likely to say they would consider having a child outside of marriage, while they are less positive towards marriage compared to their peers in intact families. These attitudes can translate to behavior, as individuals from divorced families are more likely to initiate

sexual intercourse earlier and to have a child out of wedlock. It is safe to say that the present-day phenomenon of almost 50 percent of first births being outside marriage is related to the divorce revolution of more than a generation ago.

Children of divorce are more likely to face challenges in romantic relationships, in which they tend to have less trust and more ambivalence. They have, on average, less positive attitudes towards marriage and more positive attitudes towards divorce.

Children in divorced families, on average, receive less emotional support, financial assistance, and practical help from their parents. The support they receive tends to be much lower than that received by their peers from intact homes. These diminished supports become more pronounced as they advance into high school and college.

Children of divorce, on average, experience more physical and sexual abuse. They are also more likely to experience neglect.

Divorce may also lead to more conflict between children and their parents following the breakup, especially if the children live with their opposite-sex parent (boys with their mothers or girls with their

fathers). Later, as adults, these children of divorce tend to show less capacity to handle conflict.

At the aggregate level, “externalizing” problem behaviors—stealing, skipping school, repeating a grade, weapons-carrying, fighting, substance abuse, and binge drinking—tend to be more frequent among children of divorce. Delinquency is also more common.

Even health may be affected. For instance, children of divorce are more prone to asthma. As young adults they are more likely to be hospitalized, and their life expectancy is shorter by four to five years.

At the societal level, divorce and its analogues—not marrying after conceiving a child and splitting up after cohabiting for some time—are now affecting more than half of the nation’s children.² Rejection between parents is hollowing out the body politic. It is weakening America as a nation and as a people. The data speak loudly and profoundly of divorce’s effects on children and adults.

—*Patrick F. Fagan is a Senior Fellow and Director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute at the Family Research Council.*

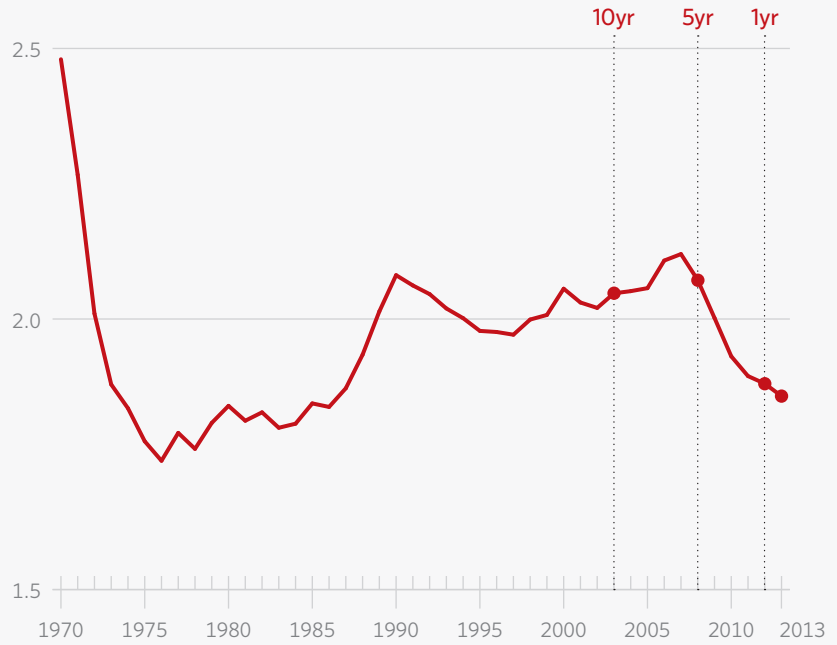
CHANGES 10-year ▼ 0.19 5-year ▼ 0.14 1-year ▼ 0.02

Total Fertility Rate

From 2003 to 2013, the total fertility rate declined by 0.19 births per woman.

Notes: The total fertility rate is the average expected number of children a woman would have during her childbearing years.
Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics Report.

BIRTHS PER WOMAN



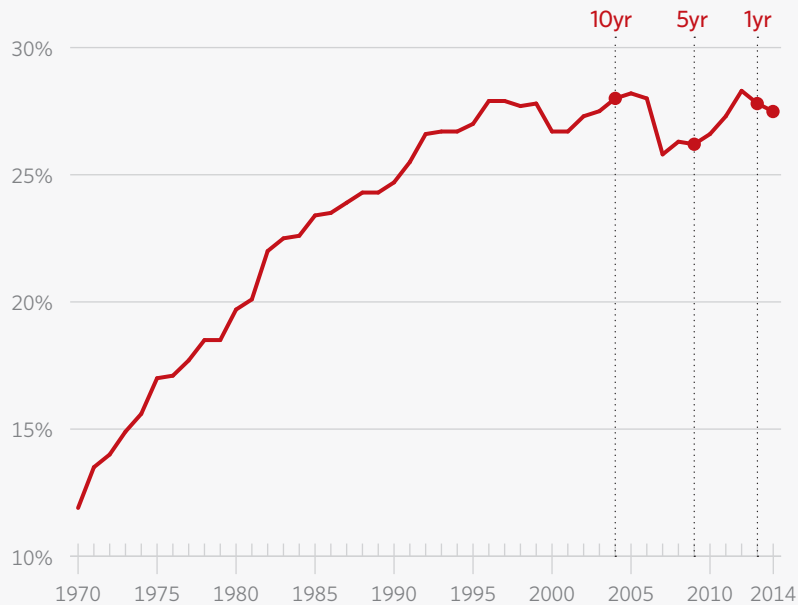
CHANGES 10-year ▼ 0.5 5-year ▲ 1.3 1-year ▼ 0.3

Single-Parent Households

From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of children living in single-parent households decreased by 0.5 percentage point.

Note: Prior to 2007, children living with unwed cohabiting parents were included with children living in single-parent households. Starting in 2007, the U.S. Census included them with children living in “two-parent” households. In 2014, about 6.6 percent of children in “two-parent” households were in cohabiting households.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN LIVING IN SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS



The Moynihan Report at 50: Why Single-Parent Households Matter Even More Today

Martin D. Brown

In 1910, just 45 years after the end of the Civil War, 73 percent of black children lived in two-parent households. In 1960, the share of black children living in two-parent households was 67 percent. This was the norm. Despite systemic issues—institutionalized racism that appeared in housing, education, employment, and insufferable levels of poverty—the divorce rate among black couples was very low, and the majority of black children were either born at home or came home from segregated hospitals to married mothers and fathers. Single-parent households were the exception; children born to married couples were the rule.

In 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan documented the increase in the number of single-parent households among blacks, and he appropriately sounded the alarm about the increasing breakdown of the black family.¹

Today, this alarm should sound for the entire nation.

Half of all children in America will live or have lived in a single-parent household at some point during their childhood. The overall rate of non-marital births is at an all-time high of 40.6 percent. The rate among whites is 29 percent, which is higher than the rate of 23 percent found among blacks in 1963.

Moynihan’s premise was spot-on, but the failed attempts at redress contributed to more suffering instead of healing. President Lyndon Johnson’s War on Poverty spent more money on government programs trying to fix the consequences of the broken family (poverty, crime, low educational achievement, employability), but it did not address the root problem of the breakdown of marriage and increased single-parent households among blacks.² In fact, the War on Poverty programs penalized marriage.

Make no mistake. It will require greater courage from all of us—policymakers, community leaders, and citizens—to push against this tsunami of new cultural norms. After all, America is now living in the second and third generations of fragmented

families. Policymakers will need a combination of tact and firm principle to address these issues with a larger percentage of people who grew up in single-parent households.

At the policy level, state and federal policymakers can do several things to promote marriage and reduce the number of fragmented families. Promoting marriage should be a priority. Removing marriage penalties from government welfare programs would be a good start.³

Looking back, the historical standard of marriage before children provides a reason for hope. It was in those most difficult of circumstances that families remained strong and children were born

to and raised by a mother and father who modeled fidelity, integrity, resilience, and self-sacrifice.

The implication for policymakers is clear. The Moynihan Report’s call to action is even more urgent today than it was 50 years ago. Moynihan also provided a key to the solution: “To advance opportunity for all in America, policymakers and other leaders must work to *reduce the number of single-parent households*, and promote marriage and intact families in policy and culture.”

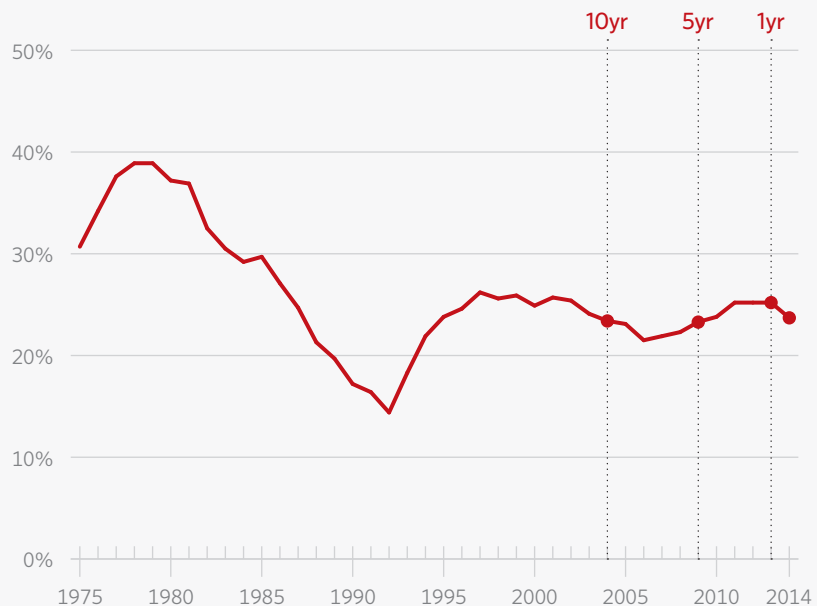
—**Martin D. Brown** is currently a Visiting Fellow in the Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity, at The Heritage Foundation.

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 0.3 5-year ▲ 0.4 1-year ▼ 1.5

Teen Drug Use

From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of 12th graders reporting current drug use increased by 0.3 percentage point.

PERCENTAGE OF 12TH GRADERS WHO USED ILLICIT DRUGS* IN PAST MONTH



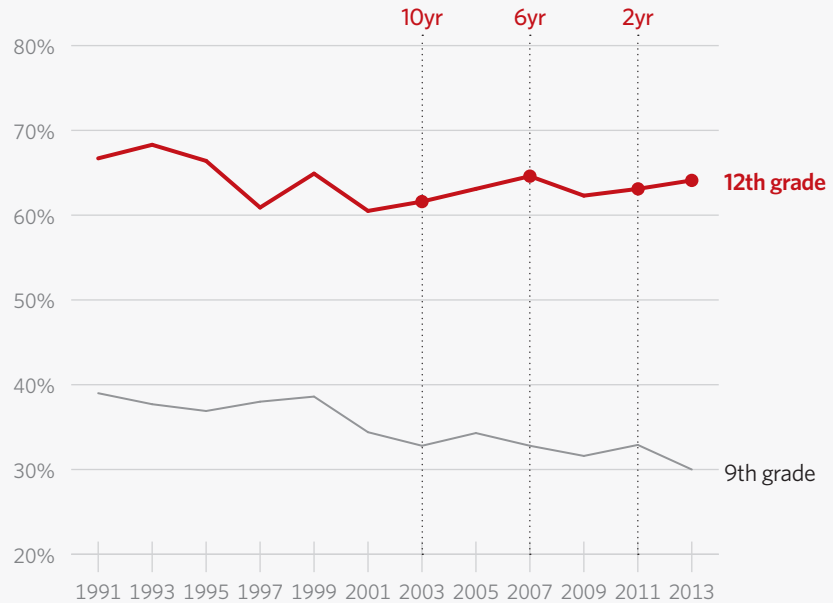
* Illicit drug use refers to the use of marijuana, LSD and other hallucinogens, cocaine and crack cocaine, heroin, or any use of narcotics without a doctor’s prescription, including amphetamines, sedatives (barbiturates), or tranquilizers.
Source: Monitoring the Future.

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 2.5 6-year ▼ 0.5 2-year ▲ 1.0

Abstinence Among High Schoolers

From 2003 to 2013, the percentage of 12th grade students who had ever had sex increased by 2.5 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE OF 9TH AND 12TH GRADE STUDENTS WHO EVER HAD SEX



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Empowering Young People’s Decisions, for Their Future—and Ours

Valerie Huber

Over the past decade, the sexualization of America’s culture has continued unabated. It is now difficult to listen to popular music or watch a movie that does not normalize casual sex in the most cavalier of ways. Cultural mores are often reflected in policy priorities, and thus the normalization of teen sex is dominant within federally funded sex-education programs throughout the nation. Since 2010, almost \$5 billion in federal funding has been spent for the so-called “comprehensive” sexual risk-reduction approach.¹ This approach assumes teens are—or soon will be—sexually active. Therefore, it places high priority on condom negotiation and contraceptive use, rather than on delaying sexual activity.

But the question of whether or not a teen has sex is about a lot more than ideology. It has a direct impact on the physical, mental, relational, economic, and cultural health of America’s future. Many of today’s societal concerns can be traced back to the content and context of sexual decision-making. A mounting body of research finds a high correlation between age of sexual initiation and a host of other

life factors: academic achievement, relational and marital success, number of lifetime partners, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), emotional health, state of future family formation, and the likelihood that an individual will live in poverty. Of course, each of these potential consequences affects not only the individual but also the foundational health of society in general.

The trends of teen sex and related risk behaviors, then, have a much broader implication than might seem apparent at first. It may come as a surprise that since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention started tracking high school sexual risk behaviors in 1991, the percentage of students in grades nine to 12 choosing to wait to have sex increased by about 15 percent—an encouraging trend. Among ninth graders, initiation of sexual activity declined 23 percent during that same time; among high school seniors, it declined a less impressive but significant 4 percent. Over the past 10 years, this statistic has remained relatively stable, with slight inflections from year to year.² Among students usually

targeted for sex-education classes (15–17-year-olds), the most recent data report that 72 percent of boys and 73 percent of girls have never had sex,³ and the majority—58 percent of females and 53 percent of males—have had no sexual contact whatsoever.⁴

However, not all the recent trends have been as positive. Over the past 10 years, the increase in delay of sexual activity among high school freshmen was nearly identical to the increase in sexual initiation among seniors⁵—a troubling statistic that accentuates the need for regular reinforcement of sexual risk-avoidance skills and messages throughout the high school years. In addition, STDs remain highest among young adults (15–24), who represent only 27 percent of sexually active Americans but who carry 50 percent of all STDs.⁶ Earlier ages of sexual initiation and higher numbers of partners correlate directly with the risk of STD acquisition. Avoiding STDs is critical to the long-term health and fertility of individuals.

In addition, since 2010, some positive trends have stalled, and others have begun to move in a negative direction. The percentage of high schoolers who had sex with four or more partners decreased almost 15 percent from 1999 to 2009, but has increased by almost 9 percent since then. Also, despite the fact that current policy places a high value on teen

contraceptive access and condom negotiation, the percentage of high school students who used no contraception at all during their last sexual encounter increased slightly since 2009.⁷

Teen birth rates have decreased 57 percent nationwide since 1991 without an increase in teen abortion rates. However, 89 percent of all teen births are non-marital, and non-marital birth increases the likelihood that both mother and child will have added challenges in their lives.⁸

These indicators cannot be ignored because of their impact on youth and the health of families as they form. Census data confirm that one of the surest ways for youth to escape poverty is to graduate from high school, to learn skills to find employment, and to have children after marriage. Called the success sequence because of the imperative of implementing each behavior in sequence, youth who follow this prescription experience only a 2 percent chance of living in poverty as adults.⁹ Persuading young people to focus on their education, future goals, and opportunities—rather than on sexual activity—is vital to their successful transition from adolescence to adulthood.

