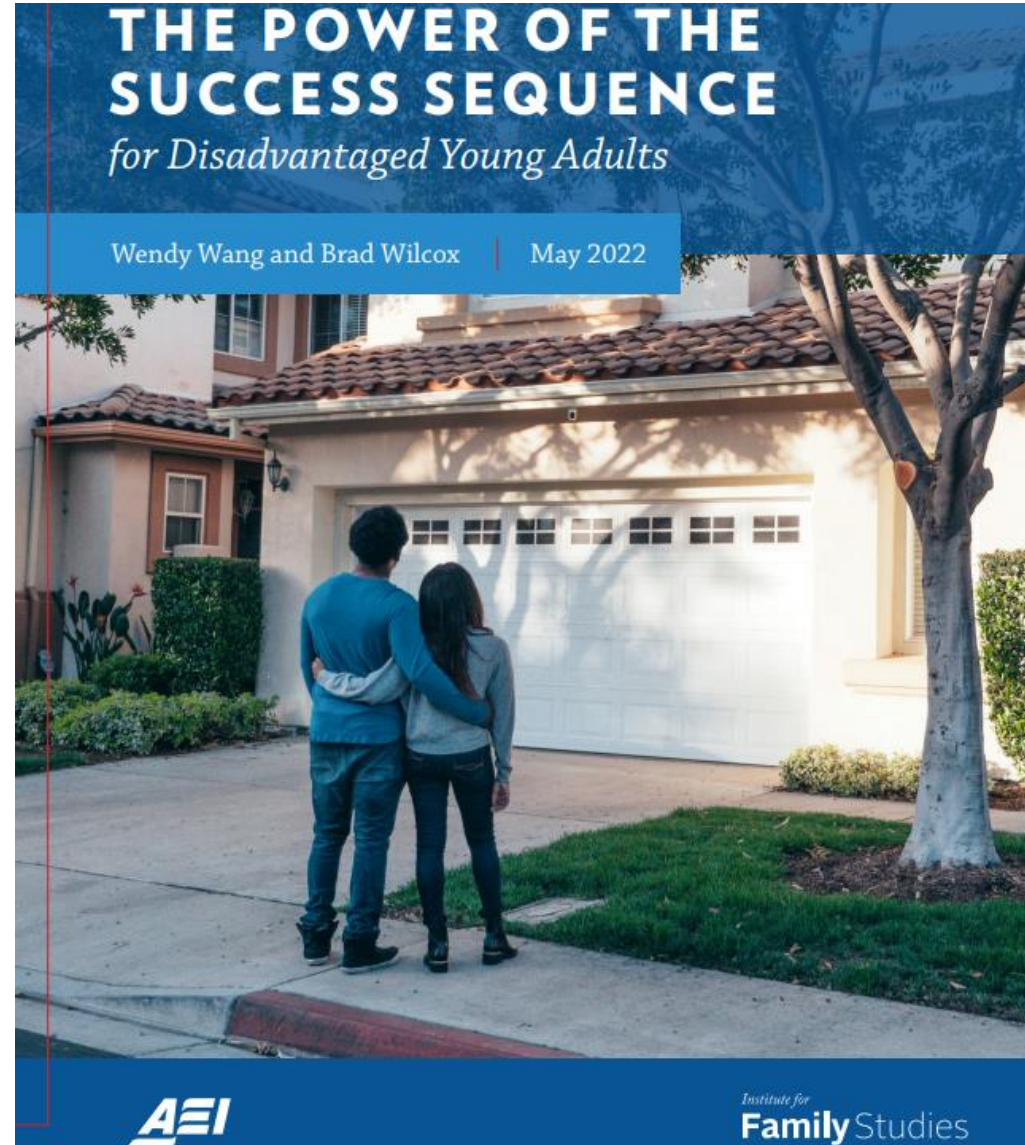


Brad Wilcox
University of Virginia
Institute for Family
Studies & AEI



GET MARRIED

WHY AMERICANS MUST DEFEY
THE ELITES, FORGE STRONG FAMILIES,
AND SAVE CIVILIZATION

BRAD WILCOX

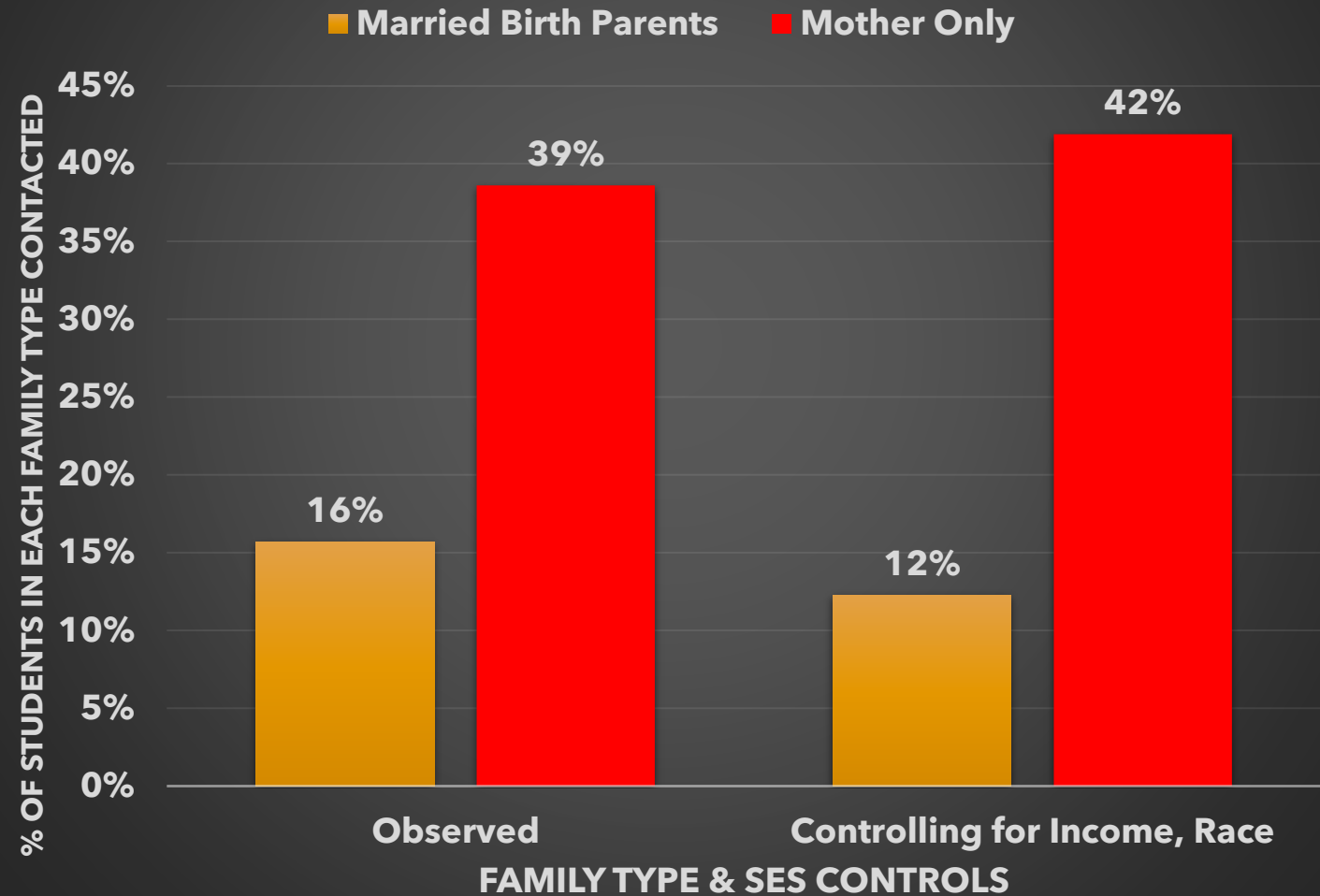