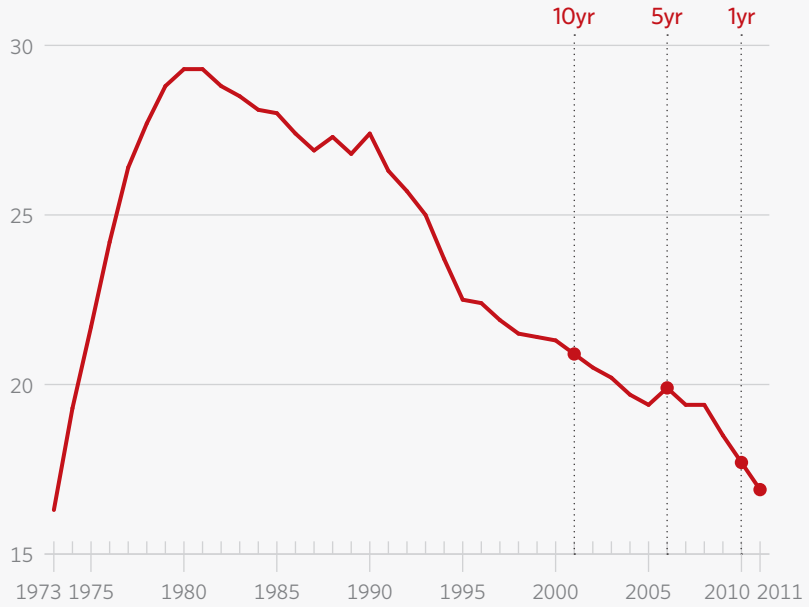
—*Valerie Huber is President of Ascend (formerly the National Abstinence Education Association).*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 4.0 5-year ▼ 3.0 1-year ▼ 0.8

Abortion Rate

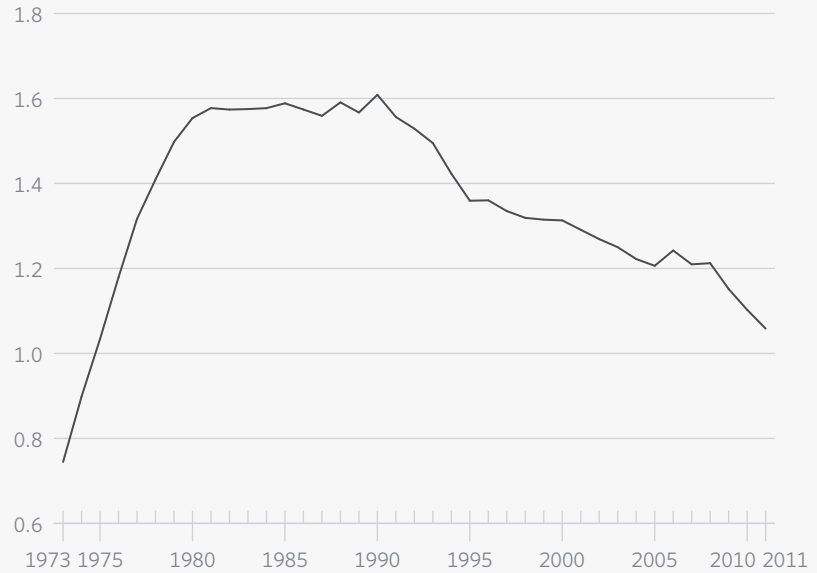
From 2001 to 2011, the abortion rate declined by 4 abortions per 1,000 women ages 15-44.

ABORTIONS PER 1,000 WOMEN AGES 15-44



Total Abortions

TOTAL NUMBER OF ABORTIONS, IN MILLIONS



Source: Alan Guttmacher Institute.

How Science, State Laws, and Exposure Are Driving the Pro-Life Comeback

Charmaine Yoest

The data on the abortion rate in the United States for 2014 has not been updated since 2011. And that is just the beginning of the problems with American abortion data. The paucity and poor quality of data on abortion in our country is worthy of note in and of itself. While the better-known aphorism is “what you subsidize, you get more of,” there seems to be a lesser-known corollary guiding abortion politics: “What you don’t measure doesn’t matter.”

Abortion data is collected by the Centers for Disease Control on a purely voluntary reporting basis. And even that is done incompletely. For example, California, Maryland, and New Hampshire do not report their abortion statistics to the CDC. The Guttmacher Institute—the research arm of the abortion lobby—conducts an annual survey of abortion providers that provides an alternate, but still non-comprehensive, source of accounting.

With those caveats, the trend shows a dramatic, and consistent, downturn in the long-term abortion rate. Assuming the drop in the abortion rate holds once we finally get updated statistics, we now have fewer abortions than at any time since legalization in 1973.

This is a seismic shift. Despite all of the abortion lobby’s apparent surface success, its foundation is cracking. A survey of the landscape reveals three factors driving and sustaining this encouraging trend.

First, and perhaps most significant, is the two-pronged advance of science related to the unborn child. Improvements in sonogram technology have made the life of the fetus difficult to deny. Coupled with the compelling images is the advancement of fetal surgery, driving the line of viability ever lower. Together these two elements are unassailably powerful in shaping how Americans think about the lives of unborn babies.

Second, there has been a dramatic increase in state-based laws defending life and affecting the abortion industry. This too is a trend with a much longer runway than has been reported. Although

significant attention has focused on the dramatic uptick in state-based legislation since the 2010 mid-term elections, the increase in state regulation of abortion has earlier antecedents.

In the early 1980s, Americans United for Life hosted a summit from which emerged a new state-level strategy of creating immediate real-world abortion limits, but also creating legal tests of the reach of *Roe*.

While news reports have highlighted the post-2010 surge in pro-life laws—some 260 pro-life laws have been passed across the country since that election—the previous decade, 2000 to 2010, had already seen a more gradual increase, totaling at least 175 new pro-life laws.

A third factor in the decline of the abortion rate is a focus on the underpinnings of Big Abortion. Government supports Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in America, to the tune of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars each year. Government subsidies are propping up an industry increasingly exposed for its reprehensible practices. Legal abortion is the back alley of American medicine, with which fewer and fewer doctors are willing to be associated. And as more states pass common-sense regulations requiring abortionists to come under the same scrutiny as other businesses, fewer abortion clinics are willing to comply, revealing the substandard conditions to which women have been subjected over the past 40 years.

All of these factors contributing to the decline in the abortion rate continue to deepen and grow in strength. At the same time, government subsidies to the abortion industry are increasing, providing a countervailing force. The next release of data, flawed though it is, will help to reveal how those factors interrelate—and ultimately affect the abortion rate moving forward.

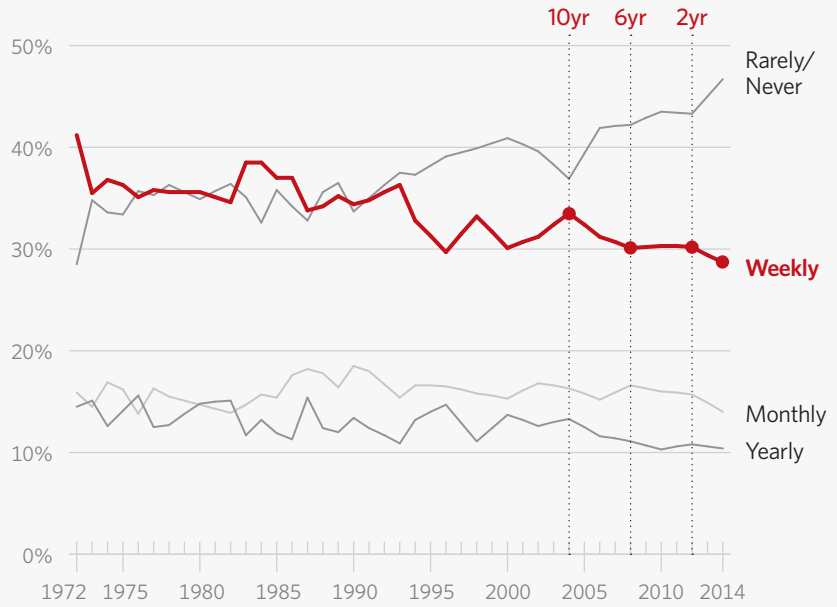
—*Charmaine Yoest is President and CEO of Americans United for Life.*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 4.8 6-year ▼ 1.4 2-year ▼ 1.5

Religious Attendance

From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of Americans attending religious services weekly declined by 4.8 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE ATTENDING RELIGIOUS SERVICES



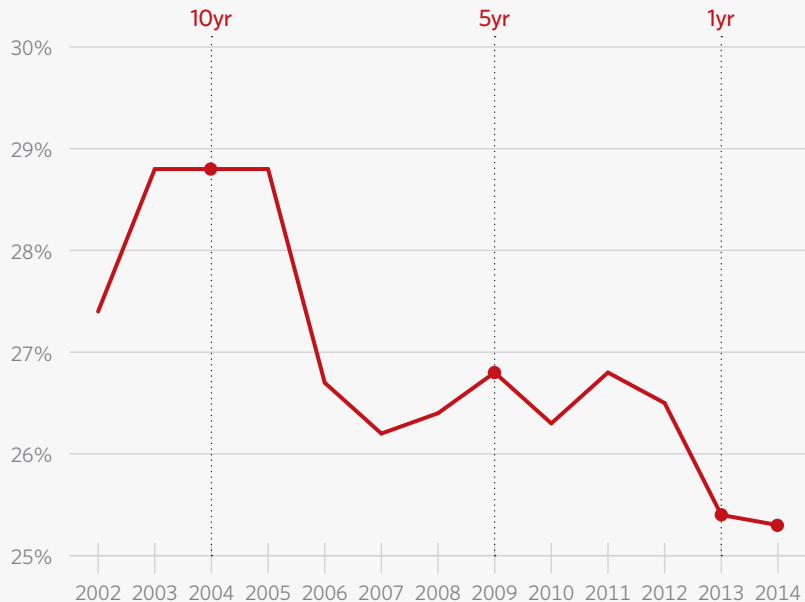
Source: General Social Survey.

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 3.5 5-year ▼ 1.5 1-year ▼ 0.1

Volunteering

From 2004 to 2014, the percentage of adults who volunteered declined by 3.5 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS VOLUNTEERING



Note: Figures are based on an annual survey of volunteering conducted in the month of September.
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Volunteering: A Fraying Bond in American Society

Marvin Olasky

The state of the union in regard to volunteering is not strong. In September 2004, nearly 29 percent of adults volunteered, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). In September 2014, just over 25 percent did so. Most of us chase our own bliss instead of volunteering to bless others.

The BLS began tracking volunteering only in 2002, but historical research indicates that the decade-long decline is only a continuation of a century-long trend. In September 1914, as great armies clashed in Europe, “little platoons” in the U.S. continued to persevere. They were continuing what Alexis de Tocqueville had called the biggest difference between the old world and the new: In America, people formed religious and civic associations in order to work together for public benefit, instead of growing government to serve this purpose.

The decline culminating in our recent decade-long drop began 85 years ago as the Depression cut into the time and money available for associations, just as needs grew. Instead of bulwarking volunteer groups, government offered a new deal: Pay your taxes to hire professionals, then stay home. Americans, forced to pay others for social services, became less likely to volunteer themselves. Today, those who take a second job to pay taxes have little time for volunteering.

The 2014 BLS numbers show that women volunteer at a rate 29 percent higher than men, but when more mothers move from part-time to full-time employment, volunteering declines. Married persons volunteer 49 percent more than the never-married, so as the latter category grows, volunteering declines. Those with children under age 18 volunteer 37 percent more than those without, so reduced volunteering accompanies childlessness.

Furthermore, the employed are more likely to volunteer than those not looking for work, so recent increases in the number of non-workers would seem to correlate with non-volunteering. Religious organizations are usually the most frequent recipients of volunteer hours, but if religious participation is declining, it is no surprise that volunteering also declines.¹

And yet, what goes down can go up. In 2002 and 2003, as 9/11 made Americans look beyond themselves and as some leaders urged “compassionate conservatism,” the percentage of adults who volunteered jumped by 5 percent. That increase held for two years before the long decline began again. Furthermore, while the one-fourth of Americans who volunteer do so on the average of one hour per week, extreme volunteers fill out some nooks and crannies.

For example, retired Christians known as SOWERS (Servants on Wheels Ever Ready) drive their RVs around the country and volunteer for a month at a time at a variety of ministries, putting in 3 to 6 hours per day as carpenters, plumbers, tutors, and painters. In the words of the organization’s website, “there are opportunities for anyone of reasonably good health to contribute.”

Such exceptional endeavors catch the attention of contemporary observers surveying America’s social landscape. But the distinctive character of America’s volunteer effort that de Tocqueville witnessed almost two centuries ago is much more difficult to discern today.

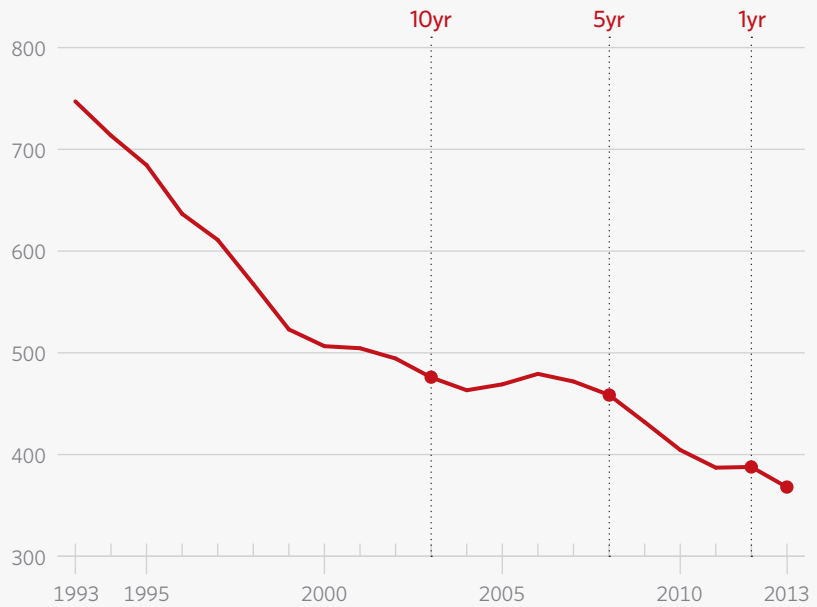
—*Marvin Olasky is the Editor in Chief of World and the author of The Tragedy of American Compassion.*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 107.9 5-year ▼ 90.7 1-year ▼ 19.9

Violent Crime Rate

From 2003 to 2013, the violent crime rate declined by 107.9 violent crimes per 100,000 people.

NUMBER OF VIOLENT CRIMES PER 100,000 PEOPLE



Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Additional Resources

Marriage Rate

FamilyFacts.org: Marriage & Family

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/marriage-and-family>

Divorce Rate

A Marshall Plan for Marriage

<http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2011/06/a-marshall-plan-for-marriage-rebuilding-our-shattered-homes?ac=1>

Total Fertility Rate

FamilyFacts.org: Sex & Childbearing

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/sex-and-childbearing>

Single-Parent Households

Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/marriage-americas-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty>

The Moynihan Report 50 Years Later: Why Marriage More Than Ever Promotes Opportunity for All

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/03/the-moynihan-report-50-years-later-why-marriage-more-than-ever-promotes-opportunity-for-all>

Teen Drug Use

FamilyFacts.org: Health

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/health>

Abstinence Among High Schoolers

FamilyFacts.org: Sex & Childbearing

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/sex-and-childbearing>

The Relationship Between Family Structure and Sexual Activity

<http://www.familyfacts.org/reports/1/the-relationship-between-family-structure-and-sexual-activity>

Abortion Rate

How to Speak Up for Life

<http://shop.heritage.org/how-to-speak-up-for-life9817.html>

Religious Attendance

FamilyFacts.org: Religious Practice

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/religious-practice>

Religious Practice and Family Stability

<http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/33/religious-practice-and-family-stability>

Volunteering

FamilyFacts.org Brief: Religiosity and Charity/Volunteering

<http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/41/religiosity-and-charity-volunteering>

Violent Crime Rate

FamilyFacts.org: Crime and Violence

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/crime-and-violence>

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The Culture of Freedom

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3. George Washington, *George Washington: A Collection*, ed. William B. Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), p. 521.
4. James Wilson, "Lectures on Law," in *Collected Works of James Wilson*, ed. Kermit L. Hall and Mark David Hall (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), Vol. 2, Part 2, Chapter 12.
5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 279.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
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With an Eye on the Children: The Effects of Divorce on Society

Patrick F. Fagan

1. This commentary is condensed from the research literature reported in detail in two synthesis papers: Patrick F. Fagan and Robert Rector, "The Effects of Divorce on America," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounders* No. 1373, June 5, 2000, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2000/06/the-effects-of-divorce-on-america?ac=1>, and Patrick F. Fagan and Aaron Churchill, "The Effects of Divorce on Children," Family Research Council, June 12, 2011, <http://downloads.frc.org/ef/ef12a22.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2015).
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Valerie Huber

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Volunteering: A Fraying Bond in American Society

Marvin Olasky

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Section Two

Poverty & Dependence

Poverty & Dependence Summary

- In 2013, 40.6 percent of children were born to unwed mothers, an increase of 6 percentage points since 2003; however, for the past five years, the percentage of unwed births has remained relatively stable. “[S]ocial scientists began to reach a consensus in the late 1990s that the children of single mothers were doing worse than the children of married mothers on just about every measure they studied,” writes Kay Hymowitz (p. 46).
- From 2004 to 2014, total federal and state government spending on welfare programs increased by \$250 billion (in constant 2014 dollars). “Far from being a compassionate series of programs worthy of defense against reform, the current welfare architecture has been a disaster for struggling communities and has done its gravest disservice to recipients themselves,” explains Paul Winfree (p. 50).
- From 2004 to 2014, the number of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, also known as food stamps) participants nearly doubled to 46.5 million individuals even as the unemployment rate dropped. “One out of seven Americans received SNAP benefits in 2014,” notes Maura Corrigan, “and the program cost \$74.1 billion—the second largest means-tested welfare program” (p. 53). The number of subsidized housing recipients increased as well, rising by about 1.3 million between 2004 and 2013.

Poverty & Dependence Indicators

	RIGHT DIRECTION	WRONG DIRECTION
Labor Force Participation Rate (p. 45)		○
Unwed Birth Rate (p. 46)		○
Self-Sufficiency (p. 48)		○
Total Welfare Spending (p. 50)		○
Subsidized Housing Participation (p. 52)		○
Food Stamp Participation (p. 52)		○
TANF Participation (p. 54)	●	
TANF Work Participation Rate (p. 54)		○

Declining Labor Force Participation and the Expanding Social Safety Net

Douglas J. Besharov and Douglas M. Call

The financial crisis and subsequent recession of 2007–2009 have left many economic problems in their wake. One of the most worrisome has been the decline in labor force participation among Americans of working age. Many believe that an out-of-date but expanding social safety net is at least partially responsible.

Declining Labor Force Participation

In 2014, the overall labor force participation rate for “prime-age” working Americans—that is 25- to 54-year-olds—was about 80.9 percent, compared to a high of 84.1 percent in the late 1990s. Of those not in the labor force, 2.7 million prime-age Americans did not have jobs and were not looking for one (even as they said they wanted one). That took them out of the “labor force,” and they therefore were not officially “unemployed.”¹ Federal Reserve Chairman Janet Yellen calls this “shadow unemployment.”²

Some blame the low level of labor force participation on the economic shocks surrounding the recent financial crisis and subsequent recession. The recession clearly reduced labor force participation. Many experts, however, think that the current significant part of the drop in labor force participation has much deeper roots, reflecting trends that are long-term if less noticed.

Work Disincentives

Impact of Safety-Net Benefits on Low-Income Americans. At least since the income maintenance experiments of the 1960s and 1970s, when

a guaranteed income appeared to decrease work and increase divorce (at least among some groups), researchers have heavily investigated the role of safety-net benefits as work disincentives. Almost all serious scholars have concluded that such benefits can reduce labor force participation, but they disagree sharply as to how much they do so. Researchers have attributed at least part of the falling labor force participation rate for all men, and especially those with less education, to declining employment prospects combined with the relative availability of disability benefits.³

Safety-net programs are supposed to soften the extreme financial hardships of unemployment, thus giving the unemployed time to find employment leading to self-sufficiency. At some point, however, safety-net benefits can become large enough to make working seem not worthwhile to large numbers of people, at least not right away. The question is usually not whether the unemployed will earn *as much as* their benefits, but rather whether they will earn enough *more than* their benefits to justify working—taking into account the possibility, on the one hand, of advancement and, on the other, of working off the books.

The Expanding Safety Net. Historically, eligibility for safety-net programs was narrowly set so that their work-d discouraging effects were limited. Cash welfare, SNAP/food stamps, housing assistance, and Medicaid benefits, for example, were available only to very low-income families, usually only female-headed. Thus, until their recent

expansions, most safety-net programs did not create a significant work disincentive for the vast bulk of middle-income Americans, because the benefits did not outweigh the palpable benefits of working in available jobs. Since the Great Recession, however, a much larger swath of Americans have become vulnerable to the work disincentives embedded in safety-net programs, at least for periods of time.⁴

The most dramatic example is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as food stamps.

- Between 2000 and 2013, the peak year, SNAP spending grew from about \$22.6 billion to about \$81.1 billion (in 2014 dollars), and the SNAP caseload increased from 17.2 million individuals to about 47.6 million individuals.
- During this same period, the number of individuals in poverty increased from 31.6 million to 45.3 million.
- Since the start of the Great Recession in 2008, the number of SNAP recipients has increased by 68.7 percent (between 2008 and 2013) even as the number of individuals in poverty has increased by only 13.8 percent.
- In 2014, as the economy improved somewhat, food stamp spending and participation dropped to \$74.1 billion and 46.5 million individuals, respectively.

Why have SNAP caseloads and expenditures increased so much? Although a struggling economy and an increase in poverty certainly have contributed to the increase in SNAP enrollment, other factors include statutory changes and local discretion that result in expanded eligibility and loosened criteria for determining eligibility. Some of the key changes include an increase in maximum monthly benefits; nullified assets tests; categorical eligibility to incomes of 200 percent of poverty; verifying income eligibility only once a year; eligibility for noncitizens; counting less income and allowing more deductions in calculating net income; increasing the amount of benefits; waived work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs); five months

of transitional benefits regardless of income; and ignoring the income of others in the household.⁵

Passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in 2010 added other benefits not tied to work status, and this resulted in still more work disincentives. For example, the ACA expanded Medicaid eligibility to include adult men and women without children who have household incomes under 138 percent of poverty (previously not covered) and provided health insurance premium tax credits that limit the cost of insurance premiums to 2 percent of annual income to households with incomes between 100 percent and 133 percent of poverty.

Whatever urgent needs they may have filled, these expansions also multiplied the number of Americans vulnerable to the work disincentives embedded in safety-net programs. Economist Casey Mulligan, for example, explains that expanded benefits contribute to the declining rates of labor force participation and employment-to-population ratios by keeping many of those who are only marginally attached to the labor force from looking harder for a job.⁶

A Safety Net that Does Not Ensnare

At least since the welfare reforms of the 1990s, when a work requirement was added to the largest cash assistance program, most experts have agreed that the right balance of work-related requirements embedded in safety-net programs can encourage labor force participation and employment. This is a key point. In fact, welfare reform is generally given credit for a significant portion of the increased labor force participation of low-skilled single mothers that occurred in the 1990s.

The challenge will be to reform the welfare system further to get work incentives right. Welfare reform touched just a few of the dozens of means-tested social welfare programs operated by the federal government. Welfare reform will require recognizing the economic realities faced by those who are in need and reforming welfare to ensure that it promotes self-sufficiency rather than undermining it by discouraging work.

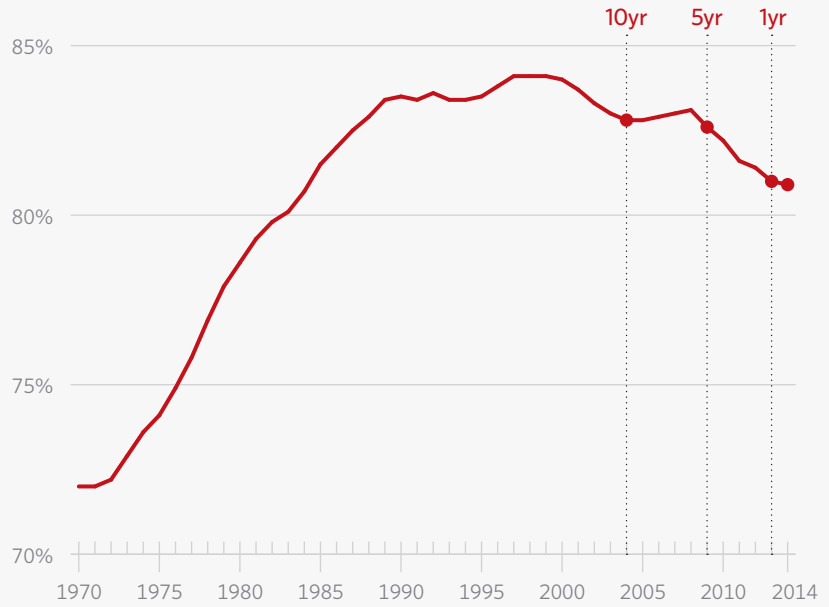
—*Douglas J. Besharov is the Norman and Florence Brody Professor and Douglas M. Call is a Senior Research Analyst at the University of Maryland School of Public Policy.*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 1.9 5-year ▼ 1.7 1-year ▼ 0.1

Labor Force Participation Rate

From 2004 to 2014, the labor force participation rate for adults ages 25 to 54 fell by 1.9 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS AGES 25-54 WORKING OR SEARCHING FOR WORK



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

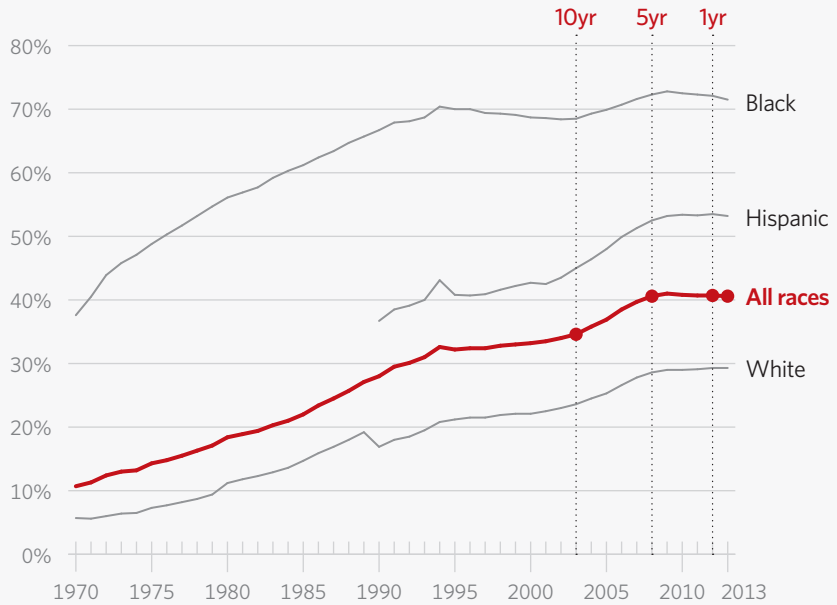
CHANGES 10-year ▲ 6.0 5-year No change 1-year ▼ 0.1

Unwed Birth Rate

From 2003 to 2013, the percentage of children born outside of marriage has grown by 6 percentage points.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, and Child Trends.

PERCENTAGE OF BIRTHS TO UNMARRIED WOMEN AGES 15 AND OLDER, BY RACE



The Legacy of the Marriage Class Divide

Kay S. Hymowitz

In 2014, 40.6 percent of all children in the United States were born to unmarried mothers. That includes close to 72 percent of black children, 53 percent of Hispanic children, and 29 percent of white children. If we can find any sliver of good news in those dispiriting numbers, it is that black non-marital births plateaued about 1994 and moved up “only” 2 percentage points since that time. Optimists might also be able to spy a microscopic decline in the rate for all groups since 2009.

There is one other small piece of good news: the full impact of unwed birth is finally being widely recognized. After a long period of denial, social scientists began to reach a consensus in the late 1990s that the children of single mothers were doing worse than the children of married mothers on just about every measure they studied: school achievement, poverty, emotional well-being, drug use, delinquency, and graduation rates. Not everyone has been convinced, but the disadvantage that attends growing up with a single mother is no longer controversial or hidden.

Experts have also begun to understand that unwed childbearing is deeply entwined with poverty. Even as the government poured money and effort into the War on Poverty, families were collapsing among black and Hispanic Americans. Family decline among whites, while later in arriving and not as dramatic, is also bringing more families near poverty. Single-parent families are about five times more likely to be poor as married-couple families. Worse, their children are more likely to remain poor. Not coincidentally, by some measures, the United States—the proud land of opportunity—is now actually less economically mobile than once hide-bound Europe.

Still, today, non-marital births are even more closely associated with class and education than race. College-educated women rarely give birth without a husband in tow. The newborn babies of lower-income and less-educated women, however, commonly have either no father to greet them or one who is only temporarily living with their mother. The class divide in marriage has led to separate and

unequal families, which translate to separate and unequal futures for children.

Even as public awareness grows about the diminished prospects of the children of single parents as well as about the relationships among unwed childbearing, poverty, and inequality, what society will do with this new information is by no means clear. The conversation about family breakdown remains deeply uncomfortable and even off-limits for many. As unmarried childbearing becomes more common all over the Western world, the younger generation will find it difficult to speak truthfully about its effects.

Even as they admit the serious disadvantages of family decline for children, the academic and policy communities offer the ambivalent public an easy, and ultimately counterproductive, way out of their dilemma. They propose enlarging the already considerable infrastructure of government support for single mothers. As a political matter, this means labeling those who warn about unintended consequences of this approach as greedy and lacking in compassion. The pressure to accept and adapt

to widespread single motherhood by increasing the size and cost of government is bound to grow.

Those committed to the two-parent family as a vital individual and social good must come up with alternative approaches for its support. One component of the problem is the welfare state. The federal government operates dozens of means-tested aid programs for poor and low-income individuals; nearly all of these programs impose financial penalties on lower-income parents who choose to marry. Alleviating these welfare marriage penalties may, over time, give many more children the benefit of stable married parents.

Conservatives point to destructive cultural norms as the reason four in 10 children are now born to single mothers. They are right to do so. The question is whether they can help breathe life into a weakened civil society that must help revive the battered institution of marriage.

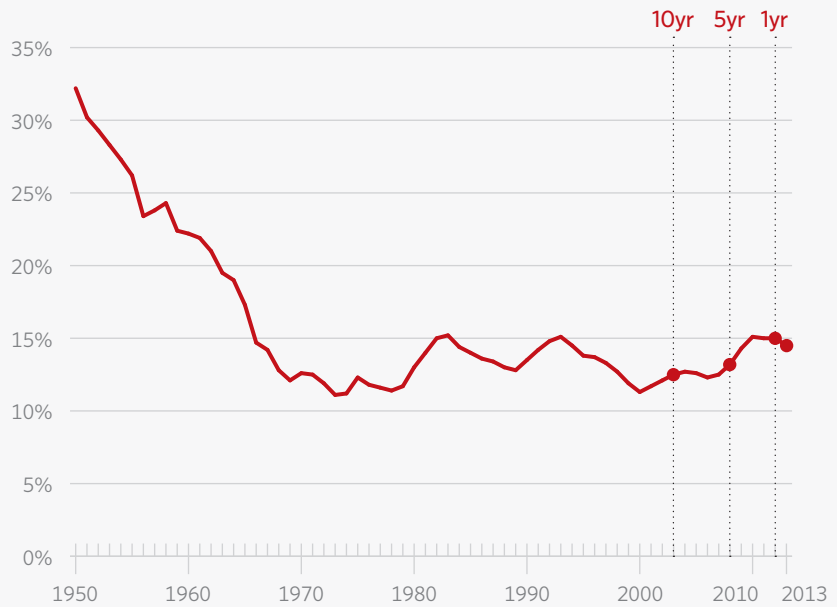
—*Kay S. Hymowitz is the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor of City Journal.*

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 2.0 5-year ▲ 1.3 1-year ▼ 0.5

Self-Sufficiency

From 2003 to 2013, the percentage of individuals living in poverty (excluding welfare benefits) increased by 2 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE OF INDIVIDUALS WHO LIVE IN POVERTY (EXCLUDING WELFARE BENEFITS)



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

A New Paradigm to Promote Self-Sufficiency

Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

Throughout the past 10 years, in spite of massive and growing funding invested in America’s antipov-erty agenda, the percentage of individuals able to support themselves free of government welfare has declined. The fundamental reason for the failure to effectively reduce dependency and promote self-suf-ficiency is a misdiagnosis of poverty in America.

People experience poverty for varied reasons. Remedies for poverty should take these diverse cohorts into account. Through my experience with the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise and the nearly 3,000 community groups working in low-income neighborhoods it has served, I have come to understand that there are typically four basic cate-gories of the poor.

There is one cohort whose poverty is the result of an unexpected setback, such as the death of a bread-winner or a job loss. For these people, the welfare system can function as originally intended—provid-ing temporary support until recipients can find their footing again. A second cohort comprises those who have remained dependent on the system because the

disincentives to marriage and work that are embed-ded in its regulations make it a rational choice to avoid those steppingstones to self-sufficiency. They have “done the math” and calculated that it is not worth the loss of benefits to take first steps toward upward mobility. The third group is made up of the disabled, many of whom will always be in need of some support. The fourth cohort consists of those who are in pov-erty because of the choices they make and the chances they take—for example, those suffering from alcohol-ism and other addictions who choose to live with the consequences rather than pursue recovery.

It is that fourth category of the poor whose choices impose avoidable costs on the larger society. Those who engage in self-destructive and predatory behav-ior make poor decisions that often lead to emergenc-y room treatment, police dispatches, and incarceration. No amount of income distribution, safety nets, or programs will make a substantial or sustainable difference in their status.

Among this cohort, a fundamental revitalization in vision, character, and values is a prerequisite for

them to reclaim their lives and escape from dependence on government aid. This internal transformation can be—and has been—uniquely engendered by community-based (often faith-inspired) outreach by neighborhood leaders throughout the country. These “healing agents” exhibit common characteristics. They share the same geographic and cultural zip codes with the people they serve; they have a firsthand understanding of the challenges faced by those they serve; and they are available on a 24/7 basis for the long haul. It is not uncommon for these grassroots leaders to be involved in a person’s life from childhood to adulthood.

I have witnessed the dramatic transformations that have resulted from the work of these selfless grassroots leaders. Once an internal transformation has been accomplished, these men and women, who had virtually lost their lives to drugs and alcohol, emerge as responsible employees, spouses, and parents. I have seen fatherless youths who were raised on the streets and were drawn to the lures of gang violence and drug trafficking—exactly those youths whom data predicts will give rise to a second generation with the same dismal futures—instead become agents of peace and renewal in their communities and loving fathers to their children, because of a surrogate father figure’s mentorship. I have known men

released from prison—with the mark of a felon and no job prospects—become successful businessmen and entrepreneurs who provide employment to others in the community. Stories of this remarkable reclamation of lives are documented in the *Comeback* video series.¹

To harness fully the power of America’s transformative neighborhood healers requires a new paradigm for identifying the “experts” who deserve recognition, trust, and support. Their authority comes not from diplomas and certificates on their walls but instead from the testimonies of the men, women, and youths whose lives they have touched.