The Institute for Family Studies

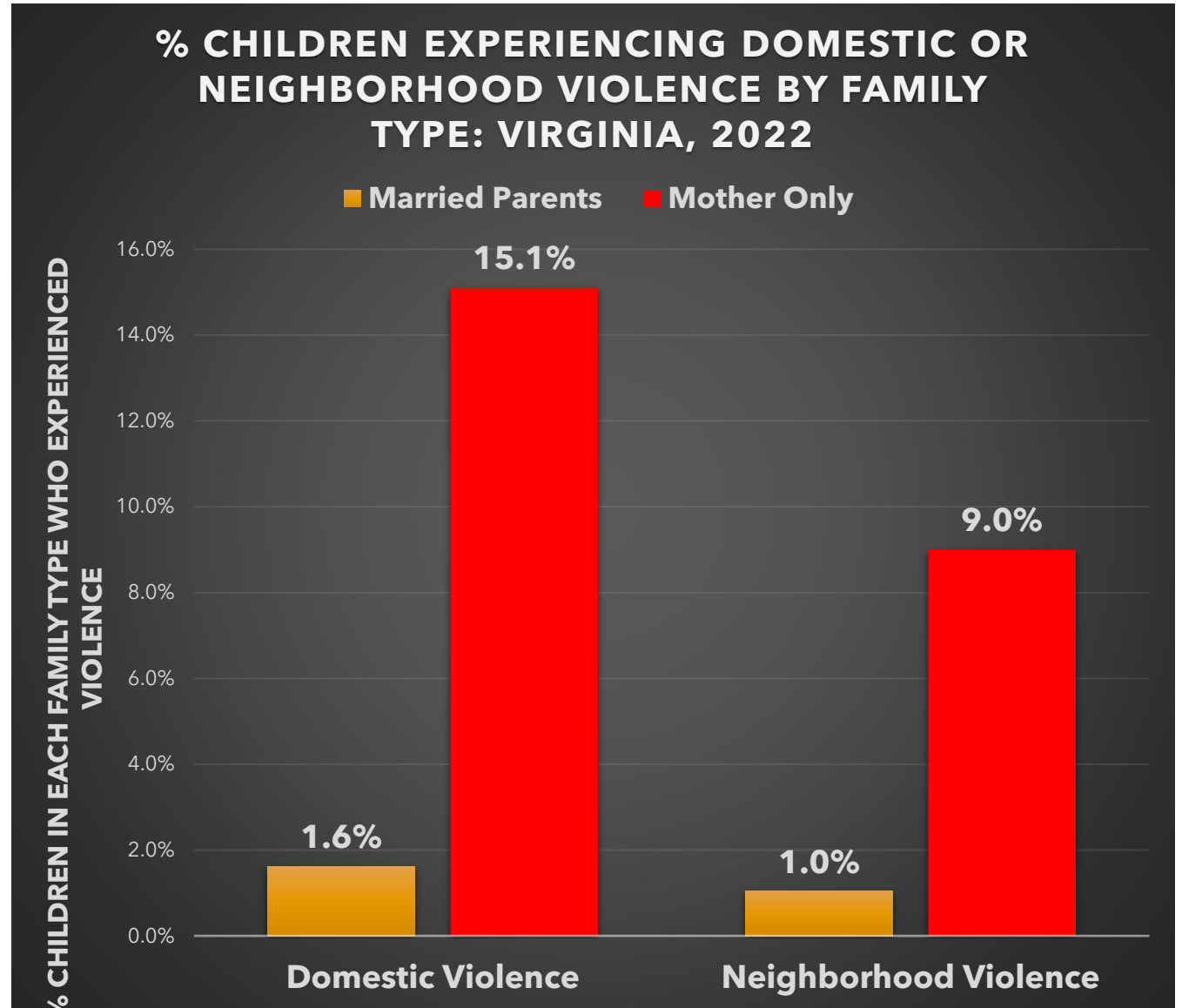
Family Matters

School Problems

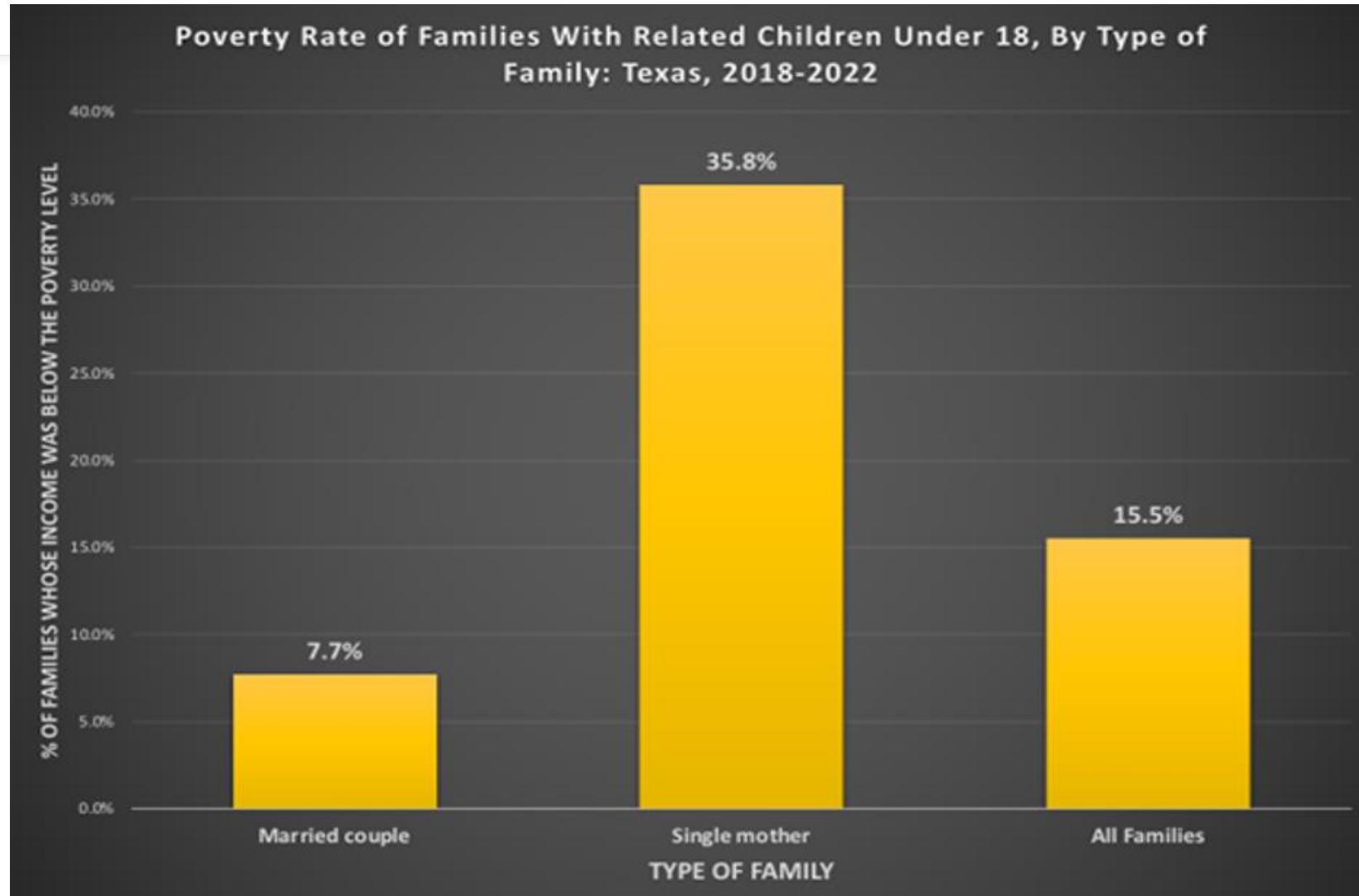
PERCENT OF STUDENTS WHOSE PARENTS WERE CONTACTED BY SCHOOL DUE TO CONDUCT OR LEARNING PROBLEMS: VIRGINIA, 2022



Violence



Child Poverty



One of Biggest Drivers of Falling Happiness & Deaths of Despair



The “recent decline in the married share of adults can explain (statistically) most of the recent decline in overall happiness.”

~ University of Chicago economist Sam Peltzman (2023)

The “marriage rate measures are each more important than the college attainment rate, age composition, or racial composition in predicting deaths of despair.”

~ Brookings economist Jonathan Rothwell (2024)