Policymakers should cease relying on sociologists’ “failure studies” that document neighborhoods’ deficits as the primary way to describe the conditions of the poor. Those living in poverty should not be identified in terms of their liabilities and disabilities but rather by their strengths and latent abilities. Such “capacity studies” can identify the coping strategies of those who have achieved against great odds. The right diagnosis would give Americans greater insight on how to bend the self-sufficiency curve in the right direction.

—**Robert L. Woodson, Sr.**, is the Founder and President of the Center for Neighborhood Enterprise.

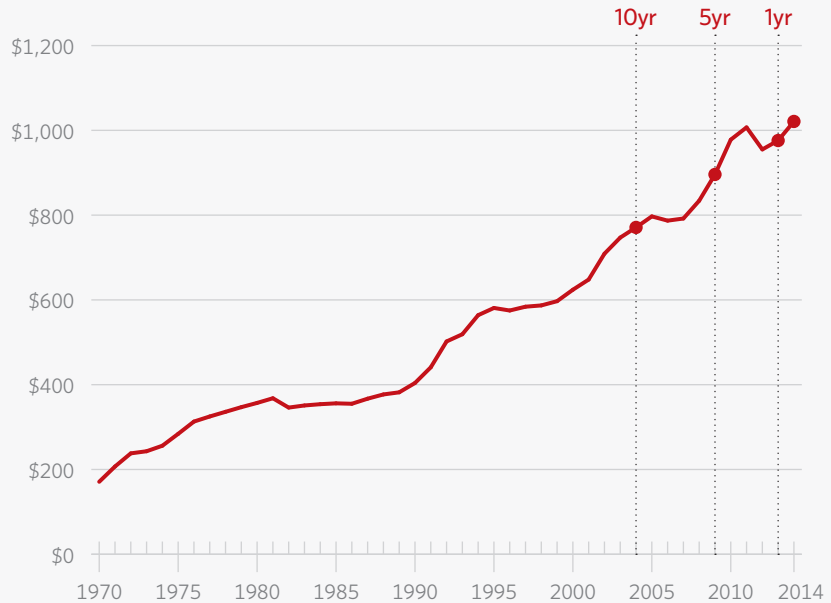
CHANGES 10-year ▲ 250 5-year ▲ 125 1-year ▲ 46

Total Welfare Spending

From 2004 to 2014, the combined cost of federal and state welfare spending increased by \$250 billion, in 2014 dollars.

Note: Total means-tested welfare spending includes over 80 government programs providing cash, food, housing, medical care, and targeted social services for poor and low-income Americans. Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, and veterans' benefits are not included in the total.
Sources: Heritage Foundation research and data from the Office of Management and Budget.

FEDERAL AND STATE WELFARE SPENDING IN BILLIONS OF 2014 DOLLARS



The Unintended Consequences of Welfare Spending

Paul L. Winfree

Federal and state governments spent \$1.02 trillion on welfare in 2014—an increase of \$274 billion, or 36 percent, since 2003 after adjusting for inflation. At the federal level, the welfare bureaucracy spans numerous agencies and includes more than 80 different means-tested aid programs that provide cash, food, housing, medical care, and social services to poor and low-income Americans. These programs range from public housing and food stamps to direct cash benefits through the earned income tax credit (EITC) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

The rapid growth in welfare spending has been driven by two interrelated factors. First, over time, more people above the poverty level have been made eligible for higher benefits. For instance, a forthcoming paper in the journal *Demography* finds that welfare benefits going to single parents with incomes less than half of the poverty level have decreased by 35 percent over the 1983 to 2004 period, whereas benefits to single parents making almost twice the poverty level have increased by 80 percent.¹

A second factor driving the growth of welfare spending is the lack of incentives built into the system for states to be good stewards of the federal programs that they administer. About 75 percent of welfare spending is federal, with the remainder contributed by states; however, states administer the programs and therefore have—but do not exercise—the capacity to constrain welfare growth. Instead, states use their discretionary authority to expand welfare while at the same time underinvesting in anti-fraud activities. For instance, a recent report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that Massachusetts had just 37 fraud investigators responsible for guaranteeing that no one among the 888,000 people with SNAP benefits, the 1,273,000 receiving Medicaid, and the 92,000 with TANF cash assistance was abusing the program.²

Far from being a compassionate series of programs worthy of defense against reform, the current welfare architecture has been a disaster for struggling communities and has done its gravest disservice to recipients themselves. The damage has been twofold.

First, the existing welfare system undermines work. By offering a generous system of entitlements to able-bodied adults without any obligation to work or prepare for work, welfare undermines the need and motivation for self-support. Welfare is primarily a system of one-way handouts: Only two out of more than 80 means-tested welfare programs include even modest work or training requirements.

Second, nearly all of these means-tested welfare programs impose significant penalties against marriage. For 50 years, welfare has driven fathers from the home. As a consequence, single mothers have become increasingly dependent on government aid. Meanwhile, low-income fathers, deprived of meaningful roles as husbands and breadwinners, have drifted into the margins of society. Their attachment to the labor force has deteriorated, and the tendency toward self-destructive and anti-social behavior has increased.

But the greatest victims of the anti-marriage incentives embedded in the welfare system have been children. Children raised without fathers in the home are substantially more likely to experience emotional and behavioral problems, to be expelled from or drop out of school, and to engage in juvenile and adult crime.

Nicholas Kristof in *The New York Times* has reflected on the unintended negative side effects of welfare. Analyzing the Supplemental Security Income program for children, he recently wrote that “America’s safety net can sometimes entangle people in soul-crushing dependency. Our poverty programs do rescue many people, but other times they backfire.”³

Costing over \$1 trillion per year, the current welfare system is enormous, but much of this spending is counterproductive. Today’s welfare programs undermine work and marriage, leading to a broadening pattern of intergenerational dependence and self-defeating behaviors.

Furthermore, if work provides benefits besides monetary compensation (such as a greater connection to society), the fact that welfare discourages work may have severe and immense long-term consequences. This shift in cultural standards is already having deep effects in other areas, such as the ability to build lasting relationships that increase opportunity and general fulfillment.

Welfare should provide aid to those who genuinely need it, but it should also strive to mobilize the best efforts of the poor to help themselves. The foundations of the welfare state must be revamped to promote rather than discourage work and marriage.

To accomplish this, all able-bodied, non-elderly adult recipients of means-tested welfare benefits should be required to work, or at least prepare for work, as a condition of receiving aid. In addition, welfare’s current financial penalties against marriage must be reduced. Reforming the welfare system in this manner would best serve the interests of the poor, the taxpayers, and society at large.

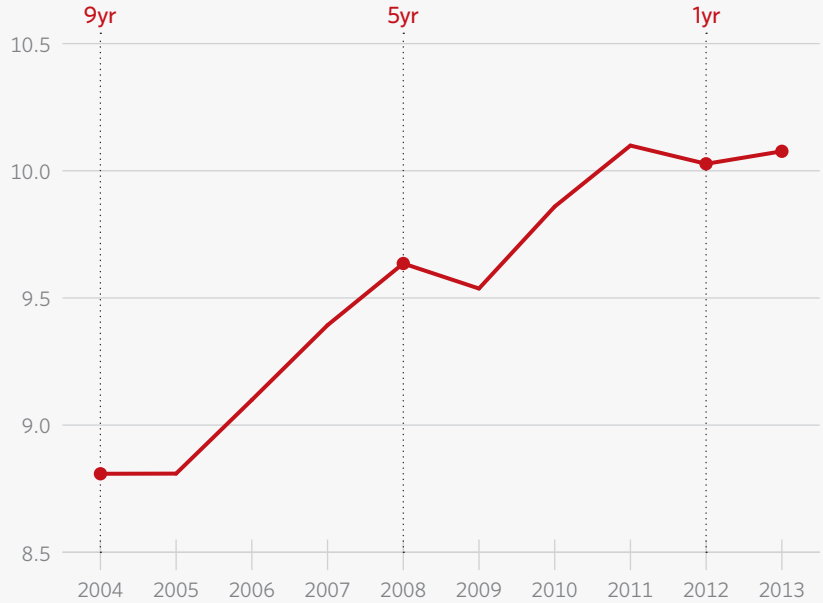
—**Paul L. Winfree** is Director of the Thomas A. Roe Institute for Economic Policy Studies, of the Institute for Economic Freedom and Opportunity, at The Heritage Foundation.

CHANGES 9-year ▲ 1.27 5-year ▲ 0.44 1-year ▲ 0.05

Subsidized Housing Participation

From 2004 to 2013, the number of people living in government-subsidized housing increased by about 1.27 million.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN SUBSIDIZED HOUSING, IN MILLIONS



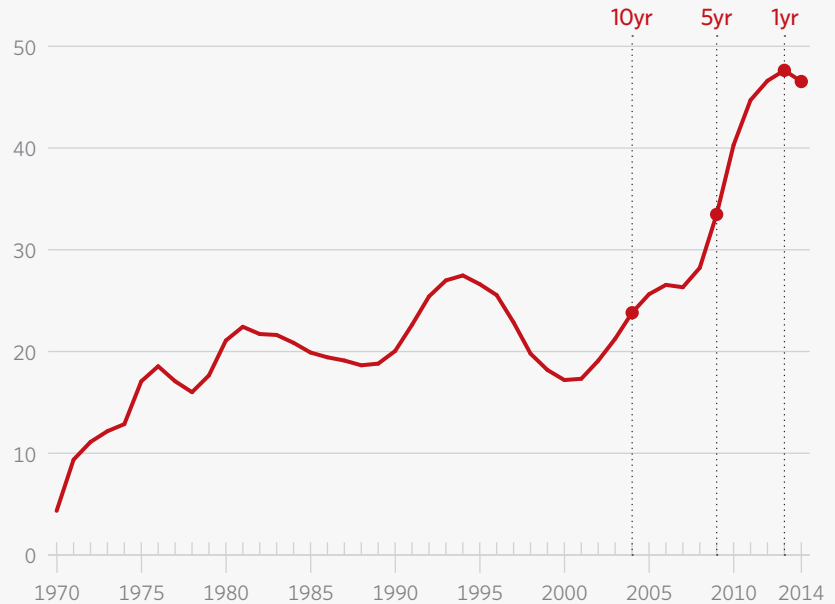
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 22.73 5-year ▲ 13.05 1-year ▼ 1.10

Food Stamp Participation

From 2004 to 2014, food stamp participation grew by about 22.73 million people.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING FOOD STAMPS, IN MILLIONS



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service.

Back to Work on Food Stamps

Maura Corrigan

The nation's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) experienced mixed results in 2014. Participation and average benefit amounts fell slightly from the previous year, but the program remains much larger than it was a decade ago, despite an improving economy. And far too few working-age adults receiving SNAP are in fact working, even years into the recovery. The program may appear to be on the right track—but it is far from perfect and travelling much too slowly.

First, some background: SNAP provides food assistance to low-income individuals and households, with the goal of preventing hunger and malnutrition. These benefits are transferred to a recipient's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card once per month and can be used in most grocery stores and establishments that sell unprepared food. With some exceptions, only households making 130 percent of the federal poverty level or less are eligible.

In 2014, participation fell to 46.5 million from 47.6 million people the year before. The average monthly payment for all SNAP households fell to \$257 in FY 2014, from \$275 in FY 2013.¹ Households with children typically receive more (around \$400 per month), while elderly recipients receive less (just over \$100).² These numbers are moving in the right direction, but not fast enough.

One out of seven Americans received SNAP benefits in 2014, and the program cost \$74.1 billion—the second largest means-tested welfare program. Participation remains twice as high as it was a decade ago (24 million in 2004), even as the unemployment rate has dropped in recent years.

Participation demographics have also changed substantially. A slight majority of recipients are now non-elderly adults; before the 2008 recession, 55 percent of SNAP households consisted of children and the elderly.³ Additionally, the number of non-working, nondisabled, working-age recipients has risen rapidly. Some of this change is due to the waiving of work requirements for able-bodied working-age adults without dependents during the recession.

As a former state human services director who administered more than 70 federal means-tested welfare programs, I believe that one track is especially important for reforming welfare programs. Our nation's simple three-word mantra should be: "Better Off Working." Social safety-net programs, including SNAP, should expect and encourage work—and the dignity and responsibility that accompany it—from those who are able to do so.

The Agricultural Act of 2014 (the "farm bill") provided for a 10-state pilot that allows states to experiment with work requirements. This is a promising development, but more needs to be done.

Rather than promoting self-sufficiency, SNAP's predominant track record over the past decade has been to add participants to its rolls. Also, its eligibility definitions are in many cases vague, allowing it to deny fraud, waste, and abuse in the program, despite the reports of such behavior from citizens and caseworkers. Also, SNAP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but it is not an agriculture program and is too often divorced from anti-poverty programs run by the Department of Health and Human Services. Moving forward, these issues need to be addressed more directly.

Many of the benefit increases and eligibility expansions in SNAP associated with the recession seem to have peaked and are on their way down. Participation in SNAP is falling as the economic prospects of Americans improve, yet participation rates and program spending are projected to remain near historically high levels into the foreseeable future (and labor force participation remains worrisomely low). The question now is whether SNAP will be effectively reformed to promote work: the most effective anti-hunger and anti-poverty solution available.

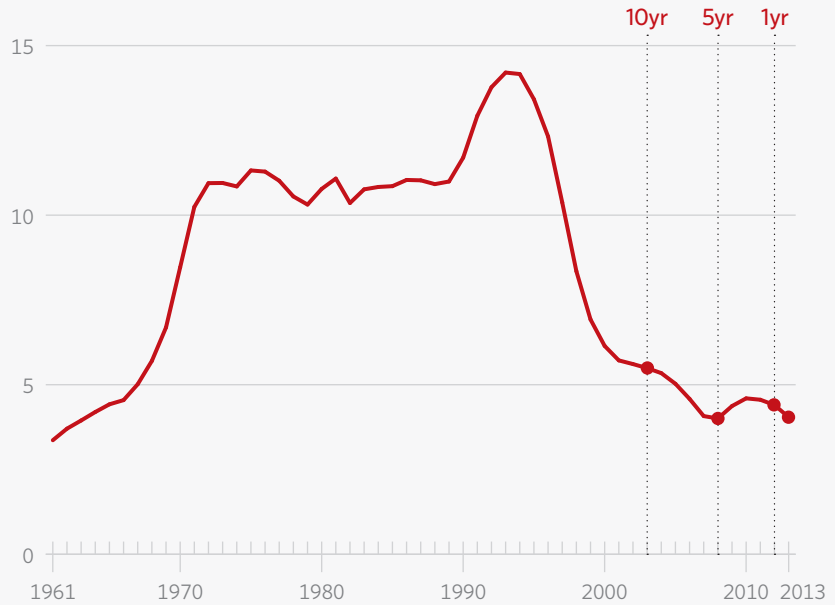
—*Maura Corrigan is a visiting fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and the former director of Michigan's Department of Human Services.*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 1.45 5-year ▲ 0.04 1-year ▼ 0.36

TANF Participation

From 2003 to 2013, the number of individuals receiving aid from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program decreased by about 1.45 million.

NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS RECEIVING CASH ASSISTANCE FROM TANF/AFDC, IN MILLIONS



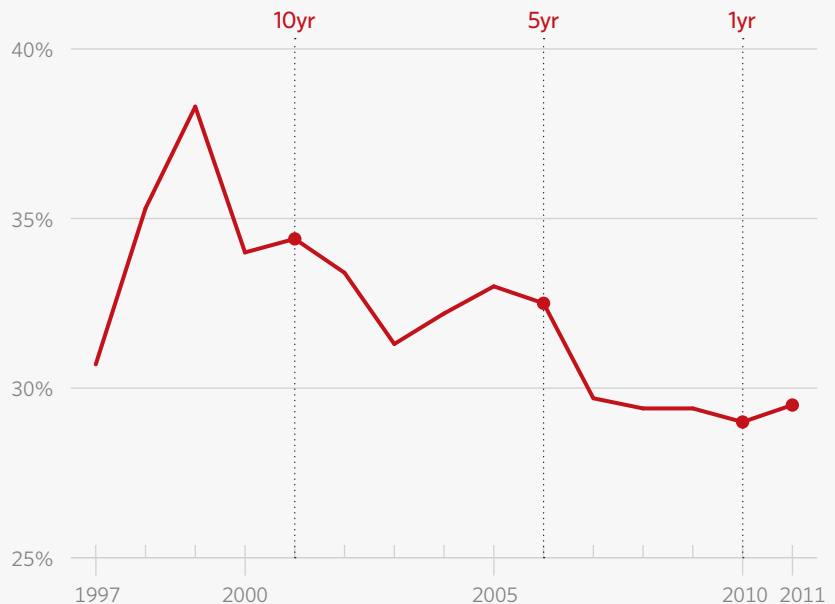
Note: Prior to 1996, TANF was known as the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (AFDC).
Source: U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, Green Book.

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 4.9 5-year ▼ 3.0 1-year ▲ 0.5

TANF Work Participation Rate

From 2001 to 2011, the work participation rate for work-eligible households receiving aid from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program declined by 4.9 percentage points.

PERCENTAGE OF WORK-ELIGIBLE TANF HOUSEHOLDS ENGAGING IN WORK ACTIVITY



Note: Figures for 2008–2011 include TANF and Separate State Program-Maintenance of Effort (SSP-MOE) work participation.
Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

Additional Resources

Labor Force Participation Rate

Not Looking for Work: Why Labor Force Participation Has Fallen During the Recession

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/09/not-looking-for-work-why-labor-force-participation-has-fallen-during-the-recession>

Unwed Birth Rate

Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/marriage-americas-greatest-weapon-against-child-poverty>

FamilyFacts.org: Marriage & Family

<http://www.familyfacts.org/charts/marriage-and-family>

Self-Sufficiency

Understanding Poverty in the United States: Surprising Facts about America's Poor

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/09/understanding-poverty-in-the-united-states-surprising-facts-about-americas-poor>

Total Welfare Spending

The War on Poverty After 50 Years

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/09/the-war-on-poverty-after-50-years>

Examining the Means-Tested Welfare State

<http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/2012/05/examining-the-means-tested-welfare-state>

Subsidized Housing Participation

Examining the Means-Tested Welfare State

<http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/2012/05/examining-the-means-tested-welfare-state>

Food Stamp Participation

Reforming the Food Stamp Program

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/07/reforming-the-food-stamp-program>

TANF Participation

The Unfinished Work of Welfare Reform

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/01/the-unfinished-work-of-welfare-reform>

TANF Work Participation Rate

FamilyFacts.org Brief: Breaking the Cycle of Welfare Dependency

<http://www.familyfacts.org/briefs/46/breaking-the-cycle-of-welfare-dependence>

Section Endnotes

Declining Labor Force Participation and the Expanding Social Safety Net

Douglas J. Besharov and Douglas M. Call

1. The government defines “unemployment” as being without a job *and also* looking for one. See U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, “How the Government Measurements Unemployment,” http://www.bls.gov/cps/cps_htgm.htm (accessed June 18, 2015).
2. We deliberately use this statistic as opposed to the narrower definition of workers who are “marginally attached” to the labor force, which refers only to individuals who want work, are available for work, were employed at some point in the past 12 months, and have not looked for employment in the past four weeks.
3. Chinhui Juhn and Simon Potter, “Changes in Labor Force Participation in the United States,” *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 2006), pp. 27–46, <http://www.class.uh.edu/faculty/cjuhn/Papers/docs/30033665.pdf> (accessed July 16, 2014); Jane R. Wilkie, “The Decline in Men’s Labor Force Participation and Income and the Changing of Family Economic Support,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (February 1991), pp. 111–122; and David H. Autor, “The Unsustainable Rise of the Disability Rolls in the United States: Causes, Consequences, and Policy Options,” National Bureau of Economic Research *Working Paper* No. 17697, December 2011, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17697> (accessed June 2, 2015).
4. Casey J. Mulligan, “Work Incentives, the Recovery Act, and the Economy,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Job Creation and Regulatory Affairs, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, February 14, 2013, <http://www.policyuncertainty.com/app/Mulligan-Testimony.pdf> (accessed June 17, 2015).
5. Douglas J. Besharov, testimony before the Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, February 25, 2015, http://www.welfareacademy.org/pubs/foodassist/Besharov_SNAP_Testimony_15_0225.pdf (accessed May 10, 2015).
6. Mulligan, “Work Incentives, the Recovery Act, and the Economy.”

A New Paradigm to Promote Self-Sufficiency

Robert L. Woodson, Sr.

1. See Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, <http://www.cneonline.org/comeback-series/>.

The Unintended Consequences of Welfare Spending

Paul L. Winfree

1. Robert A. Moffitt, “The Deserving Poor, the Family, and the U.S. Welfare System,” Presidential Address to the Population Association of America, *Demography*, Vol. 52, Issue 3 (June 2015), pp. 729–749.
2. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Supplemental Assistance Nutrition Program: Enhanced Detection Tools and Reporting Could Improve Efforts to Combat Recipient Fraud*, GAO-14-641, August 21, 2014, <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-14-641> (accessed May 18, 2015).
3. Nicholas Kristof, “Profiting from a Child’s Illiteracy,” *The New York Times*, December 7, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/09/opinion/sunday/kristof-profiting-from-a-childs-illiteracy.html?ref=nicholasdkristof&r=0> (accessed May 18, 2015).

Back to Work on Food Stamps

Maura Corrigan

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Average Monthly Benefit Per Household,” March 6, 2015, [http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/19SNAPavg\\$HH.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pd/19SNAPavg$HH.pdf) (accessed May 20, 2015).
2. Karen Cunningham et al., Mathematica Policy Research, “What the Data Reveals About SNAP Household Characteristics and Patterns of Participation,” testimony before the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, February 26, 2015.
3. James Ziliak, testimony before the Subcommittee on Nutrition, Committee on Agriculture, U.S. House of Representatives, February 26, 2015.

Section Three

General Opportunity

General Opportunity Summary

- From 2004 to 2014, the number of students participating in school choice programs more than tripled to nearly 354,000. As Juan Williams argues, school choice “treats children not as mere data points but as thinking, feeling, and multifaceted people—each with a unique, God-given potential that deserves the chance to flourish” (p. 68).
- In 2014, there were 126 pending major federal regulations that are expected to cost \$100 million or more each year, an increase of 46 compared to 2004. “[S]ince 2012,” writes Karen Harned, “at least one in five small-business owners identify government regulations as their most important problem” (p. 76). She continues: “For the American small-business owner, the opportunity costs of federal regulation are all too often crowding out investment and hiring” (p. 77).
- From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of high school students who graduated on time increased by 8 percentage points. “America badly needed the recent small improvement in graduation rates. She needs much more still,” concludes Matthew Ladner (p. 70).
- Since 2005, U.S. economic freedom has declined by 3.7 points, according to The Heritage Foundation’s *Index of Economic Freedom*. As Anthony Kim notes, “Increased tax and regulatory burdens, aggravated

General Opportunity Indicators

	RIGHT DIRECTION	WRONG DIRECTION
Reading Proficiency (p. 66)		○
Charter School Enrollment (p. 66)	●	
Private School Choice Participation (p. 67)	●	
High School Graduation Rate (p. 69)	●	
Student Loan Debt (p. 71)		○
Employment-Population Ratio (p. 73)		○
Unemployment Rate (p. 73)		○
Job Openings Rate (p. 74)	●	
Job Hires Rate (p. 74)		○
Money Taxed Away by Federal Government (p. 75)		○
Start-Up Job Share (p. 75)		○
Major Federal Regulations (p. 76)		○
Economic Freedom (p. 78)		○

by favoritism toward entrenched interests, have undercut America’s historically dynamic entrepreneurial growth and confined the U.S. economy to the rank of only ‘mostly free’” (p. 78).

Achieving Economic Mobility Through School Choice

Anna J. Egalite and Patrick J. Wolf

School choice can play an important role in helping families achieve economic mobility. Whether through vouchers, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts, charters, homeschooling, magnets, online options, or interdistrict or intradistrict open-enrollment programs, choice-based reforms reposition parents at the heart of their children's education and opportunity.

Targeted social policies are often designed and implemented in ways that are intended to increase the social enfranchisement of the group under focus. By granting individuals ownership of decisions that directly affect their families and the power to assert themselves as they attempt to climb the economic ladder, certain public policies have the power to transform traditionally disengaged groups into active and knowledgeable members of society. Choice programs have been particularly successful at empowering low-income families.

The District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (DC OSP) is a clear example of an empowering social policy. The OSP started in 2004–2005 with a \$13 million annual appropriation, sufficient to fund vouchers of up to \$7,500 for each eligible family to attend local private schools.

Researchers Thomas Stewart and Patrick Wolf use rich qualitative data gathered from focus groups, electronic polling, and interviews with participating families and community stakeholders to trace the social evolution of the program's scholarship recipients.¹ Their research suggests that families initially struggle with the challenges of choosing a school but quickly

move from being passive clients to being informed consumers of their children's education. Once low-income families begin to direct their children's education through school choice, attempts to take that responsibility away from them are met with forceful political activism to maintain parental choice.

The transformative nature of choice moves families from the margins of their children's educational experience and puts them in the driver's seat, eventually changing them from passive recipients of the status quo into effective advocates for their children's educational interests. School choice grants parents the power to exit schools that are not working for their children and choose among a set of diverse alternatives, allowing them to contribute actively to their children's educational success.

Of course, school choice is about more than just test scores; it enables families to express their different values and preferences. By its nature, school choice is inherently a family-centered reform, one that lets parents choose on their own terms. Every family is different, and through school choice, families select a school based on more than just state-defined measures of academic quality.

We do not have to hypothesize about what factors families would weigh most heavily if attendance zones were eliminated and a completely market-based system of school choice implemented. Post-Katrina New Orleans provides just such an example. Research by Douglas Harris and Matthew Larsen reveals that families highly value proximity, sports, music, and after-school programs, in addition to

test scores.² Other studies show that parents seek to use school choice to place their children in religious schools or language-immersion programs. While student safety concerns may be an underlying factor that could lead a family to choose a school that keeps its children occupied and off the streets once the final bell of the school day rings, the schools that parents select also reflect their sound understanding both of their children and of the skills and habits that will bring them success.

Schools differ tremendously in their overall culture and general learning environments, safety, teacher–student and teacher–parent relationships, techniques for motivating students, disciplinary policies, general support and encouragement, and opportunities for student leadership. Parents are uniquely positioned to recognize their children’s educational needs and the most important criteria for choosing their children’s school environment, defined along these many observable dimensions and more, and this will not always line up neatly with a school’s reputation for academic achievement, which can only reflect the average performance of students in that school.

Parents are better situated than bureaucrats to judge whether their particular children will perform well in a given school. Choice systems inherently recognize this fact and transfer decision-making power to those with the most complete knowledge of a child’s diverse strengths and unique needs.

The available evidence confirms the practical effectiveness of choice-based schooling systems. Take, for instance, data on high school graduation and college enrollment. The research on educational attainment underscores its importance for economic advancement. Human capital scholars have studied the value of a high school diploma and have shown that the investment pays dividends across multiple areas:

- High school graduates have higher lifetime earnings;³
- High school graduates are less likely to rely on public assistance programs;⁴
- High school graduates live longer, healthier lives;⁵ and
- High school graduates are less likely to engage in criminal activity.⁶

Rigorous research has shown that school choice policies can significantly boost high school graduation rates. A government evaluation of the DC OSP revealed that use of a voucher increased the likelihood of a student’s graduating from high school by 21 percentage points—from 70 percent in the control group to 91 percent.⁷ Because the DC school choice program was revealed to be one of the most effective dropout-prevention programs in recent history, it was estimated to deliver \$2.62 in future benefits to society for every \$1.00 it costs.⁸

Similar positive findings emerged from the nation’s oldest urban voucher program, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). According to the legislatively mandated, five-year evaluation of this state-funded school choice program, voucher recipients were more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in a four-year college, and persist in college at rates that were 4–7 percentage points higher than the rates for students who did not participate in the choice program.⁹ The post-secondary findings from this study are particularly interesting, given the lifetime benefits associated with attainment of a college degree. In 2012, for instance, young adults with a bachelor’s degree earned twice as much as those who had not graduated from high school (\$47,000 per year compared to \$23,000).¹⁰

Moreover, school choice can be a mechanism for the economic advancement of all students, not just the voucher user or charter enrollee. In a comprehensive and systematic review of the literature on this topic, Anna Egalite uncovers 21 studies of the competitive impacts of vouchers on public school performance.¹¹ Twenty of those studies show neutral to positive impacts of private school choice programs on public school performance, and just one study reports exclusively null effects.¹² Not a single study finds negative achievement effects on the students who remain in their assigned public schools.

Add to this growing body of evidence new findings for Louisiana showing positive competitive effects and Indiana showing null impacts in math and positive impacts on English Language Arts performance,¹³ and it becomes difficult to ignore where the evidence points: A rising tide from school choice can indeed lift all boats.¹⁴ By threatening a reduction in traditional public school budgets because of declining enrollment, choice programs encourage existing schools to improve their offerings; to take seriously and address specific student needs; and to implement the necessary reforms in

teacher personnel policies, curriculum, standards, and general operations management to serve students more effectively.

In short, the best available evidence demonstrates that school choice can create powerful forces for economic and social mobility. School voucher options—which have the strongest research base from which to draw—have especially clear impacts on boosting educational attainment, which is the most important educational outcome for students. They do so while simultaneously improving outcomes for students who remain in traditional public schools.

Finally, parents are empowered and play a more central role in their children’s education when they are given the opportunity to choose their children’s schools. The prospect of expanding school choice to more disadvantaged populations promises to transform many lives for the better.

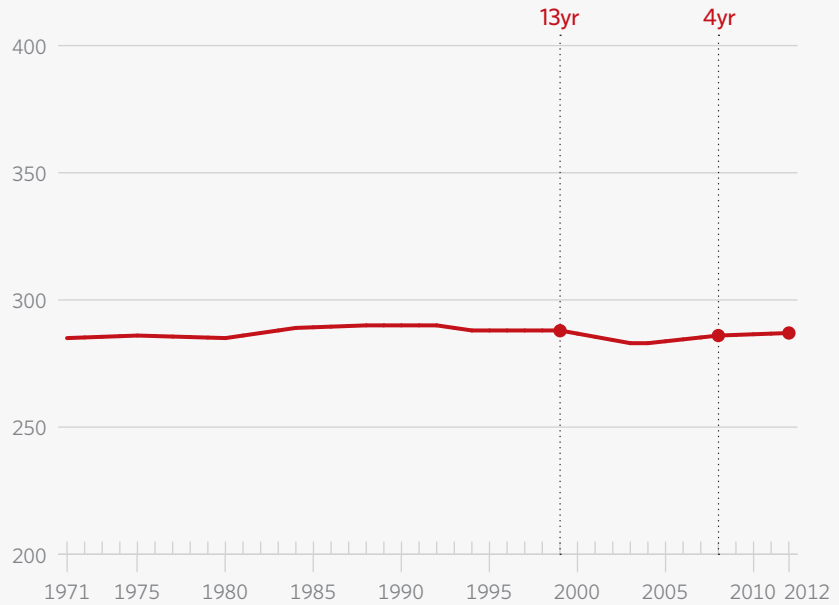
—*Anna J. Egalite is a postdoctoral fellow in the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University, and Patrick J. Wolf is a Distinguished Professor of Education Policy and 21st Century Endowed Chair in School Choice in the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas’ College of Education and Health Professions.*

CHANGES 13-year ▼ 1 4-year ▲ 1

Reading Proficiency

From 1999 to 2012, the reading proficiency rate for 17-year-olds remained nearly unchanged, declining by 1 point on a 500-point scale.

READING PROFICIENCY FOR 17-YEAR-OLDS



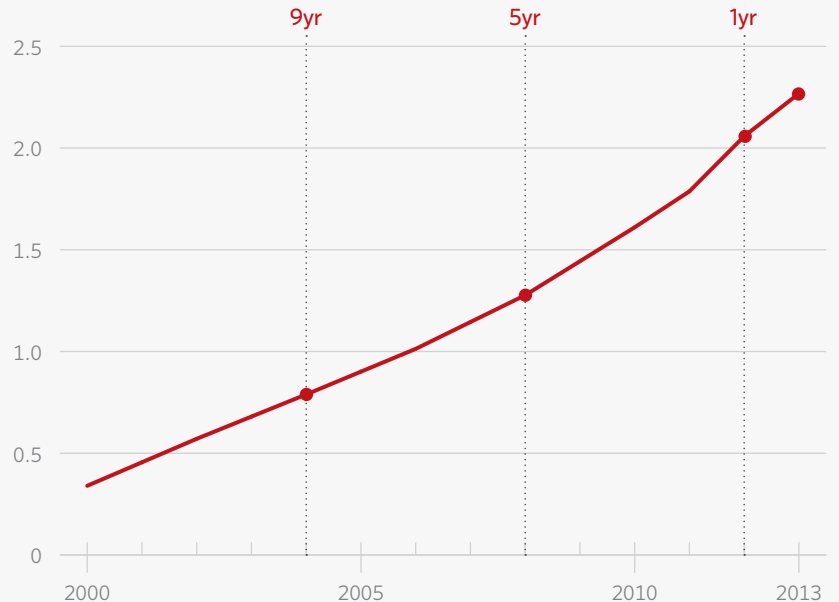
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress.