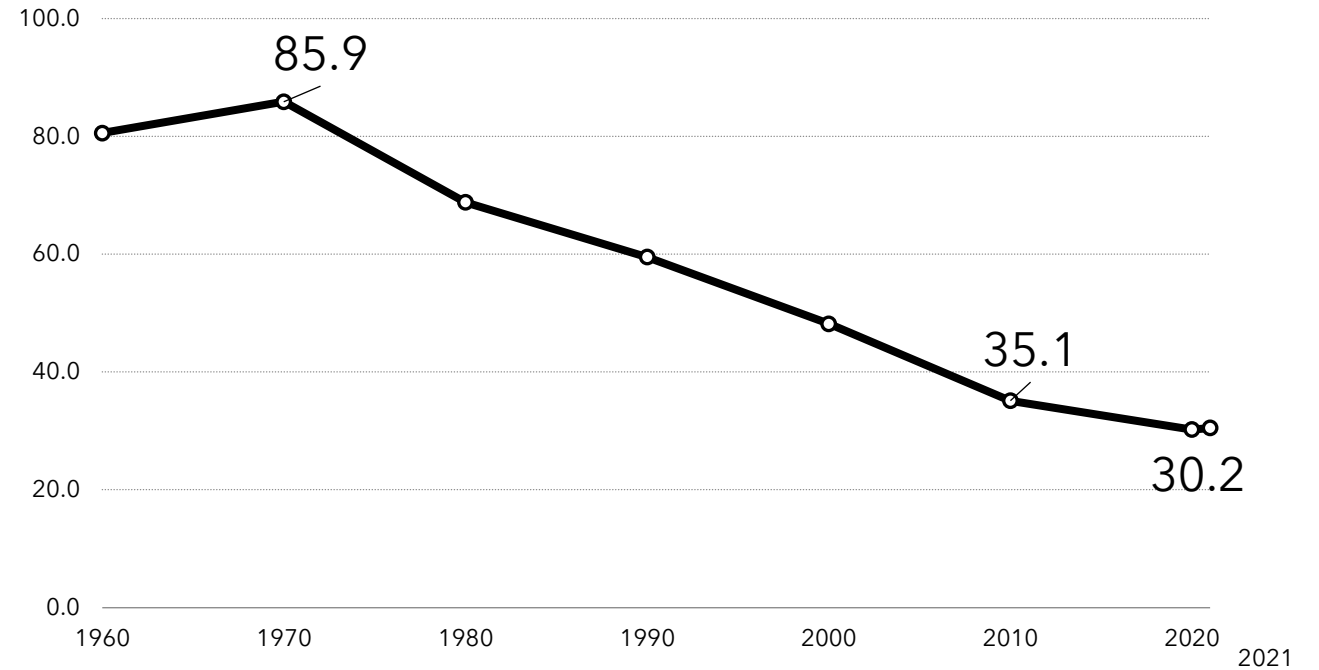
Bad News, Good News



Marriage is Down

U.S. Marriage Rate Close to All-time Low in 2021

Number of newly married people per 1,000 unmarried Americans aged 15 and up

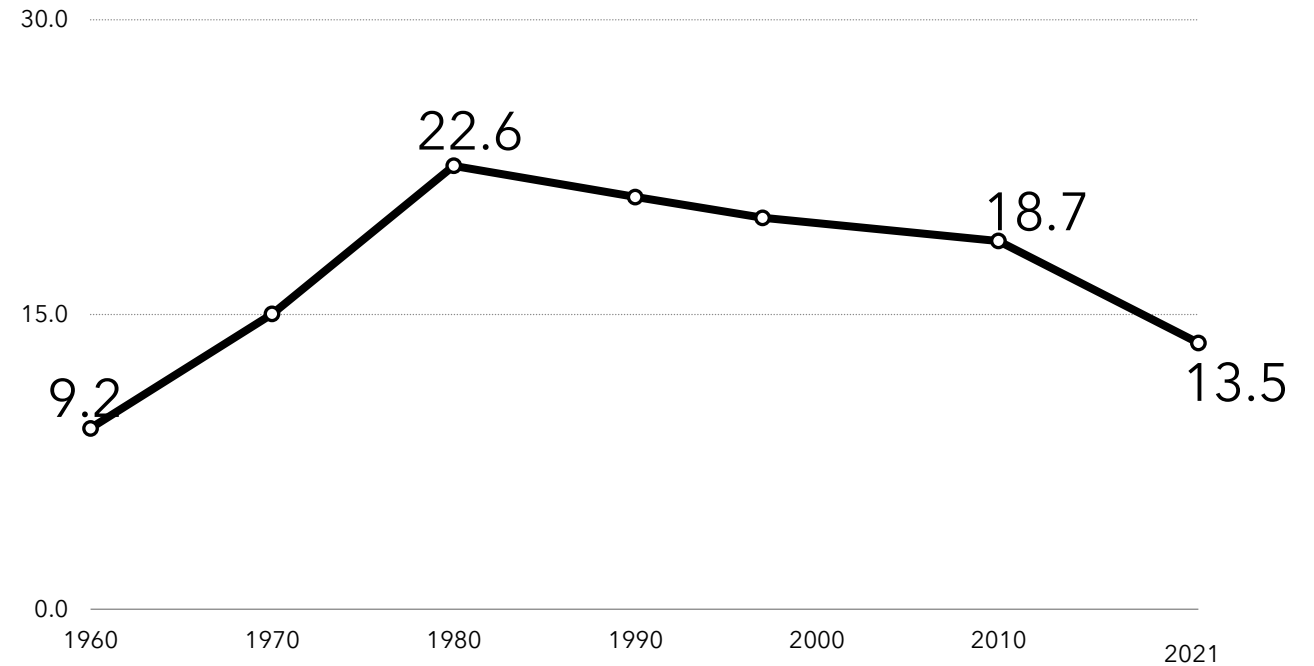


Source: Institute for Family Studies, "New Census Data: Key Takeaways on Divorce, Marriage, and Fertility in the U.S." September 22, 2022.