CHANGES 9-year ▲ 1.48 5-year ▲ 0.99 1-year ▲ 0.21

Charter School Enrollment

From 2004 to 2013, charter school* enrollment increased by about 1.5 million students.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN CHARTER SCHOOLS, IN MILLIONS



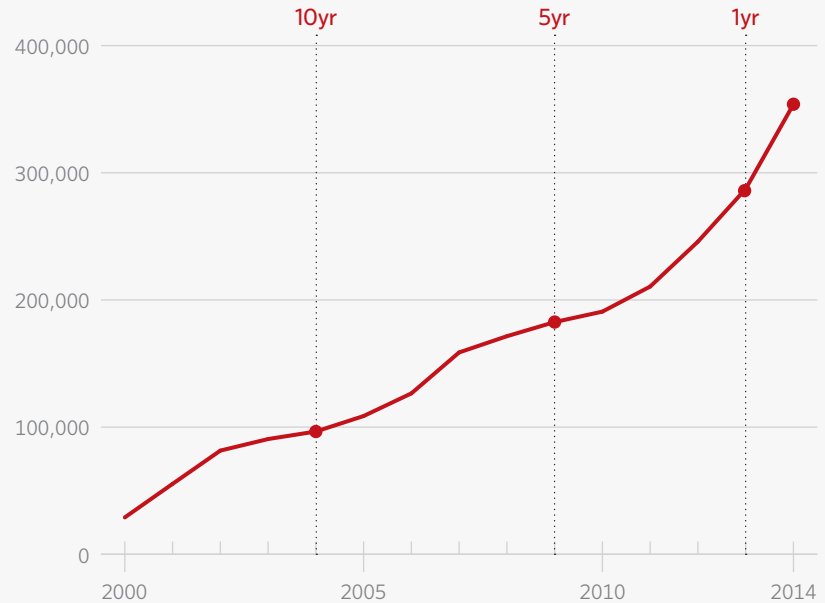
* A charter school is publicly funded but independently operated.
Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 257,282 5-year ▲ 171,202 1-year ▲ 66,512

Private School Choice Participation

From 2004 to 2014, the number of students enrolled in private school choice programs increased by 257,282.

NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN PRIVATE SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS



Source: Alliance for School Choice Yearbook, 2014–2015.

School Choice Puts Children Back at the Center of Education Reform

Juan Williams

As a black child brought to this country with an older brother and sister by a poor mother with only a fourth-grade education, I can personally testify that without strong schools (and a big push from my mother), my work as a writer and television commentator would not be possible.

It has been said: “One death is a tragedy, one million is a statistic.” Likewise, one child failing in school, especially your child, is a tragedy—but too often, because he or she is one of one million children failing in school, the tragedy becomes a statistic.

At the moment the data paint a picture of an entire generation of young Americans—white, black, Hispanic, from all areas of the country—being left behind a rising level of educational achievement around the globe.

As a journalist, I often think politicians don’t get it. That is why I was stunned with excitement when President George W. Bush stood up and declared that the “soft bigotry of low expectations” for poor children in public schools was unacceptable.

The jig is up for the self-interested teachers unions who have blocked long-overdue reforms to the public education system and condemned millions of students to lives of low-wage jobs and lack of opportunity.

Parents are on to this sham, and they are choosing to send their children to private and charter schools in record numbers. At these schools, free from union contracts, parents and children hold greater leverage to decide if the education offered meets their needs and if the quality of education is worth the money they are spending on the school.

That competitive environment fosters more innovative approaches to teaching children. The best approaches are taking root, and fewer children are being saddled with the “bigotry of low expectations.”

With more access to quality education, America’s children are better positioned to take advantage of all the economic opportunity our great country has to offer and to succeed as part of a global workforce filled with individuals who have the education and skills they need to compete with graduates of American schools.

As a well-known journalist and as a black American Democrat, I often find myself walking a lonely road as I advocate for giving students and parents more power through school choice, vouchers, and other instruments intended to achieve school reform.

The unions' fear of losing control over public education has led them to vilify school reform efforts. With so much political static, it is easy to be distracted from the core need to improve schools for children right now.

That is why it is important to look at hard numbers about the poor state of American education. President Reagan did this back in the 1980s when he issued the report, *A Nation at Risk*. Today, the *Index of Culture and Opportunity* offers a similar call to action for anyone who wants to truly understand the importance of the school choice movement.

From 2000 to 2013 charter school enrollment increased by about two million students. These are two million children whose families felt the need to break away from their existing school in order to strive for a chance at the American dream.

From 2004 to 2014, the number of students enrolled in private school choice programs increased by about 257,000.

Charter school enrollment and private school choice participation have made impressive progress over the past decade, each rising by more than 200 percent.

As my fellow school reform advocate Virginia Walden Ford explained, "More than 300,000 children are attending private schools of their choosing thanks to options like vouchers, tuition tax credit programs, and education savings accounts."

Though we may disagree in other areas of public policy, I proudly stand shoulder to shoulder with my friends at The Heritage Foundation in the fight for school choice, because it is the civil rights issue of our time.

The school choice indicators tracked by the *Index of Culture and Opportunity* move away from the educational paradigm that treats children like statistics to a more accurate, more productive, more humane way of measuring and improving education.

It treats children not as mere data points but as thinking, feeling, and multifaceted people—each with a unique, God-given potential that deserves the chance to flourish.

—*Juan Williams is a political analyst and co-host of The Five for Fox News Channel and a columnist for The Hill.*

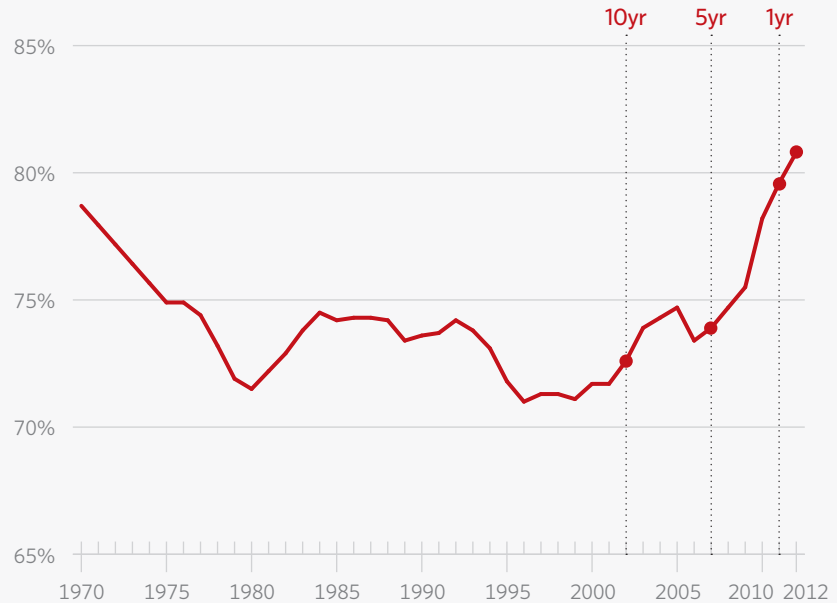
CHANGES 10-year ▲ 8.2 5-year ▲ 6.9 1-year ▲ 1.2

High School Graduation Rate

From 2002 to 2012, the percentage of public high school students who graduated on time (i.e., four years after starting 9th grade) increased by 8.2 percentage points.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS RECEIVING HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA FOUR YEARS AFTER STARTING 9TH GRADE



Growing the Graduation Rate

Matthew Ladner

High school graduation remains a crucial rite of passage. The National Center for Education Statistics estimates that, in 2013, the median earning for workers with a high school diploma was 26 percent higher than for those without it.¹ The Bureau of Labor Statistics consistently finds higher rates of employment for high school graduates than for high school dropouts. For example, in 2014, the Bureau reported that the unemployment rate among high school graduates averaged 6 percent.² By contrast, the unemployment rate among those who had not completed high school was 9 percent.

Differences in high school graduation rates reflect achievement gaps among major student subgroups' outcomes on academic assessments. A 2011 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that children from low-income families were more than five times as likely to drop out of school as those from high-income families.³ Black and Hispanic students drop out of school at rates more than double the rate of white students.

American high school graduation rates stood at 78.7 percent in 1970 but began a steady, gradual

decline before reaching a low of 71 percent in 1996. Since that point, however, graduation rates have improved—surpassing the 1970 rate in 2011 and nudging forward a bit more to 80.8 percent in 2012.

Scholars have established a very strong record among parental choice programs in boosting graduation rates. A Mathematica study of the impact of charter school attendance in Chicago and Florida found 7 percentage points and 15 percentage points higher graduation rates, respectively, associated with attending a charter school in those areas.⁴

The United States Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences conducted a high-quality random assignment study of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP).⁵ OSP is a voucher program for low-income DC students. The graduation rate for OSP students who used vouchers was 21 percentage points higher than of that of the control group. OSP students were statistically among those least likely to graduate (i.e., they were low-income students attending a large urban public school district), so this increase

in graduation rate reflects a strong return on investment for the program.

Looking forward into America's future, increasing the high school graduation rate and the overall quality of instruction looms as a crucial need.⁶ The leading edge of the baby-boom generation began qualifying for federal entitlement programs in 2008. Analysts estimate an average 10,000 baby boomers *per day* will reach retirement age between now and 2030. This will represent an unprecedented graying of the American public, and the Census Bureau also projects an increase in the youth population to accompany it. Many of the middle-aged taxpayers of the year 2030 and beyond sit in American classrooms today. The more who graduate and reach their full potential, the better.

America badly needed the recent small improvement in graduation rates. She needs much more still. The expression "a mind is a terrible thing to waste" has always been true. The cost of this waste, however, looks set to soar higher in the future. With trillions in unfunded liabilities in our entitlement programs, policymakers must focus on policies—like charter schools, school vouchers, and account-based choice mechanisms—that deliver a greater bang for the education buck and meet the needs of individual students.

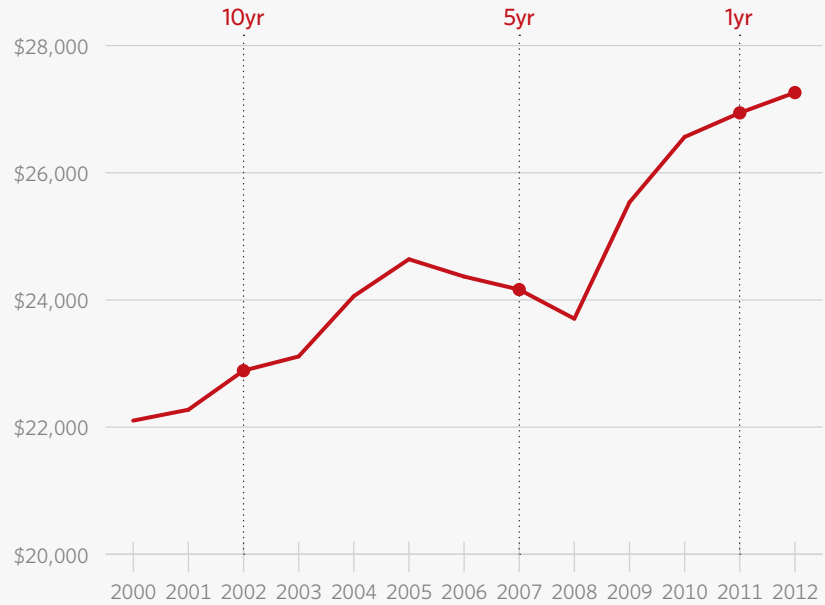
—**Matthew Ladner** is the Senior Advisor of Policy and Research at the Foundation for Excellence in Education.

CHANGES 10-year ▲ 4,373 5-year ▲ 3,098 1-year ▲ 319

Student Loan Debt

From 2002 to 2012, the average student loan debt held by each year's graduates with loans increased by \$4,373. Average student loan debt now stands at \$27,261 in 2012 dollars.

AVERAGE STUDENT DEBT PER BORROWER GRADUATE, FOUR-YEAR COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES, IN 2012 DOLLARS



Sources: The College Board, Trends in Higher Education; and The Heritage Foundation.

Student Loans: What Students Don't Know Can Hold Them Back

Matthew M. Chingos

A postsecondary credential is almost universally viewed as important. As student debt levels continue to rise, however, Americans are losing confidence in the quality and affordability of their higher education. A clear majority of Americans think that the quality of higher education in the United States has stagnated or declined, and almost three-quarters think that higher education is not affordable for everyone who needs it.

At the same time, in spite of rising costs and debt levels, investments in postsecondary education continue to pay significant dividends to individuals who persevere through graduation. For the typical household with student loan debt, monthly payments are no more burdensome than they were a generation ago. The average household with debt devotes only 7 percent of its income to making student loan payments—just slightly more than what it spends on entertainment.¹

The average bachelor's degree holder who borrows leaves college with \$27,300 in student loan debt. A major concern is that students often have little idea

what they are getting themselves into. A majority of college freshmen are not aware of how much debt they are taking on, and some do not even know that they have borrowed to attend college. This is consistent with a college search process in which potential students choose a college based on reputation or a campus tour rather than on good measures of quality and price. As a result, colleges face no strong incentives to rein in rising prices and debt.

Recent nationally representative data detail how woefully uninformed college students are about their borrowing. About half of all first-year students in the U.S. seriously underestimate how much federal student debt they have, and less than one-third provide an accurate estimate within a reasonable margin of error. The remaining quarter of students overestimate their level of federal debt. Among all first-year students with federal loans, 28 percent reported having no federal debt and 14 percent said they did not have any student debt at all.²

Students who underestimate their borrowing may end up borrowing too much and then find

themselves struggling when the payments come due, potentially leaving taxpayers to foot the bill.

Ninety-three percent of student loans are made directly by the federal government.³ As the Federal Reserve Bank of New York notes, after mortgages, student loan debt is the largest type of debt.⁴ Like

any single indicator, rising student debt levels cannot tell the whole story, but they should continue to raise an alarm that all is not well in American higher education.

—*Matthew M. Chingos is a Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute.*

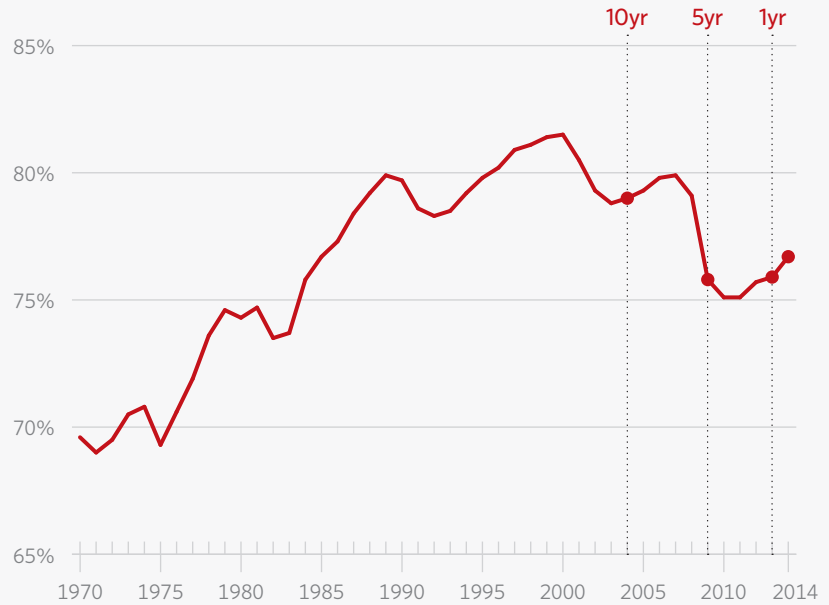
CHANGES 10-year ▼ 2.3 5-year ▲ 0.9 1-year ▲ 0.8

Employment-Population Ratio

From 2004 to 2014, the employment-population ratio for civilians ages 25 to 54 fell 2.3 percentage points.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

PERCENTAGE OF CIVILIANS AGES 25-54 WHO ARE WORKING



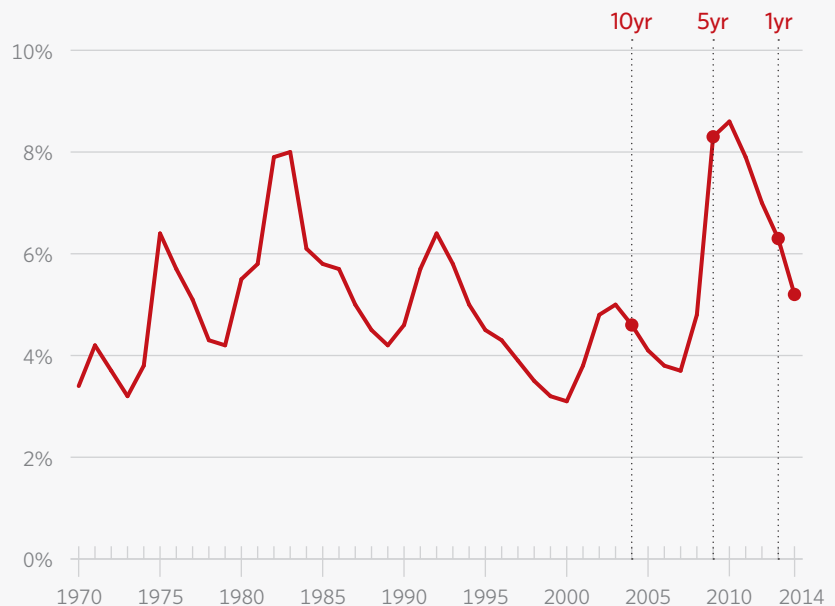
CHANGES 10-year ▲ 0.6 5-year ▼ 3.1 1-year ▼ 1.1

Unemployment Rate

From 2004 to 2014, the unemployment rate for civilians ages 25 to 54 rose by 0.6 percentage point.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, and U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

PERCENTAGE OF UNEMPLOYED CIVILIANS AGES 25-54

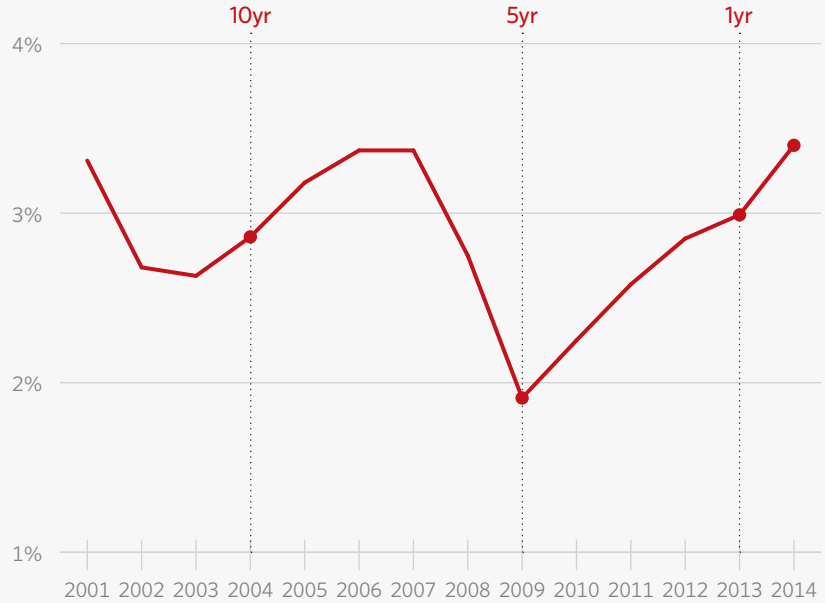


CHANGES 10-year ▲ 0.5 5-year ▲ 1.5 1-year ▲ 0.4

Job Openings Rate

From 2004 to 2014, the job openings rate increased by 0.5 percentage point.

MONTHLY PRIVATE-SECTOR JOB OPENINGS/VACANCIES AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL PRIVATE-SECTOR JOBS AND JOB OPENINGS



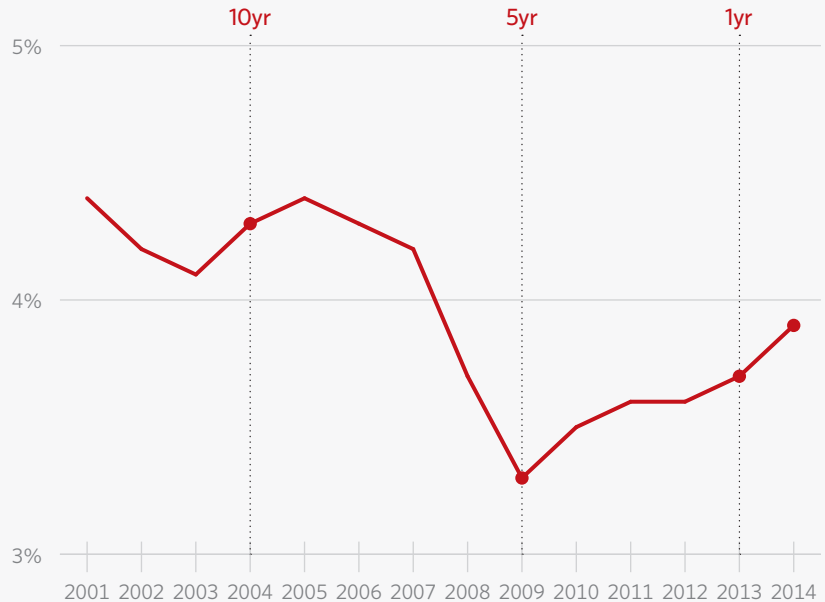
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 0.4 5-year ▲ 0.6 1-year ▲ 0.2

Job Hires Rate

From 2004 to 2014, the job hires rate decreased by 0.4 percentage point.

MONTHLY PRIVATE-SECTOR NEW HIRES AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL PRIVATE-SECTOR JOBS



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey.

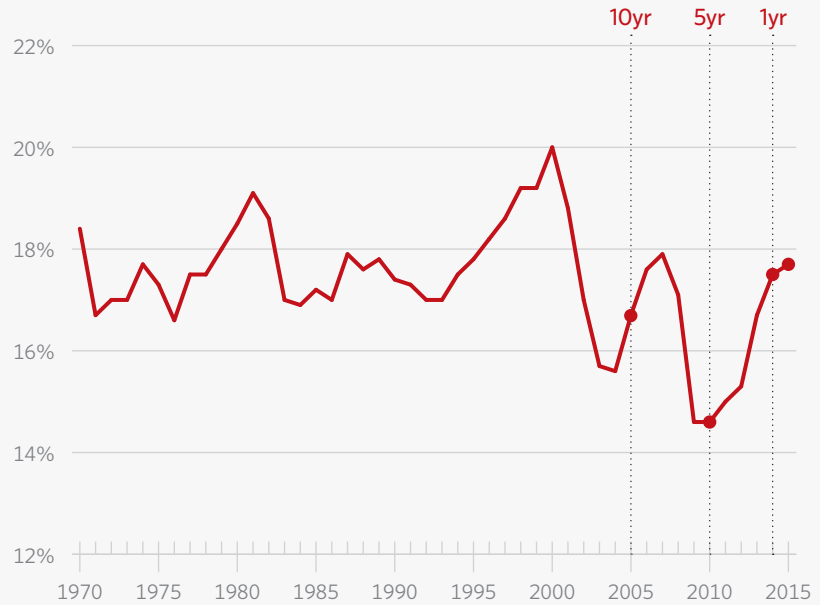
CHANGES **10-year ▲ 1.0** **5-year ▲ 3.1** **1-year ▲ 0.2**

Money Taxed Away by Federal Government

From 2005 to 2015, the percentage of GDP* taken by the federal government in taxes has increased by 1.0 percentage point.

* GDP is the total value of all goods and services produced in/by the economy.
Note: Figure for 2015 is a projection.
Source: Office of Management and Budget, FY 2016 Budget of the U.S. Government.

PERCENTAGE OF GDP TAXED AWAY BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT



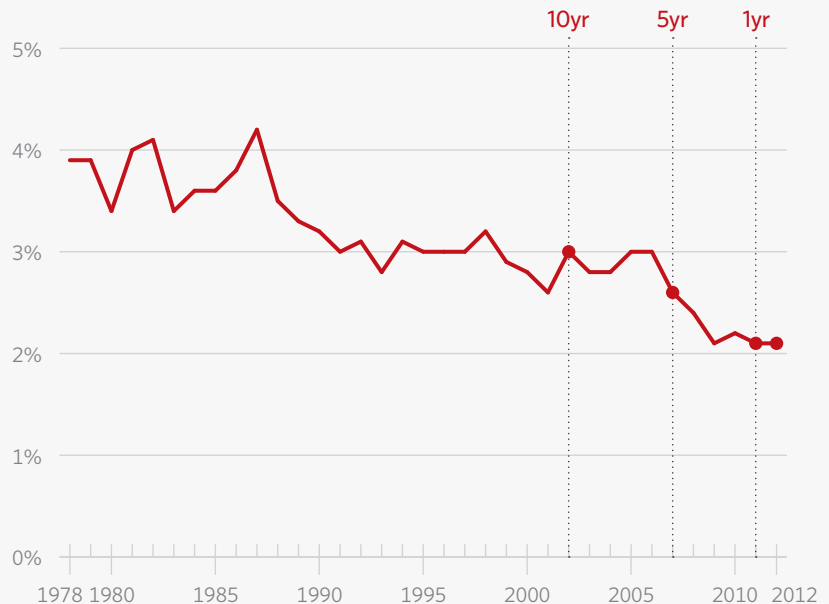
CHANGES **10-year ▼ 0.9** **5-year ▼ 0.5** **1-year No change**

Start-Up Job Share

From 2002 to 2012, the percent of Americans working at start-up companies dropped 0.9 percentage point.

Note: A start-up is defined as a firm that is less than one year old.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Business Dynamics Statistics, and Heritage Foundation calculations.

START-UP JOBS AS A PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PRIVATE-SECTOR EMPLOYMENT

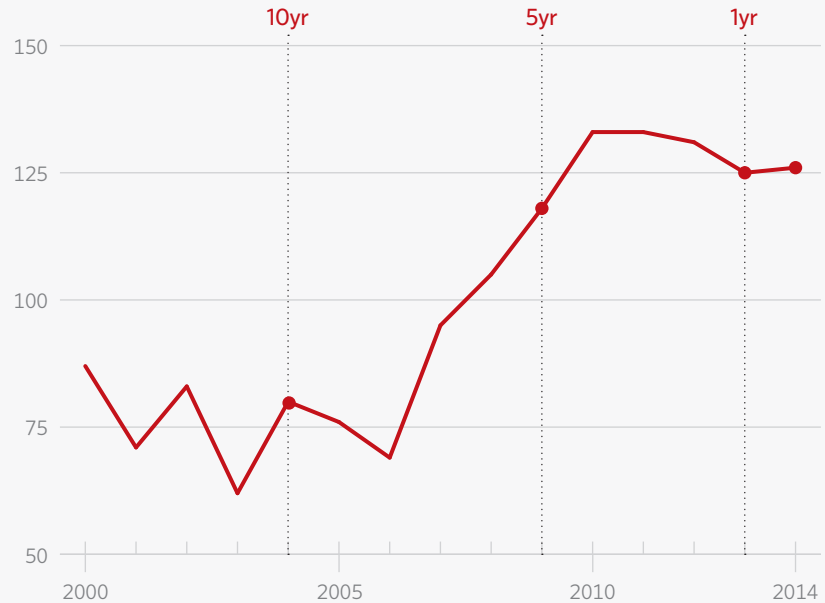


CHANGES 10-year ▲ 46 5-year ▲ 8 1-year ▲ 1

Major Federal Regulations

From 2004 to 2014, the number of economically significant regulations pending each year rose by 46 regulations.

NUMBER OF PENDING REGULATIONS EXPECTED TO COST \$100 MILLION OR MORE ANNUALLY



Note: Figures are for Fall period except for 2012 which is for Spring/Fall.
Sources: The Heritage Foundation, “Red Tape Rising,” and Office of Management and Budget.

Federal Regulations: An “Opportunity Cost” for American Small Business

Karen R. Harned

More than five years after the end of the “Great Recession,” only 21 percent of small businesses¹ say they have fully recovered.² During the recession, lack of sales ranked as the top problem small business faced. Taxes placed second, and “government regulations and red tape” placed third.³ And since 2012 at least one in five small-business owners identify government regulations as their most important problem.⁴

The reason for this is simple—small-business owners directly feel the impact of federal regulation in the daily life of their business. The small-business owner is often the main person in a business who bears the burden of complying with regulations and paperwork requirements. According to a 2010 study, small businesses spend \$10,585 per employee on regulation, which amounts to 36 percent more per employee than larger companies spend.⁵

With that as a backdrop, it is easy to see how small-business owners continue to wonder why Washington just does not get it when it comes to regulation.

For decades, Congress has sought to solve societal problems through mandates on business. Too many Americans without health insurance? Congress tries to solve that by requiring businesses to provide health insurance to their employees (regardless of whether or not they can afford it) or pay hefty penalties. Too many Americans unable to care for a sick relative? Congress seeks to address that by mandating a business keep a position open three months out of every year for qualified employees, using a cumbersome reporting system.

Always entrepreneurial, with a keen focus on the bottom line, the American small-business owner looks for ways to minimize the time and money spent on things other than running his or her business. Since many of these regulations wisely exempt the smallest of small businesses, some employers purposefully do not increase hiring because they do not want to have to comply with the regulatory regimes that await businesses that expand to 10, 15, and 50 or more employees.

America's small-business owners go into business with an idea to offer a product or service about which they are passionate. They start with the dream that they have the freedom to run their business their way. Then they find that the task of learning and complying with federal regulations soaks up more and more of the time and resources they need to invest for their business to thrive. For the American small-business owner, the opportunity costs of federal regulation are all too often crowding out investment and hiring.

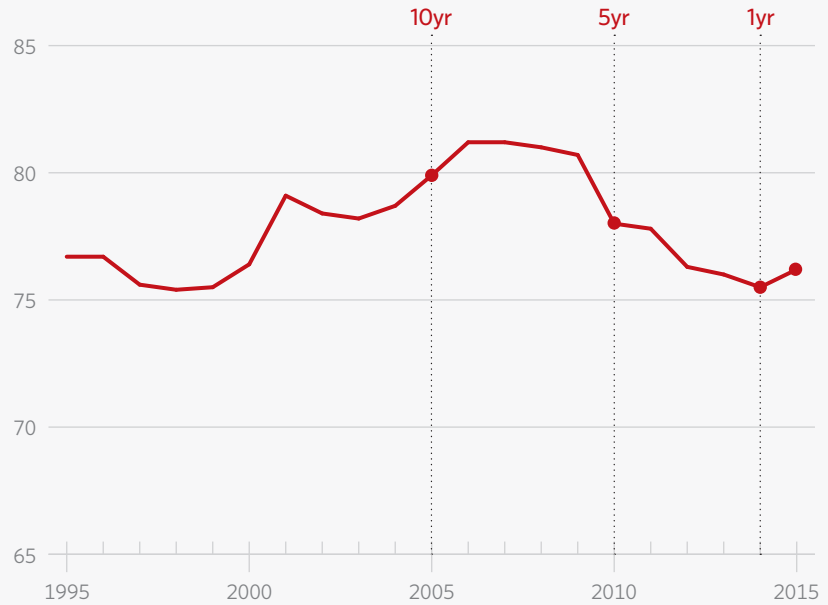
—*Karen R. Harned is the Executive Director of the National Federation of Independent Business Small Business Legal Center.*

CHANGES 10-year ▼ 3.7 5-year ▼ 1.8 1-year ▲ 0.7

Economic Freedom

From 2005 to 2015, the overall U.S. score in the Index of Economic Freedom fell by 3.7 points.

U.S. OVERALL SCORE FROM THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION'S INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM



Source: The Heritage Foundation and Wall Street Journal, 2015 Index of Economic Freedom.

Time to Restore America's Economic Freedom

Anthony B. Kim

Economic freedom is a critical element of life that transcends the market. As a vital linchpin in creating a society that values and advances opportunity and personal empowerment, economic freedom is a valuable end as well as a critical means for progress.

Indeed, the free-market economy is more than just an arrangement of voluntary economic relationships. It is the proven source of dynamic growth and upward social mobility, reinforced by the fundamental principles of economic freedom—empowerment of the individual, equality before the law, and open competition. These fundamental principles not only help underwrite societal progress, but also help achieve the broad-based economic dynamism that ultimately ensures overall well-being for individuals and society as a whole.

As documented in the *Index of Economic Freedom*,¹ an annual study that benchmarks the quality and attractiveness of the entrepreneurial framework across countries, economic freedom around the world has advanced measurably over the past two decades, thanks in large part to the historical

record of the United States in promoting and defending freedom. Yet the recent record of the United States in the Index—the undeniable trail of declining economic freedom—is a serious cause for alarm.

According to the latest edition of the *Index*, the downward spiral in U.S. economic freedom since 2008 has come to a halt, but the downward trend in overall economic freedom over the past five years reflects broad-based deteriorations in key policy areas. Increased tax and regulatory burdens, aggravated by favoritism toward entrenched interests, have undercut America's historically dynamic entrepreneurial growth and confined the U.S. economy to the rank of only “mostly free.”

There is no doubt that America's dwindling economic freedom has a human toll. Families, businesses, and community organizations across America—what the 18th-century philosopher Edmund Burke dubbed the “little platoons” of society—have been squeezed by the government's assault on America's economic freedom. Despite the ongoing recovery, the economic damage has been extensive. Its legacy

includes subpar growth, mediocre business investment, and fewer job prospects—particularly for the poor and less skilled.

This is the current status of the nation, and there is no use in denying it. However, it is critical that we understand that the economic reality America confronts is neither a statement of fate nor a forecast. The future is open to recovery. Crafting a better economic future will necessitate a return to conservative ideas based on the enduring principles of limited government, individual freedom with responsibility, and free enterprise.

At the core of this critical task lies the importance of understanding that economic and cultural factors are inextricably interwoven. Opportunities generated by policies advancing economic freedom often influence an individual's prospects for the future. In turn, the future includes a community or family in the context of which individuals make decisions. The culture of family and community also surely affects the extent to which individuals take advantage of their opportunities. As the late William E. Simon, former Treasury Secretary and a staunch advocate of liberty, once noted:

[T]he true concept of economic freedom must be understood to be far deeper and richer than the mere absence of restraint, or the license to do as one pleases. The only defensible kind of economic freedom is freedom coupled with a sense of moral responsibility to one's community and country, to the values that bind us.²

Fortunately, the greater calling for conservative solutions on many policy fronts in recent years points to new hope for revitalizing America's economic freedom. That work will surely entail the rise of a new generation of conservative leaders willing to relearn the crucial linkage among economic freedom, personal responsibility, opportunity, and empowerment. Analyzing cultural, social, and economic trends through the annual *Index of Culture and Opportunity* is a critical first step toward inspiring the resolve to get America back on track and reinvigorate the free-market dynamism that ensures opportunity for all but favoritism to none. Now is the time to rebuild America's principled policy toolkit. —**Anthony B. Kim** is Research Manager of the Index of Economic Freedom and Senior Policy Analyst for Economic Freedom in the Center for Trade and Economics, of the Institute for Economic Freedom and Opportunity, at The Heritage Foundation.