Divorce is Down

U.S. Divorce Rate Close to Record Low in 2021

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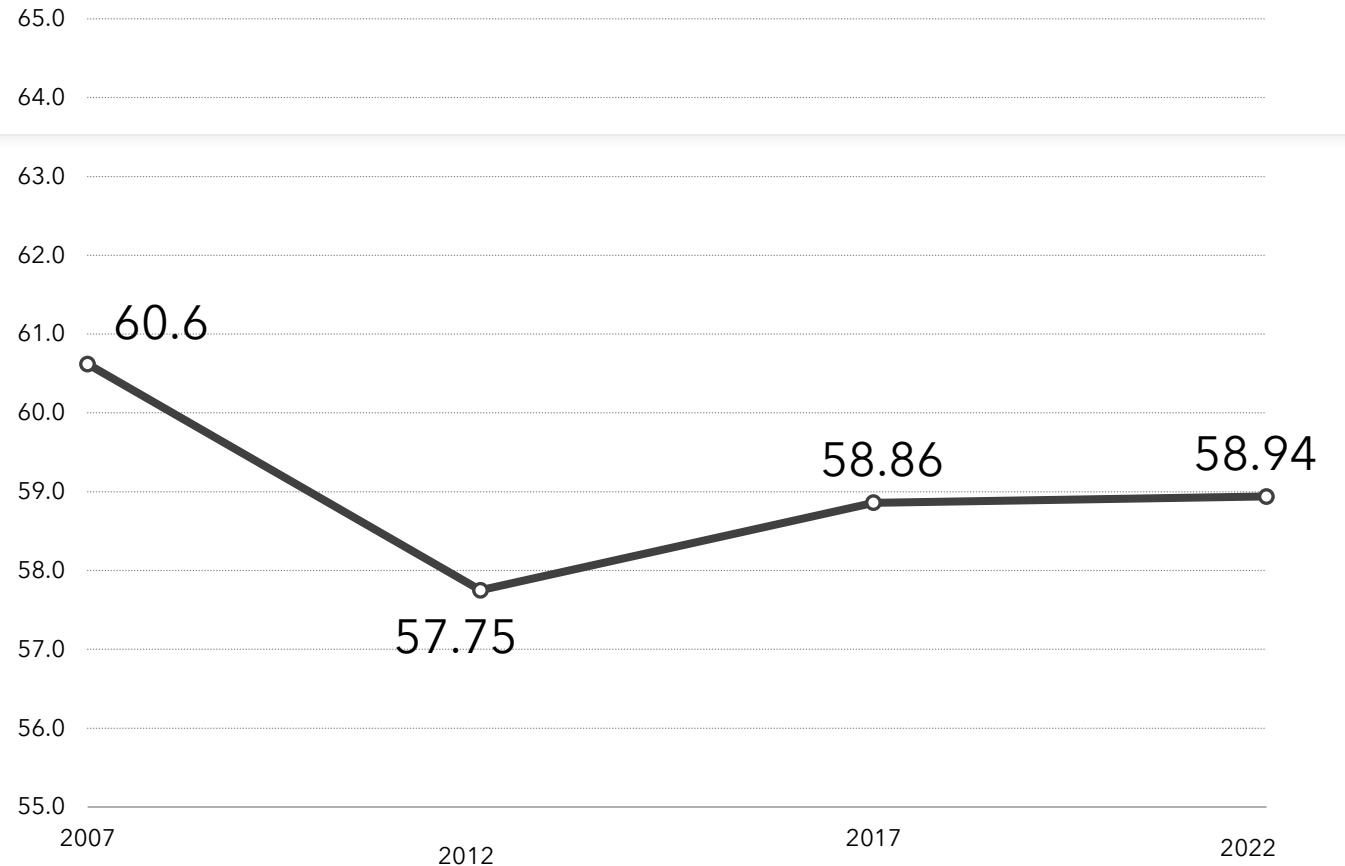
Source: Institute for Family Studies, "New Census Data: Key Takeaways on Divorce, Marriage, and Fertility in the U.S." September 22, 2022.

% Children in Intact, Married Families Ticking Up

Source: **Get Married**
(Harper Collins)

Share of Children in Intact, Married Families Ticking Up

Percent of children aged 0-17 living with married biological parents



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Surveys, ASEC, 2007-2022 (IPUMS).