Additional Resources

Educational Achievement Levels

Does Spending More on Education Improve Academic Achievement?

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/09/does-spending-more-on-education-improve-academic-achievement>

How Escalating Education Spending Is Killing Crucial Reform

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/10/how-escalating-education-spending-is-killing-crucial-reform>

Charter School Enrollment

School Choice in America 2011: Educational Opportunity Reaches New Heights

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/08/school-choice-in-america-2011-educational-opportunity-reaches-new-heights>

Private School-Choice Enrollment

Choosing to Succeed

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/01/choosing-to-succeed-choosing-to-succeed>

Expanding Education Choices: From Vouchers and Tax Credits to Savings Accounts

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/07/expanding-education-choices-from-vouchers-and-tax-credits-to-savings-accounts>

High School Graduation Rate

Barriers to High School Completion Create Barriers to Economic Mobility

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/05/barriers-to-high-school-completion-create-barriers-to-economic-mobility>

The Value of Parental Choice in Education: A Look at the Research

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/03/the-value-of-parental-choice-in-education-a-look-at-the-research>

Student Loan Debt

Accreditation: Removing the Barriers to Higher Education Reform

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/09/accreditation-removing-the-barrier-to-higher-education-reform>

College 2020

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/03/college-2020>

Employment-Population Ratio

Who Is Working Less

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/02/who-is-working-less>

Supply and Demand: Why Job Growth Remains Sluggish

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/11/supply-and-demand-why-job-growth-remains-sluggish>

Unemployment

Not Looking for Work: Why Labor Force Participation Has Fallen During the Recovery

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/09/not-looking-for-work-why-labor-force-participation-has-fallen-during-the-recovery>

Creating Opportunity in the Workplace

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/12/creating-opportunity-in-the-workplace>

Job Openings Rate

Delayed Recovery Historically Slow

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/02/delayed-recovery-historically-slow>

Job Hires Rate

Supply and Demand: Why Job Growth Remains Sluggish

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/11/supply-and-demand-why-job-growth-remains-sluggish>

Money Taxed Away by Federal Government

The Dos and Don'ts of Tax Reform

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/04/the-dos-and-donts-of-tax-reform>

Start-Up Job Share

Don't Crush the Ability of Entrepreneurs and Small Businesses to Raise Capital

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/02/dont-crush-the-ability-of-entrepreneurs-and-small-businesses-to-raise-capital>

Major Federal Regulations

Red Tape Rising: Six Years of Escalating Regulation Under Obama

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/05/red-tape-rising-six-years-of-escalating-regulation-under-obama>

Economic Freedom

The 2015 Index of Economic Freedom

<http://www.heritage.org/index/>

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Achieving Economic Mobility Through School Choice

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Growing the Graduation Rate

Matthew Ladner

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Federal Regulations: An "Opportunity Cost" for American Small Business

By Karen R. Harned

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Time to Restore America's Economic Freedom

Anthony B. Kim

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Supplementary Statistical Analysis

Jamie Bryan Hall

For each indicator, the latest figure and its one-year, five-year, and 10-year trends are straight-forward. Supplementary statistical analyses provide further statistical confidence about whether or not the observed trends may be merely random variations in the data.

Overall, 18 of 31 indicators in the *Index* show a statistically significant trend over the course of the observed data points, eight of which are on the right track and 10 of which are on the wrong track, while 13 currently show no statistically significant trend. The comprehensive table starting on page 86 reports these results, which we calculated using the statistical software package Stata 13.

To determine the appropriate regression model to use for each indicator, we must identify the indicators that are trend stationary and those that are possibly non-stationary. A trend-stationary indicator shows random movement around a trend line with a tendency to return to that trend line over time, while a non-stationary indicator follows a random walk (possibly with drift).¹ We first calculate the augmented Dickey–Fuller test statistic under the null hypothesis that the indicator follows a random walk with drift. For p-values less than 0.1 (i.e., when there is a less than 10 percent chance that as extreme

a value of the test statistic would be observed if the null hypothesis were true), we reject the null hypothesis and deem the indicator to be trend stationary. Of the 31 indicators, 17 are trend stationary and 14 are possibly non-stationary.

Although we use the full series of available data for each indicator, the *Index* highlights recent trends. We allow older data to lose statistical influence gradually over time by calculating geometrically decaying importance weights with a common ratio of 0.8. For example, data from 10 years prior to the latest year will receive a weight of $0.8^{10} \approx 0.134$ times the weight of the data from the latest year. This choice of common ratio means that the average age of the data used, weighted by its importance in the regression model, is about five years prior to the latest year, the same weighted average age as if we had used equally weighted data from the latest and 10 previous years but with far less sensitivity to the behavior of the indicator five–10 years prior to the latest year.²

For each trend-stationary indicator, we then regress the data against time, allowing for the possibility that the deviations from the trend line depend on those from the previous period and may not be normally distributed. This is accomplished

1. The quintessential example of a non-stationary time series is the number of “heads” minus the number of “tails” in a series of coin tosses. Someone who, following several consecutive heads, states that he or she is “due” for tails on the next toss is implicitly and incorrectly assuming that the series is stationary.

2. We examined the sensitivity of the regression model results to the choice of common ratio in the range from 0.7 to 0.9 and found that it has little effect on the statistical significance of most of the estimated trend parameters.

by estimating an ARIMA (1, 0, 0) model³ with robust standard errors using our importance weights. For each regression, we report the p-value of the test statistic for the trend parameter under the null hypothesis of a zero trend. Nine of 17 indicators have a p-value less than 0.1, indicating a non-zero trend.

For each non-stationary indicator, we estimate a regression model of the year-to-year change in the available data, allowing for the possibility that the errors depend on those from the previous period

and may not be normally distributed. This is accomplished by estimating an ARIMA (0, 1, 1) model with robust standard errors using our importance weights. For these regressions, we report the p-value of the test statistic for the constant parameter under the null hypothesis of a zero constant. With p-values less than 0.1, nine of 14 indicators show a non-zero constant parameter, which is analogous to a non-zero trend parameter for a trend-stationary indicator.

3. An ARIMA (p, d, q) model represents autoregressive integrated moving average with parameters p, d, and q and is the primary class of model used in time series analysis. The model may be extended in a variety of ways, and an explanation of the methods used to select an appropriate model structure is beyond the scope of our report.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Culture and Opportunity Indicators, Master Table (Page 1 of 2)

Indicator	Latest Available Data		Recent Trend			Statistical Analysis of Trend*	
	Year	Figure	1-Year	5-Year	10-Year	p-value	Direction
CULTURE							
Marriage Rate, Marriages per 1,000 Unmarried Females Ages 15 and Older	2012	34.6	-0.3	-4.6	-9.0	0.000	Wrong Direction
Divorce Rate, Number of Divorces per 1,000 Total Population	2012	3.4	-0.2	-0.2	-0.5	0.000	Right Direction
Total Fertility Rate, Births per Woman	2013	1.86	-0.02	-0.21	-0.19	0.070	Wrong Direction
Single-Parent Households, Percentage of Children Living in Single-Parent Households	2014	27.5	-0.3	1.3	-0.5	0.239	Right Direction
Teen Drug Use, Percentage of 12th Graders Who Used Illicit Drugs in Past Month	2014	23.7	-1.5	0.4	0.3	0.690	Wrong Direction
Abstinence Among High Schoolers, Percentage of High Schoolers Who Ever Had Sex	2013	64.1	(2-Year) 1.0	(6-Year) -0.5	2.5	0.361	Wrong Direction
Abortion Rate, Abortions per 1,000 Women Ages 15-44	2011	16.9	-0.8	-3.0	-4.0	0.000	Right Direction
Religious Attendance, Percentage Attending Religious Services Weekly	2014	28.7	(2-Year) -1.5	(6-Year) -1.4	-4.8	0.000	Wrong Direction
Volunteering, Percentage of Adults Volunteering	2014	25.3	-0.1	-1.5	-3.5	0.000	Wrong Direction
Violent Crime Rate, Number of Crimes per 100,000 People	2013	367.9	-19.9	-90.7	-107.9	0.000	Right Direction
Labor Force Participation Rate, Percentage of Adults Ages 25-54 Working or Searching for Work	2014	80.9	-0.1	-1.7	-1.9	0.000	Wrong Direction
Unwed Birth Rate, Percentage of Births to Unmarried Women	2013	40.6	-0.1	0.0	6.0	0.678	Wrong Direction
Self-Sufficiency, Percentage of Individuals Who Live in Poverty (Excluding Welfare Benefits)	2013	14.5	-0.5	1.3	2.0	0.102	Wrong Direction
Total Welfare Spending, Federal and State Welfare Spending, in Billions of 2014 Dollars	2014	1,021.1	45.6	125.1	249.6	0.205	Wrong Direction
Subsidized Housing Participation, Number of Individuals Living in Subsidized Housing, in Millions	2013	10.08	0.05	0.44	(9-Year) 1.27	0.000	Wrong Direction
Food Stamp Participation, Number of Individuals Receiving Food Stamps, in Millions	2014	46.54	-1.10	13.05	22.73	0.135	Wrong Direction
TANF Participation, Number of Individuals Receiving Cash Assistance from TANF/AFDC, in Millions	2013	4.04	-0.36	0.04	-1.45	0.030	Right Direction
TANF Work Participation Rate, Percentage of Work-Eligible Adult TANF Recipients Engaging in Work Activity	2011	29.5	0.5	-3.0	-4.9	0.000	Wrong Direction
POVERTY & DEPENDENCE							

Note: Directions in bold are statistically significant.

* The statistical procedures used to develop the model for each indicator and test for the significance of its trend are explained on pp. 85-86.

APPENDIX TABLE 1

Culture and Opportunity Indicators, Master Table (Page 2 of 2)

Indicator	Latest Available Data		Recent Trend			Statistical Analysis of Trend*	
	Year	Figure	1-Year	5-Year	10-Year	p-value	Direction
Reading Proficiency, Reading Proficiency for 17-Year-Olds	2012	287	n/a	(4-Year) 1	(13-Year) -1	0.060	Wrong Direction
Charter School Enrollment, Number of Students Enrolled in Charter Schools, in Millions	2013	2.27	0.21	0.99	(9-Year) 1.48	0.000	Right Direction
Private School Choice Participation, Number of Students Enrolled in Private School-Choice Programs	2014	353,810	66,512	171,202	257,282	0.000	Right Direction
High School Graduation Rate, Percentage of Public School Students Receiving High School Diploma Four Years After Starting 9th Grade	2012	80.8	1.2	6.9	8.2	0.002	Right Direction
Student Loan Debt, Average Student Debt per Borrower Graduate, Four-Year Colleges and Universities, in 2012 Dollars	2013	27,261	319	3,098	4,373	0.057	Wrong Direction
Employment-Population Ratio, Percentage of Civilians Ages 25-54 Who Are Working	2014	76.7	0.8	0.9	-2.3	0.871	Wrong Direction
Unemployment Rate, Percentage of Unemployed Civilians Ages 25-54	2014	5.2	-1.1	-3.1	0.6	0.674	Wrong Direction
Job Openings Rate, Monthly Private-Sector Job Openings/Vacancies as a Percentage of All Private-Sector Jobs	2014	3.4	0.4	1.5	0.5	0.183	Right Direction
Job Hires Rate, Monthly Private-Sector New Hires as a Percentage of All Private-Sector Jobs	2014	3.9	0.2	0.6	-0.4	0.985	Wrong Direction
Money Taxed Away by Federal Government, Percentage of GDP Taken by Federal Taxes	2015**	17.7	0.2	3.1	1.0	0.081	Wrong Direction
Start-Up Job Share, Start-Up Jobs as a Percentage of Total Private-Sector Employment	2012	2.1	0.0	-0.5	-0.9	0.000	Wrong Direction
Major Federal Regulations, Number of Pending Regulations Expected to Cost \$100 Million or More Annually	2014	126	1	8	46	0.353	Wrong Direction
Economic Freedom, U.S. Overall Score from the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom	2015	76.2	0.7	-1.8	-3.7	0.422	Wrong Direction

GENERAL OPPORTUNITY

Note: Directions in bold are statistically significant.

* The statistical procedures used to develop the model for each indicator and test for the significance of its trend are explained on pp. 85-86.

** Forecast.

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About The Heritage Foundation

Founded in 1973, The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.

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Heritage's staff pursues this mission by performing timely, accurate research on key policy issues and effectively marketing these findings to our primary audiences: members of Congress, key congressional staff members, policymakers in the executive branch, the nation's news media, and the academic and policy communities.

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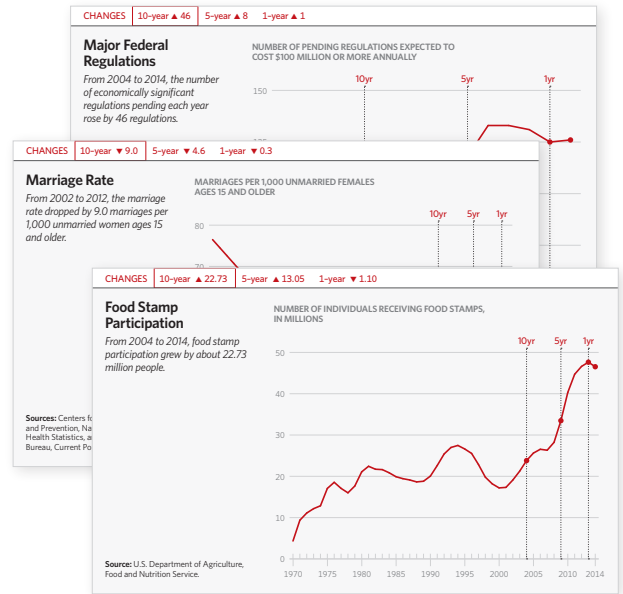
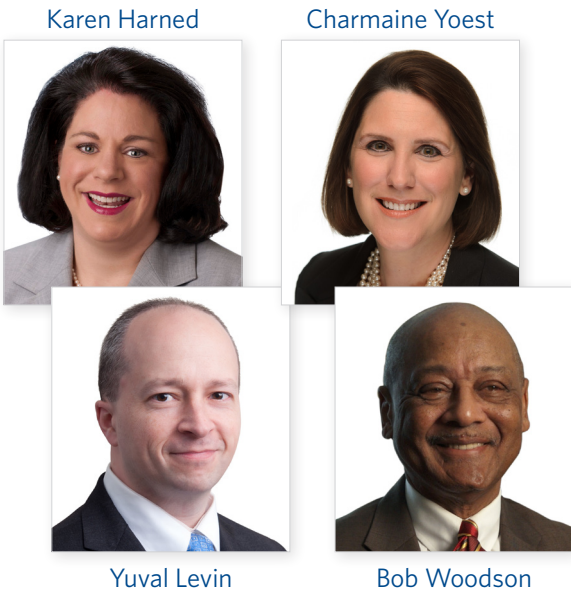
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The Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity promotes a stronger society. The work of the Institute advances: marriage, family, life, work, and religious liberty to strengthen civil society; parents' control of their children's education, and patient-centered, market-based health care. The Institute also emphasizes education on the proper nature of ordered liberty in America and the means to advance and protect it.

The Institute produces the *Index of Culture and Opportunity*, which monitors changes in key social and economic indicators affecting American culture and opportunity.

The Institute consists of the Richard and Helen DeVos Center for Religion and Civil Society, the B. Kenneth Simon Center for Principles and Politics, the Center for Health Policy Studies, and the Domestic Policy Studies staff.



Understand the Trends that Shape America

A strong society depends on opportunity. Cultural and economic factors at work today will determine whether America continues to be a land of opportunity in the future.

The *2015 Index of Culture and Opportunity*, a publication of Heritage’s Institute for Family, Community, and Opportunity, combines national data on key indicators with expert commentary to explain why they matter. Leaders from think tanks, universities, and the media discuss how the trends shaping American society came about—and what they mean for our future.

See inside for:

- **31 charts on social and economic indicators** of opportunity in America, compiled from leading national data sources.
- **Introductory essays** by Yuval Levin (Ethics and Public Policy Center and *National Affairs*) on the intergenerational compact; Carson Holloway (The Heritage Foundation) on Culture; Douglas Besharov and Douglas Call (University of Maryland) on Poverty and Dependence; and Anna Egalite (Harvard University) and Patrick Wolf (University of Arkansas) on General Opportunity.
- **Brief commentary on key indicators from 15 expert contributors** including Marvin Olasky (WORLD News Group); Charmaine Yoest (Americans United for Life); Kay Hymowitz (Manhattan Institute); and Juan Williams (Fox News Channel).
- Preface by **Jim DeMint**, President of The Heritage Foundation.

The *Index of Culture and Opportunity* is a tool for policymakers and citizens seeking to ensure opportunity for the next generation.

Explore and share this report online at Index.Heritage.org/Culture