State Family Policies



**1) Success
Sequence
marked by
3 steps**

Getting at least a
HS degree

Working full-time
in mid-20s

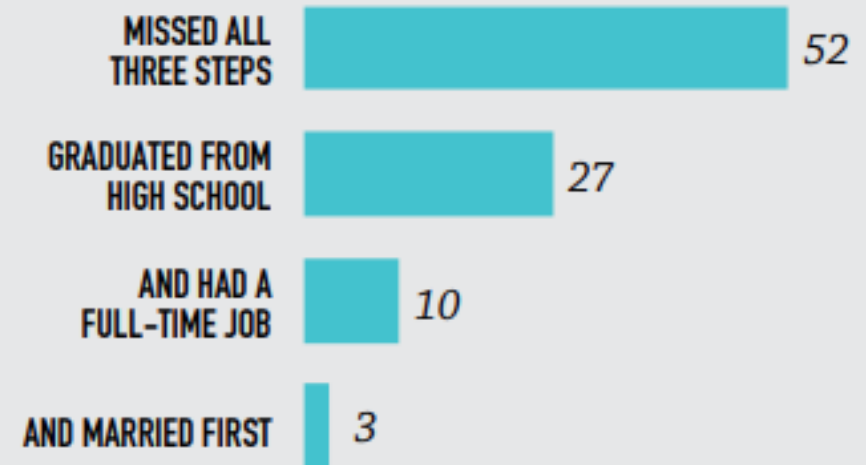
Marrying before
having children

97% of Young Adults Avoid Poverty

- 94%+ lower-income and minority avoid Poverty

97% of adults who followed the success sequence are not poor

% of adults ages 32-38 in poverty after completing each step



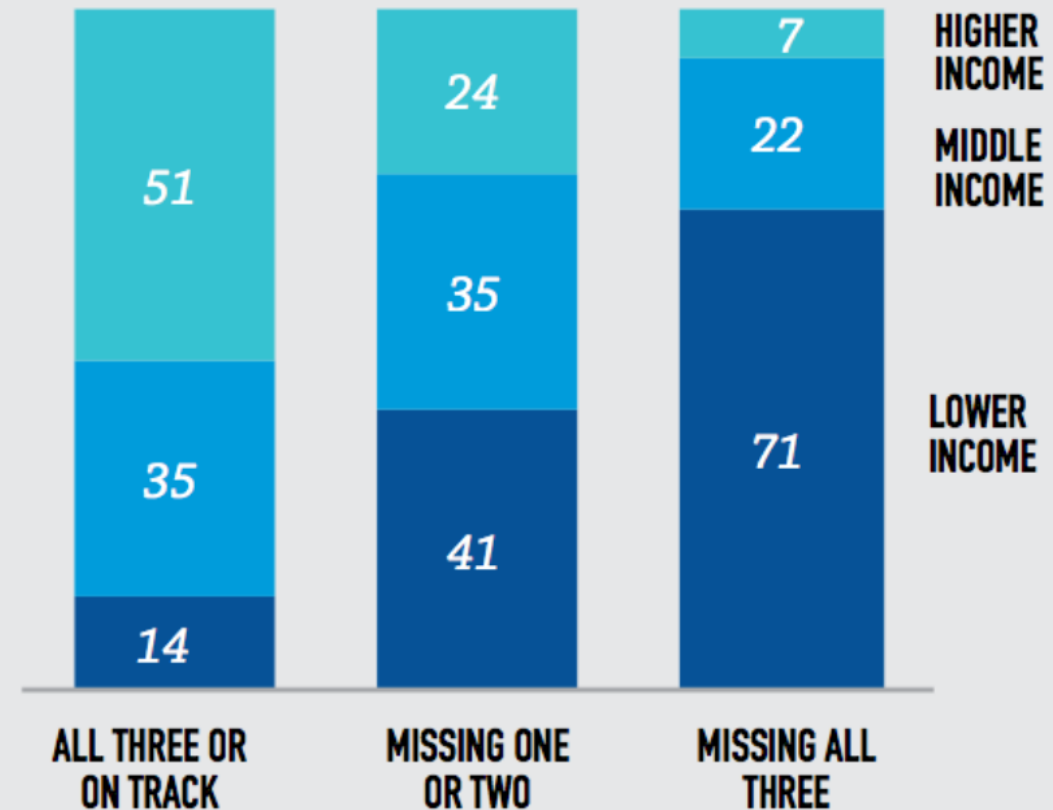
Notes: Based on adults surveyed in 2017-2018. Education and employed measured in 2010 when the cohort was in their mid 20s.

Source: IFS analysis of National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997 cohort (NLSY97).

86% of Young Adults who follow Sequence Reach Middle Class+

More than 8 in 10 Millennials who followed the “success sequence” or are “on track” are in the middle or higher income group

% of adults ages 28-34 in each income bracket





Young adults who follow Success Sequence are 52% less likely to experience emotional distress

Critics: “Work Does All the Work”



- Matt Bruenig (2017): “full-time work is responsible for the low-poverty results of the various Success Sequences.”

Married First 60% Less Likely to Be Poor

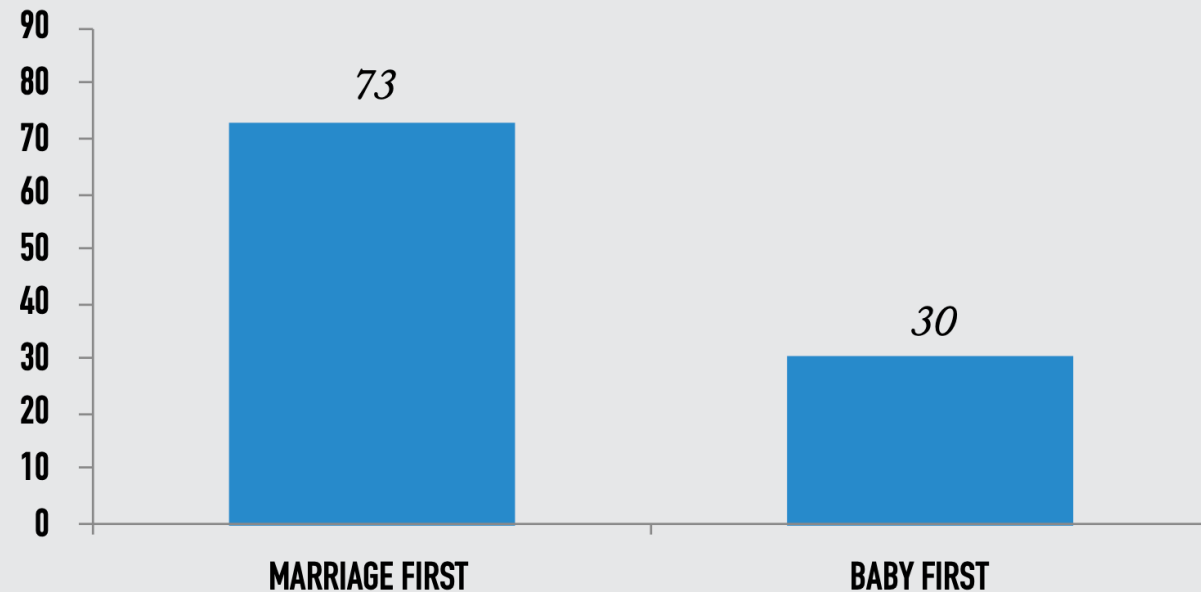
	Middle/Higher Income		Poverty	
	Odds ratio	s.e.	Odds ratio	s.e.
MARRIAGE & PARENTHOOD SEQUENCE (<i>vs. Baby first</i>)				
Marrying first	2.39***	0.09	0.40***	0.12
Unmarried, childless	1.35***	0.09	0.73**	0.10
WORKING FULLTIME	2.50***	0.07	0.34***	0.08
EDUCATION (<i>vs. less than HS</i>)				
HS or GED	1.34**	0.10	0.62***	0.10
Associate degree	2.58***	0.16	0.24***	0.23
Bachelor's or higher	5.14***	0.14	0.18***	0.19
RACE/ETHNICITY (<i>vs. white</i>)				
Black	0.65***	0.09	1.85***	0.10
Hispanic	1.10	0.09	0.88	0.12
Asian	0.99	0.31	0.77	0.49
ABOVE MEDIAN AFQT SCORE	1.62***	0.08	0.54***	0.11
FAMILY INCOME GROWING UP (<i>vs. lower income</i>)				
Middle income	1.12	0.08	0.77**	0.10 ¹
Higher income	1.77***	0.10	0.53***	0.13 ³

Marriage = Stability; Baby First = Instability

- Men & women who put childbearing before marriage more likely to break up:
 - Single parenthood
 - Child support
 - Legal costs
 - Separate homes

Millennials who marry first are much more likely to have stable families

% who are currently married and in their 1st marriage



Policy Ideas

01

Incorporate Success Sequence into Middle & High School family life & financial literacy classes

02

Produce Success Sequence PSAs for social media

03

Teach SS to young adults & couples receiving social services

A Success Sequence PSA



2) Eliminate Marriage Penalties



MEANS-TESTED PROGRAMS OFTEN
PENALIZE MARRIAGE



WORKING-CLASS COUPLES W/ KIDS
HIT HARDEST



ABOUT 10% OF LOWER-INCOME
AMERICANS REPORT NOT MARRYING
IN PART BECAUSE OF PENALTIES

Marriage penalty remedies

01

Ask for federal
waivers re:
Medicaid & Food
Stamps

02

Reform State
Household
Standard
Deduction, EITC &
CTC

03

Use TANF money
to give \$1000
marriage rebate to
lower-income
married families
incurring penalties

3) Family Metrics

State agencies, including Departments of Human Services, Education, and Correction, should report family structure's relationship to outcomes like:

- Student performance
- Poverty
- Incarceration
- Depression

